

# Meyer Steinberg, 96, helped develop first nuclear bombs

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Meyer Steinberg, a chemical engineer who was part of the top-secret project to develop the test bomb “Gadget,” the first atomic bomb ever detonated, and “Fat Man,” the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, which, along with an atomic bomb of a different design dropped on Hiroshima, helped bring World War II to an end, has died.

He was 96 — and died June 12, a month before his 97th birthday.

In an interview with Newsday nearly 75 years after the bombs were dropped on Japan in August of 1945, Steinberg pondered the possibility of nuclear war in our time — he called the prospect “terrifying” — and called the threat that led to decades of Cold War with Russia and the old Soviet Union and new threats from nations with nascent nuclear power, such as Iran and North Korea, “a sword of Damocles hanging over our heads.”

During wartime, he had been a private first class in the Army and a chemical engineer on the Manhattan Project — the code name for the top-secret American effort to develop a functional nuclear weapon — in the Army’s Special Engineers Attachment.

The effort, of course, proved successful. The Nagasaki bomb took some 43 seconds to drop. At least 80,000 Japanese people were killed.

In the 2020 interview, Steinberg said he remains proud of helping



**Meyer Steinberg of Melville served in the Army during World War II.**

develop the bombs because dropping them meant the United States could avoid a planned invasion of Japan that might have cost an estimated million American lives.

“We saved a lot of lives, American lives, even though a large number of Japanese were killed,” Steinberg said. “We were thinking of how to end the war at the time and we did. What we were working on was successful. You’re in the Army, at war, and it brought it to a conclusion. Truman made the right decision.”

He was 20 when he joined the Army. As part of the effort to build the bomb, Steinberg was sent to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, just west of Knoxville, and later to Los Alamos, New Mexico. At the research sites, he worked to help separate the ura-

nium-235 isotope from uranium-238 and later on the processing of plutonium-239.

After the war, he went on to work at Brookhaven National Laboratory, where he was an expert on greenhouse gases and led research into clean energy. He retired with 38 patents, had 500 scientific journal publications and a book on the effects of CO2 and global warming.

Meyer Steinberg was born July 10, 1924, in Philadelphia, the eldest child of store owners Freda Lin Steinberg and Jacob Louis Steinberg, an immigrant couple from Poland.

Ashkenazi Jews, the family joined one of the first congregations that was religiously conservative, a relatively new denomination of the religion, in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens, where he was raised.

He graduated from high school in 1941, and in 1950 married Ruth Elias, with whom he was set up by a friend. The two were married for over 50 years. She died in 2009.

He later married Phyllis Simon, who survives him.

He lived on Long Island, most recently in Melville.

He is survived by his children, Jay Steinberg of Huntington, at whose home the elder man died; David Steinberg of Brentwood; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His brother predeceased him.

The funeral was at the South Huntington Jewish Center, with burial at nearby Mount Golda Cemetery.

STEINBERG FAMILY