



(from left) First Division President Sue Cunniff Coughlin, Auxiliary Unit President Mary Collado receiving the Unit's Certificate of Participation from State President Kathy Cisna





## Paul Tibbets Interview Excerpt

*Paul Tibbets was born in 1915 so the interview was conducted some time in 2002.* Tibbets died in his Columbus, Ohio, home on 1 November 2007, at the age of 92. He had suffered small strokes and heart failure during his final years and had been in hospice care. He was survived by his French-born wife, Andrea, and two sons from his first marriage, Paul III and Gene as well as his son, James, from his second marriage. Tibbets had asked for no funeral nor headstone as he feared opponents of the bombing might use it as a place of protest. In accordance with his wishes, his body was cremated and his ashes were scattered over the English Channel which he had flown over many times during World War II.

What follows is an excerpt from an interview conducted with Studs Terkel with Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the B-29 that dropped the First Atom Bomb on Hiroshima during WWII. Sort of puts things in perspective when it comes to today's issues around the world. Hope you like it.

**Studs Terkel:** You came back, and you visited President Truman.

**Paul Tibbets:** We're talking 1948 now. I'm back in the Pentagon and I get notice from the chief of staff, Carl Spaatz, the first chief of staff of the Air Force. When we got to General Spaatz's office, General Doolittle was there, and a colonel named Dave Shillen. Spaatz said, "Gentlemen, I just got word from the President he wants us to go over to his office immediately." On the way over, Doolittle and Spaatz were doing some talking; I wasn't saying very much. When we got out of the car, we were escorted right quick to the Oval Office. There was a black man there who always took care of Truman's needs and he said, "General Spaatz, will you please be facing the desk?" And now, facing the desk, Spaatz is on the right, Doolittle and Shillen. Of course, militarily speaking, that's the correct order: because Spaatz is senior, Doolittle has to sit to his left. Then I was taken by this man and put in the chair that was right beside the president's desk, beside his left hand. Anyway, we got a cup of coffee and we got most of it consumed when Truman walked in and everybody stood on their feet.

He said, "Sit down, please," and he had a big smile on his face and he said, "General Spaatz, I want to congratulate you on being first Chief of the Air Force," because it was no

longer the air corps. Spaatz said, "Thank you, sir, it's a great honor and I appreciate it." And he said to Doolittle: "That was a magnificent thing you pulled flying off of that carrier," and Doolittle said, "All in a day's work, Mr... President." And he looked at Dave Shillen and said, "Colonel Shillen, I want to congratulate you on having the foresight to recognize the potential in aerial refueling. We're gonna need it bad some day." And he said thank you very much. Then he looked at me for 10 seconds and he didn't say anything. And when he finally did, he said, "What do you think?" I said, "Mr... President, I think I did what I was told." He slapped his hand on the table and said: "You're damn right you did, and I'm the guy who sent you. If anybody gives you a hard time about it, refer them to me."

**Studs Terkel:** Anybody ever give you a hard time?

**Paul Tibbets:** Nobody gave me a hard time..

**Studs Terkel:** Do you ever have any second thoughts about the bomb?

**Paul Tibbets:** Second thoughts? No. Studs, look. Number one, I got into the air corps to defend the United States to the best of my ability. That's what I believe in and that's what I work for. Number two, I'd had so much experience with airplanes... I'd had jobs where there was no particular direction about how you do it and then of course I put this thing together with my own thoughts on how it should be because when I got the directive I was to be self-supporting at all times. On the way to the target I was thinking: I can't think of any mistakes I've made. Maybe I did make a mistake: maybe I was too damned assured. At 29 years of age I was so shot in the ass with confidence I didn't think there was anything I couldn't do. Of course, that applied to airplanes and people. So, no, I had no problem with it. I knew we did the right thing because when I knew we'd be doing that I thought, yes, we're going to kill a lot of people, but by God we're going to save a lot of lives. We won't have to invade Japan].

**Studs Terkel:** Why did they drop the second one, the Boxcar [bomb] on Nagasaki?

**Paul Tibbets:** Unknown to anybody else - I knew it, but nobody else knew - there was a third one. See, the first bomb went off and they didn't hear anything out of the Japanese for two or three days. The second bomb was dropped and again they were silent for another couple of days. Then I got a phone call from General Curtis LeMay [Chief of Staff of the Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific]. He said, "You got another one of those damn things?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Where is it?" I said, "Over in Utah." He said, "Get it out here. You and your crew are going to fly it." I said, "Yes sir." I sent word back and the crew loaded it on an airplane and we headed back to bring it right on out to Tinian and when they got it to California debarkation point, the war was over.

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**Studs Terkel:** What did General LeMay have in mind with the third one?

**Paul Tibbets:** Nobody knows.

**Studs Terkel:** One big question. Since September 11, what are your thoughts? People talk about nukes, the hydrogen bomb.

**Paul Tibbets:** Let's put it this way. I don't know any more about these terrorists than you do; I know nothing. When they bombed the Trade Center, I couldn't believe what was going on. We've fought many enemies at different times. But we knew who they were and where they were. These people, we don't know who they are or where they are. That's the point that bothers me. Because they're gonna strike again, I'll put money on it. And it's going to be damned dramatic. But they're gonna do it in their own sweet time. We've got to get into a position where we can kill the bastards. None of this business of taking them to court, the hell with that. I wouldn't waste five seconds on them.

**Studs Terkel:** What about the bomb? Einstein said the world has changed since the atom was split.

**Paul Tibbets:** That's right. It has changed.

**Studs Terkel:** And Oppenheimer knew that.

**Paul Tibbets:** Oppenheimer is dead. He did something for the world and people don't understand. And it is a free world.

**Studs Terkel:** One last thing, when you hear people say, "Let's nuke 'em," "Let's nuke these people," what do you think?

**Paul Tibbets:** Oh, I wouldn't hesitate if I had the choice. I'd wipe 'em out. You're gonna kill innocent people at the same time, but we've never fought a damn war anywhere in the world where they didn't kill innocent people. If the newspapers would just cut out the s\*\*t: "You've killed so many civilians." That's their tough luck for being there.

**Studs Terkel:** By the way, I forgot to say Enola Gay was originally called number 82. How did your mother feel about having her name on it?

**Paul Tibbets:** Well, I can only tell you what my dad said.

My mother never changed her expression very much about anything, whether it was serious or light, but when she'd get tickled, her stomach would jiggle. My dad said to me that when the telephone in Miami rang, my mother was quiet first. Then, when it was announced on the radio, he said: "You should have seen the old gal's belly jiggle on that one."

Paul Tibbets and his crew on the island Tinian in front of the "Enola Gay"



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