

Air and Space Museum Director Resigns

Dr. Martin O. Harwit, embattled director of the National Air and Space Museum, resigned May 2, declaring that "nothing less than my stepping down from the directorship will satisfy the museum's critics and allow the museum to move forward with important new projects." Dr. Harwit had been under fire for more than a year because of museum plans to exhibit the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, as a prop in a politically charged program. The Air Force Association and other groups said the exhibition was severely lacking in balance and context and that it came close to depicting Japan as the victim rather than the aggressor in World War II.

Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) said that Dr. Harwit's resignation would not change his plans to hold hearings by the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, which he chairs, to answer such questions as how plans were allowed to "get so far off track" by the museum and its parent organization, the Smithsonian Institution. The hearings are scheduled for July 11 and 18.

In January, after eighty-one members of Congress had called for Dr. Harwit's resignation or replacement, the exhibition was cancelled by Smithsonian Secretary I. Michael Heyman. In his resignation letter, Dr. Harwit noted that the controversy had not subsided despite the cancellation.

Secretary Heyman had asked for time to conduct an internal review of the problem and to put together a simple, straightforward display of the front section of the *Enola Gay*, presenting the aircraft without a political message. The controversy flared again in April when, unbeknown to Secretary Heyman, Dr. Harwit laid on a breakfast reception to honor the curators and staff "for all their work on the original exhibition," the one that Secretary Heyman had cancelled in January. As soon as Smithsonian Under Secretary Constance B. Newman learned about the reception — from a *Washington Times* reporter who called up for comment — she gave orders to cancel it.

Dr. Harwit had been director of the Air and Space Museum since 1987. Previously, he was a professor of astronomy at Cornell University. Early in his tenure at the museum, he talked about an exhibit that would be a "counterpoint" to presentations of heroism because "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."

When the *Enola Gay* controversy broke loose following publication of "War Stories at Air and Space" in the April 1994 issue of Air Force Magazine, Dr. Harwit gave conflicting signals with his statements. Publicly, he insisted that the exhibition plan was sound and that the criticism was misleading and unfair. The curators did not need prodding to make whatever modifications were indicated. In an internal memo to the museum staff in April 1994, however, Dr. Harwit acknowledged that "we do have a lack of balance" and that "much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable." In August, he told an Air Force historian that the curators had "failed to follow through" and that promised modifications "had fallen through the cracks." Even so, Dr. Harwit resumed his complaints about the Air Force Association in the August-September issue of Air & Space Magazine.

Dr. Harwit's public statements had been less frequent since September 1994, when Mr. Heyman became secretary of the Smithsonian and imposed tighter controls on statements and actions by the Air and Space Museum staff.

Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Tex.), a member of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents, said that Dr. Harwit's resignation "is the first in a long line of management changes that I expect to see at the institution."

In other developments related to the *Enola Gay* controversy:

- The American University in Washington, D.C., plans to display, in cooperation with the city of Hiroshima, the "ground zero" artifacts from Japan originally designated for the exhibition at the Air and Space Museum. The university particularly wants to show a schoolgirl's lunch box with remains of peas and rice reduced to carbon by the atomic bomb. The organizer, Prof. Peter Kuznick, was among those who signed a "historical cleansing" protest letter in November.
- On April 24, Mayor Hitoshi Motoshima of Nagasaki — who had declared the use of atomic bombs against Japan to have been a war crime on a par with Germany's program of genocide against the Jews — was defeated in his bid for reelection by a vote of 106,000 to 61,000.
- At a symposium at the University of Michigan April 19, Dr. Tom D. Crouch, head of the Air and Space Museum's aeronautics department, defended the original *Enola Gay* exhibit concept and depicted the problem as a clash between scholarly truth and commemorative myth. "We behaved," he said, "as if there were only one question to be answered: 'Is this script an honest, accurate telling of the story?' We didn't pause to ask a second question: 'Are there factors at work here that might make an honest and accurate account of the events in question unacceptable to museum stakeholders or to the public?'"
- The academicians who held a press conference last November to denounce the Smithsonian for yielding to demands for "historical cleansing" have now organized themselves as the "Historians' Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima" and are promoting a "National Teach-In on Hiroshima" at colleges and universities across the United States. The committee said in April that teach-ins had been scheduled at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Towson State University near Baltimore, three campuses of the University of California (Irvine, Los Angeles, and Berkeley), Northwestern University, Central Washington University, City College of New York, Southwest State University in Marshall, Minn., and The American University.
- Prior to his resignation, Dr. Harwit reinstated Frank Rabbitt, a volunteer docent he had dismissed in June 1994 for talking to the press about the *Enola Gay* program and "undermining the exhibition." Dr. Harwit has been held up to ridicule for "firing" a volunteer who disagreed with him; adding to the awkwardness of the situation, some of Mr. Rabbitt's fellow docents took to wearing "Free Frank Rabbitt" signs as they conducted tours at the museum's Garber facility in Suitland, Md.
- In early May, the Air and Space Museum announced a "Flight Time Barbie" exhibit. A spokesman explained that this display — featuring aviation- and space-related Barbie dolls provided by Mattel, Inc. — is not a major exhibit and is intended as a light and temporary gap-filler while a regular museum gallery is closed during preparation of an upcoming exhibit. Museum officials said they hoped the Barbie display would "delight children."

—John T. Correll