

1945 August 6-12

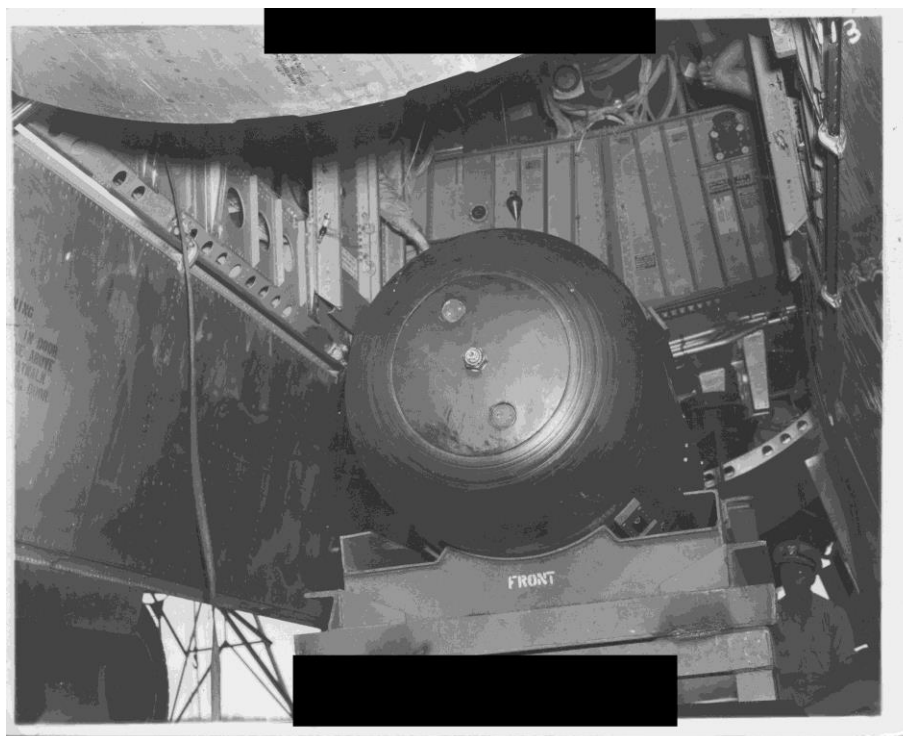
The Bomb

By August 1945, Allied air and naval assaults on Japanese forces continued to whittle away at the ability of Japan to wage war. The Japanese navy had been reduced to an almost negligible threat. Japanese industry was still producing aircraft, but most of their experienced pilots were gone. Their most effective tactic was suicide kamikaze attacks on Allied ships. But Japan still had a formidable number of men under arms, as well as a citizenry being trained to resist invaders with anything, including bamboo spears.

Japan showed no indication of giving up the fight. Winning this war would mean invading the Japanese homeland. Military resources from Europe were being redeployed to the Pacific Theater in anticipation of many more months of war.

The invasion of the first Japanese home island was scheduled for late 1945, and the second invasion would be in early 1946. Subduing Japan was predicted to result in hundreds of thousands of American and Japanese casualties.

That all changed when President Harry S. Truman, who had been in office just since the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in April, decided to use the atomic bomb.



The Little Boy atomic bomb being hoisted into the *Enola Gay*

(National Archives)

The La Crosse Tribune
VOLUME XLII NUMBER 81 EIGHT PAGES LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN, MONDAY EVENING, AUGUST 6, 1945 FINAL HOME EDITION PRICE FIVE CENTS

Atomic Bomb Hits Japs!

Explosive Power Is 2,000 Times Greater Than Any Other Used

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 August 6, page 1)

On Monday, August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber nicknamed [Enola Gay](#), piloted by Colonel [Paul Tibbets](#), took off from the island of Tinian carrying the "Little Boy" atomic bomb. Except for two trailing observation planes, the B-29 flew alone to the largest Japanese island of Honshu. The *Enola Gay* dropped its bomb on the city of [Hiroshima](#) at 8:15 a.m. It instantly destroyed four to five square miles of a city, or more than 60 percent, that had been relatively untouched by conventional bombing. The blast caused temperatures on the ground to reach thousands of degrees. More than 70,000 people were vaporized and incinerated in seconds; radioactivity would kill thousands more long after that day.¹



Hiroshima after the atomic bomb

(National Archives)

Three days later, on August 9, another B-29, this one called *Bockscar*, took off from Tinian with a second atomic bomb nicknamed "Fat Man." Major [Charles Sweeney's](#) primary target was the city of Kokura, but cloud cover forced him to divert to their secondary target of [Nagasaki](#). At 11:02 a.m., it was a replay of Monday. A single bomb destroyed about one-third of Nagasaki and killed more than 70,000 people.²

The two atomic bombings, along with Russia joining the war against the Japanese in China, convinced all but the most fanatical Japanese that the war was lost. Japan capitulated right after the Nagasaki bombing.³



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 August 10, page 1)

Work on the atomic bomb had started in 1940 when British and American scientists started sharing their knowledge and research. In 1942, two facilities were built in Tennessee and one in the state of Washington to carry out the work of building an atomic bomb.⁴

The United States government acquired 59,000 acres 20 miles west of Knoxville, Tennessee, for the top-secret [Manhattan Project](#). A town that could house 30,000 workers and plants for plutonium and uranium research and production quickly sprang up. During the war, it was known as "Site X," and later the Clinton Engineer Works. We now know it as [Oak Ridge](#).⁵

Harnessing nuclear fission and building the atomic bombs was a monumental undertaking. The atomic bombs, at a cost of \$1 billion each, were the most expensive objects ever manufactured by man up to that time.⁶ More than 600,000 people worked on the Manhattan Project.⁷

In the July 18, 1945, edition of the *La Crosse Tribune*, there was an article about the marriage of Technical Sergeant **Harvey Mahlman of La Crosse** to a Tennessee woman, Nancy Taylor. They married at the same place where the groom was stationed---Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Nobody else knew it at the time, but Mahlman was one of those 600,000-plus people working on the Manhattan Project.



Nancy Faye Taylor of White Pine, Tenn., and **T. Sgt. Harvey Arthur Mahlman** of Oak Ridge, Tenn., were married June 30 at the Chapel on the Hill, Oak Ridge, by the Rev. Robert Lundy of the Methodist church. Attendants were Eva Louise Taylor, sister, as honor maid, Jeanette Mahlman of La Crosse, sister, and Eileen Robbins of Knoxville as bridesmaids. S. Sgt. Ralph E. Magnuson of Ishpeming, Mich., was best man and Bernard Manowitz of Jersey City and Irvin Wunsch of Berwyn, Ill., were groomsmen. Ushering were Sgt. Chester Ura, Detroit, and Don Overholt, Kansas City. The couple is residing at 303 East Scott, Knoxville. The bridegroom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur A. Mahlman, 1718 Kane.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 July 18, page 4)

Harvey Arthur Mahlman was born on August 8, 1923, in La Crosse, to Arthur and Marie Mahlman.⁸ They lived at 1718 Kane Street on the north side of La Crosse.⁹ His father was an engineer for the Burlington Railroad and his mother was a housewife. The couple also had two daughters.¹⁰ Harvey was the salutatorian of the 93 seniors in the Logan High School Class of 1941.¹¹



Harvey Mahlman, Logan High School Class of 1941

(*Winneshiek 1941*, La Crosse Logan High School yearbook)

Mahlman continued his education at the University of Minnesota for one year.¹² He then transferred to La Crosse State Teachers College for the 1942-1943 school year. Mahlman was one of many men at La Crosse State who joined the enlisted reserve corps during World War II.¹³

He was called to active duty with the Army in 1943.¹⁴ When he entered the Army, Mahlman was put into the Army Specialized Training Program at the University of Illinois at Champagne. From there he went to Camp Roberts in California.¹⁵ Mahlman was slated to serve in an infantry unit in North Africa.¹⁶

But at the end of 1943, Mahlman and seven other enlisted soldiers were ordered to pack their kits for a trip across the country by train. In a 1995 interview, Mahlman said, "It was very mysterious. . . . We didn't know where we were going. We were traveling under sealed orders." On January 1, 1944, they got off the train at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The next day, they were told that they were going to help make an atomic bomb. The 20-year-old Mahlman felt overwhelmed by the gravity of what they were about to undertake.¹⁷

Mahlman was involved with separating plutonium from uranium and doing analysis on it before it was shipped to [Los Alamos, New Mexico](#). Despite the high-level work, the living conditions were Spartan in

the hastily-constructed town. "We lived in uninsulated barracks of three-quarter inch plywood. There were enough cracks in the floor so that when you swept, the dirt went through them."¹⁸

During his time at Oak Ridge, Mahlman had an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, but he declined so he could continue his work on the atomic bomb.¹⁹

While he was stationed at Oak Ridge, Mahlman met and married a local woman, Nancy Faye Taylor, on June 30, 1945.²⁰

Just weeks after their marriage, the result of the work of those thousands of people, including Harvey Mahlman, was put to its [first test](#) at Los Alamos, New Mexico on July 16.²¹

Mahlman remembered a petition circulated at Oak Ridge requesting President Harry Truman not to use the atomic bomb. Mahlman said nobody he knew signed it. They were creating a weapon that would end the war quickly and save lives.²² The weapon was used twice, and the war did end quickly without the necessity of an invasion of Japan and prolonged slaughter.

In the 1995 interview, Mahlman said it was "one of the most exciting times of my life."²³ Perhaps the excitement and importance of his work at Oak Ridge are what drew him back there twice more in his life, as well as his wife's connection to the area.

After getting out of the Army, Harvey Mahlman had a highly successful professional career. He completed degrees in chemistry and business administration at the University of Minnesota. He worked at [Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory](#) in Schenectady, New York, for a while before returning to [Oak Ridge National Laboratory](#). While working there, Mahlman wrote articles for many scientific publications and received several patents. From 1964-1965, he was a guest scientist at the [Curie Institute](#) in Paris, France, where he worked on the radioisotopes of water. His family enjoyed living in Paris and traveling throughout Europe during this time. He was a member of the [American Chemical Society](#) for 60 years, a member of the [New York Academy of Sciences](#), and a Special Fellow at the [National Institutes of Health](#). He was also a traveling lecturer on the topic of radiation chemistry. In 1973, Mahlman became a manager for [Florida Power and Light](#) in Miami. But he was not done with Oak Ridge. Mahlman moved back to work for the [Tennessee Valley Authority](#) until he retired in 1988.²⁴

After retiring, he created his own consulting company.²⁵

Mahlman was also active in his communities. He taught classes to boy scouts, including his grandsons, for the Environmental Science merit badge. Mahlman was a 60-year member of the Knoxville Masonic Lodge.²⁶

In 1995, Harvey Mahlman, then 72 years old, was selected for Logan High School's Wall of Fame.²⁷

Harvey Mahlman lived to be 94 years old. He died on February 7, 2018, in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was survived by his wife of more than 72 years, the young Tennessee woman he had married while working on one of the most significant projects in human history, Nancy (Taylor) Mahlman, and their daughter and son. Besides his service and professional accomplishments, Mahlman was remembered as "an animated storyteller and practical jokester."²⁸



Harvey Mahlman

(*Knoxville News Sentinel*, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2018 February 10)

The morality and need for the use of the atomic bomb, just as with the firebombing of cities in Europe and Japan, has been debated for decades. There are several arguments:

- A blockade by conventional air and naval forces would have starved Japan into submission.
- Japan was ready to surrender anyway.
- The atomic bomb should have been dropped somewhere other than a populated area just to demonstrate its destructive power and scare Japan into surrendering.
- Even if the first atom bomb was necessary to end the war, the second one was not.
- Although the bombings were terrible, they saved many more lives compared to an invasion of Japan.
- The Japanese got what they deserved for starting the war in the first place.²⁹

Paul Tibbetts, the pilot of the B-29 *Enola Gay* that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan, retired as a general in the United States Air Force in 1966. Tibbetts visited La Crosse in August 1999 to do a book signing of his autobiography at Gallery e, 511 Main Street. In an interview at the time, Tibbetts said he had no regrets about using such a devastating new weapon against the Japanese because it was the only way to get them to quit fighting quickly. "I hoped to God I could be successful in helping stop this damned killing," he said. "I never lost a moment's sleep over it. Why should I?" As for people years later, who criticized the decision to use the atomic bombs, Tibbetts remarked, "They never had their balls on the anvil. They weren't there."³⁰

Kermit Beahan, the bombardier who dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, said in 1985 that he would never apologize for the bombing, but he hoped he would be the last man to ever drop a nuclear bomb on people.³¹

As for Harvey Mahlman, he once said, "I've never had any reservations . . . It brought a termination to a very bloody conflict."³²

Revised: 2021 January 19

Thanks to Jenny DeRocher of the La Crosse Public Library Archives for discovering the story of Harvey Mahlman.

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² Kennedy, 621.

³ "Japs Sue For Peace!" *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 August 10, page 1.

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⁹ The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System, 147*; Box: 445.

¹⁰ Grant Blum, "Logan grad: I have no reservations about bomb," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1995 August 14, page A1.

¹¹ "'Dignity Of Work' Topic Of Student Speakers At Logan 93 Are In Graduating Group," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 June 5, page 18. His obituary states that Mahlman was the valedictorian of the class.

¹² *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin*.

¹³ "College Enrolls Students In Four Reserve Branches Of U.S. Service," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1942 September 27, page 4.

¹⁴ Blum.

¹⁵ *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

¹⁶ Blum.

¹⁷ Blum.

¹⁸ Blum.

¹⁹ *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

²⁰ "Nancy Faye Taylor," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 July 18, page 2.

²¹ "Trinity Test-1945." *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, 2014 June 18, <https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/trinity-test-1945>.

²² Blum.

²³ Blum.

²⁴ *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

²⁵ Blum.

²⁶ *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

²⁷ Blum.

²⁸ *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

²⁹ The author experiencing these opposing views almost 50 years ago in college. One history professor called President Harry Truman the greatest mass murderer in history. Another history professor fully supported the use of the atomic bombs because he was a soldier on his way to participate in the invasion of Japan.

³⁰ Terry Burt, "No regrets: Pilot who flew Enola Gay stands behind mission," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1999 August 28, page A1. Terry Burt visited Hiroshima in 1961 with a group of United States Marines, accompanied by a Japanese war veteran whose family died in the bombing of Hiroshima. (Terry Burt, "Hiroshima's scars run long and deep," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1999 August 28, page A1.)

³¹ "Man who dropped atom bomb on Nagasaki in '45 dies at 70," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1989 March 10, page A-2.

³² Blum.