



Paul Warfield Tibbets Jr.

War hero | 1915-2007 | Des Moines

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<http://data.desmoinesregister.com/famous-iowans/paul-warfield-tibbets-jr>

Few people have altered the course of history as significantly as bomber pilot Paul Warfield Tibbets Jr.

The man who played a monumental and pivotal role near the end of World War II spent much of his boyhood in Iowa. For several years he called Des Moines home.

Tibbets was born Feb. 23, 1915, in Quincy, Ill., the first child of Paul Warfield Tibbets and his Iowa-born wife, Enola Gay Haggard. Later, the couple had a daughter, Barbara.

When Paul Jr. was 3, the Tibbets family moved to Davenport, "and a couple of years later, we bought a house in Des Moines," Tibbets wrote in his autobiography, "The Tibbets Story," later titled "The Return of the Enola Gay."

The Des Moines city directory of the period shows the family living at 5700 Waterbury Road.

"It was a big, white, two-story house with green shutters," Tibbets wrote, adding that it was "at the top of a small hill on Waterbury Road in what you would call a good neighborhood."

He added that he dearly loved "a glamorous new piece of furniture" in the living room, a Zenith radio.

His father was employed by his family-operated wholesale grocery company, Warfield, Pratt & Howell, that was based in Chicago and had branches in Davenport, Des Moines and Sioux City. The senior Tibbets had met his Glidden-born future wife while crossing Iowa on business.

A turning point came during a particularly nasty Iowa winter.

The senior Tibbets went to Florida to visit his mother, who always wintered there, and as Tibbets Jr. later wrote: "He boarded the train in a blizzard and arrived in Miami two days later in bright sunshine. When he saw the palm trees and felt the warmth of the Florida sun, he decided on the spot that this was for him."

The senior Tibbets remained in Florida to establish his own wholesale confectioner's business. His son remembered being, at age 9, the first in the family to join him, via a train trip, on July 4, 1924. His mother and sister remained behind to pack up the house in Des Moines.

Tibbets wrote that the move provided him the best of both worlds: A life in Florida, plus the chance to escape Florida's summer heat with his mother and sister by returning to Iowa "for prolonged vacations."

"The move to Florida didn't sever the ties with the corn country. I went back to Iowa every summer for a long vacation on my uncle's farm."

It was in Florida, when Tibbets was 12, that he became hooked on flying. Through his father's business, he was given the chance to fly in an open-cockpit biplane during a promotion of Baby Ruth candy bars. After tying tiny parachutes to each piece of candy, his job was to toss the bars overboard as the plane flew over the heads of racetrack and beach visitors. Beginning in September 1928, and for five years after, Tibbets attended Western Military Academy in Alton, Ill.

Because his father wanted him to become a doctor, Tibbets set his sights on that goal. He attended the University of Florida beginning in 1933, then transferred to the University of Cincinnati after his sophomore year so he could enroll in its medical school.

But his interest in medicine diminished as he frequently found himself at the airport "taking lessons and renting airplanes an hour at a time for the sheer fun of flying."

On Feb. 25, 1937, Tibbets entered the Army Air Corps.

In World War II, he filled important flight missions out of England and Algeria. As a skilled aviator, he tested the B-29. But it wasn't until September 1944 that he was chosen for a top-secret mission, which he oversaw at Wendover Army Air Base in Utah. For his final task he would fly a plane that he'd name the Enola Gay, in honor of his mother.

On Aug. 5, 1945, President Truman ordered the secret mission to be executed, and on Aug. 6, Tibbets and his flight crew dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, thus leading to the end of the war. Tibbets was just 29 years old at the time.

Three days later, the United States dropped another atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan, and six days after that, Japan surrendered. Tibbets retired from the Air Force on Aug. 31, 1966, after more than 29 years of service to his country.

He soon joined Executive Jet Aviation Inc., living in Geneva, Switzerland, for about two years before moving to Columbus, Ohio, in 1970. He was named president of the company on April 21, 1976, and worked until his retirement in 1987.

Tibbets was first married to Lucy Wingate of Columbus, and they had two sons, Paul III and Gene. The marriage, it is said, broke up partly over the secrecy Tibbets had to maintain before his important war mission.

On May 4, 1956, Tibbets married Andrea Quattrehomme, a woman of French descent.

Until his death at home in Columbus on Nov. 1, 2007, Tibbets remained a military icon, with his autographs, books and photos in demand.



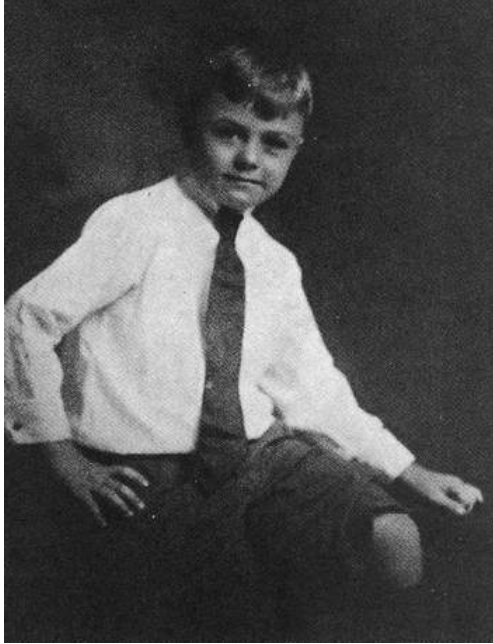
The much-honored Tibbets, who attended elementary school in Des Moines, named his warplane, the Enola Gay, after his Glidden-born mother.

The plane, now housed at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, has been restored, and Tibbets attended the unveiling in 2003.

In 1952, Tibbets' war story was filmed in Hollywood with the title "Above and Beyond." Popular actor Robert Taylor portrayed Tibbets. Tibbets said that he and Taylor hit it off immediately because they had so much in common, including a love of flying.

Tibbets never forgot his Iowa roots, and returned occasionally in the 1940s and '50s to visit. His Iowa family included his grandmother, Mary L. Haggard, uncle, Roy F. Haggard, and cousin, Don Haggard, all of Glidden, and a great-great-uncle, J. W. Howell of 2021 Grand Ave. in Des Moines.

Register File Photo



Tibbets is shown above at age 8.

Photo: Special to the Register



Col. Paul Tibbets stands beside the Enola Gay, a B-29 Superfortress bomber, in 1945 in an unknown location. He piloted the Enola Gay flight that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Associated Press File Photo