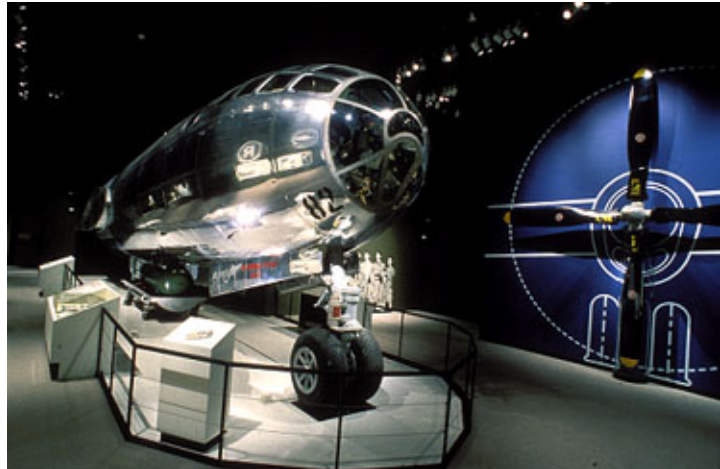


## Presenting the *Enola Gay*

The *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, finally went on display at the National Air and Space Museum June 28 in an exhibition that was aeronautical rather than political. In that, it was altogether different from the exhibition previously planned, "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." That program was canceled in January by the Smithsonian Institution (of which the museum is a part) after a long-running controversy in which the Air Force Association and others complained that the museum had thrown away balance and context to pursue an ideological agenda.

Brig. Gen. Paul W. Tibbets, who flew the *Enola Gay* on its mission in 1945, said that he was "pleased and proud" with the display that opened in June. He had called the earlier exhibition "a package of insults." Another critic of the first exhibit, Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Tex.), called the new program "a job well done." Mr. Johnson is one of the new Smithsonian regents appointed at the peak of the controversy.



*The forward fuselage of the B-29 Enola Gay now sits on display at the National Air and Space Museum—without the controversial, politically charged text and artifacts that the curators had originally assembled. (NASM photo/Carolyn Russo)*

Protest activities, timed to coincide with the opening, were conducted by representatives of about twenty self-styled peace groups and by the Historians Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima. These groups object to the cancellation of the previous exhibit, which emphasized Japanese suffering and the horrors of the atomic bomb and gave passing attention to Japanese aggression and atrocities in World War II.

More than 3,200 visitors went through the exhibit on the first day it was open to the public. Police ejected about twenty demonstrators who sought to block passage through the gallery or otherwise disrupt the program. Most of the initial protesting, however, was done outside the museum and consisted of distributing leaflets, displaying banners, and other actions of an orderly nature.

The main element in the new exhibit is the forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay*, a fifty-three-foot section that is just over half the total length of the airplane. The wings and the rest of the body would not fit into the museum gallery. Stretching from floor to ceiling on the opposite wall is one of the propellers, seventeen feet from tip to tip and a reminder of how large a B-29 was. The vertical stabilizer of the *Enola Gay* is displayed separately from the fuselage, as are two of the engines. General Tibbets and other members of the crew tell their own story in a video presentation.

Visitors can look inside the aircraft through two transparent panels. Also covered by a clear security panel is an empty casing of a bomb like the "Little Boy" weapon that fell on Hiroshima. Expectation that the artifacts might be targets for vandalism turned out to be well founded. Before the exhibition opened, a

protester charged the gallery where the *Enola Gay* is housed and flung red paint on the carpeting. Three persons were arrested July 2 after they threw human blood and ashes on the fuselage of the aircraft.

The museum's original exhibit plans flared into public controversy in the spring of 1994 when the Air Force Association and Air Force Magazine published a detailed description of the plan and circulated a detailed content analysis of graphic and text elements in the script. Over the next year, scrutiny by Congress, the news media, and veterans' groups became intense. In May 1995, Dr. Martin Harwit, director of the Air and Space Museum, resigned, saying that nothing less would satisfy the critics.

At a press conference June 27, Smithsonian Secretary I. Michael Heyman fielded accusatory questions about why he had yielded to pressure from veterans and Congress. He said that objections to the first exhibit had not come only from "a handful of people or simply a handful of legislators" and that he had received between 30,000 and 40,000 letters from citizens.

Part of the wall text in the exhibition gallery says 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 have surrendered unconditionally without such an invasion."

Official review of the controversy continues. In September, the Smithsonian will get the results of study it commissioned several months ago by the National Academy of Public Administration. There is also new reinforcement, apparently, for proposals that the National Air and Space Museum stop dabbling in politics and return to the basic mission of collecting, preserving, and displaying historic aircraft, spacecraft, and aeronautical artifacts. At the press conference, Mr. Heyman said he had "received yesterday a GAO [General Accounting Office] report on restoration activities by the Air and Space Museum that suggests we put more money into that and less into public programming.

The Smithsonian said that total cost for exhibition of the *Enola Gay* was \$451,000, of which \$ 308,000 had been expended on the "Last Act" version that was canceled in January.