

Air Force Association  
SPECIAL REPORT

---

# The Smithsonian and the Enola Gay

March 15, 1994

---

**Part 1: *War Stories at Air and Space***

**Part 2: *The Decision That Launched the Enola Gay***

**Author:**

**John T. Correll**  
Editor in Chief  
Air Force Magazine

Shorter versions of these reports appear in the April 1994 and September 1995 issues of *Air Force Magazine*, the monthly journal of the Air Force Association. The first special report is published by the Association's Aerospace Education Foundation, which also assisted with research costs. The second special report is published solely by the Air Force Association.

---

# War Stories at Air & Space

**At the Smithsonian, history grapples with cultural angst.**

The Smithsonian Institution acquired the *Enola Gay* — the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb — forty-four years ago. After a decade of deterioration in open weather, the aircraft was put into storage in 1960. [1] Now, following a lengthy period of restoration, it will finally be displayed to the public [2] on the fiftieth anniversary of its famous mission. The exhibition will run from May 1995 to January 1996 at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington.

The aircraft will be an element in a larger exhibition called "The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War." [3] The context is the development of the atomic bomb and its use against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

The *Enola Gay's* task was a grim one, hardly suitable for glamorization. Nevertheless, many visitors may be taken aback by what they see. That is particularly true for World War II veterans who had petitioned the museum to display the historic bomber in a more objective setting.

The restored aircraft will be there all right, the front fifty-six feet of it, anyway. The rest of the gallery space is allotted to a program about the atomic bomb. The presentation is designed for shock effect. The museum's exhibition plan [4] notes that parents might find some parts unsuitable for viewing by their children, and the script warns that "parental discretion is advised."

For what the plan calls the "emotional center" of the exhibit, the curators are collecting burnt watches, broken wall clocks, and photos of victims — which will be enlarged to life size — as well as melted and broken religious objects. One display will be a schoolgirl's lunch box with remains of peas and rice reduced to carbon. To ensure that nobody misses the point, "where possible, photos of the persons who owned or wore these artifacts would be used to show that real people stood behind the artifacts." Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will recall the horror in their own words.

The Air and Space Museum says it takes no position on the "difficult moral and political questions" involved. For the past two years, however, museum officials have been under fire from veterans groups who charge that the exhibition plan is politically biased.

## **Concessions to Balance**

The exhibition plan the museum was following as recently as November picked up the story of the war in 1945 as the end approached. It depicted the Japanese in a desperate defense of their home islands, saying little about what had made such a defense necessary. US conduct of the war was depicted as brutal, vindictive, and racially motivated.

The latest script, written in January, shows major concessions to balance. It acknowledges Japan's "naked aggression and extreme brutality" that began in the 1930s. It gives greater recognition to US casualties. Despite some hedging, it says the atomic bomb "played a crucial role in ending the Pacific war quickly." Further revisions to the script are expected.

The ultimate effect of the exhibition will depend, of course, on how the words are blended with the artifacts and audiovisual elements. And despite the balancing material added, the curators still make some curious calls.

"For most Americans," the script says, "it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism." Women, children, and mutilated religious objects are strongly emphasized in the "ground zero" scenes from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The museum says this is "happstance," not a deliberate ideological twist.[5]

The Air and Space Museum is also taking flak from the other side. A prominent historian serving on an advisory group for the exhibition, for example, objects to the "celebratory" treatment of the *Enola Gay* and complains that the crew showed "no remorse" for the mission.

### **Petition by 8,000 Veterans**

The Committee for the Restoration and Display of the *Enola Gay*, "a loose affiliation of World War II B-29 veterans," has collected 8,000 signatures on a petition asking the Smithsonian to either display the aircraft properly or turn it over to a museum that will do so.

"I am saddened that veterans have seen it necessary to circulate a petition asking the Museum to display the *Enola Gay* in a patriotic manner that will instill pride in the viewer," says Dr. Martin O. Harwit, director of the museum. "Do veterans really suspect that the National Air and Space Museum is an unpatriotic institution or would opt for an apologetic exhibition?"[6] The blunt answer is yes. Many veterans are suspicious, and for several reasons.

\* Prior to the January revisions, the museum staff had not budged from its politicized plan for display of the *Enola Gay*. [7] The perspective was remarkably sympathetic to the Japanese. Their losses, particularly to B-29 incendiary bombing, were described in vivid detail while American casualties were treated in matter-of-fact summations.

In 1991, incensed by the Smithsonian's initial plan to use the *Enola Gay* to examine the "controversial issue of strategic bombing," Ben Nicks of the 9th Bomb Group Association complained that this was "simply a transparent excuse to moralize about nuclear warfare. A museum's role is to present history as it was, not as its curators would like it to be."[8]

In a letter to Dr. Harwit last fall, Gen. Monroe W. Hatch, Jr. (USAF Ret.), Air Force Association executive director, said the museum's plan "treats Japan and the United States as if their participation in the war were morally equivalent. If anything, incredibly, it gives the benefit of opinion to Japan, which was the aggressor." What visitors would get from such an exhibition, General Hatch said, was "not history or fact, but a partisan interpretation."[9]

- Veterans are further wary because of past statements about military airpower by Dr. Harwit and other Smithsonian officials. In 1988, for example, while planning was under way for a program on strategic bombing, Dr. Harwit said he would like the museum to have an exhibit "as a counterpoint to the World War II gallery we now have, which portrays the heroism of the airmen,[10] but neglects to mention in any real sense the misery of the 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."[11]
- Of particular concern, and viewed as a possible indication of things to come, is the last major military exhibition the Smithsonian organized. It is a strident attack on airpower in World War I.

### **The World War I Exhibition**

"Legend, Memory, and the Great War in the Air," an exhibition currently running at the Air and Space Museum, emphasizes the horrors of World War I and takes a hostile view of airpower in that conflict. As with the *Enola Gay* program, it dwells graphically on death and destruction on the ground. The message is to debunk and discredit airpower.

The vintage aircraft are used essentially as background props for the political message. A Spad and a Fokker are situated at ground level, fenced off and dimly-lighted,[12] but most of the aircraft (five of them) are suspended overhead. No particular attention is drawn to them.

Two themes predominate: the carnage on the ground and the unwholesomeness of military aviation. The military airplane is characterized as an instrument of death. According to the curators, dangerous myths have been foisted on the world by zealots and romantics.

A wall plaque near the entrance says that "by softening the air war's often brutal reality with a heavy dose of romanticism, authors and screenwriters created an appealing memory of World War I aviation." The negative attitude toward airpower is pervasive, and remarkable in a museum devoted to air and space.

The main section of the exhibition begins with a photo of a dead soldier in a trench. Only his skeleton remains. Nearby, another photo, labeled "The Verdun Ossuary," shows a pile of hundreds of skulls.[13] A plaque says that "At Verdun, the aircraft helped the French to avoid defeat and thwarted German hopes of winning a quick victory. Aviation, however, failed to prevent the slaughter that occurred on the ground." No other tie-in with the skulls is apparent.

A large diorama shows a dead soldier slumped over a barbed wire barrier, but this time, the reasoning is explicit. The plaque says: "The price of aviation's limitations. The failure of aviation at the Somme led to carnage on the ground." An aircraft-directed artillery barrage did not clear the path for British soldiers and "the barbed wire that the barrage had not cut stopped them in their tracks," where they were killed by German machine guns.

The curators have expanded on their ideas in a companion book [14] to the exhibit. They quote approvingly from the theories of Michael Sherry [15] about the potential of military airpower for "scientific murder." Their major themes are the wrongful "lionization" of pilots as heroes and the ensuing "cult of airpower" — Billy Mitchell is among the designated offenders — and "the myth about how air power, in the form of strategic bombing, could ultimately be decisive."

World War I, the curator-authors say, has cast "the long shadow" of strategic bombing on events ever since, and it is still evident in the conduct of US military operations. The book gives credence to speculation that "70,000 civilians were killed as an aftermath of the bombing campaign in the recent Gulf War," adding that "wherever the truth lies, the fact remains that innocent civilians died as a result of the bombing and that governments on all sides, in their eagerness to demonstrate the latest developments in military technology, are unrepentant."

Dr. Harwit disagrees that the exhibit is hostile to airmen. "I think what it does is show what military airpower is all about," he says. "If there is a war, then your task in the military is to destroy targets, people, whatever you're asked to do. . . . What we also do show is that, in many cases, what had started out as a military tool escalated into destroying very large segments of the civilian population. And that's undeniable also." [16]

### **Politically Correct Curating**

The new look at the Air and Space Museum is seen as part of the cultural reinterpretation that has swept the Smithsonian complex. It is closely identified with the tenure of archaeologist Robert McCormick Adams, who became Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution in 1984.

"That Mr. Adams was moved by a political agenda was not evident until three years after his 1984 appointment when he chose to celebrate the bicentennial of the US Constitution by erecting 'A More Perfect Union,' an exhibit about the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War," said Matthew Hoffman in the *Washington Times*. "Instead of celebrating the oldest still-in-effect constitution, Mr. Adams had focused on one of the few serious lapses in its enforcement." [17]

By 1987, Secretary Adams was looking ahead to all sorts of possibilities. "Take the Air and Space Museum," he told *Washingtonian* magazine.[18] "What are the responsibilities of a museum to deal with the destruction caused by air power?" An early indication of what he had in mind was a 1989 program on "The Legacy of Strategic Bombing" at the Air and Space Museum, which included the "classic films" *On the Beach* and *Dr. Strangelove*. "In the past, the Museum has celebrated technology and looked at it uncritically," a spokesman said. "We want to look at it from a new perspective." [19]

Secretary Adams, who said he was not "running an entertainment facility," soon gained a reputation — denied by some, earnestly believed by others — as not being very interested in straight exhibits or in the aspects of the museum operation seen by visitors.[20] A new spirit was afoot, and not everyone approved.

- In an editorial commenting on the trend toward reinterpreting Christopher Columbus (on the 500th anniversary of his voyage to the New World) as a despoiler, the *Wall Street Journal* said that the "once-respected" Smithsonian was "in danger of becoming the Woodstock Nostalgia Society" with "an exhibit that is multiculturally correct down to its tiniest sensitivity." [21]
- At the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, an associate director formed a group called "the dirty dozen" to target "sexual and cultural inequity," declaring that "museums are being redefined by principles of pluralism, cultural equity, and ecology." [22] An exhibit in which a Powhatan Indian woman gazed upward at Capt. John Smith was deemed sexist.[23] An African lion exhibit, in which the lioness was shown with the cubs while the male surveyed zebras in the distance got a label stating that it is actually the female who does the hunting.
- At the Smithsonian's Museum of American Art, an exhibit titled "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920," drew fire in 1991 by depicting the westward expansion of the United States as immoral, characterized by racism and greed. One of those signing the comment book near the exit was Daniel Boorstin, historian and former Librarian of Congress, who wrote, "A perverse, historically inaccurate, destructive exhibit. No credit to the Smithsonian." [24]

(The new look at the Smithsonian is not without its supporters. A *Washington Post* editorial, for example, noted with approval the "move away from the traditional heroes, politicians, and objects in glass cases and toward a wide, fluid, social- history approach." [25])

The Smithsonian's five-year plan [26] is laden with politically correct goals and lumpy language. It says that "the Institution plans to reinterpret permanent exhibitions of the nation's most unique and vital collections so that they appeal to, enfranchise, and inspire the broadest possible audiences." The Smithsonian's responsibility, Mr. Adams says, "requires that we be at pains neither to idealize and reify the purported 'mainstream' of global as well as our national culture, when so many are still denied access to it, nor to place 'nonmainstream' cultures under an idealized bell jar that freezes them in time." [27]

Secretary Adams has announced his intention to retire in late 1994,[28] but the Smithsonian has built up considerable momentum in the direction that he set.

### **The Air and Space Director**

Dr. Harwit was formerly a professor of astronomy at Cornell University and has been director of the National Air and Space Museum since 1987. "I do not consider myself 'politically correct'," he says. Changes at the museum are intended to "present interesting and challenging — or thought-provoking — aspects of the history of this country, that will perhaps bring greater clarity to some issues that have, for a long time, not been discussed." [29]

He was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, grew up in Istanbul, and came to the United States (at age fifteen) in 1946.[30] He asks those who suspect his attitude toward US forces in World War II to consider his personal background.

"I was lucky to get out of Czechoslovakia as a young boy, and if it had not been for the allies, the chances are that I would have joined many of my family who did not manage to leave Czechoslovakia and the concentration camps from which they never came back," he says. "So I'm not a person who is going to say that World War II was fought by Americans with anything except the strongest foundation. I personally am extremely grateful for what was done there." [31]

While serving in the US Army, 1955-1957, Dr. Harwit was assigned to the nuclear weapon tests at Eniwetok and Bikini. He acknowledges that the experience "inevitably" influenced his thoughts about the *Enola Gay* exhibit. "I think anybody who has ever seen a hydrogen bomb go off at fairly close range knows that you don't ever want to see that used on people," he says. [32]

In the 1960s, Dr. Harwit established research groups at the Naval Research Laboratory and at Cornell that built the first rocket-borne telescopes cooled to liquid helium temperatures. In the 1980s, he chaired NASA's Astrophysics Management Working Group. [33]

He says that veterans have the wrong perception about plans to exhibit the *Enola Gay*. "People somehow had the feeling that either we were going to apologize to the Japanese, which we never had any intention of doing, or that we were going to take service people to task for having dropped this bomb, which again, we never had any intention of [doing]."

Museum officials have talked with the Japanese about the plan because "we wanted to make sure we also included the point of view of the vanquished as well as the point of view of the victors," but Dr. Harwit says the curators flatly rejected Japanese urging that the exhibit advocate total abolition of nuclear armaments.

"We will never apologize for this country, nor are we tempted to, nor do we take moral stances," Dr. Harwit says. [34]

### **The Message in Gallery 103**

The *Enola Gay* "Crossroads" presentation will cover about 5,500 square feet of Gallery 103 on the first floor of the Air and Space Museum. [35] Almost every square foot of it will pack a message. The aircraft is in the back section. To reach the *Enola Gay*, visitors must pass through two winding introductory sections.

Suspended from the ceiling, just inside the entrance, will be a restored *Ohka* piloted suicide bomb. This section, labeled "A Fight to the Finish," presents the Smithsonian's view of the Pacific war in the spring and summer of 1945. It describes Japan's desperate last-ditch stand and the rising casualty toll. There will be a subunit on "The Firebombing of Japan."

The next unit of the exhibition, "The Decision to Drop the Bomb," centers visually on the casing of a "Fat Man" atomic bomb, similar to the one that fell on Nagasaki. The development of the bomb and the decision to use it are explored in words and pictures. The curators hold to the view that casualty estimates for invasion of Japan — an alternative to using the bomb — were inflated. US deaths, the script argues, would not have exceeded the "tens of thousands."

The largest section of the exhibit — the one with the forward fuselage [36] of the *Enola Gay* — will be just around the corner. A "Little Boy" bomb casing (illustrating the device dropped on Hiroshima) will be also be displayed, along with a videotape of the *Enola Gay* mission. The 509th Composite Group, the unit that dropped the two atomic bombs, is covered extensively and with respect.

The curators intend the next section, "Ground Zero: Hiroshima, 8:15 a.m., August 6, 1945; Nagasaki, 11:02 a.m., August 9, 1945," to be the "emotional center" of the exhibition. In case the words and images

are not enough, the plan says that visitors "will be immediately hit by a drastic change of mood and perspective: from well-lit and airy to gloomy and oppressive."

The first item on display will be a wristwatch, loaned by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, with its hands frozen on the moment the bomb fell. The "parental discretion" warning is because of photos, artifacts, and other elements in this section. Graphic displays will include Japanese dead and wounded, flash burns, disfigurement, charred bodies in the rubble, and such vignettes as the smoking ruins of a Shinto shrine, a partially-destroyed image of Buddha, a heat-fused rosary, and personal items belonging to school children who died. *Hibakusha* (survivors of the bombing) describe what they saw and experienced. Most of the rank-and-file Americans quoted in the exhibition script are soldiers, talking about details of their fighting. Except for *kamikaze* pilots (who are seen as valiant defenders of their homeland), most of the individual Japanese speakers are persons who suffered injury themselves or who were witnesses to carnage. They talk about pain and suffering. Visitors will take strong impressions with them as they leave.

### **To Collect, Preserve, and Display**

The function of the Air and Space Museum is prescribed by law, established in 1946 and amended only once, in 1966, to add "space" to the name and the charter. The statute reads in its entirety: "The national air and space museum shall memorialize the national development of aviation and space flight; collect, preserve, and display aeronautical and space flight equipment of historical interest and significance; serve as a repository for scientific equipment and data pertaining to the development of aviation and space flight; and provide educational material for the historical study of aviation and space flight." [37]

Some aviation enthusiasts feel that the Smithsonian has veered away from its charter to "collect, preserve, and display." They also perceive a departure from subsequent (1961) congressional direction that "the Smithsonian Institution shall commemorate and display the contributions made by the military forces of the Nation toward creating, developing, and maintaining a free, peaceful, and independent society and culture in the United States. The valor and sacrificial service of the men and women of the Armed Forces shall be portrayed as an inspiration to the present and future generations of America. The demands placed on the full energies of our people, the hardships endured, and the sacrifice demanded in our constant search for world peace shall be clearly demonstrated." [38]

What Congress had in mind seems reasonably apparent. The 1961 statute added, however, that "the Smithsonian Institution shall interpret through dramatic display significant current problems affecting the Nation's security." It also authorized "a study center for scholarly research into the meaning of war, its effect on civilization, and the role of the Armed Forces in maintaining a just and lasting peace by providing a powerful deterrent to war." [39]

Opinions differ on how the program at the Air and Space Museum squares with the language in the U.S. Code. In the view of its critics, the museum shows a limited interest in its basic job, allocating a low share of budget and staff to the restoration and preservation of aircraft. Arthur H. Sanfelici, editor of *Aviation Magazine*, has been particularly outspoken. He charges that "a new order is perverting the museum's original purpose from restoring and displaying aviation and space artifacts to presenting gratuitous social commentary on the uses to which they have been put." [40]

Dr. Harwit disputes the accusation that the level of effort for aircraft restoration is down significantly on his watch. He says also that there are specific problems with funding. Those who supply the money, including Congress and private donors, want to contribute to "that part which is the most visible," the exhibits and the films, rather than to preservation and restoration. [41]

### **Airpower's Struggle on the Mall**

The Smithsonian bureaucracy has a history of not sharing the public's enthusiasm for aircraft exhibits. In 1969, S. Paul Johnston — five months before retirement from his post as director of the Air and Space Museum — blew the whistle on what was happening. [42]

"Around a place like the Smithsonian," he said, "there are any number of 'ologies' and socially-oriented disciplines whose practitioners consider aircraft only as a means of getting out to the remote boondocks to look into the private life of the green spotted frog of the upper Amazon. . . . Unfortunately, from our point of view, the current art and 'ology'-oriented management of the Smithsonian appears to favor sculpture gardens, folk art (both performing and static), and elaborate housing for the scholarly over the more practical, hardware-oriented technologies of flight."

The Air and Space Museum, even then drawing nearly a third of the total Smithsonian audience, was allotted only two percent of the Smithsonian's budget and personnel.

"There is nothing astonishing in all this," Mr. Johnston said, "if one considers the pedigree and proclivities of the Smithsonian secretariat — the top-side group which determines the Institution's policies and priorities. Most of them hail from the Groves of Academe — holders of advanced degrees in philosophy, biology, sociology, history, and art."

Funding for a new Air and Space Museum building was hung up by a legislative hold placed in 1966 by the House Rules Committee, pending a reduction in military expenditures for Vietnam, Mr. Johnston said, but the museum's real problems were with people, specifically people in the Smithsonian.

The Air and Space Museum, he said, reported to an assistant secretary with a specialty in English history who "takes some pride in the fact that he has never come within miles of the Pentagon — physically or spiritually" and who "has little personal interest in the aerospace matters."

Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) read a copy of Johnston's speech and took up the cause in a blistering speech to the Senate.[43] Congress and the Smithsonian, Senator Goldwater said, should pay attention to the "gigantic public interest in air and space" instead of "brainstorming major new sociocultural exhibits." He called for having a new Air and Space Museum ready to open for the nation's bicentennial in 1976.

Under the spotlight of congressional and public attention, things began to improve. During the directorship of former astronaut Michael Collins, who succeeded Paul Johnston as Director in 1971, plans for the new Air and Space museum building took shape. It opened to the public on July 1, 1976.

To aviation enthusiasts, the museum is a special place, where priceless artifacts are held in trust to be displayed with understanding and pride. They do not take kindly to what they perceive as the use of historical aircraft to promote an agenda of cultural revisionism.

## **Fifteen Museums and a Zoo**

The Smithsonian Institution consists of fifteen museums and the National Zoo.[44] It began with a bequest in 1826 from an Englishman, James Smithson, who left his fortune to the United States to found an institution named for him. Congress created the Smithsonian in 1846. It has operated ever since with concurrent public support and private endowment. It is governed by an independent board of regents, but nonetheless listens carefully to what Congress says because that's where most of the money comes from.

The 1993 budget for the Smithsonian Institution was \$445.3 million. About eighty-five percent of the operating budget (salaries and expenses) is from the federal government. The rest is from donations, gift shop sales, cafeterias and restaurants, the Institution's two glossy magazines — *Smithsonian* and *Air & Space* — recordings, and books published by the Smithsonian Press. Between 1988 and 1993, funding increased by forty-seven percent (an average of eight percent a year) and trust income rose almost as much. Much of that forty-seven percent gain was spent on big-ticket items, such as major scientific instruments or the National Museum of the American Indian. The federal appropriation for 1994 will be down, the first funding decrease since World War II.[45]

There are 137 million objects in the Smithsonian collections, but Secretary Adams bristles at the popular description of the Institution as "the nation's attic." A five-year prospectus published in 1992 says that "the Smithsonian has never played the role of submissive collector acting solely as the caretaker of a cabinet of curiosities." Adams regards the collections as "tools" for study, education, imagination, and "raising new questions." [46]

Most of the Smithsonian museums are clustered along the mall that stretches west from the US Capitol toward the Washington Monument. The Smithsonian attracts some 13 million visitors a year, two thirds of them drawn by the enormously popular Air and Space Museum.

Total attendance at the Air and Space Museum in 1992 was 8.6 million. Record attendance for a single day — 118,437 — was set April 14, 1984. [47] The best-known holdings of the Air and Space Museum include:

- The Wright Brothers' 1903 Kitty Hawk Flyer. (In 1910, the Smithsonian turned down the Wright Brothers' offer to donate the 1903 Flyer, then provoked a quarrel with Orville Wright that lasted for decades. The Smithsonian did not acquire the Wright Flyer and exhibit it to the public until 1948.) [48]
- Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis*.
- Chuck Yeager's X-1 *Glamorous Glennis*.
- The *Apollo 11* command module *Columbia* which took astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins to the Moon and back.

The museum's Langley theater shows special films on a five-story IMAX screen. The first ones were a vicarious aviation experience, *To Fly*, and a space epic, *The Dream is Alive*. It's a sign of the times, perhaps, that the Langley theater's show bill now includes *The Blue Planet* (which uses imagery from space to push a hard-line ecology message) as well as *Tropical Rain Forest* and *Beavers*.

Legislation passed in 1993 established an Air and Space Museum annex at Dulles Airport in suburban Virginia. When it opens, sometime around the turn of the century, it will provide space to exhibit a number of noteworthy aircraft from the Smithsonian's collection, many of which are too large to show in the main museum on the mall.

At the Dulles annex, the public will be able to see the space shuttle *Enterprise*, a B-17 *Flying Fortress*, a Lockheed *Super Constellation*, a *Concorde*, and the world's fastest airplane, the SR-71.

Also on display at Dulles — fully assembled and presumably without the political trappings — will be the most famous B-29 of all time, the *Enola Gay*. [49]

## Endnotes

---

[1] The Smithsonian accepted the *Enola Gay* in good condition July 3, 1949, at the Air Force Association convention in Chicago. It was stored outside, unlocked, at Andrews AFB, Md., from 1953 to 1960.

[2] Visitors touring the Smithsonian's Garber facility in Suitland, Md., have been able to see the *Enola Gay* during restoration.

[3] Exhibition script, National Air and Space Museum, January 12, 1994.

[4] July 1993.

[5] Dr. Martin Harwit, Director, National Air and Space Museum, interview with John T. Correll, February 8, 1994. Part of the explanation, Dr. Harwit said, was that most of the able-bodied men had been drafted into the armed forces.

[6] Identical wording in letters to Donald C. Rehl of Greenfield, Ind., and William A. Rooney of Wilmette, Ill., September 3, 1993.

[7] Dr. Martin Harwit, meeting with Monroe Hatch and John Correll, Air Force Association, November 19, 1993.

[8] Nicks, "Keep Moralizing Out of Museums," Letters, *Air & Space*, December 1990/January 1991.

[9] September 10, 1993.

[10] In fact, the museum's World War II Aviation exhibition (currently Gallery 105) consists mainly of a straightforward presentation of vintage aircraft and memorabilia. The overall treatment of American airmen — mostly via items in display cases — is nostalgic and positive, but it is not a conspicuous celebration of heroism.

[11] Elizabeth Kastor, "At Air & Space, Ideas on the Wing," *Washington Post*, October 11, 1988.

[12] The entire exhibition is dark and foreboding, with trenches and shelters much in evidence. There is no feeling of aviation or the air.

[13] The point — beyond shock value — of these photos is not apparent. They do the job intended. The images are so powerful that the immediate reaction is not analytical. It is only later that the visitor might wonder if the trench photo is genuine or contrived. The soldier's flesh is wasted completely, but his uniform looks fairly intact. His skeletal hand lies in perfect position for dramatic effect. As for the "Verdun Ossuary" photo, who collected so many skulls, separated them from the rest of the bones, and heaped them into a pile? And why?

[14] Pisano et. al. *Legend, Memory, and the Great War in the Air*. University of Washington Press, 1992. It was offered as a "featured alternate" by the Military Book Club.

[15] Michael S. Sherry. *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon*. Yale University Press, 1987.

[16] Harwit, interview with Correll, February 8, 1994.

- [17] Matthew Hoffman, "Guilt Tripping at the Smithsonian," *Washington Times*, October 15, 1992.
- [18] Howard Means, "The Quiet Revolutionary," *Washingtonian*, August 1987.
- [19] "The Legacy of Strategic Bombing," *Air & Space*, November 1989.
- [20] Means, "The Quiet Revolutionary."
- [21] "Even Columbus," *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1992.
- [22] Asra Q. Nomani, "At the Smithsonian, the 'Dirty Dozen' Attacks the Exhibits," *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 1992.
- [23] In an exhibit hall of a different museum in the Smithsonian complex, a wall notice declared as racist any use of the term "Indian" when referring to "Native Americans." Curiously, those indicted by that standard would include the Smithsonian itself, which hopes to open the "National Museum of the American Indian" in the late 1990s.
- [24] Michael Kilian, "Wild, Wild West: The Smithsonian Circles the Wagons Over Its Latest Exhibit," *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1991.
- [25] "The Shape of American History," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1994.
- [26] *Choosing the Future: Five-Year Prospectus, Fiscal Years 1993-1997*. Smithsonian, 1992.
- [27] *The Smithsonian Year*, 1989, quoted in *Choosing the Future*, 1992.
- [28] Jacqueline Trescott, "Smithsonian Secretary Adams to Retire," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1993.
- [29] Harwit, interview with Correll, February 8, 1994.
- [30] Sara Booth Conroy, "Air & Space Selects New Director," *Washington Post*, June 5, 1987.
- [31] Harwit, interview with Correll, February 8, 1994.
- [32] Harwit, interview with Correll, February 8, 1994.
- [33] "Director at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum Announced," Smithsonian news release, June 30, 1987; Martin O. Harwit Vita, NASM, January 31, 1994.
- [34] Harwit, interview with Correll, February 8, 1994.
- [35] It is scheduled for NASM Gallery 103 at the extreme west end of the first floor, the space presently occupied by the "Vertical Flight" exhibition.
- [36] Officials explain that because of its size, the whole aircraft cannot be reassembled anywhere within the National Air and Space Museum building. In addition to the forward fuselage, a propeller and a few other small components will be shown in the exhibition.
- [37] 20 U.S.C. 77a.

[38] 20 U.S.C 80a.

[39] 20 U.S.C. 80a.

[40] "Is NASM Thumbing Its Nose at Congress While No One's Watching?" *Aviation*, July 1983.

[41] Harwit, interview with Correll, February 8, 1994.

[42] S. Paul Johnston, speech to Washington Aero Club, April 22, 1969.

[43] "Time of Crisis for the National Air and Space Museum," *Congressional Record*, May 19, 1970.

[44] *Choosing the Future*, Smithsonian, 1992.

[45] Eric Gibson, "The Incredible Shrinking Smithsonian," *Washington Times*, September 24, 1993; "Smithsonian's Budget Reduced by \$2.2 Million," *Washington Times*, February 9, 1994; *Choosing the Future*, Smithsonian, 1992. (Gibson forecast 1994 funding to be down by \$5 million. The February 9 report says the decrease is \$2.2 million below 1993 funding.)

[46] *Choosing the Future*, Smithsonian Institution, 1992.

[47] NASM fact sheet, July 1993.

[48] Doug McIntyre, "Odyssey of the Flyer," *American History Illustrated*, February 1994.

[49] Smithsonian news release, August 3, 1993.

## References

---

20 U.S.C. 77-77d. (Statutory authority for National Air and Space Museum).

20 U.S.C. 80a. (Smithsonian display of contributions of Armed Forces).

Adams, Robert McCormick, "Smithsonian Horizons," *Smithsonian*, July 1988.

"Air and Space Museum Anniversary July 1," Smithsonian Institution press release, July 1977.

"Background Fact Sheet: Extension of the National Air and Space Museum," January 1990.

Bryan, C.D.B. *The National Air and Space Museum*. Abrams, 1979.

"Director at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum Announced: Cornell Astronomer Martin Harwit Appointed," news release, Smithsonian Institution, June 30, 1987.

Conroy, Sara Booth, "Air & Space Selects New Director," *Washington Post*, June 5, 1987.

*Choosing the Future: Five-Year Prospectus, Fiscal Years 1993- 1997*. Smithsonian Institution, 1992.

Correll, John T., interview with Dr. Martin Harwit, February 8, 1994.

"Even Columbus," *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1993.

"First True Space Film in Production for the National Air and Space Museum," Smithsonian Institution press release, March 2, 1984.

Flynn, George J., "Mike Collins Shapes a Museum," *United Technologies Bee Hive*, Summer 1975.

Garber, Paul. *The National Aeronautical Collections Exhibited by the National Air Museum*. Smithsonian Institution, 1956.

Gibson, Eric, "The Incredible Shrinking Smithsonian," *Washington Times*, September 24, 1993.

Goldwater, Sen. Barry, "Time of Crisis for the National Air and Space Museum," *Congressional Record*, May 19, 1970.

Hall, Scott, "Saving the Enola Gay," Greenfield, Ind., *Daily Reporter*, August 13, 1992.

Harwit, Martin, "Are We Doing Our Job?" *Air & Space*, April-May 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Are We Running Out of Wars?" *Air & Space*, April-May 1990.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Enola Gay," *Air & Space*, August-September 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Smart Versus Nuclear Bombs," *Air & Space*, June-July 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Truth in Labeling," *Air & Space*, April-May 1991.

Harwit, Martin O., *Vita*, National Air and Space Museum, January 31, 1994.

Hatch, Gen. Monroe W. Jr., (USAF, Ret.), AFA Executive Director, letter to Dr. Martin Harwit about "Crossroads" concept paper, September 10, 1993.

Hoffman, Matthew, "Guilt Tripping at the Smithsonian," *Washington Times*, October 15, 1992.  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "Picking Up the Guilt Trip Tab," *Washington Times*, October 16, 1992.

Horn, Miriam, "A Mess in the Nation's Attic," *US News & World Report*, August 13, 1990.

"In the Museum: The Legacy of Strategic Bombing," *Air & Space*, October-November 1989.

Jacobs, Madeleine, "A New Secretary Takes Charge at the Smithsonian," *Smithsonian*, October 1984.

Johnston, S. Paul, Director, Air and Space Museum, speech to Washington Aero Club, April 22, 1969.

Kastor, Elizabeth, "At Air & Space, Ideas on the Wing: Director Martin Harwit, Taking the Museum in New Directions," *Washington Post*, October 11, 1988.

Kilian, Michael, "Grounded in Reality: Exhibition Finds the Mythic WWI Ace Was a Flight of Fancy," *Chicago Tribune*, November 26, 1991.  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "Wild, Wild West: The Smithsonian Circles the Wagons Over Its Latest Exhibit," *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1992.

McIntyre, Doug, "Odyssey of the Flyer," *American History Illustrated*, February 1994.

Marshall, Eliot, "Smithsonian Institution: Bracing for Bad News," *Science*, May 1992.

Means, Howard, "The Quiet Revolutionary," *Washingtonian*, August 1987.

National Air and Space Museum, "The Crossroads: the End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Onset of the Cold War," exhibition concept paper, July 1993.  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "The Crossroads: the End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins[sic] of the Cold War," exhibition script, January 12, 1994.  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "Fifty Years On," previous concept paper draft, 1993.  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "Hiroshima and Nagasaki: a Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum," previous concept paper draft, 1993.

"National Air and Space Museum Fact Sheet," Smithsonian Institution, rev. July 1993.

*National Air and Space Museum Research Report 1986*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986.

Nicks, Ben, "Keep Moralizing Out of Museums," Letters, *Air & Space*, December 1990/January 1991.

Nomani, Asra Q., "At the Smithsonian, the 'Dirty Dozen' Attacks the Exhibits," *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 1992.

"Now, the Venerable Smithsonian is a Target of Congress," *US News & World Report*, June 27, 1977.

Oakes, Claudia M. and Kathleen L. Brooks-Pazmany. *Aircraft of the National Air and Space Museum*. Smithsonian Institution, 1985.

*Official Guide to the National Air and Space Museum*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

*Official Guide to the National Museum of American History*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

*Official Guide to the Smithsonian*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

Pisano, Dominick A., Thomas J. Dietz, Joanne M. Gernstein, and Karl S. Schneide. *Legend, Memory, and the Great War in the Air*. Published for the National Air and Space Museum by the University of Washington Press, 1992.

Public Law 722, August 12, 1946. (Established National Air Museum.)

"President Clinton Signs Legislation to Establish National Air and Space Museum Extension," Smithsonian Institution news release, August 3, 1993.

"Research Departments," National Air and Space Museum fact sheet, March 1993.

Sanfelici, Arthur H., "Is NASM Thumbing Its Nose at Congress While No One's Watching?" *Aviation*, July 1983.

\_\_\_\_\_, "NASM Responds to Our Charges That It Emphasizes Social Comment Instead of Aeronautical Heritage," *Aviation*, January 1994.

"The Shape of American History," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1994.

"The Smithsonian and Flight," Smithsonian Institution news release, n.d., 1976.

"Smithsonian's Budget Reduced by \$2.2 Million," *Washington Times*, February 9, 1994.

"Smithsonian's Garber Facility Celebrates Fifth Anniversary," January 22, 1982.

"The Smithsonian Institution: Fact Sheet," January 1990.

Steele, Bill, "Museum's High Hopes," *The Scientist*, September 7, 1987.

Suid, Larry, "The Enola Gay," *After the Battle*, #41, 1983.

Trescott, Jacqueline, "Air & Space Annex Cleared," *Washington Post*, June 30, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Smithsonian Secretary Adams to Retire," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1993.

# The Decision That Launched the *Enola Gay*

**In April 1945, the new President learned the most closely-held secret of the war.**

As Vice President, Harry Truman had not known about the development of the atomic bomb. On the day he assumed the presidency at the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson had spoken to him briefly and told him that the United States was working on a weapon of extraordinary power. Twelve days later, on April 25, 1945, Stimson and Maj. Gen. Leslie R. Groves, director of the Manhattan Project, briefed President Truman in detail on the secret of the atomic bomb.

The bomb had not yet been tested. Once it was proved to work, Truman would consult with allies and advisors, but the decision on whether to use it would be his. Truman said later that he had no great difficulty in reaching the decision.[1] The question before him was how to end the war and save lives. He regarded the atomic bomb as a *weapon* — an awesome one, to be sure — but still a weapon to be used.

Roosevelt's view, apparently, had been the same. According to Stimson, who had been responsible to the President for the Manhattan Project since 1941, there was never any question in Roosevelt's mind but that the bomb would be used when ready.[2]

On Truman's orders, the B-29 *Enola Gay* dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima August 6. Another B-29, *Bockscar*, dropped the second bomb on Nagasaki August 9.

The unconditional surrender of Japan followed on August 15. For the next fifty years, however, Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb would be questioned again and again, and the retroactive judgment would often be harsh.

To understand the decision, it is necessary to examine the circumstances and the options as Truman saw them in the summer of 1945.

## **The War in 1945**

Between 1941 and 1945, World War II cost more than one million US casualties.[3] It consumed the nation's energies and resources to an extent not experienced before or since, requiring the service of 16.1 million Americans in the armed forces and mobilization of the domestic industry and economy. In 1944, the war effort absorbed an astounding forty-four percent of America's GNP.[4]

When Truman became President in April 1945, US casualties were averaging more than 900 *a day*. In the Pacific, the toll from each successive battle rose higher. During the first three months of Truman's presidency, US battle casualties in the Pacific were equal to nearly half the total of US casualties in the Pacific over the previous three years.[5]

More than 26,000 Americans had been killed or wounded in the battle of Iwo Jima, February 15-March 25. US casualties in the battle of Okinawa, April 1-June 30, were about 48,000. As Truman deliberated about use of the atomic bomb, the long battle for the Philippines continued. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, commander of US forces in the western Pacific, did not declare liberation of the Philippines until July 5, 1945 — almost nine months after he had walked ashore at Leyte on October 20, 1944. Remnants of the Japanese occupation army continued with sporadic fighting from mountain redoubts until after the surrender. (That was also the case on Okinawa and elsewhere.)

The war ended in Europe on V-E Day, May 9, but Japan fought on. Most of the Japanese naval fleet had been destroyed, and Japanese airpower had been taken severe attrition. The eventual military outcome of the war had been sealed since the US captured the Marianas in 1944, but Japan had not accepted defeat and the fighting continued with casualties mounting.

In 1945, the war had finally come home to Japan. B-29s from Guam, Saipan, and Tinian were striking the Japanese homeland regularly, systematically destroying the industrial cities on Honshu and Kyushu. The US Navy and the Army Air Forces had cut off Japan's supply lines. Nevertheless, the war dragged on, with the prospect of its continuing into 1946. US and allied forces prepared for a difficult and costly invasion of the Japanese islands.

### ***Bushido and Kamikaze***

As Japan's desperation worsened, the ferocity of the fighting intensified. The code of *bushido* — "the way of the warrior" — was deeply ingrained. Surrender was dishonorable. Defeated Japanese leaders preferred to take their own lives in the painful samurai ritual of *seppuku* (called *hara kiri* in the West.)[6] Warriors who surrendered were not deemed worthy of regard or respect. This explains, in part, the Japanese mistreatment, torture, and summary execution of POWs. There was no shortage of volunteers for *kamikaze* missions or of troops willing to serve as human torpedoes or ride to honorable death on piloted buzz bombs.

Japan was dead on its feet in every way but one: The Japanese still had the means — and the determination — to make the invading Allied forces pay a terrible price for the final victory. Quantitative estimates of the last-ditch defenses vary, but there is no argument but that they would have been formidable.

Since the summer of 1944, the Imperial General Headquarters had been drawing units back to Japan in anticipation of a final stand there. The force thus assembled had extensive infantry and armor. Although the Japanese Navy had the bulk of the aerial responsibility with 1,030 fighters, 330 ground-attack planes, and 3,725 other aircraft (including *kamikaze* and maritime patrol), the Army still had enough planes to be a factor. Its principal contribution was air defense. The First Air Army had 600 *kamikaze*, 500 other aircraft. The Sixth Air Army had 1,000 *kamikaze*, 500 other aircraft.[7]

By one analysis, the Japanese force in the home islands had some 10,000 aircraft, nearly two-thirds of them *kamikazes*, which would engage the invasion force before it landed. Suicide boats and human torpedoes would defend the beaches. The Japanese Army planned to attack the allied landing force with a three-to-one advantage in manpower. If that failed, the militia and the people of Japan were expected to carry on with guerrilla warfare.[8] Civilians were being taught to strap explosives to their bodies and throw themselves under advancing tanks.[9] Construction battalions had fortified the shorelines of Kyushu and Honshu with tunnels, bunkers, and barbed wire.[10]

The Japanese were prepared to absorb massive casualties. On August 9 — after both atomic bombs had fallen — Gen. Korechika Anami, the War Minister, reviewed Japan's Ketsu Go (Operation Decision) defense plan for the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War. Anami said the military could commit 2,350,000 troops. In addition, commanders could call on four million civil servants. The Japanese cabinet had approved a measure extending the draft to include men from ages fifteen to sixty and women from seventeen to forty-five (an additional 28 million people). Questioned by Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo, Army Chief of Staff Yoshijiro Umezumi said that, "With luck, we will repulse the invaders before they land. At any rate, I can say with confidence that we will be able to destroy the major part of an invading force." [11]

It is generally assumed that the citizens would have fought with pickup weapons and bamboo lances, but in the spring of 1945, the Japanese government was planning to produce "people's weapons" that could be made easily in underground factories or with domestic materials in factories moved to safe locations.[12] How many "people's weapons" might actually have been produced by the start of the allied invasion is unknown.

## **Invasion Plans and Casualty Estimates**

US military opinion was divided on what it would require to induce Japan's surrender and finally bring the war to an end. Gen. George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, and Gen. Douglas MacArthur, commanding US forces in the western Pacific, believed an invasion of the Japanese home islands would be necessary.

Gen. H. H. Arnold, commander of the Army Air Forces, and Maj. Gen. Curtis E. LeMay (whose XXI Bomber Command in the Marianas was pounding Japan relentlessly) believed that B-29 conventional bombing could do the job. The AAF position in June and July, however, was to support Marshall's advocacy of invasion on the basis that a blockade of Honshu required air bases on Kyushu.[13]

Adm. William D. Leahy, the President's Chief of Staff, and Adm. Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, thought Japan could be defeated without an invasion.[14] When Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, commanding US forces in the central Pacific, joined MacArthur in recommending invasion of Kyushu, however, King agreed.[15]

Truman was aware of the differences among the military leaders but was satisfied that they had been reconciled for consensus with Marshall. Furthermore, Truman respected Marshall deeply and regarded him as the nation's chief strategist, so Marshall's opinion carried particular weight.[16]

The official plan called for an invasion in two stages:

- Operation Olympic, to begin Nov. 1, 1945, would be a land invasion of Kyushu, southernmost of the Japanese main islands.
- Operation Coronet, planned for March 1, 1946, was an invasion of Honshu, the largest island.

The Joint Chiefs envisioned that the two-stage invasion would involve some *five million troops*, most of them American.[17] The invasion was to be preceded by a massive aerial bombardment, reaching maximum intensity before troops went ashore on Honshu. One memorandum said that "more bombs will be dropped on Japan than were delivered against Germany during the entire European war." [18]

A June 18 estimate from the military chiefs said that casualties in the first thirty days of the Kyushu invasion could be 31,000. Adm. King estimated 41,000. Adm. Nimitz said 49,000. MacArthur's staff said 50,000. Casualty estimates for Olympic and Coronet combined ranged from 220,000 to 500,000+.[19]

"I asked General Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokio plain and other places in Japan," Truman said later. "It was his opinion that such an invasion would cost at minimum one quarter of a million casualties, and might cost as much as a million, on the American side alone, with an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men present agreed." [20]

The relevant fact here is that Truman believed that unless he used the atomic bomb, an invasion of Japan would be necessary and that the casualties would be enormous.

## **Strategic Bombing**

The capture of the Marianas in the summer of 1944 had given the Army Air Forces bases 1,300 miles from Tokyo. B-29s from Guam, Saipan, and Tinian could reach all of the major cities in Japan, including the big industrial cities on Honshu. B-29s operated at altitudes too high for Japanese fighters to stop them.[21]

On January 20, 1945, LeMay took command of XXI Bomber Command. On the night of March 9-10, without telling Arnold in advance what he was going to do in case it failed, LeMay launched a massive mission — 334 B-29s — to drop incendiary bombs on Tokyo. It was the most destructive raid in history. The official casualty report listed 83,793 dead and 40,918 wounded.[22] Sixteen square miles of Tokyo

were destroyed that night.[23] In Operation Starvation, conducted concurrently with the strategic bombing campaign, the B-29s mined the waters along key stretches of the Japanese coast, cutting off an important mode of domestic transportation as well as the import of food and raw materials.[24]

The long-range B-29, which had first struck Japan in June 1944 from bases in China, inspired fear and awe. The Japanese called it "*B-san*," or "Mr. B." [25] Arnold, on a visit to Guam in June 1945, expressed his belief that the B-29 campaign "would enable our infantrymen to walk ashore on Japan with their rifles slung." [26]

The B-29s systematically laid waste to Japan's large industrial cities. LeMay told Arnold there would soon be nothing left to bomb or burn except for Kyoto (the old capital) and four other cities — Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Niigata, and Kokura — that were barred for routine B-29 missions. These four were, of course, on the target list for the "special bomb." [27]

## The Emperor Takes a Hand

By the summer of 1945, the Japanese government had split into a peace faction (including Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki) and a war faction (Anami and the military). The war faction was powerful, but the peace faction was gaining an extraordinary ally: the Emperor, Hirohito. The Emperor, regarded as divine and the embodiment of the Japanese state, supposedly "lived beyond the clouds," [28] above politics and government. In fact, the Emperor was interested and well informed. While he did not interfere, he was often present at important meetings.

The B-29 missions strengthened Hirohito's growing belief that Japan should not be devastated further in a losing cause. On March 18, he toured areas of Tokyo that had been firebombed March 9-10. The experience persuaded him that the war must end as quickly as possible. [29]

Hirohito shattered precedent at a meeting of the Supreme War Council June 22, openly stating his criticism of the military: "We have heard enough of this determination of yours to fight to the last soldiers. We wish that you, leaders of Japan, will now strive to study the ways and means to conclude the war. In so doing, try not to be bound by the decisions you have made in the past." [30]

Anami and his faction managed to sidestep the Emperor's rebuke. All concerned — including the Emperor — hoped that the Soviet Union could be persuaded to act as an intermediary and help end the war on a more acceptable basis than unconditional surrender. [31] The basis for this, as the Japanese saw it, was that Japan's neutrality had allowed the Russians to concentrate on their real enemy, the Germans, and that in the postwar world, the Soviet Union would find a strong Japan to be useful as a buffer between its Asian holdings and the United States. [32]

Through July and into August, Japan continued to hope it could negotiate terms, including concessions for control of the armed forces and the future of its military leaders.

The passage of time and the repeated publication of pictures from Hiroshima and Nagasaki have transformed Japan's image to that of victim in World War II. In the 1940s, Japan's image was different. The allies had imposed unconditional surrender on Germany. The United States was not inclined to make deals with the Japanese regime responsible for Pearl Harbor, the Bataan death march, the forced labor camps, habitual mistreatment of prisoners of war, and a fifteen-year chain of atrocities stretching from Manchuria to the East Indies.

## Options

Basically, President Truman and the armed forces had three strategic options for inducing the Japanese surrender:

- **Continue the fire bombing and blockade.** After the war, the Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that without the atomic bomb or invasion, Japan would have accepted unconditional

surrender, probably by November and definitely by the end of the year.[33] In the summer of 1945, however, Army Air Force leaders were not able to persuade Marshall that this strategy would work.

- **Invasion.** Neither Marshall nor Truman was convinced that LeMay's B-29 bombing campaign could bring a prompt end to the war. In their view, the only conventional alternative was invasion. The battle for Okinawa, occurring while deliberations about the bomb proceeded, was much on the minds of American leaders. Between April 1 and June 30, the United States took about 48,000 casualties [34] on Okinawa, where it was opposed by a Japanese force a fraction the size of the one waiting in the home islands. Kamikaze attacks in the Okinawa campaign sank twenty-eight US ships and did severe damage to hundreds more.[35]
- **Use the atomic bomb.** Within a few years after World War II, the specter of global nuclear war (combined with visions of Hiroshima) would imbue the bomb with special horror. In 1945, the perspective was different. "The final decision of when and where to use the atomic bomb was up to me," Truman said. "I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it would be used." [36]

A contemporary perspective on the atomic bomb can be found in the final (September- October 1945) issue of *Impact*, a classified publication distributed to Army Air Force units during the war. "The single fact that atom bombs are 2,000 times as powerful as ordinary bombs will make present-day air forces obsolete," it said. "In the future, a handful of planes will theoretically do the same job — provided they can get to the target. . . . [I]t will not be long before our present air force will seem as curious as the lumbering triplanes of the last war." [37]

In 1945, the doubts and disagreements about use of the atomic bomb were mostly of a strategic nature, reflecting the belief that an invasion might not be necessary or that bombing and blockade would be sufficient. (Use of the bomb to end the war eventually saved Japanese casualties, too. The incendiary bombs from B-29s were taking a terrible toll. The attack on Tokyo March 9-10 killed more people than either the Hiroshima or Nagasaki bombs.)

### **Advice About the Bomb**

As discussions about use of the bomb continued, US authorities made preparations for the decision that seemed most likely. On May 28, a special committee in Washington nominated four urban industrial centers — Kokura, Hiroshima, Niigata, and Kyoto — as targets. On May 29, however, Secretary of War Stimson struck Kyoto (Japan's capital for more than 1,000 years) from the list. Nagasaki was eventually picked as the fourth potential target.[38]

The Interim Committee on S-1 (a code term for the Manhattan Project) advised the President on May 31 that the bomb should be used against Japan and that a demonstration explosion would not be sufficient. Reasons included the possibility that the bomb would not work, that the Japanese might think the demonstration was faked, and that there was no way to make the demonstration convincing enough to end the war.[39]

In his memoirs, Truman said a consensus had been reached in July, during the Big Three meeting at Potsdam, by Secretary of State James Byrnes, Stimson, Leahy, Marshall, and Arnold that the bomb should be used.[40] In fact, the advice was not as clear-cut as Truman depicted it in his memoirs. Although Arnold supported the decision, he declared his view at Potsdam that use of the bomb was not a military necessity.[41] Leahy had reservations about the decision also. And at a meeting with Truman July 20 during the Potsdam conference, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, commander of allied forces in Europe, advised against using the atomic bomb (although he said later his reaction was personal and not based on any analysis of the circumstances).[42]

Casualties were increasing with every day that Japan refused to surrender. Truman's biographer, David McCullough, sets the perspective trenchantly with a consideration that applied as the President was taking the final counsel of his advisors and allies at Potsdam: "Had the bomb been ready in March and

deployed by Roosevelt, had it shocked Japan into surrender then, it would have already saved nearly fifty thousand American lives lost in the Pacific in the time since, not to say a vastly larger number of Japanese lives." [43]

During the Potsdam conference, Truman received word that the "Fat Man" bomb test at Alamogordo (5:30 a.m., July 16, Alamogordo time) had been successful. On July 25, the War Department relayed Truman's order that the 509th Composite Group should deliver the first "special bomb" as soon after August 3 as weather permitted on one of the four target cities. [44]

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed with Truman. At Potsdam, he said, "the decision whether or not to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never even an issue. There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table." Years later, Churchill still thought that using the bomb had been the right decision. [45]

The Potsdam Proclamation, issued July 26 by the heads of government of the US, UK, and China, [46] warned of "utter devastation of Japanese homeland" unless Japan surrendered unconditionally. "We shall brook no delay," it said. The same day, the cruiser *Indianapolis* delivered the U-235 core of the "Little Boy" bomb to Tinian.

On July 28, Prime Minister Suzuki declared the Potsdam Proclamation a "thing of no great value" and said, "We will simply *mokusatsu* it." Literally, *mokusatsu* means "kill with silence." Meanings include "to ignore" and "to remain in a wise and masterly inactivity." [47] Suzuki said later the meaning he intended was "no comment." [48] The Allies took the statement as rejection of the Potsdam Proclamation.

## Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The unit that would deliver the atomic bombs, the 509th Composite Group, had been organized in 1944. [49] Crews were handpicked by the commander, Col. Paul W. Tibbets, Jr. The 509th trained in secrecy and then deployed to Tinian, where it was standing by when Truman's order was received.

In the early morning hours of August 6, the *Enola Gay*, flown by Tibbets, took off from Tinian. The primary target was Hiroshima, the seventh largest city in Japan, an industrial and military shipping center on the Inland seacoast of Honshu. At precisely 8:16 a.m., the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. More than half of the city [50] was destroyed in a flash, and about 80,000 Japanese were killed. [51]

Reaction by the Japanese cabinet was polarized, split evenly between the war faction and the peace faction. With the cabinet at an impasse, Hirohito took a more assertive position. On August 8, the Emperor instructed Foreign Minister Togo to tell Prime Minister Suzuki that Japan must accept the inevitable and terminate the war with the least possible delay, that the tragedy of Hiroshima must not be repeated. [52]

Anami could not bring himself to flatly defy the Emperor, but he continued to argue his position passionately. Hard-liners in the military were plotting to kill Suzuki and others of the peace faction. Anami was not part of the plot — although his brother-in-law, Masahiko Takeshita, was a ring leader. Anami was tolerant of the plotters and gave them tacit encouragement. [53]

The Soviet Union, seeing an opportunity for easy pickings with limited risk, declared war on Japan August 8. Despite the desperation of a war suddenly active on two fronts, the Japanese were not quite ready to capitulate.

The primary target for the second atomic bomb mission on August 9 was Kokura, but the aim point was obscured by smoke drifting from a nearby city that had been bombed two days before. *Bockscar* diverted to Nagasaki on the western coast of Kyushu. Nagasaki was heavily industrialized and "had become essentially a Mitsubishi town, with shipyards, electric equipment production, steel factories, and an arms

plant, all run by the conglomerate firm. Having been struck previously by only five small-scale bombing raids, Nagasaki presented a relatively pristine target."<sup>[54]</sup> The aiming point for *Bockscar* was the Mitsubishi Steel and Arms Works in the northern part of Nagasaki.<sup>[55]</sup> The bomb exploded on Nagasaki at 11:02 a.m., killing 40,000.<sup>[56]</sup>

### Truman States His Reasons

In his radio address August 9, Truman said the United States had used the atomic bomb "against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans. We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan's power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us."<sup>[57]</sup>

The Japanese cabinet was aware of a rumor, based on interrogation of a captured B-29 pilot, that the next atomic bomb was to fall on Tokyo August 12. This may have prompted the surrender somewhat, but it was not a major factor in the decision.<sup>[58]</sup>

Japanese deliberation on August 9 lasted all day and into the night. At a Cabinet meeting that began at 2:30 p.m. — hours after the second atomic bomb had fallen — Anami said: "We cannot pretend to claim that victory is certain, but it is far too early to say the war is lost. That we will inflict severe losses on the enemy when he invades Japan is certain, and it is by no means impossible that we may be able to reverse the situation in our favor, pulling victory out of defeat."<sup>[59]</sup> Finally, at 2:00 a.m. on August 10, the Emperor told the Big Six meeting (the Supreme War Council) that "the time has come to bear the unbearable" and that "I give my sanction to the proposal to accept the Allied Proclamation on the basis outlined by the Foreign Minister."<sup>[60]</sup>

At 4:00 a.m. the Cabinet adopted a message for radio transmission to Allied powers, saying in part: "The Japanese government are ready to accept the terms enumerated in the joint declaration, which was issued at Potsdam on July 26th, 1945, by the heads of the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, and China, and later subscribed to by the Soviet Government, with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler."<sup>[61]</sup>

The Allied response August 11 said that the "authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers" and that "the Emperor shall authorize and ensure the signature by the government of Japan and the Japanese General Headquarters of the surrender terms."<sup>[62]</sup>

### The Surrender

The Anami faction continued to haggle, but at noon on August 14, the Emperor asked the Cabinet to prepare an Imperial Rescript of Surrender. He said that "a peaceful end to the war is preferable to seeing Japan annihilated."<sup>[63]</sup> The plotters engaged in various disruptive actions in the hours that followed, but it was over. At 11:30 p.m. the Emperor recorded his radio message for broadcast the following day. Anami committed *seppuku* at 5:00 a.m., August 15.

In the Imperial Rescript of Surrender, broadcast at noon on August 15, Emperor Hirohito said: "Despite the best that has been done by everyone — the gallant fighting of the military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State, and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people — the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest.

"Moreover, *the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable*, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should We continue to fight, not only would it result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead

to the total extinction of human civilization. Such being the case, how are We to save the millions of Our subjects, or to atone Ourselves before the hallowed spirits of Our Imperial Ancestors? This is the reason why We have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Powers."<sup>[64]</sup>  
[Emphasis added.]

The atomic bomb did not win the war. Japan had been defeated already by the land, sea, and air campaign that went before. It is reasonable to conclude, however, that the bomb forced the Japanese surrender — and considerably sooner than it would have occurred otherwise.

## Chronology

---

March 9. B-29s begin mass incendiary raids.

April 1. Battle of Okinawa begins.

April 12. Roosevelt dies; Truman becomes president.

April 25. Groves and Stimson brief Truman on Manhattan Project.

May 9. V-E Day, victory in Europe.

May 28. Target committee selects four urban industrial centers.

May 31. Interim Committee on S-1 says the bomb should be used against Japan and advises against a demonstration explosion.

June 18. Truman meets with Secretary of War, Joint Chiefs, and approves plan — briefed by Marshall — for invasion of Japan.

June 30. Battle on Okinawa ends.

July 16-August 2. Big Three conference at Potsdam.

July 16. Successful test of "Fat Man" bomb at Alamogordo.

July 25. War Department relays Truman's order to drop "special bomb."

July 26. Potsdam Proclamation. Cruiser Indianapolis delivers U-235 core of "Little Boy" bomb to Tinian.

July 28. Japan dismisses Potsdam Proclamation.

August 6. Hiroshima bomb. 8:16 a.m.

August 8. USSR declares war on Japan.

August 9. Nagasaki bomb. 11:02 a.m.

August 10. Japanese message explores for terms of capitulation.

August 11. Allies state that Japanese government will be subject to Supreme Allied Commander.

August 15. V-J Day. At noon, the Emperor's radio message, the Imperial Rescript of Surrender, is broadcast.

September 2. MacArthur accepts formal surrender, battleship Missouri, Tokyo Bay.

## Endnotes

---

[1] Toland, *The Rising Sun*.

[2] Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces*.

[3] *Defense 92 Almanac* (also source for total number serving in armed forces) gives the casualty breakout as 291,557 battle deaths, 113,842 other deaths, and 671,846 wounds not mortal. Dupuy, *World War II*, says 292,129 killed and 670,846 wounded.

[4] Air Force Association, *Lifeline Adrift*.

[5] McCullough, *Truman*.

[6] Simons, *Japan at War*.

[7] Tarnstrom, *The Wars of Japan*.

[8] Bradley, *The Second World War: Asia and the Pacific*.

[9] McCullough, *Truman*.

[10] Wheeler, *The Fall of Japan*.

[11] Wheeler, *The Fall of Japan*.

[12] Hoyt, *Japan's War*.

[13] Wolk, "The B-29, the A-Bomb, and the Japanese Surrender."

[14] Wolk.

[15] Specter, *Eagle Against the Sun*.

[16] Truman, *Memoirs*.

[17] Wheeler, *The Fall of Japan*.

[18] McCullough, *Truman*.

[19] McCullough, *Truman*.

[20] Truman, letter to Cate, January 12, 1953, reproduced in Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces*. In his memoirs, Truman said that "General Marshall told me that it might cost half a million American lives to force the enemy's surrender on his home grounds." Note: Truman used the alternative spelling, Tokio, in his letter to Cate.

[21] Wheeler, *Bombers Over Japan*.

[22] Wolk, "The B-29, the A-Bomb, and the Japanese Surrender."

[23] Coox, "Strategic Bombing in the Pacific."

[24] Wheeler, *Bombers Over Japan*.

[25] Hoyt, *Japan's War*.

[26] Coox, "Strategic Bombing in the Pacific."

[27] Wheeler, *Bombers Over Japan*.

[28] Wheeler, *The Fall of Japan*.

[29] Hoyt, *Japan's War* ; Coox, "Strategic Bombing in the Pacific."

[30] Hoyt, *Japan's War*.

[31] Hoyt, *Japan's War*.

[32] Wheeler, *The Fall of Japan*.

[33] Wolk, "The B-29, the A-Bomb, and the Japanese Surrender."

[34] Published casualty figures for Okinawa vary. McCullough gives total as 48,000. Wheeler says 52,600. Gow says 55,163. National Air and Space Museum, January 1994, says 12,500 US dead, 35,500 wounded.

[35] Gow, *Okinawa*; McCullough, *Truman*.

[36] McCullough, *Truman*.

[37] "Air Victory Over Japan," Impact.

[38] Wheeler, *The Fall of Japan*, says the selection of Nagasaki was made in July by XXI Bomber Command. Coox says it was designated "unenthusiastically" by Arnold. Craven and Cate, in *Army Air Forces*, identify the members of the target committee as James F. Byrnes, Ralph A. Bard, William L. Clayton, Vannevar Bush, Karl T. Compton, James B. Conant, and George L. Harrison. Hershberg, in *James B. Conant*, says Stimson chaired the committee with Harrison, his aide, as alternate chairman. Byrnes was Truman's personal representative, soon to be Secretary of State. Bard was Undersecretary of the Navy and Clayton Assistant Secretary of State. Bush, Compton, and Conant were "scientist-administrators."

[39] Wheeler, *Fall of Japan*; McCullough, *Truman*.

[40] Truman, *Memoirs* ; McCullough, *Truman*.

[41] Wolk, "The B-29, the A-Bomb, and the Japanese Surrender."

[42] McCullough, *Truman*; Toland, *The Rising Sun*.

[43] McCullough, *Truman*.

[44] Letter to Gen. Carl Spaatz, commanding general, Army Strategic Air Forces, from Gen. Thomas T. Handy, acting Chief of Staff. Facsimile in Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces*.

[45] Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 1953.

[46] Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek was not at Potsdam. His approval was obtained by radio. This statement is properly called the Potsdam Proclamation. It is often referred to as the Potsdam Declaration, but that term applies to an altogether different document issued August 2 by the US, the UK, and the USSR as a general report on the conference.

[47] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[48] Toland, *The Rising Sun*.

[49] Fifty years later, the US Air Force chose to continue the lineage of this unit as the 509th Bomb Wing, the first wing equipped with B-2 Stealth bombers. Frank Oliveri, "The Spirit of Missouri," *Air Force Magazine*, April 1994.

[50] Coox, "Strategic Bombing in the Pacific," says the bomb destroyed 4.4 of the seven square miles of the city.

[51] Figures vary. Dupuy: 60,000. Goralski: 78,000. Young: 80,000. Hoyt: 80,000 (or more).

[52] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[53] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[54] Coox, "Strategic Bombing in the Pacific."

[55] Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces*.

[56] Again, figures vary. Goralski: 35,000. Dupuy and Young: 40,000. Hoyt, 60,000.

[57] McCullough, *Truman*.

[58] Craven and Cate, *Army Air Forces*.

[59] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[60] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[61] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[62] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[63] *Japan's Longest Day*.

[64] *Japan's Longest Day*.

## References

---

- Air Force Association and USNI Military Database. *Lifeline Adrift*. Aerospace Education Foundation, 1988.
- "Air Victory Over Japan," Impact, Office of the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, September-October, 1945. (*Army Air Forces Confidential Picture History of World War II*, declassified and published in eight volumes by James Parton and Company, 1980.)
- Bradley, John H. *The Second World War: Asia and the Pacific*. West Point Military History Series. Avery, 1984.
- Calvocoressi, Peter, and Guy Wint. *Total War: the Story of World War II*. Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Churchill, Winston S. *Triumph and Tragedy*. (The Second World War, vol. 6) Houghton Mifflin, 1953.
- Coox, Alvin D., "Strategic Bombing in the Pacific: The American Air Assault on Japan, 1942- 1945," in *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment*, forthcoming, Center for Air Force History, 1994.
- Craven, Wesley Frank, and James Lea Cate, ed. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. Vol. 5, *The Pacific: Matterhorn to Nagasaki, June 1944 to August 1945*. University of Chicago Press, 1953.
- Defense 92 Almanac*. American Forces Information Service, Department of Defense. September/October 1992.
- Dupuy, R. Ernest. *World War II: a Compact History*. Hawthorn Books, 1969.
- Goralski, Robert. *World War II Almanac, 1931-1945*. Putnam, 1981.
- Gow, Ian. *Okinawa 1945: Gateway to Japan*. Doubleday, 1985.
- Hershberg, James G. *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- Hoyt, Edwin P. *Closing the Circle: War in the Pacific, 1945*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1982.  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Japan's War: the Great Pacific Conflict, 1853 to 1952*. McGraw-Hill, 1986.
- Kerr, E. Bartlett. *Flames Over Tokyo: The U.S. Army Air Forces' Incendiary Campaign Against Japan, 1944-1945*. Donald I. Fine, Inc., 1991.
- McCullough, David. *Truman*. Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- Mee, Charles L., Jr. *Meeting at Potsdam*. Evans, 1975.
- National Air and Space Museum, "The Crossroads: the End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War," draft exhibition script, January 12, 1994.
- The Pacific War Research Society. *Japan's Longest Day*. Kodanasha International, Ltd., 1968. English-language edition of *Nihon No Ichiban Nagai Hi*, Bungei Shunju Ltd., 1965.

- Simons, Gerald, ed. *Japan at War*. Time-Life Books, 1980.
- Spector, Ronald H. *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan*. The Free Press, 1985.
- Tarnstrom, Ronald L. *The Wars of Japan*. Trogen Books, 1992.
- Tibbets, Paul W., with Clair Stebbins and Harry Franken. *The Tibbets Story*. Stein and Day, 1978.  
\_\_\_\_\_, "Training the 509th for Hiroshima," *Air Force Magazine*, August 1973.
- Toland, John. *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945*. Random House, 1970.
- Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs, Vol. 1, Year of Decisions*. Doubleday, 1955.
- Wheeler, Keith. *Bombers Over Japan*. Time-Life Books, 1982.  
\_\_\_\_\_, *The Fall of Japan*. Time-Life Books, 1983.  
\_\_\_\_\_, *The Road to Tokyo*. Time-Life Books, 1979.
- Wolk, Herman S., "The B-29, the A-Bomb, and the Japanese Surrender," *Air Force Magazine*, February 1975.
- Young, Peter, ed. *The World Almanac of World War II*. rev. ed. World Almanac, 1986.
- Zich, Arthur. *The Rising Sun*. Time-Life Books, 1977.