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Museum Promises to Change *Enola Gay* Exhibition

Washington, D. C., September 6—Hammered by public opinion, Congress, and the news media, the National Air and Space Museum has promised major revisions to its plan for exhibiting the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb.

That was a major reversal of the position the museum had taken at midsummer, when the curators declared the script for the exhibition final except for "minor wording changes." In late June, however, *Air Force Magazine* circulated a detailed analysis of the "final" script, finding it to be biased and emotionally charged, using the *Enola Gay* as a prop in a political program about the atomic bomb. (An expanded version of that analysis appeared as "'The Last Act' at Air and Space" in the September 1994 issue.)

In early August, dozens of congressmen called on the museum to change its course. Rep Peter Blute (R-Mass.), speaking for a bipartisan group of twenty-four congressmen, condemned the proposed exhibit as "anti-American" and "biased." Separately, Rep. Tom Lewis (R-Fla.) said on behalf of himself and five other congressmen that the museum's "job is to tell history, not rewrite it." Most of the congressional criticism and much of the coverage by the national media that followed was based on *Air Force Magazine* reports.

At a meeting with service historians and others on August 16, Dr. Martin Harwit, the museum's director, overruled his curators' call that the plan was final and promised that major revisions would be made. The new script, he said, would affirm emphatically that the United States employed the atomic bomb in 1945 to shorten the war and save lives. (This point has been disputed previously by Dr. Harwit's curators.) On August 29, the museum published a press release announcing the addition of a 4,000-square-foot section called "The War in the Pacific: An American Perspective" to the exhibition.

The revised exhibit, supposedly, will incorporate changes that Dr. Harwit directed months ago but which were largely ignored by his curators. Over a weekend last April, Dr. Harwit rechecked the museum's plan and concluded that "we do have a lack of balance" and that "much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable." In his public statements over the next several months, Dr. Harwit defended the exhibit as balanced and assailed the critics—especially *Air Force Magazine*—who said otherwise. In late August, Dr. Harwit's experienced another weekend discovery when he examined the latest plan in detail. He said he was "taken aback at how little had been done to correct the imbalances." He noted "some word changes here and there" but concluded that most of the alleged revisions "had fallen through the cracks."

Finally, on September 1, museum officials began circulating review copies of a revised script to *Air Force Magazine*. (The Office of Air Force History, which had also criticized the museum's plans, was likewise excluded from the first distribution.)

—*John T. Correll*