

Ten years ago this month, an *Air Force Magazine* article alerted the public to the Smithsonian's plans for the *Enola Gay*.

# Revisionism Gone Wrong

By John T. Correll

**O**n Aug. 6, 1945, the B-29 *Enola Gay* dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. A second bomb fell on Nagasaki Aug. 9. Japan surrendered Aug. 15.

At Hiroshima, more than half the city was destroyed in a flash, and 80,000 were killed instantly. The Nagasaki bomb killed 40,000.

However, these missions brought an end to a war in which 17 million people had died at the hands of the Japanese empire between 1931 and 1945. Until the atomic bombs fell, Japan had not been ready to end the war.

By eliminating the need for an invasion of Japan, the bombs prevented casualties, both American and Japanese, that would have exceeded the death tolls at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.

The bombing of Hiroshima was a defining moment of the 20th century, but the aircraft that flew the mission was largely forgotten and left to deteriorate until restoration finally began in 1984.

Fifty years after Hiroshima, the airplane flew into controversy of a different sort. In the 1990s, the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum laid plans to use the *Enola Gay* as a prop in a political horror show. It depicted the Japanese more as victims than as aggressors in World War II.

When the plans were revealed by an article in *Air Force Magazine*, a raging controversy ensued. The exhibition was canceled in response to

public and Congressional outrage, and the museum director was fired.

From 1995 to 1998, the museum displayed the forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay* in a depoliticized exhibit that drew four million visitors, the most in the museum's history for a special exhibition.

In December 2003, the museum put the *Enola Gay*, fully assembled, on permanent exhibition at its new Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Va., near Dulles Airport.

Over the years, the controversy never died. A host of books and articles about it have been written by people who have not bothered to check the facts. Here is what really happened.

## A Museum With a Message

The Smithsonian accepted the *Enola Gay* in good condition July 3, 1949, at the Air Force Association Convention in Chicago. It was moved temporarily to a base in Texas and then, from 1953 to 1960, was stored outside, unlocked, at Andrews AFB, Md. In 1960, it was disassembled and stored at the Smithsonian's restoration facility in Suitland, Md.

*Bockscar*, the B-29 that flew the Nagasaki mission, has been displayed at the US Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, since 1961. But when the Smithsonian opened the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., in 1976, there was no move to exhibit the *Enola Gay*. Part of the reluctance to display it was that it was too big—99 feet long, with a wingspan of 141 feet—to fit, fully assembled, into the building.

Restoration of the *Enola Gay* finally began in December 1984 and plans to display it, or part of it, followed in 1987. By then, new political winds were blowing at the Smithsonian.

In the 1980s, the National Air and Space Museum veered away from its mission to collect, preserve, and display historic aircraft and spacecraft. It was part of broader cultural change at the Smithsonian, which the *Washington Post* described as a “move away from the traditional heroes, politicians, and objects in glass cases and toward a wide, fluid, social-history approach.”

The museum was influenced significantly by historians of the so-called “Revisionist” persuasion, who disputed the conventional interpretation of the Cold War and cast doubt on actions, statements, and motives of the United States. In the case of

*The Spark. In August 1993, Air Force Magazine published a pictorial about the National Air and Space Museum. On the cover appeared this photo of the Enola Gay's restored cockpit, which attracted much attention.*



the *Enola Gay*, the Revisionists held that the bombing of Hiroshima was unnecessary and immoral.

Martin O. Harwit became director of the Air and Space Museum in August 1987. Previously, he had been a professor of astronomy at Cornell University. Harwit was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, grew up in Istanbul, Turkey, and came to the United States at age 15 in 1946. While serving in the US Army, 1955-57, Harwit was assigned to the nuclear weapons tests at Eniwetok and Bikini Atolls in the Marshall Islands. He acknowledged that the experience “inevitably” influenced his thoughts about the *Enola Gay* exhibit, planning for which began shortly after Harwit’s arrival.

In a 1988 interview with the *Washington Post*, Harwit described plans for a program on strategic bombing “as a counterpoint to the World War II gallery we have now, which portrays the heroism of the airmen but neglects to mention in any real sense the misery of war. ... I think we just can’t afford to make war a heroic event where people could prove their manliness and then come home to woo the fair damsel.”

Harwit’s thoughts were in harmony with those of Robert McCormick Adams, who had been secretary of the Smithsonian Institution since 1984. “Take the Air and Space Museum,” Adams told *Washingtonian Magazine* in 1987. “What are the responsibilities of a museum to deal with the destruction caused by airpower?”

### Assembling a Team

Harwit began to assemble his *Enola Gay* team. It would be headed by Tom D. Crouch, chairman of the Aeronautics Department, who sent Harwit a preliminary plan for an exhibition that “would avoid the impression that we are only ‘celebrating’ Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

The official curator was Michael J. Neufeld. He coordinated the script, assisted by Crouch, who was manager of the curatorial team.

In a memo to Harwit, Crouch said, “Do you want to do an exhibition intended to make veterans feel good, or do you want an exhibition that will lead our visitors to think about the consequences of the atomic bombing of Japan? Frankly, I don’t think we can do both.”

What the curators had in mind was



**Afterward. The Enola Gay returns to Tinian after its Aug. 6, 1945, mission. Half of Hiroshima was destroyed, but the attack helped end a war in which millions died at the hands of Imperial Japan.**

clear from their 16-page planning document, written in July 1993.

- The [“Combat in the Pacific”] subunit’s purpose will be “to show how different the Pacific war was for Americans—no quarter was given and few prisoners were taken—as well as for the Japanese, who increasingly felt compelled to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend the Emperor and nation.”

- “Neither the atomic bomb nor an invasion was probably needed to end the Pacific war, but this is more obvious in hindsight than it was at the time.”

- The “emotional center” of the exhibition would be Unit 4, Ground Zero: Hiroshima and Nagasaki. “When visitors go from Unit 3 to Unit 4, they will be immediately hit by a drastic change of mood and perspective: from well-lit and airy to gloomy and oppressive.”

- “Photos of victims, enlarged to life size, stare out at the visitor.”

- Artifacts would be borrowed from Hiroshima and Nagasaki: burnt watches, broken wall clocks, “a schoolgirl’s lunch box with completely burned contents, burned and shredded clothing, and melted and broken religious objects. Where possible, photos of the persons who owned or wore these artifacts.”

### A Letter From Burr Bennett

In the 1980s, former B-29 crew members and other World War II veterans began campaigning for restora-

tion of the *Enola Gay*. The Smithsonian and Congress were bombarded with letters from “five old men,” as they described themselves, calling for “proud display of the *Enola Gay*.”

The “five old men,” active throughout the controversy, were William A. Rooney of Wilmette, Ill., W. Burr Bennett Jr., of Northbrook, Ill., Donald C. Rehl of Fountaintown, Ind., Ben Nicks of Shawnee, Kan., and Frank Stewart of Indianapolis.

The Air Force Association (AFA) entered the picture in August 1993, when *Air Force Magazine* published “In Aviation’s Attic,” a pictorial feature on aircraft restoration by the Air and Space Museum. The *Enola Gay* was on the cover. That drew a letter to me—then editor in chief of the magazine—from Bennett, one of the five old men.

“I am one of a small group of B-29 veterans of World War II engaged in a struggle with the Smithsonian Institution to display the *Enola Gay* proudly” or else “give it to a museum that will,” he wrote. In fact, the situation at the museum was much worse than he knew.

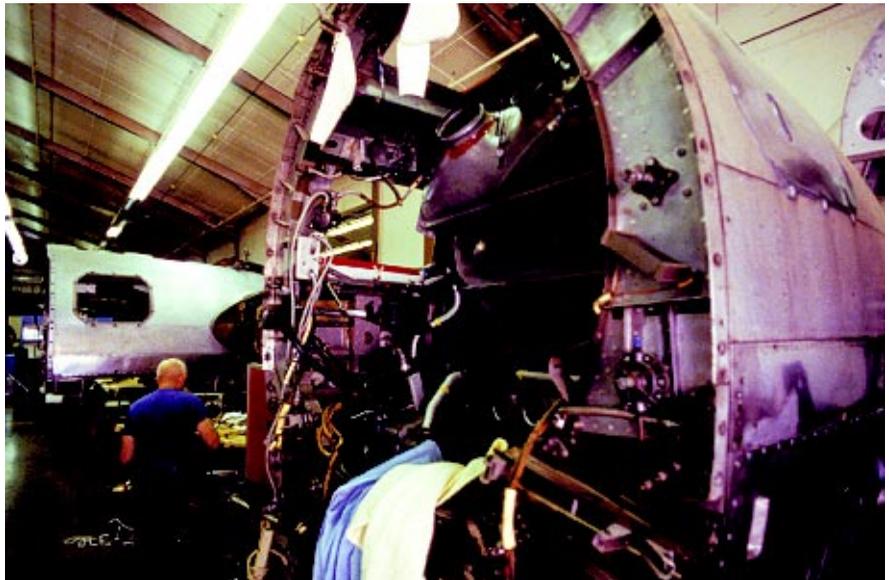
Later that month, AFA heard from Harwit, who had been told by an advisor that AFA might be a source of financial support for the exhibit. He called Executive Director Monroe W. Hatch Jr. and sent him a copy of the July 1993 planning document.

AFA was open to critical, even controversial, treatment of the subject. As *Air Force Magazine* had reported more than once, Hap Arnold—

wartime leader of the Army Air Forces and founding father of AFA—had not believed it was necessary to use the atomic bombs to win the war. However, the museum’s plan was not a critical analysis. It was a one-sided, antinuclear rant.

In his reply to Harwit, Hatch noted the claim in the concept paper that the museum was nonpartisan—taking no position on the “difficult moral and political questions”—but that the full text did not bear out that statement. “Similarly, you assure me that the exhibition will ‘honor the bravery of the veterans,’ but that theme is virtually nonexistent in the proposal as drafted,” Hatch said.

Furthermore, “the concept paper treats Japan and the United States in the war as if their participation were morally equivalent,” Hatch said. “If anything, incredibly, it gives the



Staff photos by Guy Aceto

**Restoration.** *The Smithsonian accepted the Enola Gay on July 3, 1949. In 1960, it was disassembled and stored in Suitland, Md. Actual restoration finally began in December 1984.*



**Biggest Ever.** *The Enola Gay had been disassembled into 52 pieces for storage. Reassembly required 300,000 staff hours. Museum leaders call it the largest reassembly job they have ever attempted.*

benefit of opinion to Japan, which was the aggressor.”

We met with Harwit, Crouch, and Neufeld at the museum Nov. 19. We found them willing to talk, but they were not responsive. Harwit, buoyed by his curators, his convictions, and his advisory panel of scholars and historians, put little importance on AFA’s concerns.

### The “Crossroads” Script

In January 1994, Harwit sent Hatch a copy of the just-completed script for the exhibition. The title was “The Crossroads: The End of World War

II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War.”

Harwit often claimed that AFA used this copy of the script for the *Air Force Magazine* article in April 1994 and released it to Congress and the news media. Not so. Unbeknownst to Harwit, *Air Force Magazine* received a copy two weeks earlier—no strings attached—from sources which are not disclosed. That was the copy, not the one Harwit sent to Hatch, used for the article and which AFA later reproduced and passed out.

Despite some hedging, the script

said the atomic bomb “played a crucial role in ending the Pacific war quickly.”

It also contained two lines that were to become infamous: “For most Americans this war was fundamentally different than the one waged against Germany and Italy—it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism.” If that seemed to suggest that the Japanese were the victims rather than the aggressors in World War II, there was more to come.

Japanese kamikaze suicide bombers were portrayed as valiant defenders of the homeland. There was no comparable recognition of American bravery or sacrifice. The script minimized the impact of the war on the American home front. “For many Americans,” it said, “combat in the Pacific remained a distant series of events.”

The curators cast doubt on the prospect of high casualties in an invasion of Japan (which was the alternative to dropping the bomb). The script said that it “appears likely that postwar estimates of a half-million deaths were too high, but many tens of thousands of dead were a real possibility.”

The “Ground Zero: Hiroshima and Nagasaki” section was to be set with theatrical lighting. No opportunity was missed to tug at the heartstrings. A kitten could not simply be dead. It had to glare “with eternally locked eyes.”

There was Reiko Watanabe’s lunch



Harwit's Folly. **Martin Harwit, the director of the National Air and Space Museum, assembled a team of curators who wanted to use the Enola Gay as a prop in an antinuclear morality pageant. He resigned in 1995.**

box with “the carbonized remains of sweet green peas and polished rice, a rare wartime luxury” and Miyoko Osugi’s shoe: “The blast of heat from the initial explosion apparently darkened the outer portion of the clog not covered by her foot.”

There were some 40 photos and artifacts related to women, children, and mutilated religious objects, a key theme for the section. There was also graphic emphasis on survivors with flash burns, scars, disfiguring.

In the section on “The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” the main display labels delivered the message. Among them: “The Cold War and the Arms Race”; “The Failure of International Control”; “More Bombs and Bigger Bombs”; “A World Gone ‘M.A.D.’”

Little attention was given to the years of Japanese aggression and atrocities that led to the circumstances of 1945. The script focused on the last six months of the war, when the people Japan had attacked were hitting back and closing in.

### The Plan Exposed

“War Stories at Air and Space” and a companion article, “The Mission That Launched the *Enola Gay*,” appeared in the April 1994 issue of *Air Force Magazine*. AFA circulated longer, fully documented versions of these articles in advance to the news media and others.

The first notice by the press was “Rewriting History,” a segment in the “Inside the Beltway” column in the *Washington Times* March 28. It paraphrased the magazine (accurately) as saying the exhibit was “skewed toward the Japanese victims of the bomb with little regard for the context of the times in which the bomb was dropped.”

Harwit’s response, published in “Inside the Beltway,” March 31, said *Air Force Magazine*’s accusations were “simply not true.” He said, “The exhibition describes the ‘naked brutality’ of Japanese forces in concrete terms, calling attention to the rape of Nanking, the treatment of POWs, the use of Chinese and Koreans as slave laborers, and the conduct of biological and chemical experiments on human victims.” On April 4, AFA delivered a copy of the exhibition script to the newspaper “so that you may judge for yourself.”

At the request of Congressional staffers for more information, *Air Force Magazine* produced a content analysis of the script. It showed ample evidence of imbalance. For example, the 559-page script (302 pages of text, 257 pages of graphics) had 49 photos of Japanese casualties, three photos of American casualties. There were only four text references to Japanese atrocities, the longest of them 16 lines.

Thereafter, AFA content analyses of each successive script revision

became a regular element in the controversy.

### Internal Admissions

One of the most astounding developments in the entire controversy was an April 16, 1994, internal memo from Harwit to his exhibition staff, explicitly agreeing with many of the points that *Air Force Magazine* and AFA had made.

■ “Though I carefully read the exhibition script a month ago, I evidently paid greater attention to accuracy than to balance. ... A second reading shows that we do have a lack of balance and that much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable.”

■ “We talk of the heavy bombing of Tokyo, show great empathy for Japanese mothers, but are strangely quiet about similar losses to Americans and our own Allies in Europe and Asia.”

■ “We show terrible pictures of human suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Section 400, without earlier, in Section 100, showing pictures of the suffering the Japanese had inflicted in China, in the camps they set up for Dutch and British civilians and military, and US prisoners of war.”

■ “We do not note that conditions in the American internment camps were far more favorable than in Japanese internment camps, where slave labor conditions prevailed.”

■ “The alternatives to the atomic bomb are stated more as ‘probabilities’ than as ‘speculations’ and are dwelled on more than they should be.”

When AFA obtained and circulated copies of the memo, Harwit, who had been caught saying one thing in public and an opposite thing in private, was outraged and indignant about “privileged correspondence released by one of the lobbying organizations, the Air Force Association.”

Despite his admissions in the memo, Harwit continued publicly to insist that AFA was wrong.

On April 20, 1994, Harwit appointed an internal “Tiger Team” to review the script and “look for any signs of imbalance.” A month later, the team turned in a stinging report. Its findings were remarkably similar to the *Air Force Magazine* criticisms. It cited numerous imbalances, including “depictions of Japanese as

victims” and “insufficient development of Japan’s extensive prewar aggression.”

The script, the Tiger Team said, appeared “to convey the impression that Japan was seeking peace, while the US was seeking to obstruct means for a negotiated settlement.” Whereas B-29 missions were characterized in the script as “burning cities,” “attacking cities,” and “razing cities,” there was “no reference to industrial complexes, war-producing industries, or other ‘targets’ of military value in and around those cities.”

The Tiger Team report was kept under wraps until August 1994, when the museum finally provided a copy to *Air Force Magazine* in voluntary response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

The museum’s own docents, or volunteer tour guides, also thought the exhibition was wrong. After meeting with the docents in March, Crouch sent a memo to Harwit on March 31: “It did not go well with the docents last night. Many of them have now read the script, and the majority of those in attendance were very angry about the exhibition.”

### The Curators Dig in

To Harwit’s displeasure, AFA was not easy to shrug off. The Air Force Association “had not been content just to offer advice; they insisted on seeing their wishes carried out,” he said. “Each change the museum made evoked a triumphant cry from the AFA and a howl of dismay from academic historians.”

In hopes of neutralizing AFA, the museum devised a bizarre strategy.

“Given the unyielding attitudes of the AFA,” the Smithsonian decided in May 1994 to seek support from the American Legion on the assumption that “the AFA, whose membership was only about 180,000, would have to defer to such giants as the American Legion, with its 3.1 million members.”

This made no sense. Did museum officials imagine the American Legion would agree with their distorted view of World War II? The Legion had already adopted a resolution calling the exhibition plan “politically biased.” In any case, why would AFA “have to defer” to the American Legion?

The script was revised May 31, but AFA did not get a copy for all

most a month. There were a number of changes. Eleven of the 75 “Ground Zero” photos had been removed, as were two of the 26 “Ground Zero” artifacts. Creditably, the script added a photo of a kneeling Australian airman, about to be beheaded in August 1945 after Japan had surrendered.

Overall, though, the extent of the revision did not shift the balance or the context appreciably.

The script was still interspersed with a series of “Historical Controversies”: Would the Bomb Have Been Dropped on the Germans? Did the Demand for Unconditional Surrender Prolong the War? How Important was the Soviet Factor in the “Decision to Drop the Bomb”? Was a Warning Demonstration Possible? Was an Invasion Inevitable Without the Bomb? Was the Decision to Drop the Bomb Justified?

The revised script, which had 295 text pages, devoted less than one page and only eight visual images to Japanese military activity prior to 1945. The emphasis was still on Japanese suffering.

The notorious “War of Vengeance” lines were modified and now read: “For most Americans, this war was different from the one waged against Germany and Italy: It was a war to defeat a vicious aggressor but also a war to punish Japan for Pearl Harbor and for the brutal treatment of Allied prisoners. For most Japanese, what had begun as a war of imperial conquest had become a

battle to save their nation from destruction.”

### Leaking Like a Sieve

As an article in *Washingtonian* magazine would later note, AFA “kept track of every piece of paper—official, unofficial, and private—that flew during the debacle, compiling them all in thick, green-covered books and distributing them around Washington.”

We often received the same document from more than one source. I. Michael Heyman, who would become secretary of the Smithsonian in September 1994, told Harwit that “your museum is like a sieve.” Harwit himself used the documents from AFA in writing his book, *An Exhibit Denied* (Copernicus, 1996). “The information contained in these files was invaluable,” he said.

There was much talk, then and later, about the script being a work in progress. Thus, it was another embarrassment for the museum when we obtained and circulated a June 21, 1994, memo from Neufeld, telling his advisors that the revisions were essentially over.

“If you find any factual errors or if you object strongly to certain formulations in the revised script, I would be happy to hear them,” Neufeld wrote. “But, if the exhibit is to be opened in late May 1995, as planned, we must now move on to the production and construction phase. This script therefore must be considered



*Kamikaze. The Kugisho Okha 22 kamikaze aircraft (here, at NASM’s new Udvar-Hazy Center) never had the chance to see action. The script of “The Last Act” portrayed Japanese kamikaze fighters as valiant defenders of the homeland.*

Photo by Paul Kennedy

a finished product, minor wording changes aside.”

In August 1994, the museum was still claiming that the exhibition script had strong backing from service historians. This was contradicted not only by statements from the military historians but also by Harwit’s own admission. In his charge to the Tiger Team in April, Harwit said that “a team of historians from different branches of the military” had “expressed dissatisfaction with the script’s overall balance. In their opinion, it was flawed in its portrayal of Japanese and American history, activities, and customs.”

Martin Harwit didn’t know it, but the landslide was about to begin.

### The Controversy Explodes

Twenty-four members of Congress sent a letter Aug. 10 to Robert McCormick Adams, then in his last days as secretary of the Smithsonian, expressing “concern and dismay” about the intended exhibit. They said the “revised script is still biased, lacking context,” and that “judging from recent public statements by museum officials, it seems that Air and Space is digging its heels in to defend an indefensible position.”

Harwit interpreted it as AFA manipulation. “The hand of the Air Force Association could not have been clearer if the letter had been written on AFA stationery,” he said.

Secretary Adams offered the usual defenses. In a letter to Rep. Peter

Blute (R-Mass.), Adams described the script as “a work in progress” and “still only at an intermediate stage in an ongoing, iterative process.”

On Sept. 23, a Sense of the Senate resolution on the *Enola Gay* exhibition, sponsored by Sen. Nancy L. Kassebaum (R-Kan.), passed unanimously on a voice vote. It said the latest version of the script was “Revisionist and offensive.” Again, Harwit blamed AFA, whose reports, he said, were “the text that, with minor editing, became Senator Kassebaum’s resolution.”

In August 1994, Harwit told Air Force historian Herman S. Wolk that he had taken another look at the script to see whether his curators had made changes proposed by the historians.

“Harwit told me that his weekend review showed that, in fact, the curators had failed to take those recommendations, especially those of AF/HO,” Wolk said in his memo for the record. “Dr. Harwit emphasized that he had been ‘*taken aback at how little had been done.*’ There were some ‘word changes here and there’ Harwit said, but clearly the curators had failed to follow through. As he put it, this ‘had fallen through the cracks.’” (Emphasis in original.)

However, Harwit soon resumed his regular message, telling the *Washington Post* that “we could have handled all this internally” if the first script had not been made public. The controversy since then “hasn’t

forced on us any [script] changes we wouldn’t have made ourselves.”

The new secretary of the Smithsonian, I. Michael Heyman, who took office Sept. 19, saw the problem right away. He told the *Washington Post* that “our first script for the exhibition was deficient.”

### The Museum’s Special Constituencies

Harwit resisted involvement in the exhibit by veterans, but he welcomed participation from the left. Peace groups and activists, alarmed that the message about the *Enola Gay* was changing, met with Harwit Sept. 20.

Father John Dear, a Jesuit priest and the spokesman for the activists, described Harwit as “exasperated.” He quoted Harwit as saying, “Where have you been? You are too late. Why haven’t you been in before? Why haven’t you talked to the media?” Harwit later said Father Dear’s account of the meeting was “fairly accurate.”

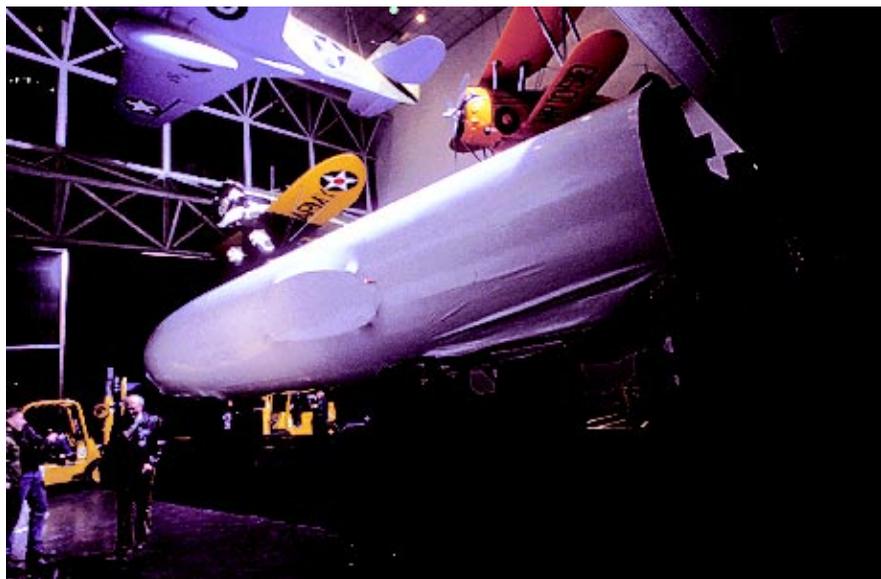
A group of 48 “historians and scholars” wrote to Secretary Heyman Nov. 16, saying that “only by resisting pressures from political sources ill-informed about the relevant historical scholarship can you hope to defend the Smithsonian’s credibility as a public institution.”

The Revisionists argued that Truman dropped the bomb for reasons other than avoiding casualties. They rejected Truman’s assertions, in his memoirs and elsewhere, that the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, had told him the invasion would cost a quarter-million to a million US casualties and an equal number of the enemy. To shore up their position, the Revisionists gave credence to low casualty estimates and attacked higher estimates.

The Revisionists disparaged the recollections of World War II veterans, saying that such memories were not to be trusted after 50 years, especially on emotional issues. Yet, they gave full credence to the memories of the *hibakusha*, the scarred and disfigured survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who were invited to appear at Revisionist programs in the United States.

Another constituency important to Harwit was the Japanese. Minutes from a museum staff meeting in July 1994—obtained and made public almost six months after the fact by Rep. Sam

Photo by Paul Kennedy



*Squeezed. In 1995-98, NASM displayed the Enola Gay’s forward fuselage (here in protective covering) and a few other parts. The downtown museum was too small to accommodate the entire 99-foot-long, 141-foot-wide bomber.*

Johnson (R-Tex.)—revealed that the May 1994 script revision had been translated into Japanese and shipped to Japan by Federal Express, asking for “a quick response.” A museum spokesman confirmed that at least three of the five full versions of the script were sent to city officials in Nagasaki and Hiroshima for comment.

In April 1993, Harwit and Tom Crouch had visited Hiroshima, where they promised to “make a powerful exhibition of the catastrophic effects of the bombing.”

Harwit said he wanted to avoid reviving “hard feelings between the US and Japan.” It was regrettable that “such concerns never seemed to have occurred to the five old men and other veterans. ... To men like Burr Bennett, Donald Rehl, and William Rooney, there were no moral dilemmas at all,” Harwit said. “Truman had merely chosen to save their lives instead of those of some Japanese. To them this made obvious sense.”

Meddling by the Air Force Association threatened the relationship with Japan. “I am most seriously concerned that the changes in the exhibition demanded by the Air Force Association would, if accepted, cause an uproar in Japan when the exhibition opens,” Harwit said in a July 1994 letter to Secretary of the Air Force Sheila E. Widnall.

Indeed, the Japanese were alarmed. Harwit felt a need to visit Japan “to reassure the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in person.” Heat from the Senate and public opinion “made such a trip doubtful, at least until after the November elections,” Harwit said.

The Japanese decided that if Harwit could not come to them, they would send a delegation to Washington to express their dismay face to face. How to explain to them that such a visit would be a political disaster?

“We all agreed that I could not go to Japan now and that we could not have the Japanese come, either. But we could not put this in writing,” Harwit said. “Heyman adamantly wanted to avoid a ‘paper trail.’ Whatever we did needed to be done verbally to leave no trace.”

Harwit really never did find a way to explain to the Japanese why their visit would be unwise. He wrestled with that problem right up to the end.

### Backing and Filling

On Aug. 31, meanwhile, another



AP photo by Shizuo Kambayashi

*Ground Zero. Children float paper lanterns at Hiroshima's Atomic Bomb Dome. Museum officials felt a need to assure the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the exhibit would reflect their views.*

revision had appeared. The curators continued to retreat, word by word, and line by line, but the structural, contextual, and ideological problems remained.

For example, the “Historical Controversies” had been removed *per se*, but most of the “eliminated” material showed up elsewhere. For example, the question “Was an Invasion Inevitable Without the Bomb?” was now preceded by the introductory word “Hindsight” instead of “Historical Controversies.”

Two more revisions followed in October. They reduced the number of grisly photos and artifacts, but the emotional punches and the imbalances were still there. A new section—labeled “Section 000,” entitled “The War in the Pacific”—was added in December 1994. It sought to create an illusion of balance by allotting 4,000 square feet of floor space to this section, but most of it was taken up by a Grumman F6F Hellcat carrier-based fighter. It did little to improve the overall balance.

The museum pegged its strategy on dealing with the American Legion to the exclusion of AFA and others. The curators opened script negotiations with the Legion Sept. 21, announcing that it had “expanded the exhibition review process beyond its original advisory committee, to include additional scholars, military historians, and representatives of the American Legion.” Others were pointedly not mentioned.

So far as we could tell, the Legion’s views were about the same as ours. We wished them well. But when the arrangement did not work out as expected, Harwit knew where the fault lay.

By November 1994, Harwit said, “The pressure on the American Legion leadership was mounting. They could not stay entirely aloof from their own membership, which had long been stirred up by the AFA’s and even the Legion’s own earlier propaganda, and they could not entirely defy the assembled strength of the other veterans organizations.”

The idea of using the American Legion to neutralize AFA had backfired. The Legion was now leading the charge, while AFA continued to analyze and distribute information about the museum’s plans and scripts.

By the end of the year, “pressures on the Legion from other veterans groups and individual veterans who had been aroused by the AFA’s and the Legion’s media campaigns, appeared now to be leading to a tougher stance,” Harwit said.

The Legion had run out of patience with Harwit. On Jan. 4, 1995, National Commander William M. Detweiler recommended that the organization “actively oppose” the exhibit, which he said was “suspect from all perspectives.”

### Spin, Crash, and Burn

On Jan. 9, 1995, Martin Harwit struck again. Heyman had promised

there would be no more uncoordinated changes. Without authorization—and to the horror of Smithsonian officials—Harwit wrote to the American Legion, saying he had been persuaded by academic advice that the casualty estimates for invasion of Japan in the script were too high, so he was changing the script.

Among his other adjustments, Harwit deleted the part of the script that said US “casualties conceivably could have risen to as many as a million (including a quarter of a million deaths). Added to the American losses would have been perhaps five times as many Japanese casualties—military and civilian.”

The replacement words made a different point: “After the war, Truman often said that the invasion could have cost half a million or a million American casualties.” The script then discounted Truman’s statement with a dismissive tag line, “The origin of these figures is uncertain.”

Whatever his motivation was, Harwit must have realized that he was advancing a major—and disputed—theme of the Revisionist dogma.

On Jan. 18, the American Legion called for the exhibit to be “canceled immediately” and for Congress “to conduct hearings into how the nation’s most visited and revered museum could mount such an exhibit.” The Legion said, “This exhibit, in our opinion, so closely parallels the design, content, and conclusions of the Nagasaki Peace Museum as to defy coincidence.”

Eighty-one members of Congress called, on Jan. 24, for “the immediate resignation or termination of Mr. Martin Harwit,” citing his “continuing defiance and disregard for needed improvements to the exhibit.” Twenty thousand subscribers to *Smithsonian Magazine* had also complained about the exhibit.

On Jan. 30, the Smithsonian canceled the exhibition. Heyman said the failed program would be replaced with “a much simpler one, essentially a display, allowing the *Enola Gay* and its crew to speak for themselves.”

Martin Harwit had one more surprise left. In April 1995, the Smithsonian abruptly canceled a reception—planned by Harwit without notifying Smithsonian leaders—to honor the curators of the original,

failed exhibition. Heyman learned about the event when the *Washington Times* called for comment.

Time had finally run out for Harwit. He resigned May 2. The fact that he had been fired would not be disclosed until the publication of his book the following year.

### The News Media

News media coverage was extensive. Press reports were generally deep and balanced, but the museum did not fare well in the commentaries. Many, if not most, of the columns and editorials interpreted the situation much the same way that AFA did. This was intolerable to the curators and their supporters, who sought to explain it away with a “Bamboozled Media” theory.

“The media largely spoke with one voice,” Harwit wrote in *Japan Quarterly* in 1997. “It seemed that hardly any of the journalists had read the 500-page exhibition script that the museum had completed in January 1994. They preferred instead to take their cue from Air Force Association press releases.”

Among those we allegedly bamboozled was the *Washington Post*.

In January 1995, the *Post* said that early drafts of the script had been “incredibly propagandistic and intellectually shabby” and “had a tendentiously antinuclear and anti-American tone.”

In February, another *Post* editorial said, “It is important to be clear about what happened at the Smithsonian. It is not, as some have it, that benighted advocates of a special-interest or right-wing point of view brought political power to bear to crush and distort the historical truth. Quite the contrary. Narrow-minded representatives of a special-interest and Revisionist point of view attempted to use their inside track to appropriate and hollow out a historical event that large numbers of Americans alive at that time and engaged in the war had witnessed and understood in a very different—and authentic—way.”

Among major newspapers and magazines, the bastion of support for the curators was the *New York Times*. “The Smithsonian would probably have worked its way to a more balanced exhibition without pressure from Congress,” the *Times* said in a September 1994 editorial. “In fact,

months before Congress intervened, Mr. Harwit wrote to his curators telling them that the exhibition was one-sided. That is how the process ought to work: Curators propose, review committees advise, the exhibition gradually comes into focus.”

The editorial writer obviously did not check out the story behind Harwit’s memo to the curators and was a bit behind on how the process really worked.

The Revisionists got their big moment on prime-time television July 27, 1995, with a Peter Jennings ABC special, “Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped.”

As the *Washington Post* review said, Jennings was led along by “a largely stacked deck of Revisionist historians” to the assessment of President Harry Truman “as an intellectual dwarf, propelled by ambitious militarists and politicians to a nuclear slaughter of the innocents.”

Jennings said, “It is unfortunate, we think, that some veterans organizations and some politicians felt the need to bully our most important national museum so the whole story of Hiroshima is not represented here.”

One of the few non-Revisionists interviewed for the Jennings special was Robert James Maddox, professor of American history at Pennsylvania State University. He said ABC misrepresented his views and ignored information he supplied. He called the show “the worst piece of garbage I’ve seen.”

### The Controversy Lingers On

In March 1995, six weeks before Martin Harwit was fired, the activist “historians and scholars” reconstituted themselves as the “Historians’ Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima.” The co-chairmen were Martin J. Sherwin and Kai Bird.

Sherwin was a professor of history at Dartmouth and Tufts. In 1994, in his capacity as an advisor to the Air and Space Museum on the *Enola Gay* exhibit, Sherwin complained that the crew had shown “no remorse” for the mission.

Bird was a journalist turned historian and author. In one of his op-ed pieces, Bird denounced the “humiliating spectacle” of “scholars being forced to recant the truth.”

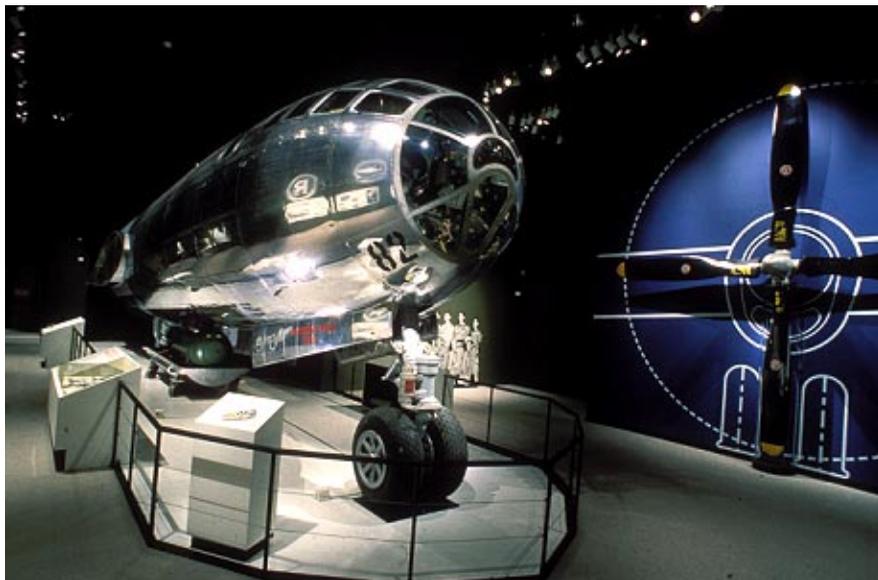
The Revisionists had not fared well in news media coverage of the controversy, but they found a more ad-

vantageous venue in book publishing, where the influence of scholars and academicians was strong and in which they got to write the material themselves, their way.

Some of the books were worse than others. Among the most strident in denouncing AFA and defending the curators was Philip Nobile's *Judgment at the Smithsonian* in 1995. The press release promoting this book depicted Nobile as blowing the lid off a cover-up after he "obtained a rare copy" of the exhibition script.

As Nobile admitted in the "acknowledgments" section of his book, he got his "rare copy" of the script from AFA, the same as everybody else.

Nobile's book hit a low point with its "mock war crimes trial of Harry Truman." According to the press re-



NASM photos by Carolyn Russo

**After "The Last Act." With Harwit gone, the museum displayed the Enola Gay's forward fuselage, a propeller, and other components in a depoliticized exhibit. It drew four million visitors, the most ever for a special exhibit.**



**Luster Restored. Also on display in the 1995-98 exhibit at NASM's downtown location was the Enola Gay's distinctive tail. Its aluminum skin was buffed and polished to its original shine.**

lease, "Nobile's fictional cross-examination of Truman leaves little doubt about the defendant's guilt."

Gar Alperovitz, a leading proponent of Revisionist theory about Truman and the atomic bomb, argued that a "new consensus" had developed among historians and that it supported the curators and the Revisionists. Alperovitz was stretching with his claim of consensus.

In 1994, a survey by the Organization of American Historians asked historians to rank various events as "bright spots" and "dark spots" in American history. World War II

ranked third from the top among 46 "bright" spots. The Atomic Bomb and Hiroshima tied (with the Mexican War) for 23rd place on the list of "dark" spots, being considered less dark than Watergate, the Great Depression, sexism, the Cold War, and the 1980s in general.

#### **Four Million Visitors**

For the most part, Secretary Heyman steered clear of ideology, concentrating instead on practical measures to extricate the Smithsonian from its troubles.

Heyman did, however, contribute

one misperception to the legend of the lost exhibit. Testifying to the Senate Rules Committee in May 1995, he said, "The fundamental flaw, in my view, lay in the concept of the exhibition itself. The basic error was attempting to couple an historical dialogue centering on the use of atomic weapons with the 50th commemoration of the end of the war."

The problem was never that history and commemoration would not mix. The problem was distorted history. But Heyman had found a convenient rationale that gave him quick separation from the failed exhibit, and he repeated it often.

In June 1995, the museum opened a straightforward historical exhibition on the *Enola Gay* and its mission. The centerpiece was the forward fuselage of the airplane, a 53-foot section and just over half the total length, up on the nose wheel. Also on display were a propeller, the tail, and two of the engines.

Part of the wall text in the exhibition gallery said that "the use of the [atomic] bombs led to the immediate surrender of Japan and made unnecessary the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands. Such an invasion, especially if undertaken for both main islands, would have led to very heavy casualties among American and Allied troops and Japanese civilians and military. It was thought highly unlikely that Japan, while in a very weakened military condition, would



*Mission Accomplished. The famous B-29 bomber, finally exhibited with respect, reposes in NASM's new Udvar-Hazy Center, where it dwarfs smaller aircraft such as the nearby P-38 and Japanese N1K2.*

have surrendered unconditionally without such an invasion.”

At a press conference opening the new exhibition, Heyman was asked why he had given in to veterans and Congress. He said that objections had not come only from “a handful of people or simply a handful of legislators.” He had received 30,000 to 40,000 letters from citizens.

Comment cards from visitors were overwhelmingly favorable. Before the exhibition closed in May 1998 after a three-year run, it had drawn almost four million visitors, making it by far the most popular special exhibition in the history of the museum.

Retired Vice Adm. Donald D. Engen was chosen to head Air and Space. He took the museum back to its charter to collect, preserve, and display historic aircraft and spacecraft.

Engen was killed in a glider accident in 1999, but his successor, retired Marine Corps Gen. John R. Dailey, appointed in January 2000, was of the same mold.

When the museum opened the Udvar-Hazy annex in December 2003, the airplane in center position in the aviation hangar was the *Enola Gay*, completely restored and fully assembled for the first time since 1960. Like other aircraft at Udvar-Hazy, the *Enola Gay* was shown with a basic descriptive label. It said, “Boeing’s B-29 Superfortress was the most sophisticated propeller-driven bomber of World War II. ... On Aug. 6, 1945, this Martin-built B-29-45-MO dropped the

first atomic weapon used in combat on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, *Bockscar* (on display at the US Air Force Museum near Dayton, Ohio) delivered a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. *Enola Gay* flew as the advance weather reconnaissance aircraft that day.”

The Committee for a National Discussion of Nuclear History and Current Policy—“a committee of scholars, veterans, clergy, activists, students, and others”—filed a protest petition. Among those signing it were Daniel Ellsberg, Noam Chomsky, Oliver Stone, and leading lights of the Revisionist movement. The museum acknowledged the petition but said it did not plan to change the exhibit

To the Revisionists, it was intolerable that the *Enola Gay* was displayed without an antinuclear message attached. “You wouldn’t display a slave ship solely as a model of technological advancement,” said David Nasaw, a cultural historian at the City University of New York.

About 75 protesters showed up for opening day at Udvar-Hazy. One protester threw a bottle of red paint at the *Enola Gay*. It made a minor dent on the side of the airplane, bounced off, and broke on the floor. The bottle thrower was arrested and the rest of the demonstrators were escorted out, chant-

ing and singing “Down by the Riverside.”

Peter J. Kuznick of American University, leader of the committee, said, “Our greatest concern is that the disturbing issues raised by the atomic bombings in 1945 will not be addressed in the planned exhibit and that President Truman’s use of atomic weapons will legitimize the Bush Administration’s current effort to lower the threshold for future use of nuclear weapons.”

### Forces of Change

Over the years, myths about the controversy have taken root. One of them is that the museum was overwhelmed by impossible odds. “You have no idea of the forces opposing this exhibit, not in your wildest dreams—jobs are at stake, the Smithsonian is at stake,” curator Tom Crouch told the peace group leader, Father John Dear.

“The Air Force Association must have had an incredibly well-oiled public relations machine,” Harwit said. “To that was added the American Legion. We were kind of outgunned.”

In another instance, Harwit said, “Defeat of a museum with a total of 280 [personnel], by veterans’ organizations whose summed membership stands at six million strong, is not shameful. I like to believe we fought valiantly, but were badly outgunned.”

The impossible odds theory avoided the actual explanation: that the public was intelligent enough to see the truth.

The vast alliance, six million strong, was mostly in the minds of the curators.

Veterans groups cooperated, but they were not coordinated. We shared information and kept in touch, but there was no joint strategy, few meetings, and nobody telling anybody what to do. As for AFA, only three or four of us were significantly engaged, and part time at that.

In the Revisionist books and journal articles, *Air Force Magazine* and AFA have become the demons of record. In truth, the people who brought down the exhibit were the curators and Martin Harwit.

Our contribution was to shine a light on what the museum was doing, and public outrage did the rest. ■

*John T. Correll was editor in chief of Air Force Magazine for 18 years and is now a contributing editor. His most recent article, “The Nation’s Hangar,” appeared in the March issue.*