

NOTES FROM FILES, TAPES AND INTERVIEWS

This is a collection of interview transcripts from Jacob Beser's private files. Some have been transcribed from tapes and other scanned from his notes.

In a 1985 radio call in show interview Jacob was ask several questions about the training program at Wendover. One caller ask: "The movie {The Enola Gay} last night emphasized that you were the only man in the 509th to have a body guard. Why did you have this guard and did you ever manage to "lose him"? Jacob responded: I had been working with the scientist at Los Alamos and was aware that this was an atomic project with the objective of building a bomb. This created some special problems for me. As my knowledge of the bomb and proximity fuse increased, my personal security became a genuine concern and I was assigned a project security agent to be with me at all times while off base. It was his job to make sure that I did not meet or talk with anyone about what we were doing. A real problem on a date! And, yes I lost him a few times. In Cuba I was able to lose him for three days.

Security was of absolute importance on the project and maintained from the very beginning. The word "atomic" was taboo. Because of my support of the radar altimeter proximity fuse design and association with the scientist at Los Alamos, I knew we would be carrying an atomic bomb. In fact as my knowledge of the Manhattan program increased a personal security guard was assigned to keep tabs on me 24 hours a day whenever I was off post. I was the only one that was provided such "protection".

The words "nuclear" and "atomic" were never permitted to be spoken outside of Los Alamos. They were spoken at Wendover. As far as I know the other members of the Enola Gay crew who knew we would be delivering an bomb were: Tibbets definitely knew, Parsons knew because he helped design it, Morrie Jepson the weaponeer knew, I think Ferefee knew, Van Kirk and Lewis I don't think knew, the radio operators, the gunners and the radar operators didn't know. It was closely held story. Because of the Nagasaki trip, we took another crew. I was the only one of the Enola Gay crew who made the second run. Dick Ashworth, he's a Real Admiral now, knew. He was Parson's right hand man and Brownie, the weaponeer at Nagasaki knew, the weaponeers were really not part of the 509th, but were a hand picked bunch of boys who grew up with the thing. They knew the workings of the apparatus inside and out. I had to learn some of it, to understand it, in order to understand what they wanted me to do, in order to do the test work.

We had a midnight briefing prior to the Hiroshima mission. The purpose of this briefing was to show the crews what an atomic explosion really was but as I recall the word atomic was not used. For security reasons this briefing was limited to the crews of the three aircraft involved in the actual Hiroshima strike. The first time I recall the word atomic being used openly was after we had dropped the bomb and Col. Tibbets announced that you have just witnessed the first atomic bomb or words to that effect. This was confirmed by interviews with the Enola Gay crew members 15 years later.

Another caller ask "why were you the only man to fly on the strike aircraft for both missions? To this question Jacob responded: "I could be factious and say I was the best man for the job but I won't. My job in the group {509th Composite Group} was Electronics Officer which was a staff position. I had a crew of about 45 people in my section. Probably some of the radar men could have been trained to perform the job on the flights but that would have presented more security problems. But, I was the only man in my group that had worked with the design of the proximity fuse and knew the thing inside our and how it was supposed to work and what radar

interference it could and could not tolerate. Of course there were civilians there that could have done the job equally as well but they were "too valuable" to risk on a combat flight."

Another questions frequently asked was: "Was Major Charles Sweeney or Col. Paul Tibbets supposed to fly the first mission?" Jacob's response was: "I have heard many times that my good friend Chuck Sweeney was the only man to fly both of the missions that dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To many this implies that he was the pilot the strike aircraft for both mission which is a myth. It is true that Sweeney was the pilot of the Great Artiste, the instrumentation aircraft on the Hiroshima mission and the pilot of the Bockscar which was the strike aircraft on the Nagasaki mission but I was the only man to fly as a crew member on the strike aircraft for both missions. And to make it absolutely clear, my responsibility was to monitor the workings of a radar proximity fuse-device that I had helped design. This device detonated the bombs when radar beams bounced off the ground indicated that the weapon had fallen to a precise altitude for an air burst of maximum destructiveness. My other job on both flights to and over the targets was to make sure that there were no enemy radar using the same operating frequency as the proximity fuse which could have set off the bomb prematurely."

During the development of the radar proximity fuse I worked with Dr. Edward Doll who was in charge of the weapon electronics. The same electronics was used in both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki weapons even though they were different types of bombs. I helped with the development of the electronics in the fusing system as well as flying with them when the bombs were deployed. Radar was very critical. In order for the bombs to have maximum blast effect they had to be detonated above the ground, at about 1500-1800 ft. At 1500 ft above the ground, you only have about one and a half seconds for proximity fuse to react and detonate the bomb when it's supposed to.

For some reason I noticed that not all the crews were initially allowed to execute the violent 150 degree turn and diving maneuver. This was not a conventional bombing technique. I suspected and later learned that this was for security reasons. To avoid speculation on the subject, only Col. Tibbets and Maj. Sweeney executed it under the cover story of checking the airplanes stability to make such a turn at altitude. Col. Tibbets' background as a B-29 test pilot made this explanation acceptable.

The B-29 assigned to carry the Hiroshima bomb was the Enola Gay. This airplane had been personally selected by Col. Tibbets and assigned to Bob Lewis. In theory by being the 509th Composite Group Commander Tibbets did not officially have a plane and crew assigned to him. But, after he accepted the plane and "shook" it down we observed that he would let no one other than himself or Bob Lewis fly it. Neither would he let anyone but Sgt. Duzenbury, his flight engineer, or his selected ground crew "put a wrench to it". Regardless of what others may say, I sat in on enough planning meetings to know that there is no question that there was ever any thought given to having anyone other than Col. Tibbets fly the first mission. Also I might add after the problems that developed on the second mission which was commanded by my good friend Maj. Chuck Sweeney, it is my opinion that if there were any additional mission, Col. Tibbets would have been the pilot.

Another question which is often raised is: Where and when did the atomic bomb final assembly occur?

We built the bombs up on Tinian. I was there and saw it. The First Ordinance Squadron, which was a part of our group had this small complex that we built for them out on the island.

That is where the thing {first atomic bomb} was put together. They did not risk flying the material {fissionable} over. Instead the USS Indianapolis brought it over and proceeded to get itself sunk about 24 hours later.

The second bomb I think Costello flew it out from the states. He had a hair raising experience. Right at take-off the life raft door blew off and the raft fouled his elevator. As a result they had an emergency go-around and landing with a load of gas, twelve guys and the bomb onboard. It was at March Field, that this happened. He was a real interesting person. He very seldom showed any excitement when things were happening. But, to hear him tell about it later was a real comedy. That guy came close to having "it" right then and there. But he was a skilled pilot. He knew his B-29 and he knew what he could do with it. So he managed to stay airborne long enough. They kept him up there a couple of hours to lighten his load and then he maneuvered it in using mostly trim tabs because he had a fouled elevator.

Most people don't know the fact the Enola Gay had stenciled on its nose the names of just the nine normal crew members. But there were three others on board. Captain William S. Parsons, who was in military command of Los Alamos. He was the mission commander and weaponeer. Captain Parsons' assistance was Lt. Morrie Jepson and I was the radar countermeasures officer.

The Eatherly Story (From tape)

The use of the atomic bombs on Japan has been a fertile ground for revisionist historians and propagandists. In an interview on a talk radio show in 1985 the host said to Jacob; "There has been lots of stories about the crew of the Enola Gay. I have heard, like a lot of people in the country did, that the pilot out of his grief, remorse and guilt lost his mind - had a nervous breakdown. Apparently that is not true. As a matter there were stories that all of you guys had problems".

To which Jacob replied: "That is true. The story began with the onset of the public awareness of the problems of one Maj. Eatherly. Maj. Eatherly was a member of our group and he flew the weather recon aircraft which preceded us over the city of Hiroshima by several hours and he radioed his weather report to us and he returned to Tinian in the Marianas. That was the extent of his participation to Hiroshima and to the decision making process whereby it was selected as the primary target. He informed us of the weather.

He was a very unusual person. He was probably the best pilot I have ever known and I a lot of them in WWII. He was a happy go lucky type of person who needed, and demanded, a lot of attention to himself. When he did not get attention he always sought ways of attracting it to himself.

A little later in his career he was taking a course to be a meteorological officer and in the course of the final examination to get this rating, rather than studying the night before as everyone else had Eatherly probably engaged in a poker game or whatever else his normal evening past times were. (During the exam) he decided that his neighbor sitting next to him in the examination room probably had all the right answers and he would make liberal use of whatever information he could and cheating is not tolerated and he was dismissed from the service. From that point on it was downhill for Maj. Eatherly. He was first caught in New Orleans in the company of another Col. Who had fallen on better days and they were running

guns to Central America. They got caught by the federal agents and they were rather heavily fined, but they gained a lot of notoriety from it - national press coverage, radio and TV coverage. This sort of pleased Maj. Eatherly that he got all this attention and he figured some way that he could get the attention and not get confined. So he began holding up corner grocery stores and post offices. Once the money was transferred to him he would lay a toy gun which he carried and say "now call the police and the newspapers". Eventually he was committed to a mental hospital.

In the summer of about 1964 I received a letter from a person in Czechoslovakia who was concerned about Maj. Eatherly's plight and wanted to engage in a three way written dialog with me and Eatherly. He felt that Eatherly was being abused by the government because of his opinion and actions. He believed Eatherly's story that he was having night mares about being over Hiroshima . (Bad Tape section) This was converted to a book called "Burning Conscience" and it was the plight of Maj. Eatherly. Based on the book "Buning Conscience" a play was produced. I think it was in West Germany, in the summer of 1974 and it became a top play and of course it was ammunition for liberal propogandists in Europe and the rumor got world wide attention.

Question: Were you aware they may be making an atomic bomb?

Beser: Oh, yes, I knew what he was talking about. In those days, "splitting atoms" was the standard terminology in all the physics departments. Then he started mentioning names of people I might've heard of: Neils Bohr, Enrico Fermi — and these were people right there! So that was my start on the "project" as they called it. We began practicing drops from B-29s over the desert. I was also undergoing more training myself as well as training others. Then we did over-water flight training. We began to mesh together like a well-oiled machine.

Question : Was there any real fear that the Germans might beat us to the atomic bomb?

Beser: Yes, it was in the back of every-one's mind. There were two Allied commando raids made in Norway against German heavy water plants to prevent their getting the bomb first.

Beser: I got out there and ran into a lot of guys from the old group who wanted to know what we were going to be doing, but I couldn't tell them anything. Actually, our unit, the 509lh Composite Group, became the object of ridicule for awhile. We did fly some missions. We took the "pumpkin" version of the bomb without the nuclear component, but with normal high explosives instead — and went in behind the big raids over the Empire to hit individual targets — stuff that had survived their raids. At the same lime, we were getting the Japanese used to seeing single B-29s on missions, We'd drop a single bomb, there'd be a big boom and then fly away. This was June-July 1945. We flew over many cities of the Empire.

Question: What were your first thoughts?

Beser: Mine was "Thank God the God-damned thing worked after all this buildup we'd gotten!" The story is that Bob Lewis said. "My God! What have we done?" but what he really said was. "My God! Look at that sonofabitch blow!" He was Tibbets' copilot. I had installed a recorder at Tibbets' request on all stations to record everyone's impressions. I turned the tape over to Armed Forces Radio when we landed, and that was the last time I saw it. I know they used it, because I heard it that night.

Question: : Did the Japanese send anybody up to intercept you?

Beser: On the third pass, I detected them coming and notified our cockpit. The tail gunner also saw them, and said, "Here they come!" We made the third run and the fuel problem was getting very severe, and we were afraid we might not be able to make it back to even Iwo Jima if we didn't leave soon, so we decided then we were going on down to Nagasaki and — orders or no — if we couldn't see the target, we were going to bomb on radar. Then we were going to go up the coast and head in the direction of Okinawa —and hope we made it. After the bombing, we told them where we were and they had the air-sea rescue alerted.

We started a radar run over Nagasaki, and in the last 15 to 20 seconds, there was a hole that opened up in the clouds. The bombardier shouted, "I see it! I got it! Bombs away!" —just like that. When the bomb went off, it was the same as before, except this the plane got three pretty good jolts! There was the main bang, the reflection from the ground under it and then off the hills on the side. Despite our scarcity of fuel Sweeney circled once, then headed for Okinawa. We broke radio silence to get a flight plan there, and that invited any enemy hornets who were in the area and who wanted to come in and get us to do so — but none did.

There was a flight of American Liberator bombers there, though. We were shouting, "Mayday! Mayday!" but no one seemed to be listening, so one of our guys fired a Very flare pistol out of the front of the plane to show the Libs. that we were in distress. The smoke got sucked back into the plane, however, and those of us who didn't know he'd fired a pistol thought that we were on fire! The Liberators peeled off meanwhile, and we were able to land, but it was a close call.

Question: What happened when you got back from Hiroshima?

Beser: There was a big beer bus! And barbecue for the whole group after we came out of the interrogation by the generals and admirals, such as Carl Spaatz and Nathan Twining.

Question: How did General Spaatz impress you?

Beser: I had a personal session with him. Tom Classen took me over to meet him, and he was a hell of a nice guy. He and I talked for about 15 minutes before the rest of the crowd got there. I also got to see him several times after I got back to the States at different dinners where he was speaking and I was a guest.

Question: How about Twining?

Beser: He asked very significant questions, of Tibbets in particular. I got to know Twining better when he was commander of SAC, the Strategic Air Command and I was then working for Westinghouse.

Question: Let's discuss some of the personalities involved with the bomb whom you met at Los Alamos. What did you think of Drs. Edward Teller and J. Robert Oppenheimer, for instance?

Beser: Teller was very egotistical. Oppenheimer was pretty hard to judge, since he mumbled most of the time instead of talking.

Question: What about Maj. Gen, Leslie R. Groves, who was in overall command?

Beser: The story was that the program succeeded despite him! I don't believe that, and the people who talked like that were mostly civilians. Both Groves and Oppenheimer are dead. I saw Teller on TV just last week. Teller was the guy who later sold Truman on the hydrogen bomb, when the rest of the crowd was saying there was no need for it, and they were probably right.

Question: What kind of reception did you get when you returned from Nagasaki?

Beser: There were no crowds to greet us, no medal pinning ceremony, only those who would be concerned with our interrogation were there. After having some picture taken in front of the Bockscar, the crew members were debriefed, ate a late dinner, and shared a few drinks. We had completed our mission, glitches and all, and now waited to see the response of the Japanese government.

Beser: If someone is looking for an apology for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki you won't get it from me. While I am against war in general and atomic warfare in particular I am proud of my role in missions that ended World War II. I felt then, and feel the same today, that what we did saved the lives of millions of Allied and Japanese soldier despite what revisionist "historians" would like to say. I also think that Monday-morning quarterbacking 50 years later is an easy way to get up on a soapbox for people who didn't have to make the hard choices that had to be made in 1945..I think it was Harry Truman who said, "I haven't heard anyone apologize for Pearl Harbor."

Beser: I never turn down an invitation to speak to school and community groups about my war experiences. I always try to get the messages across that war itself is immoral as are all things done in pursuit of victory. I have personally seen the horror of atomic warfare. We as a people have also seen the horror of atomic warfare and cannot afford to let it recur, but in the perspective of the times, the dropping of the atomic bomb was the best decision that could have made. Yes, thousands of Japanese were killed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that's a damn shame. They were, however, the enemy and they started it. The use of the atomic bombs, despite revisionist objections, shortened the war and saved both American and Japanese lives. In the perspective of the times, that's really all that matters. (GET REMAINING QUOTE FROM INTERVIEW TAPE IF I CAN)

Question: Did you fly practice missions over the Empire?

Beser: SEE INTERVIEW I made maybe a dozen flightsTibbets made time to fly on some of these practice missions. But he was under strict orders not to go along on the flights over Japan. He knew too much for the United States to risk his capture. Other members of the 509th, who had been told little, could and did fly practice runs over the Japanese home islands. They knew their mission was special; they knew the maneuvers they would have to carry out; but they knew little else.

Question: Other than yourself who flew on the Enola Gay on the Hiroshima mission?

Beser: Tibbets had chosen Theodore "Dutch" Van Kirk as his navigator and Thomas W. Ferebee as his bombardier. Both had flown with Tibbets on bombing missions over Europe during the early years of the war. Other members of Enola Gay's crew were Robert A. Lewis, copilot; Wyatt E. Duzenbury, aircraft flight engineer; George R. "Bob" Caron, tail gunner; Joseph A. Stiborik,

radar operator; Richard H. "Junior" Nelson, radio operator; and, Robert Shumard, assistant aircraft flight engineer. Navy captain William S. "Deak" Parsons was the weapons officer on loan from the Manhattan Project, which had built the bomb; and his assistant, Morris R. Jeppson, proximity fuse specialist.

Question: Before dropping the bomb, had you given thought to the people on the target, or were they just the enemy?

Well, you always think about them. I felt no undue concern for their welfare. As far as I was concerned they were people down there who were doing their patriotic Japanese duty; working in their factories and mills; building their airplanes and ships; and, guns for killing our people. There was no doubt in my mind at the time that this was a war that they had asked for. Since then, I have gone back into some of the historical aspects of it, just wondering how much of it was by pre-arrangement on our parts?

Question: What do you mean?

Well, its a hard thing to describe whether the war was something we needed, wanted, ask for or whether it was thrust upon us. It was, if you look at the sequence of events and they go way back, there may have been a possibility of averting this thing if we had taken a firm stand with Japan back in the 30's when she first began to branch out in Manchuria and China. Whether we consciously asked for it or not is hard to say. But darned little was done to try and avert it. We were talking peace out of one side of our mouth with them, and the junk dealers were sending them scrap iron to build up their war machine on the other, and as you know, not only with Japan, but the same thing with Germany. Those big red books here, are the transcripts of the German archives. I spent many an hour digging through there for several reasons. I am Jewish and I was quite interested in seeing for myself if some of the things that I had heard about really took place. The Jewish people in Germany during the early days of Hitler were used as tools and instruments of foreign policy. They were used more or less as hostages in exchange for capital goods. People were set free and allowed to leave the country. Then I got interested in the whole buildup of the extreme nationalistic National Socialism, its foundation and the part that Russia has had to do with it. This all gives me a little better understanding of the things that I deal with day to day. Russia wasn't innocent in all of this. She trained the German army on a rotating basis in the p[ost Versailles years. They had a treaty and every year so many German officers and non-coms were rotated to Russia to maneuver with the Russian army. They instructed and built up the Soviet army at the same time they were exercising themselves. Well, this bothers me today, when we speak of planning our defensive posture on the basis of their intent. This was a well-camouflaged maneuver that they were pulling off then and we postulate five or ten years on this basis of intent. I am not sure in my own mind that our intelligent community has everything necessary to gauge that intent but we do have sufficient information to gauge their capabilities and we should plan accordingly. I think their intent will become clearer as time goes by.

Question: When you were on this mission, you knew that it would become historical and not just another run?

Oh Yes.

Question: You've been on both of these raids. Have you ever given any thoughts to the casualties?

Not seriously. Beyond the extent that people get hurt in war. Wars are dangerous. Wars are basically immoral. Everything that goes along with war is immoral. It's a mode of operation that man has used for thousands of years but that still doesn't make it right. If you start worrying about things like that in the haste of battle then I think you are a psycho!

I don't know if you are aware of the fact or not but Nagasaki was our alternate target. Kokura was our other choice. We tried to get into Kokura but that city was all obscured by smoke from a fire bombing the night before. The actual raid was for Kokura the Pittsburgh of Japan. Nagasaki weather was bad, We pulled off Kokura and we couldn't get in there we went down to Nagasaki and we had problems galore. There was a lot of discussion about the problems of takeoff, or the others we became aware of over Kokura. We had 600 gal of gas in the bomb bay that we couldn't use. Chuck paddled around there {over Kokura} for almost an hour at full war power burning up the gas. I think we made three passes at Kokura. About that time they {the Japanese} were getting serious and started sending up fighters after us. But they never got to us before we pulled out of there! We had some close by flak bursts and things were getting a little hairy. That's when Ashworth and Sweeney decided that we would make one run on to Nagasaki since there was no sense trying to drag this thing {the bomb} home or dump it in the ocean.

So we went down to Nagasaki. The weather there was also bad with ten-ten cloud coverage. So we started the bomb run using radar. But in the last couple of seconds he {the bombardier} got a hole in the clouds and saw what he thought was his briefed aiming point. However it turned out we were a couple of miles off the briefed aiming point. The bomb hit up in the industrial valley instead of over on the other side of the ridge of hills into the city. Well, I look at that sometimes and I am sure not what you would call an overly devout person. I'm a religious person and I think the same God that was protecting us was also protecting many innocent Japanese on the ground. If we had hit the briefed aiming point, the casualty rate would have been higher. I got into an interesting discussion about this a few years ago with my rabbi and I....well those discussions never came to any meaningful conclusions.

Question: Have you had any feelings of guilt about the thing, either one?

No! No sir. I saw enough of the war casualties. They were coming back to the states before I left. I had already known about much that had been going on in Asia when the Japanese were beating up on China. We still had a friendly government there, and a free press operating and we saw a lot of the results of their atrocities. The Japanese people, any people to my way of thinking, are fully responsible for their government's actions. I don't care whether it's a dictatorship or what. No people that refuses to be subjugated must be subjugated. A hundred million people can certainly overcome five or ten million soldiers. It might be bloody but there are ways of doing it. As long as they went along with it, they share the guilt and they were punished accordingly.

Question: Do you have any feelings that the bomb shouldn't have been dropped?

Non whatsoever. I think it should have been, and my one regret is that the bomb was not available for the final subjugation of Germany. I think the German people earned the right to that honor more than the Japanese people did. I say this because I have rubbed shoulders with a lot of Germans including men who worked at Penamunda; scientist who worked in the laboratories for the big German companies; and, others who worked for the German government ministries. By some strange coincidence they all said their jobs were all non political--just scientists doing their

job. As far as I am concerned they are a bunch of square-headed bastards. They knew what they were doing and why!

Question: How do you feel if and when you do see pictures of Hiroshima victims?

Nothing particular. No strange sensations. I think it's one of the tragedies of war. I think all wars are tragic. All casualties are tragic. It hits home when it's your family. There is a certain detachment when it's someone else. It's true they are all fellow human beings, but the human animal chose this way of life by himself and I think he has to live with it.

Question: Have you ever gotten into any fights or arguments about this?

Oh, I have debated the issue many times, more than I can count. I have discussed it with members of the clergy of all faiths. I have debated the issue with members of congress and on public platforms. I have defended the entire operation and myself in the press and on radio. I am not averse to getting into open and free conversation with anyone about it, because I feel that it was something that definitely part and parcel of the whole war. When you get right down to it, it doesn't matter how you are going to die. If you are going to die in a war, these night fire-raids against Japan were far more horrifying experiences, due to the length of them, the slowness with which they progressed, the uncertainty at to their progress. This thing was instantaneous, it was merciful for those that got it immediately and sure there are scars left over.

JACOB BESER

Interview with Jacob Beser on September 17, 1985.

Question: As I indicated to you before, the paper I am doing, and that is my primary interest in you, is how the military people, leadership and otherwise, saw the ethics and morality of dropping the bomb. And I think I pointed out that my co-paper presenter is doing Tokyo raids and from what I understand, a number of people or many people believe that the Atomic bomb was far more moral, if you will, than firebombing.

A: Well, to begin with, I have noticed over the years and more markedly in the last couple, two, three years, a distinct change in attitude towards the bombing. And I have noticed very markedly this past summer a lot of revising of history by historians who know better, As a perfect example, this Dr. McWilliams here at Towson State University--! think it was eight, nine, ten years ago, used to run a (mini-mester) seminar called Hiroshima, and he invited me as a guest panelist. This was a select group of students that intensively studied all of the issues and the ramifications of the Hiroshima bombing. And I was invited for about, I think, a two-hour session. And I appeared on time and I started my presentation on time and I got out of there—on time was 8:30 in the morning, and I got out of there about four o'clock that afternoon. The kids just wouldn't let go. And he wouldn't let go. And it appeared to me at that time that the point he was trying to make with this class was that while there are a lot of questions on the periphery of this thing, the basic issues, whether it justified a raid was "Yes." Now, he presents it as an overreaction, as a totally unnecessary thing, and so forth. Now, there is a lot of (. archival'')) data become available in recent years which wasn't available eight, ten years ago. And these people look at that and I don't think they always look at the dateline or the (dotted one). And sometimes the date line is ten years after the event, and it is somebody else's interpretation, or somebody else's creation after having read fundamental documents. And a man would say, "I am of the opinion that..." Now, what are

his credentials? Who is he? And what The only thing I can say and I have said consistently for forty years is, to the best that we knew, and I have to reserve that "we" to the guys in the pits now, not at the decision making level, the best we knew, there was an invasion coining. We saw them training for it on our island. We saw kid Marines every day going ashore off landing craft. We saw huge supplies of ammunition and guns being accumulated there in support of these people. We had no indication that the Japanese were trying to surrender, that Hanoi had gone to Russia, or that approaches were being made in Geneva. We had no indication of any of that. we were out there to carry out a mission that was defined to us the first very day we met as the 509th Group in September, (1945). We were going to deliver a special weapon that, if it would successful, could bring about a rapid conclusion too the war. That's all they ever told us about it as a group, And we were ready to do our job. Now, I think this whole subject of morality is a joke. War, by its very nature, is immoral. There is no question in my mind that this is true. Now, if you have a choice of weapons, one that will allow the war to run its course, the other that will bring it to an abrupt halt, I think it is more immoral not to use that modern sophisticated weapon than it is to let the thing run its course. And this is a doctrine that I have been preaching for forty years, And I have seen nothing, archival or otherwise, than can change my mind.

INTERRUPTION

The second point that I would make is that you have to look at these things in the context of the time and place in which they happened. Hindsight is beautiful. We all have 20-20 hindsight. But you must evaluate the event in terms of what (accurate) data did they have on which they based their decision. (The use of the) weapon. Was there support for that decision? And was it a popular decision at the time? Because--this is obviously a political decision. And we know it was political and it was—we know it was tempered by the politicians. The generals could not unilaterally made the decision to use this weapon. But at the highest levels of government committees were formed, reporting directly to the President and advising the President. And I recently spent some time in Japan with (Ward Norrison) who was the Secretary of that Interim committee. And he and I reviewed a lot of these issues together so that-"I get very upset when I--when my friends today come around and tell me that it is time to get on with it, I agree with their bottom line. We don't want to do it again. I just had a book delivered to me today where there was a piece that I wrote on August 11, 1945. I said on the way home from Nagasaki we all hoped that we would never have to do it again. And there is no question--nobody wants to do that again. But let's don't run down everything that happened.

Question: Let me back up. I know you said September, I think, of 1944, you were convened. But you knew more than everyone except Tibbetts and--

A: Eventually I did know more, that was true.

Question: And Parsons and Ashforth. When you found out that "It was an atomic weapon,"

A; Yes?

Question: Did that, in any way, change your view of whether it should be used--the fact that it was a special weapon?

A: No. I knew it was to be a special weapon, so I wasn't surprised, because the first-within the first hour that I had gone to Los Alamos, for the first time, saw faces and heard names, I knew before anybody ever said anything to me what was going on. And it became—and I remember, immediately, that for the preceding two or three years all discussion of this subject had vanished

from the scientific literature I had just come from the campus of Johns Hopkins University. And the--

Question: The fact that it was "atomic", the fact there might be radiation had no~no adverse affect on your thoughts?

A: No, because I frankly have to admit that persists after effects .radiation after effects, I never even. thought about until way later. Way later. And that's one of the things that--You know, if it were just a big explosion, one wouldn't maybe equivocate more about using it again. But there are some other side issues here.

Question: But they didn't enter into your decision?

A: Not at that point in time, no.

Question: I raise the question--I have a friend out at Stanford I am going to be talking to in a couple of weeks, who has written about the issue of how much they know about radiation and all this sort of thing. And the argument is also advanced, and he has advanced it, that they did not know how many people would really be saved if they dropped it. He said Truman's 500,000 was wrong. And I said, "But-""

A: Bullshit.

Question:: Okay, but whatever the figure, he said, to me, is unimportant. That if you hadn't dropped the two atomic bombs, you would have continued the fire bombing until the day of the invasion, because you were trying to get them to surrender.

A: Right.

Question:: So more people would have died in conventional bombing--.

A: Of course--yeah, well. You see, if you would come next Thursday night I will be lecturing over at Hopkins on the subject, and I cover all those arguments . It's a class called Morals and Ethics in Management. I am a guest lecturer every year, for the last five years. And this is—this—there is no question that-- you know, you talk about this radiation. I didn't think in terms of long-term radiation effects, I was aware of the fact that there was a radiation hazard here because the laboratories at Los Alamos--there was no question about it.

Question: But that didn't even bother you?

A: Didn't bother me because I didn't put in the place of, say, poison gas, which would have bothered me. And the reason I didn't was because I didn't think in terms of genetic mutations or other wild things that may or may not really have happened. I had an interesting conversation last month with the director of the Red Cross, the Atom Bomb hospital in Hiroshima. And I asked him about all these lurid statistics that were still around. And he said, "Our () except for the incidence in the female of stomach cancer and breast cancer. Their other rates are right in line with the rest of Japan.

Question: Absolutely.

A: Yes. Yes. And he said, "The females, there is a higher incidence of breast cancer and stomach cancer in the female in the () ."

Question: But the question is how much more and does it matter?

A: And he said it really wasn't significantly more.

Question: Yes.

A: He said that. I think I have him on tape.

Question: The interesting thing, it seems to me, is what--again, people forget, we were dropping the bomb for one reason—to kill people to end the war.

A; Oh, and the other thing that McWilliams--oh, he let me have it. They didn't tell he was going to tailgate, we in a radio thing that I, did. And he did there and then writing (again) he did it, and one of the reasons that prompted this cleanup this morning was I was looking for some clippings because I have to sit down and answer him. He talks about the fact that we bombed innocent civilians. The Japanese didn't bomb any civilians in the United States. Well, Christ, they couldn't. They didn't have the capability. But look what they did on Bataan and Pearl Harbor.

Question: What about Pearl Harbor?

A; Oh, he calls that a knee-jerk. Now, and he forgets that there was a national mental mood, a mindset. There was nothing too bad for the Japanese at that time.

Question: Let me back up. You have given me what I really came for. Was there any discussion, I would guess it would have to be after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by riders? . your fellow writers on the airplane, that this was bad or that this--because it was so different that it should not have been done. Did you hear any?

A; Yes, Yes, First of all the thing that captured everybody's mind was the bizarre nature of this thing. One airplane, one bomb, just totally ruined the city. I never saw the intact city of Hiroshima. By the time I go there it was gone. See, I just saw this much and stuff, with new fires breaking out. I saw the fire- storm break out. The only guy at that point in time who really had any feeling about it, as I remember, was Morrie Jeppson (inaudible.) And he came to me--we had a beer party after we slept it off and—for the whole outfit, just to relieve the' tensions. And Morrie Jeppson said to me, "God I hope never again." He said, "I'm not sure we should have done that. And I said, "Well, Morrie, you don't have to worry about it. All you did was verify that the (thing is right). (It was immoral.) Of course, he made a fortune in the nuclear instrumentation business afterwards. It didn't keep him out of that. In fact, (three businesses were built up and sold), But it did bother him.

Question: Well, it is one thing, it seems to me, to bother him on a personal level. It's another thing to—

A: Oh, I never heard him say, "Hey, we've just committed an atrocity," or whatnot.

Question: All right. you, if I am correct, was the only person who went on both raids--! know on the airplane--I mean, on the —

A: On the strike, yes,

Question: But in the--

A: Observer planes. Harold Agnew went twice, and I think Louis Alvarez went twice, and Bernie Walton.

Question: You were the only one that were on the carrying plane.

A: Right.

Question: Both times.

A: But Harold—Harold and I have talked this over many times, as recently as two years ago, three years ago.

Question: I have written him to try and see him in San Diego when I am out there.

A; Yes, well, Harold--he's over in La Jolla. He is one troop.

Question: I am hoping he will talk. Of course the problem with using him in this paper is he was a scientist and I am really looking at the military people in this, you see. And how they viewed it as a weapon. Now, he has written about it--

A; I hear what these historians have to say about ---.

Question: Let me ask a question which is obviously one of the key controversies in all that. Do you have any different thoughts about Nagasaki? Than Hiroshima?

A: None whatsoever. I did say, myself, coming back from Nagasaki--well, when I came back from—on the way back from Hiroshima I said to myself, "Boy, I hope they get the point because I don't know how many times we are going to be able to stand this." And coming back from Nagasaki, I was motivated happen to the by two things: One, what I saw left of the city. And two, the fact that some of our assignments in the 509th were political and I flew with a crew that I didn't think should have made ---- And I said, "Christ, I don't want to ride with them again."

Question: Well, it was a pretty botched up trip all the way.

A: That's why I want to see what Ashworth is telling people because for a number of years they would come to me and I would say, "Go talk to Ashworth." And Ashworth would come in and say, "Go talk to Beser." Because he was still in the Navy.

Question: Well, there is nothing that he said in his thing, or that he told me that was, how should you put it—I mean, he mentioned that it was a fouled up mission and that they had a problem with the fuel--just the standard story. And that he made--

A: I'll tell you the real story about that.

Question: Well—

A: When this thing is turned off.

Question:: Okay, and that he made the—he with Sweeney made the decision that they would drop it by radar rather than bring it back and then the whole--

A: The answer to that one, though—well, you see, that's one thing that does bother me a hell of a lot—to a certain extent, because I had a big input to that decision. That's what I was there for, and I had to evaluate the radar operator as well as the equipment.

Question: YOU mean evaluate the operator—whether he was getting the right--?

A: Whether he was the guy to do it. See? And on this crew these guys hadn't done a hell of a lot of flying. See, all the rest of us had gone up—Hiroshima was my 13th trip.. I had more trips than anybody because every day the group flew, I moved all my junk on to another airplane because I wanted to be able to do my job right when the time came. And I wanted to get fairly familiar with the electronics environment over Japan. That's what I was there for.

Question: Did you have any concerns if the plane was shot down and they captured you? Because you did know--

A: I never thought in those terms.

Question: Okay, but you did' know enough to--

A: Yes, but I never thought in those terms. I always thought in terms of--you know, somebody would say to me, like my room mate, "What do you want me to do with this and this and this if you don't come back?" I'd say, "Don't worry about it. I'll be back. Nobody going to get old Jake."

Question:: Can I ask--you have raised so many interesting questions, and you obviously know so much more about it. But I asked Tibbetts and it was on the basis of a very bad book that misquoted him completely, but the book says, he radioed back, "Mission accomplished."

A: That's not true.

Question: Of course not. No. I understand that. But I read it and I fell asleep and in my dream I had that the bomb didn't go off and it hit the ground, and what was the contingency, and then I saw Tibbetts very shortly afterwards. I asked him, did he have a plan or was there a plan? I asked Nichols, was there a plan? And both of them said as far as they knew there was no plan in case the bomb didn't go off.

A: That's true.

Question:: Okay.

A: That's true. However, wait a while. No—the probabilities that we are talking about here were so slight because we had--to do our mission we had the electronic fuse is the (primary) backing up was a barometric fuse and if all else fails, we had a self-destruct, conventional impact nose and tail fusing and the whole God-damned thing cased in high explosives.

Question:: Okay. That I didn't know.

A: So the probability of that was so low—that nobody even gave it a second thought. If they did, you know, we weren't aware of it. I wasn't aware of it. Paul might have been if there was one. If he says no, I'd believe him.

Question: He says no. Because if it didn't—and it didn't explode for some reason, the Japanese would have figured had studied at Berkeley under Lawrence showed up--

A: Oh, I know, I know.

Question: But I thought they would have firebombed it or some such thing but he—Tibbetts said no.

A: No. You better believe they would have reacted. They would have reacted. They would have gone in the next day and done something.

Question:: That's—yes, he said—but there wasn't a--

A; There was no concrete plans.. Now, the strike report—before we ever left the ground Parsons was given an array of statements to make, depending on what he saw and the effects. And that is exactly what was passed to the radio operator for the strike report. "At such and such a time," I have forgotten— "dimples 82 over someplace, "you know, and "the sun shone beautifully." Or words to that effect, which meant we had everything we ever dreamed of. No, none of this "mission accomplished."

Question:: No, I understand that it was very bad. But, you are saying except for Jepsen, none of the other military people—

A: No, not at that time. There was a lot of--you know I used to laugh about this. Bob Lewis, and he was getting worse every year until the time he died, and now I know why, because I met this so-called psychologist that had him until he died. This business of, "My God, what have we done." It was, "My God, look at that son of a bitch go;" That's exactly what was said.

Question:: Okay, because there was just a comment that I read this last week that that—the supposed comment he made was wrong.

A: Oh, I know it.

A. Okay. "My God, look at that son of a bitch go!" That was the language he used. The guy came off the streets of Paterson, New Jersey. He wasn't a holy man. He swore like a trooper, constantly.

Question: Did you hear him make that comment?

A: Yes. I recorded it.

Question: Okay.

A: I recorded it.

Question: I must tell you something if I may.

INTERRUPTION

Question: Was—what was your reaction from when you saw it?

A: Well, you see, I didn't see anything. I was very busy. I had to--I say very busy. I was very intent on what I was doing. Actually, I was watching simultaneously four different frequencies. I watched the fuses come on, I watched the function at the time the signal disappeared, all got real bright light and everything. When I got to the window he had pulled out of this tight turn, because I was pinned to the floor when he made his turn. And I forgot whether it was—Joe Stuborak (inaudible)--And I used words quite similar to what Lewis said.. And that's what we heard--The younger guys were more emotional. They were more emotional.

Question: Excitable rather than—you mean, impressed? Is that what you mean?

A: Yes. Yes. They were kind of, I say--they verbalized it more.

Question: YOU had not been at the Trinity test. You were already over at--

A: No, I was already overseas.

Question: But you saw the—didn't they show the movie?

A: They brought the movie.

Question.: It didn't work.

A: Had projector problem. Couldn't get another one. Parsons gave us a chalk talk and he drew the mushroom cloud and-- and I remember when he mentioned 20 kiloton yield, and I tried to visualize that. And the only frame of reference I had was these one pound blocks that we used to play with in training. I thought, "How do you extrapolate that mentally to 20,000 tons of this stuff?" You don't.

Question: Well, Hiroshima was really only 13.

A: Oh, I'm aware--yes. I am going to give a paper over at the Westinghouse Engineering Seminar the first of November, and I am to go through all those calculations for them, Somebody at Los Alamos sent me the whole sheet of things.

Question: Let me ask a personal question of you. Did you feel any special significance or do you, for having been the only person on both planes? Did that give you a particular satisfaction?

A: Well, I will tell you how I got there and I will tell you—when I got interviewed for the job and I was literally interviewed and I got hired for it, Hal Brode looked me square in the eye and he says, "We have people that could do the job we want you to do, but they are too valuable to risk." So I thought, Jesus Christ, what am I getting into here? See, he asked me how did I feel about flying combat? I told him that's what I was trained for. I had wings and all that kind of stuff. And then he tells me—makes this statement to me. And --no, Any special significance—

Question:: I mean, you are a historical figure.

A: To an extent there was a degree of trust placed in my stability as a person, because they told me I would continue to go until I felt I'd had enough. Well, I didn't know they only had three bombs

Question: But you would have gone on the third one, too?

A: Yes.

Question: And you know Tibbetts said he was going to fly the third one if there had been a--

A: Yes. The only other guy—the guy that really should have flown—I give Tibbetts his due for the first one, but the second one should have been a guy named Tom Classen but they sent him back to the States on a wild goose chase to get him out of there so that they could give it to Sweneey who was a buddy-buddy for the B-29.

Question: I asked Tibbetts why Lewis didn't fly the second mission and he laughed and said he wouldn't trust him as far as he could—you know, as an independent person he's a good one.

A: He was no god-damned good.

Question: Didn't Lewis fly to Japan with you on some of these training missions? I mean, I thought Lewis-

A: I never flew with Lewis. I think Lewis made one trip—one trip.

Question:: Because he thought he was going to fly the mission, of course. You know—

A: Well, that's what he says. That's not true. He knew he wasn't going to fly that mission. There was never any doubt who was going to fly that mission. you see, Lewis—this guy. Glen Van Warrebey, the—he has written a book called Look Up-Look Down it's a piece of garbage. If I had known what his true objectives were when he came to me, I would have never talked to the guy. He never presented himself to us as a psychologist and his interpretation of the data we gave him (inaudible). But he had gotten a hold of Bob Lewis. His father was a friend of Lewis', and Lewis' wife was--this was his second wife, and she was a very devout woman, and she had a lot of qualms about the attention he was getting because of this (stuff). and when he married her, that's when he began to change. And finally this kid got a hold of him and he put words in his mouth. He is the one, I almost dropped my teeth here one night late July, I get a call from Associated Press. "Do you have any way of getting a hold of Kermet Behan and we have to talk to him right away." Behan was the bombardier on Nagasaki. "We understand he wrote a letter to the Mayor of Nagasaki and wants to come over and tell them how sorry he is and the Mayor turned him down." Well, I couldn't see Behan doing that for anything, I know that man too well. It wasn't until I am in Nagasaki and this damn Van Warrebey comes up to me, and in the meantime there have been some press releases day-and he is talking about Behan and how much remorse he has and how badly he wanted to come and the Mayor wouldn't let him." I said, "Glen, who wrote that letter--! can't see Behan having done it." He said, "No, I did. Why do you ask?" I said, "Boy, don't you ever do that to me because if you do you are going to be in court so fast," and it shook him up. And I said, "When I get through talking to Behan you are going to be in

court, too." So as soon as I got back to the States, I called Behan. I couldn't get to him. He pulled his phone for three days because—he didn't know what was happening. The whole world descends on him. He didn't even know this idiot had done this. And I told him the whole story. I just sent him about a four-page letter detailing all the conversations I had with Van Warrebey and —

Question:: Van Warrebey is a psychologist?

A: That's what he says.

Question: The interesting thing, when I was in Japan, and I talked to a couple or three Japanese, and they said what I--what Staff Warren put in his report, that the Japanese never could understand why some people thought said it allowed them to save face.

A: Let me tell you something. They came up to me and they said, "You are not wrong for what you did. It was a war then. We didn't want the war. The militarists in Tokyo did, but we had to take what came with it." I said, I told this one lady, one little lady that was on Good Morning, America, with me (inaudible) was an English teacher, 80 years old, and we were sitting there in the () talking I said, I asked her what were you doing forty years ago today when that thing went (inaudible)? She said, "Well, at eight o'clock I sat down to eat my breakfast, because at 8:30 I go to work. At 8:15 you came and dropped your bomb, and she said at 8:20 my neighbor pulled me out of my house—my house had fallen down on me and my neighbor pulled me out. didn't have a scratch. You, scared me."

Question:: It's funny how they—the Japanese accept it as war.

A; Sure.

Question: And what I found

END OF INTERVIEW

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Question You have raised so many interesting questions, and you obviously know so much more about it. But I asked Tibbetts and it was on the basis of a very bad book that misquoted him completely, but the book says, he radioed back, "Mission accomplished."

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Question: What was the contingency plan, or was there a plan, in case the bomb didn't go off?

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Jacob was a student in the School of Engineering at Johns Hopkins University when the Japanese onslaught in (he Pacific following their attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor brought America into war. After the war, Beser would return to JHU, and in 1948 received his degree in mechanical engineering. A registered professional engineer in Maryland since 1956. he has been certified as well in both electrical and mechanical engineering, with an emphasis in aerospace applications.

During the war, Beser served in the US Army Air Force as a Radar Countermeasures Observer in the Pacific, and in that capacity Hew with the strike aircraft crews of both the Enola Gay and Bock's Car — the B-29 bombers that dropped the A-bombs on Japan.

In 1946, he helped establish the Sandia Laboratories for the US Army Corps of Engineers, which later became a Bell Laboratories-operated weapon facility of the US Atomic Energy Commission. in 1951, after four years at JHU — first as a student, and then as a research associate in the School of Medicine there Beser returned to private industry.

He worked first for AAI Corporation, now located in Cockeysville, Maryland, as a builder of armored tanks for the US Army, then moved after almost six years ~ to the Westinghouse Defense Electronic Center at the Baltimore-Washington Inter National Airport, where he worked for almost 29 years.

He retired as Deputy Program Manager and Manger of Subcontracts for the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program in 1985.

Following his retirement, Beser became a consultant to the aerospace industry in the field of material planning, programming and procurement for space systems, with special emphasis on critical program subcontracting.

For the past four decades-plus, Beser has lectured to students across the country about his wartime experiences, as well as to civic, cultural and political organizations. In recent years, he has spoken at Dickerson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, site of the US Army War College and US Army Military History Institute and at Baltimore's Towson State and Johns Hopkins Universities. Catonsville Community College and the University of Baltimore.

Beser has shared panel positions with historians and authors in open discussions relating to the use of atomic weapons in World War Two, the decision-making process leading to their usage and postwar efforts at nuclear weapons control.

In 1988 he published his memoirs, entitled *Hiroshima and Nagasaki Revisited*. in which he juxtaposes his 1945 experiences with those of the Japanese.

When he returned to Japan to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the ending of the Pacific War. His trip there in August 1985 saw him serve as a consultant to various media witnessing the Japanese observations of the bombings, during which, he says, "I was able to move freely among the Japanese and mix with people from all walks of life." He also made several appearances on Japanese television nationwide, as well as on British, American and Australian TV and the British Radio News.

Upon his return from Japan. Beser began setting down his observations in writing for his book, which, thus far, has received very favorable critical reviews.

Beser is active in Jewish community affairs and has served on the board of the Jewish Family and Childrens' Service and is a past president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society of Baltimore of the Associated Jewish Charities. In this latter capacity, Beser was deeply involved in the resettlement of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Russian immigrants in Maryland.

An active member of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation — the oldest established synagogue in the Free State — Beser has been on its board of directors as well.

Married to the former Sylvia Rosen of Towson, Beser is proud of his wife's work as Therapeutic Recreation Director of the Jewish Convalescent and Nursing Home of Baltimore, Inc. Mrs. Bescr - a graduate of the former Towson State Teacher's College (now TSU) and the Maryland institute of Art in downtown Baltimore — is an active Chesapeake Bay artist, past President of the Community Garden Club and The Maryland Activity Directors Society.

For recreation, the Besers sail a 34-foot Bristol sloop and are members of the Baltimore Yacht Club on Sue Island, Maryland, and the Cruising Club of Baltimore, of which Beser is a past commodore as well. The Besers have four married sons and eight grandchildren — at last count, anyway.

Aside from his postwar brilliant career, Beser is certainly best-known worldwide for his wartime exploits, which were chronicled at the time by Time. Life. the Associated Press and other global newspapers and magazines.

Stated the Associated Press of the Hiroshima explosion of 6 August 1945, the city was "completely destroyed, and the dead are too numerous to be counted — practically all living things — human and animal — were literally 'scared to death by the new weapon loosed against the industrial and military city. 'The destructive power of this new bomb spreads over a large area,' said Tokyo radio. People who were out-doors were burned alive by high temperature, while those who were indoors were crushed by falling building.

"The US Strategic Air Corps commander, Gen. Carl Spaatz, said that 4.1 square miles of Hiroshima's built up area of 6.9 square miles was wiped out. Five military targets were destroyed by the one bomb — the enemy broadcast indicated that the dead could not be distinguished from the injured. Neither could be identified. Destruction was so great, and need for relief so urgent, that authorities had been unable to establish the extent of civilian casualties.

"Spaatz based his communiqué on photographs from the sky. They showed the heart of the city devastated with awful thoroughness — as if a giant bulldozer had swept up buildings and houses and dumped them into a river — the city appeared turned to ashes. The lens caught photographic proof that one bomb — small enough to be carried by any American bomber or Fighter plane — packs more death and destruction than thousands of tons of ordinary fire and demolition bombs.

"American officers who studied the pictures said the destruction was about the same as they would expect from a force of about 150 Superforts, each carrying seven tons of incendiary and demolition bombs — the Japanese said that it was parachuted, and that it exploded before it reached the earth." Stated one American officer on the Enola Gay, "We were at least ten miles away and there was a visual impact even though every man wore colored glasses for protection. We had braced ourselves for the shock ... we stayed around two or three minutes, and by that time the smoke had risen to 40,000 feet. The town was entirely obscured."

I met Jacob Beser for his side of the atomic bomb saga in the study of his quiet suburban home on 18 August 1988. The results follow:

Taylor: What did you do prior to being assigned to the atomic missions? What was your early military career like?

Beser I graduated from Communications School and was not given any options, but was told to go to Radar School. and as a compromise I went to the Field School at Boca Raton, Florida. The agreement that I made with the army was that I would be able to go overseas after that and it was the first of many broken promises! This was in 1942. After I Finished Radar School, we were shipped to Orlando to the Army Air Force School of Applied Tactics. When we First got there, under secret order, they didn't know what to do with us! They gave me the run of the place and said, "Find yourself a Job". I ended up teaching in the Heavy Bombardment Division-1 was one of three non-combat veterans teaching this cadre of new officers to go into combat, which I though! was utterly ridiculous! Then I became a project officer for the Air Force, and this was pretty rewarding. This was an establishment that dealt with production problems of new equipment getting to the field and not working. We would get samples of the equipment, verify the fault and come up with a fix, then gel back to the manufacturer about it . It was a good background experience that gave me lime to work on my own. solving problems and learning how to utilize whatever resources were available to get the job done, and I had a lot of contact with industry.

Taylor: What happened next?

Beser: Somewhere along the line, I got tired of Orlando, and decided I wanted to go back to school after this 15 months. I was shipped back to Boca Raton to take the Radar Countermeasures Course. This was in 1943. I got , a flight rating which allowed me to fly in an aircraft.

Taylor: But you weren't a pilot?

Beser; No. I came back after the course, resumed my duties and got bored again, -so I went up to Washington to see Maj. Gen. J. A. Ulio, the adjutant general of the Army, because he could send you anywhere you wanted to go. I told him what I wanted to do. I had family that was getting chewed up in the Holocaust over in Europe. My father's people were still in Germany when the war started, and my mother's side was Eastern European. My classmates were all in England with the 8th Air Force and I told him I just wanted to go over with them and take part in the war. So Gen. Ulio said, "Okay. just go sit out in the outer office and we'll take care of you." About a half hour later, this sergeant-major comes back with my records. He's talking to the general and they're shaking their heads. He look me into the office and said, "I don't understand it, son, but your records are 'flagged,' and even I can't touch you. I suggest that you go back where you came from and wait. I determined that they were making a survey of my Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) to see what we did.

Taylor How many people were there at that time who did what you did?

Beser: There were less than 200 of us. They were training 10-15 people every four months.

Taylor: What did you do actually?

Beser: We were trained in what is now called electronic intelligence, but in those days was called radar countermeasures. We studied the electronic environment and analyzed it. We would interfere with it so that we could deny the enemy the use of their equipment.

Taylor Now. What does that mean in simple terms?

Beser: We would jam it.

Taylor; These were messages going back and forth?

Beser: Yes. Messages, radar, detection devices, whatever.

Taylor: Were the Japanese more sophisticated in that respect than the Germans?

Be.ier: No. The Germans were very sophisticated. The Japanese were coming along though. I acquired that MOS and returned to Orlando, where I found out that the demonstration group in our department in the Heavy Bombardment Division was going to go to B-29 bombers, and my commanding officer of the group was a good friend of mine, Col. James T. Connally. The baby brother of Sen. Tom Connally of Texas, I didn't tell him that I had tried to get transferred and was disallowed, but told him I wanted to get out and into some of the action.

Taylor: You must've felt like a professional student by this point?

Beser: Oh, yeah! He was agreeable, and it was an internal transfer at Orlando and didn't have to be cleared with Washington. When the relocation order came down, I went with the 9th Bomb Group to Dalhart, Texas, where we formed the cadre for the 313th Wing (VH), and I went along as the Radar Countermeasures Officer. This was in early 1944. I wound up back in Orlando teaching the same course I'd left for a month before! From there, we went to Nebraska, where I was assigned to the 504th Bomb Group which was Connally's group, and I was his staff electronics officer. By this time, I was a first lieutenant, which I stayed the rest of the war. Our B-29s were late in coming, so we were flying B-17s, boring useless holes in the sky every day and doing nothing! We were getting bored to tears. Somewhere along the line, I got a three-day pass to Chicago, and got mixed up with some bad company aboard the train and seven days later realized I was still in Chicago and just sobering up I'd had a great time, but things like that were frowned upon, so I decided I'd better get back. They were waiting for me, and the group adjutant — with whom I never did get along very well! — threw the book at me, but it blew over, and they assigned me to the 393rd Squadron. The commander of that squadron was Tom Classen, who'd also flown B-17s out in the South Pacific, so he knew what the war was all about. They thought he'd be a good disciplinarian for me! I knew him well and liked him, so it was fine with me. I enjoyed my time there, got closer to the training and got to fly more.

Taylor: What happened next?

Beser: One day — out of the blue — comes an order from Washington which froze everybody — nobody in, nobody out. And a transfer for "temporary duty" to Wendover Army Airfield in Utah but the hooker was that there was authorization for us to take all our dependents and our equipment, so it didn't sound much like "temporary" duty!

week furlough, but he had an ulterior motive. They'd infiltrated the group heavily with outsiders and he wanted to see what kind of talking the guys would do while on leave. When he announced that, he said,

"Everybody can go except Lt. Beser, and would you please be in my office in 15 minutes?"

Taylor: What happened?

Beser: Tom Classen got hold of me and said, "Go wash your face, put on a clean uniform and behave yourself — so he knew something.

Taylor: How did Tibbets impress you up to that point?

Beser: As just another guy. When I got up to his office, there was a whole group of people in there — Navy uniforms, civilian clothes. Army uniforms. I was introduced to this crowd, and Tibbets read off about me from a sheet. They knew more about me than I knew about myself! The conversation started immediately, and I got the impression that they were trying to sell me on the job!

Taylor: To try to convince you to do it?

Beser: Yes. I was asked how I felt about

Taylor: From that?

Beser: Oh, yes, I knew what he was talking about. In those days, "splitting atoms" was the standard terminology in all the physics departments. Then he started mentioning names of people

I might've heard of: Neils Bor, Enrico Fermi — and these were people right there. So that was my start on the "project" as they called it. We began practicing drops from B-29s over the desert. I was also undergoing more training myself as well as training others. Then we did over-water flight training. We began to mesh together like a well-oiled machine.

Taylor: Are most of the people you worked with still living?

Beser: Oh, yes. For instance, Tibetts is, and I'll be seeing him next week in Boston. By now, it was early 1945, and Tibetts decided it was time for us to go over-seas. The ground part of the group got sent over in January,

Taylor: Let's discuss some of the personalities involved with the bomb whom you met at Los Alamos. What did you think of Drs. Edward Teller and J. Robert Oppenheimer, for instance?

Beser: Teller was very egotistical. Oppenheimer was pretty hard to judge, since he mumbled most of the time instead of talking.

Taylor: What about Maj. Gen, Leslie R. Groves, who was in overall command?

Beser: The story was that the program succeeded despite him! I don't believe that, and the people who talked like that were mostly civilians. Both Groves and Oppenheimer are dead. I saw Teller on TV just last week. Teller was the guy who later sold Truman on the hydrogen bomb, when the rest of the crowd was saying there was no need for it, and they were probably right,

Taylor: It's been said that some of the scientists weren't sure that the bomb wouldn't work or, this if it did, it might blow up the world altogether by igniting the air. Did you ever hear that?

Beser: Yes. Well, they knew the "Little Boy" bomb would work, even leading up to the Trinity test, and they even had an accident in a lab where a man was killed. The scientists had a lot of second thoughts. They weren't concerned at that point that Japan was going to be beaten, but at using their science to do such a dastardly deed, to get man to the point where he could terminate his own existence.

Taylor: How about the view that they were dropped to impress the Russians?

Beser: Well, in every group you have your hardliners, but I'm not sure this wasn't a bad idea, either.

Taylor: When you were there working with it, did you ever have any personal fears that the bomb might explode, blow up the entire base and kill all of you?

Beser: No, I never did. I never thought in so far as that—only that every thing was going to come up roses. I never for a moment worried about the mission. You didn't want to think that way, or you'd go berserk.

Taylor: Looking back on it, are you amazed that they managed to keep the whole thing secret right up until the time you dropped it?

Beser: Yes, I am, particularly when you consider that David Greenglass and Klaus Fuchs were there as Soviet spies. I knew them, and used to see them outside at Los Alamos on smoke breaks.

Both were later caught. Greenglass was executed, while Fuchs served his 20 years in British jails, went back to Russia and died not too long ago.

Taylor: Was there any real fear that the Germans might bent us to the atomic bomb?

Beser: Yes, it was in the back of ever -one's mind. There were two Allied commando raids made in Norway against German heavy water plants to prevent their getting the bomb first.

Taylor: Okay, so now back to the Pacific. Did you fly directly to Tinian Island in the Marianas?

Beser: Yes, I flew out in a C-54, and the cruiser Indianapolis later brought out the fissionable material by sea- Three days later. she got sunk by a Japanese submarine.

Taylor: Yes, and most of her crew got eaten by sharks, as was discussed on the movie Jaws in 1975.

Beser: I gotl out there and ran into a lot of guys from the old group who wanted to know what we were going to be doing, but I couldn't tell them anything. Actually, our unit — the 509th Composite Group — became the object of ridicule for awhile. We did fly some missions. We took the "Fat Man" version of the bomb — without the nuclear component, but with normal high explosives instead — and went in behind the big raids over the Empire to hit individual targets — stuff that had survived their raids. At the same time, we were getting the Japanese used to seeing single B-29s on missions, We'd drop a single bomb, there'd be a big boom and men fly away. This was June-July 1945. We flew over many cities of the Empire.

Taylor: Where were you physically located in the planes?

Beser: Right next to the "honey bucket" — the crapper!

Taylor; Was there any kind of window that you could look out of?

Beser: No. I couldn't see out, I had a couple of racks back there where the equipment was installed. I went on many of these earlier raids so I could get familiar with the electronic environment over Japan.

Taylor: How many missions had you flown prior to the first atomic drop?

Beser: About a dozen.

Taylor: When did you find out that you'd be going on the first mission?

Beser: I knew all along. That's why they were training me so hard!

Taylor: Were you the only Jew on the missions?

Beser: Yes.

Taylor: Did you feel odd about that, or did the others or did you in any way feel representative?

Beser: No. We didn't have any of that nonsense!

Taylor: I can see where you were enthusiastic about going to fight the Germans because of what they were doing to the Jews. Did you feel any animosity toward the Japanese other than the fact that they had bombed Pearl Harbor?

Beser: Yes. Both my parents served in the First World War. my mother as a social worker with overseas I mops. My father was a "cannon cocker" with the field artillery, He was wounded and met my mother in fans, where he'd become the personnel sergeant major of the Stars and Stripes newspaper after he got out of the hospital, She was from Baltimore and he was from Cincinnati — so they came back here" her home city, and that's how I came to be born in Maryland. My grandfather on my father's side served on the Union side in the Civil War. He was in Germany when Bismarck finally opened up the gettoes. My father had cousins he fought; in the First World War in the German Army, often at the same place! This was not uncommon, especially for Baltimoreans. because Baltimore had a large German population, My father's family was from Hanover.

Taylor:; Okay, back to the mission. When you got on the plane on 6 August 1945, how did you find out that was going to be the day?

Beser: I knew right after the Trinity test of 16 July was a success in New Mexico. We were alerted that anytime after the first of August we could go. After that date, it was a matter of waiting for clear weather over Japan, On the 5th we received a detailed briefing and they were going to show us movies of (he Trinity test, but —naturally! -- the projector broke and destroyed part of the film so they gave up and gave us a "chalk talk" and drew the mushroom cloud and were talking about a 20-kiloton yield ot' TNT. The biggest boom I had seen with TNT was in one-pound blocks as part of the interprelation course of the overseas training. Some damn idiot blew one right under me in a swamp. It scared the hell out of me! Here, I'm trying to mentally extrapolate from one pound to 20 killotons — you couldn't do it. It just boggled your mind.

Taylor: Did it ever enter your mind that this thing might blow you out of the sky?

Beser: The only thing I was mildly concerned about was the mushroom cloud containing a fairly high-density field of radiation.

Taylor: Have any of your guys died from this?

Beser: One died in 1966 from leukemia, and by law his widow is now gelling special compensation as a bomb victim-

Taylor: Does that worry you at age?

Beser: No, but the law was made retroactive to cover our mission, and I told my wile, "I ought to get cancer now because the government will take cure of you!" They went over us with a fine-tooth comb when we got back, with geiger counters .and everything else.

Taylor: How long was the flight from Tinian to Hiroshima?

Beser: Thirteen hours out and back.

Taylor: Were you tired when you got there — or were you all keyed up'.'

Beser: I had not slept for 27 hours when we left the ground to go. He had just gotten those wheels up when I went forward to talk with him, I came back, used my parachute pack as a pillow, stretched out on the floor of the Enola Gay and was gone.

Taylor: So you slept through the flight to Hiroshima?

Beser: Yes. When we got to Iwo Jima — and had to get ready to go — the guys up front were playing a game by rolling oranges back toward me. The guy who hit me in the head first, won. All I knew was that it woke me up! At Iwo we got a message from the three airplanes that went ahead of us to look at the weather. Because the weather over Hiroshima was acceptable, that became our primary target. We started climbing to bombing altitude and I started firing up all my equipment to work,

Taylor: What was your equipment to do?

Beser: I had what was called search receivers, radios that tuned various parts of the spectrum and whatever signals might be there.

Taylor: Were these signals from Japanese radar units to detect your plane?

Beser: Yes, and from other emitters, and I had the ability with my equipment to analyze these signals to see if there was any intelligence in them, and especially to see if they were close to where we were operating. If we're going in to lay mines or fire-bomb and there was anti aircraft fire being directed by those signals, you would then jam those signals — otherwise, you would just sit there and learn.

Taylor: Was there much activity that particular day?

Beser: Yes, the environment normal; 300 miles off the coast I began to pick up their early warning radars.

Taylor: So you knew that they knew you were coming?

Beser: I knew when they knew we were coming! Their signals were no longer "whoosh-whooshing" but were locked right on us. I was getting a steady signal, and perspired a little bit for about 30 seconds, then figured, "What the hell! He sees me — so what?" I was also able to listen to his radio command channels, and — while I don't speak Japanese! — I was able to differentiate between airborne and ground signals and could tell if he was sending up fighters after us.

Taylor: They didn't send anybody up, did they?

Beser: No.

Taylor: And you actually flew in unopposed?

Beser: Yes.

Taylor: What happened next? Col.: Tibbetts got to his initial point, they opened the bomb bay doors by a lone signal that came on the air to tell the other two airplanes with us that we were getting ready to drop. We said, "Bombs away" and that tone signal stopped. They knew to do their thing, which was to drop their instrumentation, start their cameras and break away.

Taylor: All three planes were B-29s, so even if the Japanese had known there was an atomic bomb aboard, they wouldn't have known on which one?

Beser: No. but they had no idea anyway. Incidentally, at one of our own reunions we had the Japanese past president of the Hiroshima Survivors' Association ~ who is now a big executive in the hierarchy of the Sanyo Corporation — say that he saw these parachute canisters coming down with instrumentation — blasting gauges and light density gauges to check the effects to radio the results back to us. Two of the three canisters survived, and I saw them at the Hiroshima Museum when I was there in 1985. Anyway, when he saw these things, he thought they were the bombs.

Taylor: In the pictures that you see of the bombs, you don't see people in them, so you don't get any idea of scale, or of the size of them.

Beser: "Little Boy" was twelve feet long, 28 inches in diameter and weighed 9000 pounds. "Fat Man" was 10 1/2 feet long. was about four feet in diameter and weighed 10500 pounds.

Taylor: How did they load those things — with cranes?

Beser: By hoists.

Taylor: Were they armed in flight?

Beser: The first one was, but not the second.

Taylor: What happened next?

Beser: I was busy doing things, but I could feel the release of the bomb. Then, when the plane turned to the right, I was just pinned to the floor by the force. When I got to the window, it was all over — the cloud was up to about 50,000 feet- I got to look only after he leveled out. We were at 29,000 feet.

Taylor: Did you wear your dark glasses?

Beser: We had them, but I couldn't do my work and wear them- They had green liner over the windows anyway, so I figured it wouldn't hurt much.

Taylor: Did you hear the explosion?

Beser: No.

Taylor: Was there anything to be heard?

Beser: Yes, and there was a big compression wave that came up, which I thought was a nearby flak burst- You could also feel the plane get knocked around. It wasn't too bad .it Hiroshima, but at Nagasaki it really got rocked!

Taylor: Besides the mushroom cloud, what could you see down below?

Beser: It was like being at the seashore and watching the sand billowing — and there were fires breaking out all around the periphery.

Taylor: Could you see the other two planes?

Beser; No. We began to talk to each other immediately, though.

Taylor: What were your first thoughts?

Beser: Mine was "Thank God the God-damned thing worked after all this buildup we'd gotten!" The story is that Bob Lewis said. "My God! What have we done?" but what he really said was. "My God! Look at that sonofabitch blow". He was Tibbetts' copilot. I had installed a recorder at Tibbetts request on all stations to record everyone's impressions. I turned the tape over to Armed Forces Radio when we landed, and that was the last time I saw of it. I know they used it, because I heard it that night.

Taylor: How much time elapsed from when you knew the bomb had been dropped Until you saw the mushroom cloud?

Beser: Forty-six seconds elapsed.

Taylor: Did it seem like that to you?

Beser: It seemed like it.

Taylor: What about the trip back?

Beser: That was actually the shortest part of all. We went into cruise control for fuel consumption, and we were in a long powered glide from Japan back to Tinian Island. Also, we were lighter, streaming along and just making tracks.

Taylor: What happened when you got back?

Beser: There was a big beer bust And barbecue for the whole group after we came out of the interrogation by the generals and admirals, such as Carl Spaatz and Nathan Twining.

Taylor: How did General Spaatz impress you?

Beser: I had a personal session with him. Tom Classen took me over to meet him, and he was a hell of a nice guy. He and I talked for about 15 minutes before the rest of the crowd got there. I also got to see him several times after I got back to the States at different dinners where he was speaking and I was a guest.

Taylor: How about Twining?

Beser: He asked very significant questions, of Tibbetts in particular. I got to know Twining better when he was commander of SAC, the Strategic Air Command and I was then working for Westinghouse.

Taylor: When did you know that you were going on the Nagasaki mission on 9 August?

Beser: When I went on the Hiroshiniiii mission on the 6th, in fact, I also knew that I would be going on any other missions a well if there were any more.

Taylor: At that time, how many bombs did we have the capability of building?

Beser: Four.

Taylor: Do you know where the other two would've been dropped?

Beser: Yes, Kokura and Nihama

Taylor: So Tokyo wasn'tI considered?

Beser; No, ie was a big barren plain —it was gone. You wouldn't believe what these huge cities would look like- They were just burnt — gone!

Taylor: It's been said that the fire raids destroyed even more than the A-bombs.

Beser: Oh yes!

Taylor: The pilot of the second mission was Chuck Sweeney. Are most of the men from the Nagasaki mission still living?

Beser: Yes. The second target originally was Kokura. which was east of Yawata, the Pittsburgh or steel center of Japan. The weather up there wasn't very good, however, and ihe visibility over the site was also clouded because of the conventional fire bomb raids a few days before, and all the smoke and debris from Yawata was blowing downwind over Kokura, and the bombardier couldn't get a good visual sighting of his target. We made three passes over that target in the period of an hour from three different directions, and burned 500 gallons of gasoline.

Taylor: Did the Japanese send anybody up to intercept you?

Beser: On the third pass, I detected them coming and notified our cockpit. The tail gunner also saw them, and said, "Here they come!" We made the third run and the fuel problem was getting very severe, and we were afraid we might not be able to make it hack to even Iwo Jima if we didn't leave soon, so we decided timl we were going on down to Nagasaki and — orders or no — if we couldn't see the target, we were going to bomb on radar. Then we were going to go up the coast and head in the direction of Okinawa —and hope we made if. After the bombing, we would tell them where we were and they had the air-sea rescue alerted. We started a radar run over Nagasaki, and in the last 15 to 20 seconds, there was a hole that opened up in the clouds. The bombardier shouted, "I see it! I got it! Bombs away!" —just like that. When the bomb went off, it was the same as before, except that the plane got three pretty good jolts! There was the main bang, the reflection from the ground under it and (hen off the hills on the side. Despite our

scarcity of fuel, Swenney circled once, then headed for Okinawa. We broke radio silence to get a flight plan there, and that invited any enemy Hornets who were in the area and who wanted to come in and get us to do so — but none did. There was a flight of American Liberator bombers there, though. We were shouting, "Mayday! Mayday!" but no one seemed to be listening, so one of our guys fired a Very flare pistol out of the front of the plane to show the Libs that we were in distress. The smoke got sucked back into the plane, however, and those of us who didn't know he'd fired a pistol thought that we were on fire! The Liberators peeled off meanwhile, and we were able to land, but it was a close call.

Jacob Beser Crewman at Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Jacob Beser was a 24-year-old radar specialist aboard the Enola Gay on Aug. 6, 1945, when it dropped the "Little Boy" atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, Beser was aboard Bock's Car when "Fat Man" was dropped on Nagasaki. He was the only person who crewed in the attack aircraft of both missions. His responsibility aboard the planes was to monitor the workings of a fuse-device that set off the bomb when radar beams bounced off the ground indicated that the weapon had fallen to a precise altitude for an air burst of maximum destructiveness. In Hiroshima, the altitude was 1,850 feet. His other job on the flight to the targets was to make sure that there were no enemy radars using the same frequency as the fuse -- which could have set off the bomb prematurely.

Little Boy produced an explosion equal to 12,000 tons of TNT and killed 78,150 of Hiroshima's population of 255,000. More than 25,000 people were injured and 13,425 people were never found. In Nagasaki, 35,000 were killed or never found and 40,000 were injured, out of a population of 195,000.

Beser is a native of Baltimore. Prior to enlisting in the Air Force, he studied mechanical engineering at Johns Hopkins University and worked on the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos in the area of firing and fusing. After 27 years of service, Beser recently retired from Westinghouse, where most of his work was classified.

This summer Beser plans to return to Japan for the first time since the war, and has been invited to attend memorial ceremonies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He lives with Sylvia Beser, his wife of 36 years, in Pikesville, Md., where he is active in Jewish organizations. The Besers have four sons and five grandchildren.

Jacob Beser died in 1992 at age 71]

Q: Do you often think of August 1945?

A: Yeah, I think of it because people like you and others don't let you forget it. It's not that I care to forget it, but there's always constant reminders.

Q: Before you were aware of what the mission was, you requested a transfer to a combat unit. Were you pretty anxious to fight?

A: I was quite anxious to get into it. I wanted to go to Europe. Classmates were there. I had family in Germany who had been chewed up already.

I went up to Washington to see the adjutant general of the army, who theoretically could send you anywhere you wanted to go. He said, "I don't know why, but even I can't touch you. Your file has been flagged for some reason."

Eventually I got transferred into the [Army Air Corps] 393rd [Heavy Bombardment Squadron, the one assigned to the Manhattan Project]. A month after that, orders came down from Washington freezing all the personnel in the 393rd. Nobody in, nobody out. And they were alerted for a temporary move to Wendover Air Force Base. They said take everything you own with you, which was quite unusual. All your trucks and your organizational equipment.

We were at Wendover a couple of days and we got called together in the base auditorium to meet Paul Tibbets, our new group commander. He said we were going to form a new group, independent, able to operate anywhere in the world, the purpose of which was not to be told to us for a while. Don't ask questions, just trust me. It was secret. And everybody could go home on two weeks leave except Lt. Jacob Beser, please report to my office immediately.

I was ushered into his office with two more army personnel, a naval officer and a civilian, Dr. Al Brode, who had just come off a college campus. A light came on in my head and I said, "Hey, this guy is a big wheel in physics." They wanted to know where I was from, how old I was, where I went to school and what my background and experience had been.

Brode looked me straight in the eye and said, "How do you feel about flying combat?" "I have a pair of wings," I said. "That's what I was trained for. What's the problem?" He said, "Well, this job we want you to do, it's not that we don't have people that can do it in our organization but they're too valuable to risk." I could see my life expectancy going down, my insurance rates going up.

I was excused from the room and about 10 minutes later invited back and everybody shook my hand and congratulated me. I'd been hired. What for? Nobody was saying, but I was now part of the crowd. I didn't know what I was part of.

Several days later we were told to be on the flight line at 7 the next morning and be packed for three or four days travel. I said, "Where are we going?" "You'll find out when we get there." That's interesting. "And do I take warm clothes or summer clothes or what?" "Take 'em both." They wouldn't give me the slightest clue.

I crawled in the airplane. I didn't know the rest of these fellows too well. But I did know the pilot and I said, "Arthur, where are we going?" He said, "I don't know but when we get near we'll find out. All I know is I filed a clearance for a place called Y. The letter Y. I've never been there before."

Q: And that turned out to be Los Alamos?

A: Yeah. I was escorted there by Col. Tibbets and Navy Capt. Richard Ashworth. We went right to the office of Dr. Norman Ramsey, who was a young PhD from Columbia University. He ran the fusing and firing section.

Q: Nobody ever said atomic in that briefing?

A: No, no. No way. They just told me "a weapon." Ramsey said that they wanted this weapon to burst over the ground at a precise altitude and they had been working on the problem but they weren't nearly as far along as they should be.

We would have lunch at the lodge and there were names like Nils Bohr bandied around, Enrico Fermi, Hans Bethe. It all began to add up. Then in conversations with Ramsey one day he pretty much filled me in without ever saying words like atomic bomb. He talked about fundamental forces of the universe. He hit all around it, and it spelled mother.

Q: You were the only crew member who was on both missions. On the second mission, you were already a veteran.

A: Yeah. But sometimes I wish I hadn't been, the things that went on on the second. The second mission was not nearly as smooth as the first. The first one was textbook. The second mission, the weather forecast was a bust to start with so one of the aircraft missed a rendezvous point. He was up in the air up there tooling around but he never found us right away.

Q: And the second bomb was wide of its mark.

A: The first one missed its mark too, you know.

Q: Just by a few hundred feet.

A. Well, it missed. I mean people tell us how hot we were, we dropped 'em in practice better than that. But it's academic how many you kill whether you missed by 500 feet or not.

But the second one, there is a story around that we had 600 gallons of gas in the bomb bay that couldn't be touched because the pump [for the auxiliary tank] malfunctioned. Our primary target based on weather reconnaissance was Kokura. We got over Kokura and it was all smoked and hazed in. They had bombed Yawata two nights before and it was still burning. Kokura was downwind of that. So we tool around there for an hour, burn 900 gallons of gas, and now we don't have enough to get back because we can't touch this [tank]. We hadn't dropped the weapon yet and the Japanese were getting curious and coming up to take a look at us. A decision was made to get the hell out of here.

We were going to go to Nagasaki and I told Ashworth if we wanted I could ride a scope in the back there and bring him right dead over the center of Nagasaki. If he would tell me what part of town he wanted hit I could do it. I saw no reason to abort the mission, dump it in the ocean. What the hell, that's ridiculous. So we decided to go on down to Nagasaki.

The rest of the world was keeping the Japanese pretty busy that morning. There were B-24s from Okinawa bombing and there were P-47 beating up the railroads and there were naval aircraft all over the place. It was a flying circus. We get down close to Nagasaki and it's still socked in just like the reconnaissance aircraft told us it was. So we started a radar run. The last 10 or 15 seconds of the run a hole opened up in the clouds and Behan (the bombardier) said "I got it, I got it, I got it," and he dropped visually.

The only trouble was he had a hole about one-millionth the size he really needed to tell what he was bombing. He had something in his the cross hairs of his sight that he thought was his briefed aiming point. It was three miles to the northwest. Right smack in the middle of this industrial

valley was the Mitsubishi plant and the heavy industry. Nagasaki was to be the convincer, the antipersonnel type bombing, and we were going to bomb the residential areas of the city. Well we didn't. We bombed the other end, so the casualty rate wasn't nearly as high.

Q: At Wendover, did you know the weapon would end the war?

A: They told us it would. First thing Tibbets told us: If what we are going to be trained to do works, it will tremendously shorten the war.

Q: You've worked for the military nearly your whole adult life. Do you consider yourself a hawk?

A: You have to define a hawk. I don't know. Am I a warmonger? No. I'm scared. I don't like getting shot at. I don't want my children and my grandchildren shot at.

Q: Do you think the world is safer now than it was in 1945?

A: The only thing good I can say for it is that deterrence has worked. I don't think [there's] any more real peril now than there's ever been. I think the consequences if you ever cross that line are greater.

Q: Did you go to Japan afterward?

A: No. I'm working on that right now. Asahi [a Japanese news agency] has contacted me and they're working on plans for taking me over, 15th of July through the 15th of August or the end of August. Speak to Japanese business people and also, I hope, to participate in these Hiroshima and Nagasaki ceremonies.

In 1980, I entertained the head of the Hiroshima Survivors Association. He's also president of Sanyo Corporation, a big conglomerate like GE in Japan. He has invited us to come over also.

Q: How often do the people from the 393rd get together?

A: About every two years.

Q: A full-blown reunion?

A: Yeah, they're getting tame. A bunch of wheelchair basket cases. The guys are beginning to drop off., too. We don't live forever. I guess we're paying our dues for misspent youth. War is hell, and all those other things, but I wouldn't trade the 4 1/2 years I spent in the service for anything.

Q: Do people in the aerospace industry still think of you as Jacob Beser from the --

A: Sometimes, sometimes.

Q: Does it make you feel uncomfortable?

A: No more than there's a guy who's a golf pro. It's just something that happened in my life. My close associates here in Baltimore at Westinghouse, they think it's great. Every time we get a new customer in, they make sure he knows, especially if he's a blue suiter [a member of the Air

Force]. And it bears some weight with the young Air Force people. But you gotta do your job. If you don't do your job, you can take all of that and 50 cents and buy a cup of coffee. You can trade on it after hours, you get kinda close, in a bar, and these guys start telling me their Vietnam war stories and after a while we get to fighting World War II. Veterans are no different. I remember my father and my mother both used to talk about France, the first war. I used to wonder if he'd ever run out of stories. And I guess today people wonder if I'll ever run out of stories.

Q: What was it like when you were on the Enola Gay and the bomb went off?

A: I wasn't watching the radar screen. I had my own instrumentation I was concerned with. I saw the fuse come on after the bomb separated from the aircraft, fixed time delay of about 10 seconds, give it time to clear. I saw the fuse come on to get the whole thing rolling and then the thing disappeared. At the same time it disappeared there was this big flash which illuminated the inside of the airplane. I couldn't wear the goggles like they were supposed to. I was busy analyzing the environment making sure there was nothing [unplanned] happening. I was looking for the presence of signals.

Q: Which could accidentally have set it off?

A: Yeah. When I got to the window two, three minutes later, the cloud was already up there, the mushroom that you see. It was still boiling and changing colors and I looked out and couldn't believe my eyes. It looked like -- you get down here at Ocean City and you get about two feet out in the water and you start stirring up the sand and how it billows? Well, it was like the whole goddamned ground was doing it. And I could see new fires breaking on the periphery all the time. I never saw the cities in either place.

Q: Had they told you about what effects to expect?

A: At the briefing they showed us a picture of the mushroom cloud. They talked about these high yields, you know, high explosive effects, but that's about as far as it could go. There wasn't much they could do.

Q: When people talk to you about the whole experience, what question do they ask you most often?

A: Would you do it again.

Q: Would you do it again?

A: Given the same circumstances in the same kind of context, the answer is yes. However, you have to admit that the circumstances don't exist now. They probably never will again. I have no regrets, no remorse about it. As far as our country was concerned, we were three years downstream in a war, going on four. The world had been at war, really, from the '30s in China, continuously, and millions and millions of people had been killed. Add to that the deliberate killing that went on in Europe, [and] it's kind of ludicrous to say well, geez, look at all those people that were instantly murdered. In November of 1945 there was an invasion of Japan planned. Three million men were gonna be thrown against Japan. There were about three million Japanese digging in for the defense of their homeland, and there was a casualty potential of over a million people. That's what was avoided. If you take the highest figures of casualties of both

cities, say, 300,000 combined casualties in Hiroshima [and] Nagasaki, versus a million, I'm sorry to say, it's a good tradeoff. It's a very cold way to look at it, but it's the only way to look at it. Now looking into tomorrow, that's something else again. I don't have any pat answers for that.