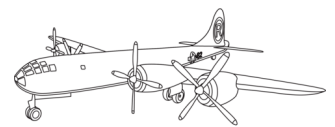


The Enola Gay Controversy, 1994-1995



Prologue

The voice of the radio DJ rocks you from your sleep: "Good Morning! Northern Virginia! It's 5:00am and the beltway is clogging up." You blink hard and make quick work of getting dressed, hoping to avoid the traffic jam on I-95 getting to the train.

Downstairs the coffee is already brewing, you pour a cup and swirl your hands over the piles of inky papers and glossy magazines on the breakfast table. You stop at the *Washington Post* folded open to a headline reading "Restoring the Enola Gay and a Point in History"

The opening lines read "Aircraft restorers are working to recreate a B-29 heavy bomber exactly as it was when it changed the face of warfare in 1945."

"Oh, that's neat," you think.

You can hear your husband's *Sweating to the Oldies* tape concluding in the den.

"Have you read this?" you yell, waving the newspaper, "it is about the airplane that dropped the atomic bomb!" You pause, then continue, "They said the craft 'lies dismembered in a couple of utility buildings'" outside of the District at the Smithsonian Institution's Paul E. Garber Facility."

"Neat," he responds.

"That is what I said! But get this, 'it remains unclear exactly how this memento of the horrific uses to which man sometimes puts his genius will ultimately be displayed'" Dark, huh?"

"Weird. Are they going to fly it?" he asks.

"Says here, no. And it will cost 2 million dollars to fix up."

"And it will *not* fly?!"

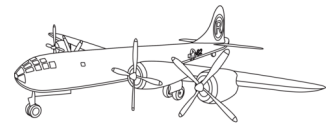
"No, no. Ted, here, see, the curator at the Smithsonian says it will be an 'educational tool to teach the public about the issues that went into President Harry S. Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb' and the eventual exhibit will focus on 'what happened and how it was perceived by different groups.'"

"What different groups? Like scientists and pilots?" Ted asks.

"Probably, but it did mention that Japanese groups are interested in it."

"Really? I can't imagine they would have anything positive to say about it. Especially if they knew people in those cities back then. Why would the museum let them have a say in it? I don't think Truman did."

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He pauses to wipe his brow and thoughts click in his mind “Mm, did you read John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*? I don’t want to see that on display.” That takes you back a little.

“I had not considered that. But I don’t think it would be all *that* bad,” you respond.

“We could not bring Grandpa John there. He chucked my copy of the book out the door when he visited my dorm and saw it on my desk.”

You remember that story well. Ted’s grandpa, a World War Two veteran, felt that Ted’s professor made the students read the harrowing tale of what happened when the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima to radicalize them against America.

“Well...” you pause, “Grandpa John is dramatic.”

“I don’t know! He has a point, we both read the book. The United States is not portrayed in a kind light.”

“The Vietnam War certainly portrayed America in a bad light, too! And we saw all that on our own good old-American TV news,” you say.

“That war was a mess,” he responds, “a quagmire like Nixon said, but in World War Two we are the good guys.”

“Hmmm,” you intone as you consider the difference.

“Grandpa John has an odd way of showing it, but he had a point. The United States needs to be shown to the people in a good light to inspire people to participate in democracy. If they think the U.S. is bad, they will not participate, and democracy will fall apart, and we will be swayed by some autocrat.”

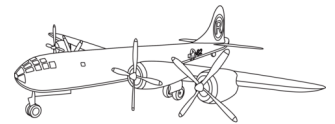
“Why do people have to feel good about the nation’s past to participate in its future?” you ask.

“It is about disillusionment,” he says while pouring a cup of coffee. “If people become disillusioned with the nation and its system of government, they might not be invested in its future and then they might not participate. Our democracy could crumble.”

“Yea, but Americans have been disillusioned and disappointed with the government for decades. Women fought for the right to vote because of their dissatisfaction with the government and their lack of rights. And the people who marched in the streets in the 1960s for voting rights were plenty mad at the current system of government, and its racist history, and they sought to change it.”

“I’m thinking about Uncle Tim. Do you remember meeting him a few Thanksgivings back? He had a real tough time in Vietnam and things did not improve when he got home. He wasn’t even drafted; he signed up to fight the Communists, and the war ground him and his patriotism to dust. When I turned 18, he told me not to waste my time voting. I think there are a lot of ‘Uncle

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Tim's' out there. And think of it this way, these guys are the sons of World War Two veterans who had a much clearer fight. They beat the Nazis and the Japanese and returned home as war heroes. I loved listening to your Grandpa John's stories."

"Oh yea, he has some good tales. Scouting in the forests, the gags he and his buddies pulled, and that small girl he pulled out from the rubble—who still sends him letters—ah, Zophia!"

"Right! They make you feel good about being an American and being participants in the righteous democratic government. Uncle Tim's stories are tragic and bewildering. Remember that one about his buddy at the VFW being thrown into deadly secret missions only to have the VA deny him benefits because the government did not keep records of secret missions? Or the story about My Lai where the American guys killed unarmed women and children before burning their village down? It's just one tragedy after another. To have him tell it, the U.S. is the bad guy."

That is a lot to take in. You both contemplate the issues over a few sips of coffee.

"Tim has had a really rough time, and I don't mean this to be a commentary on that, but I really don't think including the Japanese perspective in the curation of the "Enola Gay" is going to transform our memory of World War Two into Vietnam. Plus, Americans don't participate in the government just because they think it is good, they participate because they believe they can affect it. That they can create change. Again, think about the Civil Rights movement! And women! The Suffragists didn't push for the right to vote because they liked that the Government did not let them vote, they did it because they knew they would help make the U.S. better."

Ted seems to be considering your argument.

"After all, all war is messy Ted. Why can't Grandpa John's story of Zophia and John Hersey's *Hiroshima* exist in the same world? Because, after all, they did!"