The former director of the National Air and Space Museum has written a book about the *Enola Gay* controversy.

The Revelations of Martin Harwit

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DR. MARTIN O. Harwit, formerly a professor of astronomy at Cornell University, became director of the National Air and Space Museum in 1987. He says he was chosen, contrary to the recommendation of the museum staff, by Robert McCormick Adams, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, who had a reputation for wanting "to change the Smithsonian into a university."

Under Dr. Harwit's stewardship, the museum branched out from its charter to collect, preserve, and display aircraft, spacecraft, and other artifacts and drifted deep into ideological controversy. He resigned in May 1995, under fire from Congress, the news media, and veterans groups for his handling of plans to display the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 bomber that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan in 1945.

Among the revelations in his recently published book (*An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of Enola Gay*, Copernicus, 1996, 477 pages, $27.50) is that he did not step down willingly. The new Smithsonian secretary, I. Michael Heyman, asked for his resignation and gave him only four days to turn it in.

Dr. Harwit lays the primary blame for his troubles on the Air Force Association and *Air Force* Magazine, whose reports from March 1994 onward brought to public attention the museum's plans to use the *Enola Gay* as a prop in a political horror show. Early in the fray, AFA told Dr. Harwit that the exhibition 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."

Dr. Harwit acknowledges he wrote an internal memo—which was acquired and published by AFA—admitting "that we do have a lack of balance and that much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable." What he does not explain is why he then continued publicly to denounce *Air Force* Magazine's reports as inaccurate, unfair, and misleading.

The museum's regular tactics with veterans over the years had been to listen to their complaints but ignore what they had to say. Thus, it came as something of a surprise that "the Air Force Association had not been content just to offer advice; they insisted on seeing their wishes carried out."

"First Casualty of AFA"

The book depicts AFA as a mighty force, sweeping Congress, reporters, and public opinion along at will. "The first casualty of the AFA" is identified as Lt. Gen. C. M. Kicklighter, USA (Ret.), executive director of the Fiftieth Anniversary of World War II Com-

memoration Committee, who turned "tentative" and "cautious" toward the exhibit plan after seeing AFA's analysis of it. Commenting on a letter to the Smithsonian signed by two dozen members of Congress, Dr. Harwit says, "The hand of the Air Force Association could not have been clearer if this letter had been written on AFA stationery."

He reports a bizarre scheme in which the Smithsonian decided to seek support from the American Legion on an assumption that "the AFA, whose membership was only about 180,000, would have to defer to such giants as the American Legion, with its 3.1 million members." This notion seems to have persisted, even though museum officials soon discovered that the Legion had already drafted a resolution condemning the exhibit. Why the curators thought AFA had to "defer" to the Legion is not explained.

By late 1994, Dr. Harwit says, "the pressure on the American Legion leadership was mounting. They could not stay entirely aloof from their own membership, which had long been stirred up by the AFA's and even the Legion's own earlier propaganda." Having interpreted the Legion's position in this strange manner, Dr. Harwit was taken aback in January 1995 when the final straw before cancellation of the exhibit was a strong blast from the American Legion.

Criticism from AFA was seen as unwelcome interference, but activism from the left was a different matter. Dr. Harwit describes as "fairly accurate" reports that when eight representatives of peace and environmental groups came to see him, he said, "Where have you been? You are too late. Why haven't you been in before? Why haven't you talked to the media?"

Covering the Trail

The book traces Dr. Harwit's continuous concern about the opinion of Japanese officials, from whom the museum hoped to borrow artifacts for the "emotional center" of the exhibition.

"I knew that the AFA's ideas about an exhibition would be totally unacceptable to Japan and would precipitate an international incident if followed through," he says. He wrote in a letter that "I am most seriously concerned that the changes in the exhibition demanded by the Air Force Association would, if accepted, cause an uproar in Japan when the exhibition opens."

Worried that the Japanese might "back away from working with us" on the exhibition, Dr. Harwit felt a need in August 1994 to visit Japan "to reassure the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in person."

He and his colleagues "all agreed that I could not go to Japan now, and that we could not afford to have the Japanese come either. But we could not put this in writing. The furor such a letter would raise would top everything. Heyman adamantly wanted to avoid a 'paper trail.' Whatever we did needed to be done verbally to leave no trace."

Later on, he says, "Heyman and I were driven to the Japanese embassy. . . . I introduced Heyman to the ambassador and began apprising him of the situation, namely that we could not publicly confer with Hiroshima and Nagasaki representatives without risking the entire shutdown of the exhibition by Congress." Of another visit to the Japanese embassy, he says, "The important thing was not to leave a paper trail that might be leaked."

Outrage and Alienation

Dr. Harwit is also consistent in his sensitivity to the academic world. In early 1995, the exhibition plan had been through four revisions and was still catching flak. Secretary Heyman began to consider closing it down in favor of a straightforward display of the *Enola Gay*. Dr. Harwit recalls, "I was aghast. . . . We would have lost our last hope of support from like-minded people who also stood for education as an important national goal. I said I understood his fears, but our supporters, and particularly the academic community, would be outraged and accuse us of capitulating. In the long term, these were the groups on whom we would need to rely for help."

Veterans groups had been assured by the Smithsonian that Dr. Harwit would not be allowed to make unilateral changes to the exhibition script. He says he was unaware of that promise. On the basis of academic advice, he marked down from 250,000 to 63,000 the number of US casualties expected had an invasion of the Japanese homeland been necessary in 1945.

The reaction rocked the Smithsonian. Eighty-one members of Congress called for Dr. Harwit's resignation or removal. The Washington *Post* said planning for the exhibit had been "incredibly propagandistic and intellectually shabby." Rep. Gerald B. H. Solomon (R–N. Y.), chairman of the House Rules Committee, said that unless the exhibit was straightened out, "I will personally take measures this year to zero out the Smithsonian's Congressional appropriation. You can count on that." Dr. Harwit's reaction, incredibly, was to wonder, "What about the people from his district who had elected Solomon? Would they all want the Smithsonian's budget zeroed out?"

Feeling a need at that point for "some dispassionate advice," Dr. Harwit began placing telephone calls to members of the Smithsonian Board of Regents. Furious that Dr. Harwit had gone around him, Secretary Heyman had the under secretary, Constance Newman, deliver the cease-and-desist order. On January 25, Secretary Heyman canceled the politicized exhibition.

Dr. Harwit managed to hang on for a few more months, but he was clearly alienated from the Smithsonian's top officials. It had been "disheartening" that Secretary Heyman had said, upon taking office, that early exhibition scripts were "deficient." The day after cancellation of the exhibit, Dr. Harwit says, the secretary cast a "pall" on museum morale by making the same statement to the assembled staff that he had made to the public. Secretary Heyman and Under Secretary Newman, he says, "were totally consumed with the issue of Congressional funding," and that "with money the highest priority of the Institution, academic integrity began to take second place."

Of all Dr. Harwit's grievances against the Air Force Association—and the book is loaded with them—the one that seems to gravel him most is that we made copies of his plans and circulated them. The curators routinely sent review copies to their colleagues in Japan but fought hard to keep them away from critical eyes in the United States.

In this regard, there is one last surprise for Dr. Harwit.

He harps repeatedly on his belief that AFA, against his wishes, gave the news media and Congress copies of an exhibit script he sent to the executive director on January 31, 1994. For the record, if it matters, what we actually duplicated and distributed was a copy of the script that had come to *Air Force* Magazine from other sources two weeks previously. As Martin Harwit's boss made a habit of reminding him, museum operations in the Harwit era leaked like a sieve.

—John T. Correll, Editor in Chief