

## The Smithsonian and the Enola Gay: *The Crew*

### The Commander

Paul Warfield Tibbets was born in Quincy, Ill., Feb. 23, 1915. He joined the Army in 1937, became an aviation cadet, and earned his wings and commission in 1938. In the early years of World War II, Tibbets was an outstanding B-17 pilot and squadron commander in Europe. He was chosen to be a test pilot for the B-29, then in development. In September 1944, Lt. Col. Tibbets was picked to organize and train a unit to deliver the atomic bomb. He was promoted to colonel in January 1945.

In May 1945, Tibbets took his unit, the 509th Composite Group, to Tinian, from where it flew the atomic bomb missions against Japan in August.

After the war, Tibbets stayed in the Air Force. One of his assignments was heading the bomber requirements branch at the Pentagon during the development of the B-47 jet bomber. He retired as a **brigadier general** in 1966. In civilian life, he rose to chairman of the board of Executive Jet Aviation in Columbus, Ohio, retiring from that post in 1986.

At the dedication of the National Air and Space Museum's Udvar-Hazy Center in December 2003, the 88-year-old Tibbets stood in front of the restored *Enola Gay*, shaking hands and receiving the high regard of visitors. (Col. Paul Tibbets in front of the *Enola Gay*—US Air Force photo)



### The *Enola Gay* Crew

#### Airplane Crew

Col. Paul W. Tibbets	509th commander and pilot
Capt. Robert A. Lewis	co-pilot
Maj. Thomas W. Ferebee	bombardier
Capt. Theodore J. Van Kirk	navigator
SSgt. Wyatt E. Duzenbury	flight engineer
Sgt. Robert H. Shumard	assistant flight engineer
Pfc Richard H. Nelson	radio operator
SSgt George R. Caron	tail gunner
Sgt. Joseph S. Stiborik	radar operator
Navy Capt. William "Deak" Parsons	weaponer & ordnance officer
Lt. Jacob Beser	radar countermeasures officer
Lt. Morris R. Jeppson	assistant weaponer

#### Ground Crew

TSgt. Walter F. McCaleb	
Sgt. Leonard W. Markley	
Sgt. Leonard W. Markley	
Sgt. Jean S. Cooper	
Cpl. Frank D. Duffy	
Cpl. John E. Jackson	
Cpl. Harold R. Olson	
Pfc. John J. Lesniewski	
Lt. Col. John Porter	maintenance officer

### The names on the fuselage

The *Enola Gay*, on display at the National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Va., bears the same markings that it did in 1945, including the names of the flight crew from the historic mission, stenciled below the copilot's window. But whereas 12 men were aboard the aircraft for the Hiroshima mission, only nine names are painted on the fuselage.

Three officers—Navy Capt. Deak Parsons, the weaponeer, Lt. Morris Jeppson, the assistant weaponeer, and Lt. Jacob Beser, the radar countermeasures officer—are not on the list. They were mission specialists rather than flight crew members.

### Crew notes

- Four members of the *Enola Gay* crew had been on Tibbets's B-17 crew in Europe: bombardier Ferebee (called by Tibbets "the best bombardier who ever looked through the eyepiece of a Norden bombsight") navigator Van Kirk, tail gunner Caron, and flight engineer Duzenbury.
- Among others personally recruited by Tibbets for the 509th were the *Enola Gay* copilot, Lewis, radar specialist Beser, and four members of the *Bockscar* flight crew: aircraft commander Chuck Sweeney, copilot Don Albury, bombardier Kermit Behan, and navigator James Van Pelt.
- Lt. Jacob Beser was the radar countermeasures officer on the *Enola Gay* at Hiroshima and on *Bockscar* at Nagasaki, the only person aboard the bombing aircraft on both atomic bomb missions.

### The *Bockscar* Crew



Maj. Charles W. Sweeney	aircraft commander
Maj. Charles W. Sweeney	copilot
Capt. James F. Van Pelt	navigator
Capt. Kermit K. Behan	bombardier
2nd Lt. Fred J. Olivi	observer
MSgt John D. Kuharek	flight engineer
Sgt. Raymond G. Gallagher	asst. engineer/scanner
Sgt. Abe M. Spitzer	radio operator
SSgt. Edward K. Buckley	radar operator
SSgt. Albert T. Dehart	tail gunner
Lt. Jacob Beser	radar countermeasures officer
Navy Cdr. Frederick C. Ashworth	weaponeer
Lt. Philip Barnes	asst. weaponeer

(Bockscar crew photo taken Aug. 11, 1945, two days after the Nagasaki mission. Note there is no nose art on the aircraft.—US Air Force photo)

### The 509th Composite Group/509th Bomb Wing

The unit that dropped the atomic bombs was activated at Wendover Army Air Field, Utah, Dec. 17, 1944. The crews trained with practice bombs called "pumpkins" because of their size and shape, which was the same as "Fat Man" atomic bomb.

The 509th deployed to Tinian in the Marianas in May 1945. It was a self-contained unit, with personnel strength of about 1,770. It consisted of the 393rd Bomber Squadron, 320th Troop Carrier Squadron,

390th Air Service Group, 603rd Air Engineering Squadron, 1027th Air Materiel Squadron, 1395th Military Police Company, and 1st Ordnance Squadron (in charge of handling the atomic bombs).

After the war, the group returned to the United States and was assigned to Roswell Army Air Base, N.M. It was redesignated the 509th Bombardment Group in 1946 and the **509th Bombardment Wing** in 1947. The heritage was preserved in various locations and missions through the years.

In the 1990s, the Air Force assigned all of its B-2 bombers to 509th, based at Whiteman AFB, Mo. At Whiteman, Tibbets was able to visit with pride his grandson, Capt. Paul W. Tibbets IV, a B-2 pilot and commander of the 509th Bomb Group.

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### Further reading

*509th Composite Group Pictorial Album*, Tinian, 1945. Reprinted by Mid Coast Marketing, 2002.

**SWEENEY, Maj. Gen. Charles W., with James A. Antonucci and Marion K. Antonucci.** *War's End*. Avon Books, 1997.

**THOMAS, Gordon and Max Morgan-Witts.** *Enola Gay: Mission to Hiroshima*. Dallas Watson, 1995.

**TIBBETS, Paul W.** *Return of the Enola Gay*. Mid Coast Marketing, 1998.