

### Little known heroes of the nuclear age, part 3

Arnold Kramish, mentioned in part one and two of this series, was a private in the Special Engineer Detachment in 1944 and was stationed at the Clinton Engineer Works. In August 1944, he volunteered along with nine other enlisted men to participate in an unknown secret effort at the U.S. Navy shipyard in South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He would become one of the first people injured in the Manhattan Project.

As we continue his story, he tells of the conversation he held with the priest who attempted to administer last rites to him after the accident, "I telephoned Father McDonough at Mercy Hospital in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His memory of the Philadelphia accident was as vivid as mine, and, once more, we laughed at my blasphemy and the chicken soup. He was in the hospital with skin and prostate cancer. He said he was coming along fine, but since he had prayed for me, in spite of my rejection, asked if I would pray for him. I promised I would.

"He offered to supply his remembrances of the event if I would write. Then he asked, 'By the way, what was that yellow gas?' The question was understandable; Maj. Gen. Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, had lowered a veil of secrecy over the accident. In ministering to the accident victims, the chaplain had acquired a substantial coating of the substance on his hands. I told him the gas was uranium hexafluoride.

"Uranium? You mean for the atom bomb?' he asked.

"Yes, Father,' I replied. The line went dead.

"Father? Father?' I kept repeating for about a minute, until I heard the dial tone.

"I wrote to Father McDonough and a reply came from his executor, saying that 'I regret to inform you that our wonderful Father Louis V. McDonough passed away March 28, 1980, at 12:15 PM' — just after we had spoken. The good father and I had just come full circle, having met when I was supposed to be dying and again when he himself was at the point of death.

"He died of a heart attack. What were his thoughts after we spoke and I awaited his reply? That question still haunts me. Quietly, I recited the Mourner's Kaddish for an early and final victim of Hiroshima.

Arnold Kramish's obituary as published in the New York Times and Washington Post reads in part, "After World War II, Kramish became a nuclear intelligence and policy expert. He served with the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission until 1951, when he joined the staff of the RAND Corporation as a nuclear weapons research strategist.

"He was one of the first to find out the nature of the Soviet nuclear weapons program after World War II,' said Samuel Cohen, the physicist who invented the neutron bomb. 'He got hold of good intelligence and tried desperately to send the word up to the top.'

"In the early 1950s, Kramish also worked with Edward Teller on the hydrogen bomb, and he was the only scientist who participated in the interrogation of Soviet spy David Greenglass, brother-in-law of Julius Rosenberg.

"He was the AEC's liaison with the CIA, working on Soviet espionage.

"In later years, Kramish wrote *The Griffin* about the life of Paul Rosbaud, a spy who passed information about the Nazi atomic bomb effort to the British during World War II.

"Born in Denver, Kramish graduated from Denver University in 1945 and received a master's degree in physics from Harvard in 1947.

"In the 1970s, he worked as an arms control adviser for the U.S. State Department in Paris. Under President Ronald Reagan, he directed a White House study that approved of the Strategic Defence Initiative, also known as Star Wars.

"Kramish taught courses at the University of California at Los Angeles, the London School of Economics, as well as other institutions.

"In addition to *The Griffin*, his other books include *Atomic Energy in the Soviet Union* (1959), *The Peaceful Atom in Foreign Policy* (1963) and *The Future of Non-Nuclear Nations* (1970). He also held a patent for a nuclear radiometer.

Recently, Pamela Kramish Jones, Arnold's daughter, and her family toured Oak Ridge. I was pleased to help her arrange for a tour of the Graphite Reactor and to take her and her family on a tour of Y-12. She is helping finish this series of articles on her father by supplying material about his life and experiences after the Manhattan Project.

One thing she told me was that as a result of the accident in the Philadelphia Navy shipyard, his ankles were always very red and had a horrible rash that itched and caused him great pain for the rest of his life. Kramish's wife is still living.

Pam indicated that she had been contacted a number of times regarding the memoirs he was said to have been writing. She is unaware of a manuscript if one exists, but she offered to see what she could find.

I look forward to the information she will provide and will share her impressions of her family's visit to Oak Ridge, the place where it all started for her father. She did say, "He was my father, I thought it was not unusual to have a physicist for a father..."

However, now that she has seen the actual places where he worked and learned about his life here in Oak Ridge, she seemed intrigued by Y-12 and the amazing things that have resulted from her father's early work on the design of the S-50 Thermal Diffusion Plant that helped to win World War II. One of Pamela's daughters is named "Sarah" in honor of the great grandmother who brought the chicken soup to her grandfather after that awful accident.

Kramish's life after World War II is full of interesting experiences as well. His death on June 15, 2010, is an example of the loss of not only a great man whose family members miss him, but also a loss to all who are attempting to capture the history of the Nuclear Age. Sad to note that we are losing more and more of these people who have tremendous experiences to tell about, and, like the "Kramish lost manuscript," may be lost forever.

Next, Pamela's reflections on her trip to Oak Ridge.