

= Robert Furman =

Robert Ralph Furman (August 21 , 1915 ? October 14 , 2008) was a civil engineer who during World War II was the chief of foreign intelligence for the Manhattan Engineer District directing espionage against the German nuclear energy project . He participated in the Alsos Mission , which conducted a series of operations with the intent to place all uranium in Europe into Allied hands , and at the end of the war rounded up German atomic scientists to keep them out of the Soviet Union . He personally escorted half of the uranium @-@ 235 necessary for the Little Boy atomic bomb to the Pacific island of Tinian . He was also a key figure overseeing the construction of The Pentagon building . After the war he founded Furman Builders Inc . , a construction company that built hundreds of structures , including the Potomac Mills shopping mall in Woodbridge , Virginia .

= = Early life = =

Robert Ralph Furman was born on August 21 , 1915 , in Trenton , New Jersey , one of five sons of William and Leila Ficht Furman . His father was a bank teller , and his mother worked as a riveter during World War II . He attended Princeton University and graduated in 1937 with a degree in civil engineering . He then worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and a construction company in New York .

= = World War II = =

In December 1940 , Furman was activated as a member of the United States Army Reserve and assigned to the Quartermaster Corps Construction Division , where he worked for Colonel Leslie R. Groves , Jr . , supervising the day @-@ to @-@ day construction of The Pentagon . When the building was completed in 1943 , Groves was reassigned to the " Manhattan Project " and brought his aide , Furman , with him .

In August 1943 Furman was put in charge of an intelligence effort formed by Groves in response to concerns raised by atomic bomb project scientists about the German nuclear energy project . As director of intelligence , Furman was responsible for ascertaining the progress the Germans were making . In December 1943 , Groves sent Furman to Britain to discuss the establishment of a London Liaison Office for the Manhattan Project and the British government , and to confer over coordinating the intelligence effort .

Furman sent the spy Moe Berg to Switzerland to meet the head of the German project , Werner Heisenberg . After chatting with Heisenberg at a cocktail party , Berg concluded that the Germans were a long way behind the Allied effort . Furman travelled to Rome in June 1944 , where he interviewed Italian scientists about the German project .

When the Alsos Mission found documentation in office of Union Minière in Antwerp that indicated over 1 @,@ 000 tons of refined uranium had been sent to Germany , but about 150 tons still remained at Olen , Belgium , Groves sent Furman back to Europe with orders to secure the Olen cache . The Alsos Mission located 68 tons there , but another 80 tons was missing , having been shipped to France in 1940 ahead of the German invasion of Belgium . Groves had the Olen uranium shipped to England and , ultimately , to the United States .

Documentation indicated that the missing uranium had been sent to Toulouse . An Alsos Mission team under Boris Pash 's command reached Toulouse on October 1 and inspected a French Army arsenal with a Geiger counter . When the needle jumped near some barrels , they were inspected and found to be the 31 tons of uranium from Belgium . The 3342nd Quartermaster Truck Company was released from the Red Ball Express to retrieve the shipment . The barrels were collected and transported to Marseilles , where Furman supervised their loading on a ship bound for the United States .

In April 1945 , Furman participated in Operation Harborage . The Alsos Mission and the 1269th Engineer Combat Battalion occupied Haigerloch , where they found and destroyed a German experimental nuclear reactor , and recovered uranium and heavy water . The Alsos Mission took

Heisenberg into custody on May 2 . Furman supervised his detention and that of nine other German scientists , who were taken to Rheims , then Versailles , and finally to the country estate of Farm Hall in England , where their conversations were monitored and where they could not defect to the Soviet Union .

In July 1945 , Furman personally escorted half of the uranium @-@ 235 necessary for the Little Boy atomic bomb to the Pacific island of Tinian . Accompanied by Captain James F. Nolan , a radiologist with Project Alberta , Furman set out by car from Santa Fe to Albuquerque on July 14 , then travelled by air to Hamilton Field , California . The men boarded the cruiser USS Indianapolis at Hunters Point Naval Shipyard , and crossed the Pacific to Tinian , arriving on July 26 . A few days after leaving Tinian , the Indianapolis was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine with the loss of over 800 men .

= = Later life = =

Furman left the army the year after the war ended and founded Furman Builders Inc. in Rockville , Maryland . The firm built hundreds of homes , schools and commercial buildings , including the Potomac Mills shopping mall in Woodbridge , Virginia , the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington , D.C. , and the United States embassy in Nicaragua . He married Mary Eddy in 1952 . They had four children : a son , David , and three daughters , Martha Keating , Julia Costello and Serena Furman .

For the most part , Furman kept quiet about his exploits during the war . He served as president of the local rotary club and sang baritone in a barbershop quartet . He retired in 1993 , and died of metastatic melanoma on October 14 , 2008 at Buckingham 's Choice retirement community in Adamstown , Maryland at the age of 93 .