

**National Air & Space Museum Concept Document 2 (early 1993)**  
(From Air Force Association Enola Gay Controversy Archive)

## **Fifty Years On**

World War II ended in 1945. In Europe the war came to an end on May 8; in the Pacific on August 15. But in these two theaters the Allies had fought two very different conflicts. The men inducted in Europe in 1939 battled an enemy remarkably similar to the foe their fathers had met, with weaponry initially quite similar. As in World War I, battles might end with whole armies surrendering, and troops passing the remainder of the war in prisoner of war camps. And though wonder weapons, like long-range rockets and jet aircraft, were brought on line, none except radar had a major impact on the outcome of the war.

The war in the Pacific was different. Opposing forces battled an unfamiliar enemy. Racial and cultural differences fanned fears, and inflamed hatreds. Savage battles ended with horrible losses on both sides, as men fought to their deaths, taking no prisoners and afraid to surrender for fear of consequences worse than death. And in the war against Japan there was indeed a vastly superior new weapon.

While all the major participants in World War II had conducted rudimentary experiments on nuclear fission, only the United States had completed construction of an atomic bomb. Its employment against Hiroshima and Nagasaki may not have influenced the ultimate outcome of the war, but it set in motion events that have had consequences of unparalleled proportions for our times.

In the first section of the exhibit, the necessary historical context will be given: the last phase of World War II in Europe and the Pacific and the increasingly brutal character of that conflict. This section will touch upon a variety of topics, including strategic bombing in Europe, the firebombing of Japan, and contrasting racist perceptions about the different enemies. (For a more complete discussion of the war in Europe, and battles at sea, visitors will, at this point, be directed respectively to the Museum's existing World War II and Naval Aviation galleries, while the new exhibition will continue with a focus directed at the war against Japan, inadequately discussed elsewhere in the Museum.)

A video of selected newsreel footage from the period will give a sense of the atmosphere in the last months of the war in the United States and Japan, as well as posters, cartoons and other visual images of this period. The fighting on Okinawa and other islands and the kamikaze campaign will highlight the desperate character of the Pacific conflict. Among the artifacts that may be included are a Japanese "Okha" suicide bomb and leaflets and bomb canisters dropped by American B-29s.

This introductory section will prepare the ground for the next major unit: After a quick overview of the decision to build the atomic bomb and the history of the Manhattan Project, this unit will offer the visitor a nuanced picture of the way decisions were made in the American and Japanese governments in 1945, to provide visitors a deeper understanding of this complex topic: Quotations from major participants and key documents, such as the 1939 Einstein letter to President Roosevelt and the July 1945 Air Force order to drop the atomic bombs, will be used in this context. A "Little Boy" atomic bomb casing will be used here to indicate the reality of the bomb that was becoming available to American decision-makers. A fuller discussion of the topic, however, will be left to outside reading suggested in a brochure that will be available to visitors.

A key component of the next part of the exhibition will be the forward fuselage of the B-29 Enola Gay. The entire aircraft has been in the Museum's possession for many decades and will be fully restored by 1995, but it is too large to fit in any of the Museum's galleries. Therefore, the exhibit will be using only the portion comprising the aircraft's cockpit and the bombsight, the evocative name painted on the port side of the aircraft, and the bomb-bay with a reconstruction of the special sway braces and latch. In the vicinity

of this massive artifact we will treat the development of the bases in the Marianas, the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group (Col. Tibbets' special atomic weapons unit) and the final preparations for the missions. Beyond the fuselage itself, artifacts that can be used in this section will include an engine, propeller or other pieces of the Enola Gay (to further convey its massive scale), plus documents, pictures and memorabilia of the crews.

The next major section of the exhibit will treat the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki themselves and the ensuing surrender of Japan. The dimensions of the destruction and suffering in the two cities will be shown here through pictures and film of the victims, however upsetting that may be to some visitors. We will include, as far as possible, bomb-damaged artifacts from the two cities and other documents and artifacts from the missions. A "Fat Man"-type plutonium bomb-casing will also be shown here. A video or movie in this section would include footage of the missions and their aftermath, plus interviews with survivors on the ground and crew members of the attacking and accompanying aircraft.

The exhibition would conclude by noting the debatable character of the atomic bombings, as well as their important role as one of the starting points of the nuclear age and Cold War. The closing video will include the perspectives of a whole range of people—historical actors, survivors, scholars and ordinary people, both Japanese and American. At the very end, visitors will be able to ponder what they have seen and record their own reactions and thoughts in comment books. They will leave the exhibition, it is hoped, with a deeper appreciation for the importance and complexity of these watershed events in modern history.

In setting this exhibition in motion, we have had the cooperation of a large number of organizations, both in the United States and in Japan. A consensus appears to have emerged that events, discussions of which were so often shunned in the past, should now, fifty years after their occurrence, be aired—perhaps as much as anything for the healing effect that such a debate might finally have. Discussions with the mayors of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki have taken place for the loan of items from these two cities' museums, whose directors have been most helpful. Japanese historians, humanists and artists have promised their cooperation in a search for accuracy of fact and balance to the presentation. The Radiation Effects Research Foundation, jointly administered by the United States and Japan, has volunteered to provide clarifying data on long-term health issues. Similar support has been obtained from U.S. veterans' organizations which aided the Museum in its restoration of the **Enola Gay**; from the Executive Director and staff of the Congressionally mandated 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of World War II Commemorative Committee; from the staff of the American Embassy in Japan working for Ambassador Michael Armacost, and from a variety of other interested organizations.

Fifty years after the atomic bombing of Japan, the National Air and Space Museum, with its unique collections of historic artifacts relevant to the events—most of them kept in storage and inaccessible to the general public for half a century—has an opportunity and, many would maintain, an obligation to mount an exhibition that will help visitors understand this pivotal moment in the history of World War II and the twentieth century.