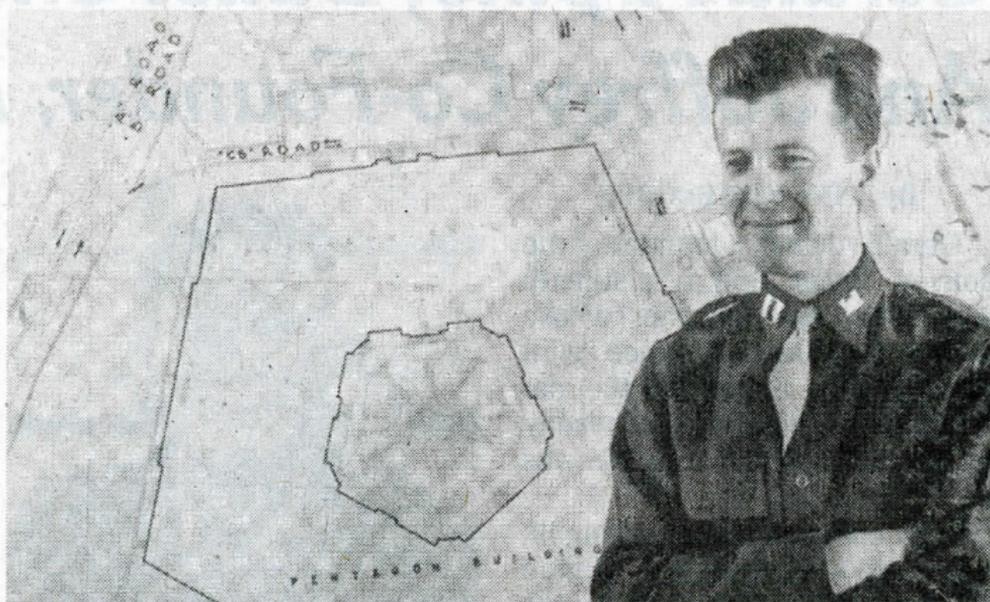


OBITUARIES



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Robert R. Furman with the Pentagon layout, later built in 1943.

R. R. Furman, 93, Dies; Led Bomb-Project Spying

By DENNIS HEVESI

Robert R. Furman, a former Army major who as chief of foreign intelligence for the American atomic bomb project in World War II coordinated and often joined harrowing espionage missions to kidnap German scientists, seize uranium ore in Europe and determine the extent of Nazi efforts to build the bomb, died Oct. 14 at his home in Adamstown, Md. He was 93.

The cause was metastatic melanoma, a skin cancer, said his son, David.

Not a spy but a civil engineer by training, Major Furman was a protégé of Gen. Leslie R. Groves, the military director of the Manhattan Project, the top-secret program that designed the atom bomb. They first worked together in 1941 when General Groves, then a colonel, was in charge of constructing a new War Department building across the Potomac from Washington, the Pentagon. Captain Furman, a 1937 Princeton graduate who had worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and a construction company in New York, was assigned to General Groves's staff as the third-ranking supervisor of the Pentagon project.

When the building was completed in 1943, in only 17 months, General Groves was put in charge of the atom bomb project and brought along his aide, who by then had been promoted to major.

"In August 1943, in response to the continuing concerns of his scientists about a German bomb, Groves began to organize an intelligence effort," the historian Robert S. Norris wrote in "Rac-

what was called Operation Peppermint, Major Furman led a team to Belgium where, under German sniper fire, they seized uranium samples.

"The trail eventually led to the arsenal in Toulouse, in southern France," Mr. Norris's book says. "The amount that was found totaled 31 tons, about three railcars' worth," it continues. "Helping to get the uranium safely to port was Major Furman, Groves's eyes and ears on the scene." The ore was eventually shipped to the United States.

General Groves wanted Germany's leading physicist, Werner Heisenberg, kidnapped or killed. With Major Furman coordinating the mission, Moe Berg — a former major-league baseball player and Princeton graduate who was fluent in seven languages — was assigned to follow Heisenberg. His efforts led to Heisenberg's capture in May 1945.

Meanwhile, Major Furman escorted six other German scien-

The chief of foreign intelligence on atomic developments in World War II.

tists to Rheims, France. Eventually, 10 scientists, including Heisenberg, were flown to Versailles and placed in a detention center called the Dustbin, out of the reach of the Soviets.

The findings of the Alsos team indicated that the German bomb

"Groves chose Major Furman to head it," the book continues, and told him he was "responsible for finding out what the Germans were doing."

The major, then 28, began by interviewing prominent scientists working on the project, traveling between their campuses and the secluded installations at Oak Ridge, Tenn.; Hanford, Wash.; and Los Alamos, N.M.

Roger Meade, historian emeritus of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, said Wednesday that Major Furman worked closely with Luis Alvarez, a physicist at Los Alamos who later won a Nobel Prize. "They looked at ways to collect water samples from the Upper Rhine and Lake Constance" — between Germany, Switzerland and Austria — "to see if there was evidence of German nuclear activity," Mr. Meade said. In one of the first counterintelligence activities related to atomic bombs, they looked for heavy water (water containing a heavy isotope of hydrogen), which is used in bomb production.

Mr. Meade called the major "a very shadowy figure" who only reluctantly began to discuss his espionage activities in the 1960s. Major Furman was the primary coordinator of a team of spies, code-named Alsos, who followed Allied troops across Europe. In

of being two years ahead, they were two years behind," Mr. Norris wrote.

Robert Ralph Furman was born in Trenton, N.J., one of five sons of William and Leila Ficht Furman. His father was a bank teller; his mother worked as a riveter during World War II.

Major Furman left the Army in 1946 and moved to Bethesda, Md., where he started a construction company that built homes, schools and commercial buildings. He retired in 1993.

Besides his son, he is survived by his wife of 57 years, the former Mary Eddy; his brother Richard; three daughters, Martha Keating, Julia Costello and Serena Furman; four grandchildren; and a great-grandson.

Major Furman's connection to the atomic bomb did not end with Germany's surrender. In July 1945, he returned to Los Alamos. General Groves assigned him to escort half of the uranium for the bomb to Tinian Island in the Pacific aboard the cruiser Indianapolis. It arrived on July 26. Four days later, when the major and his top-secret cargo were no longer aboard, the Indianapolis was torpedoed; more than 800 sailors died.

On Aug. 6, 1945, with the atom bomb assembled, Major Furman watched as the B-29 Enola Gay took off toward Hiroshima.

York Times in 1988, when he succeeded Mr. Joffrey as artistic director. "The artist in dance must

rock hits like his 1970 "Trinity"; several political protest pieces; and bold, erotically tinged works; and