



IN MEMORIAM

Edward Teller
University Professor, Emeritus
Davis
1908–2003

Edward Teller was born in Budapest, Hungary on January 15, 1908. Even as a child, he had already developed a love for mathematics; as a young man, he studied the newly developing field of quantum mechanics under the tutelage of Werner Heisenberg at the University of Leipzig, Germany. From 1930 to 1933, he attended the university in Göttingen, the historical center of German mathematical and physical science.

Faced with the rise of Nazism in Germany, Edward Teller fled first to Copenhagen in 1933 and then to London. Two years later he came to the United States, accepting a position teaching physics at the George Washington University. Subsequently he joined Enrico Fermi at the University of Chicago. It was Teller, along with Eugene Wigner and Leo Szilard, who went to Albert Einstein's summer home on Long Island in 1939, where Einstein signed the famous letter to President Roosevelt urging him to pursue atomic weapons research before the Nazis could preempt the field. Edward Teller then followed his conviction and went to Los Alamos, where he was a member of the Manhattan Project, a top-secret team that designed and built the atomic bomb.

After World War II, Edward Teller returned to the University of Chicago, but he was very concerned about the rise of Communism, even though the mood of the country was no longer defense oriented. When Ernest O. Lawrence invited him to join the University of California, he stipulated one condition: that he be allowed to work in a laboratory devoted to the development of the thermonuclear weapons, which he felt even then to be the chief deterrent against an open conflict with the Soviet Union.

Edward Teller founded the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory (now named the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, LLNL), and proceeded to put the laboratory on the path to national security prominence. Beyond being the driving force for the successful testing of the first hydrogen bomb, he advanced the concept of the submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), which eventually led to the warhead prototypes for the Polaris SLBM. Edward Teller's tenure as the Director of LLL was from 1958 to the mid-1960's. He said in 1998, "The Laboratory is the one thing in my life that I am completely happy about" and cited three specific contributions of major importance:

1. The introduction of very large computers into scientific enterprise and the laboratory's leadership in that area;
2. The development of nuclear weapons that could be launched by submarines;
3. The work on strategic defense, which he and others believe led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

Edward Teller has always been inspired to teach. He worked hard to instill in students of all ages the love that he had for science. He was the driver behind the establishing the Department of Applied Science (DAS) at the LLL, which became a part of the College of Engineering at the UC Davis in the early 1960's. He served as its founding Chair and inspired the first and most comprehensive use of a national laboratory as a resource for graduate student education and research. This legacy lives on even as the LLL grew and matured as did UC Davis. Edward Teller taught on several campuses of the UC system and held the title of University Professor

Emeritus. In 1999, the Edward Teller Chair Endowment at the DAS of UC Davis was established in his honor.

Edward Teller was also instrumental in initiating the Hertz Foundation, which is dedicated to nurturing young, brilliant minds in applied sciences. In 2003, the Edward Teller Education Center, a partnership between UC and LLNL, was created to honor his career as a teacher and advocate for science education.

Many awards were bestowed upon Edward Teller during his lifetime. Among these are the American Ordnance Association Harrison Medal (1955), Albert Einstein Award (1958), US Atomic Energy Commission's Enrico Fermi Award (1962), Israel's Harvey Prize (1975), National Medal of Science (1983), the Presidential Citizens Medal ((1989), the first Sicilian Regional Science Peace Prize from Italy's Ettore Marjorana- Enrice- Scienze (1990), the DOE Gold Award (2002) and the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award (2003). He was also granted twenty- three honorary doctorate degrees and elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

One award bestowed upon Edward Teller that he believed to be an acknowledgement of his greatest achievement is the Hungarian government's Corvin Medal for "exceptional achievement in the arts and science, and for having 'helped end the Cold War without bloodshed'". Author and historian Gregg Herken remarked, "My view of Edward Teller is that it is difficult if not impossible to overstate his influence as a scientist upon the politics and policies of the United States in the 20th century. In many ways, he was a force of nature as much as a human being. His passing marks the end of an era – an era when scientists had extraordinary prestige and influence with the government – for having invented the weapons that won not only the Second World War but the Cold War with the Soviet Union." U.C. President Emeritus Richard C. Atkinson said, "Edward Teller was one of the world's leading scientific minds of the 20th century, and he made a major contribution to the security of our nation and world peace. It has been a great honor for the University of California to be identified with him and to have had him as a member of our community and a key leader in the national laboratories."

Edward Teller died on September 9, 2003. He is survived by his son Paul, daughter Wendy, four grandchildren and one great grandchild. His wife of 66 years, Mici, died four year ago.

Yin Yeh
Dick Christensen
Rick Freeman