



# Edward Teller (1908–2003)

## A Life Dedicated to Science

**D**R. Edward Teller, world-renowned physicist, co-founder of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and a lifelong advocate for education, died September 9, 2003. He was 95.

“The loss of Dr. Edward Teller is a great loss for this Laboratory and for the nation,” said Livermore Director Michael Anastasio. “He was a passionate advocate for science, for technology, for education, and for Lawrence Livermore National Lab. He put his heart and soul into this Laboratory and into ensuring the security of this nation, and his intense dedication never wavered.”

Since he embarked on his scientific career, Teller’s life has intertwined with myriad heads of state, dignitaries, and other elected officials. He met with every U.S. president since Franklin D. Roosevelt as well as with Pope John Paul II.

Less than two months before his death, Teller was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civil honor, during a special ceremony conducted by President George W. Bush at the White House.

Although Teller could not attend that ceremony—his daughter Wendy accepted the medal on his behalf—he was touched by the honor. “In my long life, I had to face some difficult decisions and found myself often in doubt whether I acted in the right way,” he said, commenting on the award. “Thus, receiving the medal is a great blessing for me.”

Throughout his long life, Teller often found himself at the forefront of some of the 20th century’s most dramatic and history-making endeavors. Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1908, Teller received a Ph.D. in physics at the University of Leipzig. It was Teller who drove Leo Szilard and Eugene Wigner to meet with Albert Einstein, who together would write a letter

to President Roosevelt urging him to pursue atomic weapons research before the Nazis did.

Teller went on to work on the Manhattan Project at the fledgling Los Alamos National Laboratory and eventually became assistant director. His efforts were instrumental in creating the Livermore site of the University of California Radiation Laboratory in 1952. Teller strongly advocated development of the hydrogen bomb and promised and delivered

a submarine-launched nuclear weapons system. He served as director at Livermore for two years and then as associate director for physics.

“I always think of Edward Teller as passionately patriotic American with a deep Hungarian accent and a dry sense of humor,” said Duane Sewell, a Teller colleague and friend for more than 50 years. “He was committed to doing every thing in his power to create a strong America, and in my eyes, he went a long way toward achieving his goal. In

my eyes he was a kind, caring human being.”

To Teller, science and education always went hand in hand. He taught physics at the University of California (UC), then created and chaired the UC Davis Department of Applied Science, which is located at the Livermore site.

He often admitted that knowledge was dangerous, but warned that ignorance “can be incomparably more dangerous.” He was an advocate for education, believing that education was vital to the U.S. if the nation is to maintain its leadership role in the world.

In 1975, Teller was named Director Emeritus of the Laboratory and was also appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution. In the 1980s, he served as a determined advocate for the development of a ballistic missile

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***“Edward Teller played a pivotal role in ending the Cold War. He has been a strong advocate for national defense and the cause of human freedom. The United States honors him for his excellence in science and in education, and his unwavering commitment to the nation.”***

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—President George W. Bush, during his presentation of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Edward Teller on July 23, 2003

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defense system to protect the nation from nuclear attack. These efforts contributed to the end of the Cold War.

Teller received numerous awards for his contributions to physics, his dedication to education, and his public life. He published more than a dozen books on subjects ranging from energy policy and defense issues to his own memoirs.

Teller is survived by his son Paul, daughter Wendy, four grandchildren, and one great grandchild. His wife of 66 years, Mici, died three years ago.

“Dr. Teller will long be remembered as one of the most distinguished individuals in science,” says Anastasio. “He devoted his life to preserving freedom, pursuing new knowledge, and passing along his passion for science and technology to students of all ages. We will greatly miss his enthusiasm and insight, his humor and passion, and the optimism he had for the future.”

— Lynda Seaver  
Newsline Staff Writer

For further information on Dr. Teller's life, see the Web site at:  
[www.llnl.gov/llnl/06news/NewsMedia/teller\\_edward/teller\\_index.html](http://www.llnl.gov/llnl/06news/NewsMedia/teller_edward/teller_index.html)

