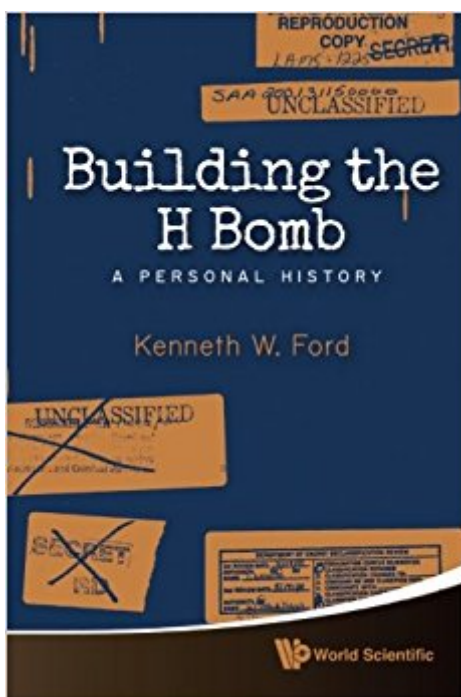


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Building The H Bomb: A Personal History



Synopsis

In this engaging scientific memoir, Kenneth Ford recounts the time when, in his mid-twenties, he was a member of the team that designed and built the first hydrogen bomb. He worked with "and relaxed with" scientific giants of that time such as Edward Teller, Enrico Fermi, Stan Ulam, John von Neumann, and John Wheeler, and here offers illuminating insights into the personalities, the strengths, and the quirks of these men. Well known for his ability to explain physics to nonspecialists, Ford also brings to life the physics of fission and fusion and provides a brief history of nuclear science from the discovery of radioactivity in 1896 to the ten-megaton explosion of "Mike" that obliterated a Pacific Island in 1952. Ford worked at both Los Alamos and Princeton's Project Matterhorn, and brings out Matterhorn's major, but previously unheralded contribution to the development of the H bomb. Outside the lab, he drove a battered Chevrolet around New Mexico, a bantam motorcycle across the country, and a British roadster around New Jersey. Part of the charm of Ford's book is the way in which he leavens his well-researched descriptions of the scientific work with brief tales of his life away from weapons. Readership: A memoir for general readership in the history of science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book originally to get more history on the Ulam vs. Teller event. My point of view was from a long background on von Neumann and computers and knowing Stan Ulam's work and his relationship with von Neumann. Before I add detail one has to wonder if Teller at the time the concepts for the Teller-Ulam version of the bomb were being developed had had the guts and

maturity to give credit where credit was due, including credit to Richard Garwin, then Kenneth Ford would have written quite a different book, if written it all, since much of the conflict would have been removed. Teller could always have said, "Stan Ulam brought in a new decisive concept that motivated me to take a new approach, and after this was done, Richard Garwin designed the bomb, and I really have to give credit to the two of them, and the rest of the team to making this work." The book thus has a lot to do with Teller. You really have to understand that before all this coming up to the 1940's Teller had a really good reputation. He was always very helpful to other people and many physicists would proclaim this. Freeman Dyson to this day is big backer of Teller. Something happened during the 1940's through the Los Alamos days which began to change him. Thus the Teller we see in this book at the time it takes place is a changed Teller. What was really new to me was Chapter 14, "The Garwin Design," which probably was old hat to many physicists. In Chapter 15 Marshall Rosenbluth's discovery of the pre-detonation possibility of the fission trigger is discussed which is almost amusing, but illustrates the role of these brilliant young physicists in making things really work.

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