



NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560

June 17, 1994

B/Gen. Paul W. Tibbets (USAF Ret.)
5574 Knollwood Drive
Columbus, OH 43232

Dear Gen. Tibbets,

I am writing to follow up on our conversation a few weeks ago, when we briefly spoke at the National Air and Space Museum's Garber restoration facility.

You may recall that I asked whether you would be willing to provide your recollections and express your informed views on the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the exhibition which the Museum is planning to open in May 1995, *The Final Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*. In the many interviews we have conducted in preparing for the exhibition, we have found that the public -- particularly the younger generation -- carries so many misconceptions about the raids, what happened to the crews after the war, and what your personal role might have been, that any video-recorded statement you could make would be of the greatest value in setting the record straight.

The main aim of the exhibition is to tell the story of the last days of World War II for the benefit of the generations of Americans who have grown up since 1945 and don't understand either why the United States is the only country to have ever used the atomic bomb in war, or how powerful a weapon the bomb really was. It is of paramount importance that this history is not forgotten or trivialized and thereby misinterpreted or lost.

For the future of our nation it is essential that people understand the rational arguments leading to President Truman's decision to drop the bomb. It is also important for the public to realize just how powerful and destructive a weapon the atomic bomb was and is. That is why one section of our exhibition shows the awesome extent of destruction suffered at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Misinterpreting our display of these effects of the bombing, critics have taken us to task for displaying undue sympathy for the Japanese.

The Museum has also been criticized for inadequately caring for the *Enola Gay* in decades past. The evidence, however, denies that allegation. Aircraft of the *Enola Gay*'s size cannot be transported off the grounds of an airfield. Never having had an airport of its own, the Smithsonian was always in need of a host Air Force base for housing the aircraft. At Andrews AFB, the airplane was denied hangar space even though my predecessor Paul Garber must have pleaded that the aircraft be brought indoors to stop its deterioration. Ultimately in 1960, when vandalism and the weather threatened total deterioration, the Smithsonian took the draconic step of disassembling the airplane so it could at

least be transported to and brought under roof at our restoration facility.

I am told that, in the early 1970s, the Museum offered the *Enola Gay* to two Air Force bases, Offut AFB in Nebraska and Kirtland AFB at Albuquerque. Both had expressed interest in displaying her, but neither could guarantee to keep the aircraft under roof, and so the *Enola Gay* stayed at the Garber restoration facility, where work began ten years ago to fully restore the aircraft for history. Since coming to the Museum in 1987, I have directed that this restoration be maintained as our highest priority, and it will continue to hold that preeminence until fully restored next year.

I know it pains you that we will not yet have a building adequate for displaying the fully assembled aircraft in 1995. Congress only last summer authorized us to plan a facility that will be permanently able to house the *Enola Gay* indoors, at Washington's Dulles airport; but that action came too late for a display there in 1995. Nevertheless, the Museum believes that the front 60 feet of the aircraft's forward fuselage resting on its landing gear, and with a *Little Boy* casing on a dolly beneath the open bomb bay doors, will make an impressive sight in the gallery we are assembling.

These are the circumstances surrounding our planned exhibition. They are not ideal, but I believe they provide the Museum a never-to-be-repeated opportunity to bring to the public a thoughtful exhibition on the most pivotal historic event of this century, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. In my mind, it is essential that we make every effort, for the sake of our country, to make you and your views a part of the exhibition.

I am writing you now for two reasons. First, I would like to again invite you, as we have invited so many other members of the 509th, to present your personal views to our visitors in a video-recorded statement. The lessons of the historic ending of World War II and the role that you and the members of the 509th played must be properly remembered, so future generations of Americans might learn from them and apply them to problems our nation might face in a future decade. With eight to ten million visitors coming to the National Air and Space Museum each year, the opportunity to present your personal views to such a large fraction of our public should not be overlooked.

Secondly, I have read the statement you released last week and am concerned that, while rumors about the exhibition have reached you, you have not had an opportunity to see for yourself the full script, which comprises the exact text of every label to be displayed, a compendium of every picture to appear, and the list of artifacts to be exhibited. A new draft of the script was completed last week.

I invite you to come to Washington, as a guest of the Museum, so that we might walk you through our plans for the exhibition, give you a copy of the script that you can study at your leisure, and listen to your comments or answer any questions that you might have. If it is inconvenient for you to travel to Washington at this time, members of the exhibition team and I are ready to personally visit you in Columbus, at any time convenient to you, to provide you with the same information.

I know that you will wish to think about this request, and you may also want to avail yourself of further information before you make a decision. Should you wish to speak with Dr. Tom Crouch, Chairman of the Museum's Aeronautics Department and in charge of the exhibition, his phone number is (202) 357-2515. Alternatively, you might speak with Col. Don Lopez (USAF Ret.), who served under you after the War, before coming to the Museum more than twenty years ago. You could reach him at (202) 357-1330. And my own number is (202) 357-1745; I too would be glad to provide you with any information you might like to have.

I plan to call you in the next few days, when you have had an opportunity to consider our request.

General Tibbets, you have always served your country when it needed you. Could we not ask you to once more take up that challenge and provide the American people your views on the events that so dramatically brought World War II to a conclusion and forever changed people's lives?

Sincerely yours,

Martin Harwit

Martin Harwit
Director

cc: Tom Crouch
Don Lopez