



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

May 2, 1995

Secretary I. Michael Heyman
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, DC

Dear Mike,

I am writing to let you know that I am today stepping down from the Directorship of the National Air and Space Museum.

I do so with deep regret. During my eight years at the Museum, I have gained a profound respect for the men and women on the staff. Their high professional standards, dedication to excellence, and devotion to public service have made this the most visited museum in the world. In the past five years, the attendance at Air and Space rose, while all other Smithsonian museums on the National Mall saw a decline.

During my time at the Museum we acquired a number of truly significant donations: the Air Force SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft, which on delivery broke the transcontinental speed record, by flying coast to coast in 68 minutes, and the recently declassified Corona camera for high-precision photography from Earth orbit. Both played an important role during much of the Cold War. To these we added a Soviet SS-20 and a U.S. Army Pershing 2 rocket, harbingers of the dramatic reduction in nuclear armaments set in motion by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty; a Vietnam era Navy A-6 attack aircraft; and a rare World War II Shturmovik Il-2, the Soviet ground-attack aircraft, which helped turn the tides on the Eastern front.

The Museum has also attracted the highest caliber scientific and historical researchers, archivists, art historians, exhibition specialists and educators, to bring greater depth and breadth to the production of exhibitions and films and the provision of archival services. A newly created development department has substantially augmented Federal funding with private contributions in support of new galleries, films, and collections care. Working together, as teams, this staff has produced a series of informative galleries, including the futuristic "Where Next Columbus?"; the World War I gallery, "Legend, Memory and the Great War in the Air"; "Star Trek", the most popular gallery ever produced at the Smithsonian; and "Beyond the Limits", the story of computers and flight. To these, they have added two recent, wide-screen IMAX films, "Blue Planet", about Earth seen from space; and "Destiny in Space", a vision of the future of space exploration.

The Museum's craftsmen have restored for display a wealth of aerospace treasures, including a World War I French Voisin bomber; the first operational jet aircraft, the German World War

II Arado reconnaissance/bomber; the Hubble Space Telescope Structural Dynamic Test Vehicle; and the World War II U.S. Army Air Force B-29 bomber Enola Gay -- the largest restoration project ever undertaken by the Museum -- which is to go on display in a few weeks.

Initial plans for a historical display of this aircraft have persistently provoked controversy and divisiveness. Three months after the cancellation of that planned exhibition, the controversy still continues. I believe that nothing less than my stepping down from the directorship will satisfy the Museum's critics and allow the Museum to move forward with important new projects, such as the Extension to be built at Washington's Dulles International Airport to provide better care for the collections.

There is no choice but to resign: The Museum's welfare and future are too important.

Sincerely yours,

Martin
Martin Harwit
Director

May 2, 1995

Today, Martin Harwit has decided to step down as the Director of the National Air and Space Museum. At the time of his appointment in 1987 it was expected that the period of his directorship would be followed by an appointment at the museum in astrophysical research. However, he has decided not to accept the Institution's offer to remain as senior scientist.

Dr. Harwit became the Director of the National Air and Space Museum in 1987. Since that time, that museum has remained the most visited museum in the Nation with over 8 million visitors annually. Those visitors have had the opportunity to view such interesting exhibits as "Where Next, Columbus?" which examined prospects for space exploration during the next 500 years and the very popular "Star Trek." Also, popular at that museum have been IMAX films such as Blue Planet, and Destiny in Space.

Martin Harwit has led the museum's successful efforts in collecting, preserving, restoring, and displaying aeronautic and space flight equipment of historical interest. Furthermore, he has insured that the museum increased the depth and scope of the research and publications in aviation

and space flight history and technology, astrophysics, planetary studies, and the evolution of the Earth. The important restoration of the Enola Gay took place under his guidance. The planned exhibit ,of course, has been fraught with controversy, as Dr. Harwit notes.

Dr. Harwit led the effort to secure passage of the legislation authorizing the National Air and Space Extension at Washington Dulles International Airport in Virginia. That facility will provide space to house and restore the museum's collection of airplanes and spacecraft, many of which are too large for the building on the National Mall.

Prior to coming to the Smithsonian, Dr. Harwit had been the Chairman of the Department of Astronomy at Cornell University. He is the author of three books and over 250 articles.

For all of Dr. Harwit's many contributions to the Institution, I wish to express my gratitude.

Secretary