

August 6: a controversial anniversary

The Bethlehem Gadfly Uncategorized August 6, 2020

Mari Yamaguchi, "Urgency to bear witness grows for last Hiroshima victims." Associated Press, August 4, 2020.

At meeting on Sunday a Friend reminded us that even during the pandemic we should not forget that this week — today, in fact — marks the 75th anniversary of Hiroshima, the first use of an atomic bomb.

Easy to forget with so much going on.

The “mushroom cloud” pictures from Beirut may have reminded some of us.

Beirut suffered less than 20% of the force at Hiroshima.

Probably 140,000 died, and for many it was not lucky to survive.

Hiroshima birthed the specter of nuclear war and the nuclear arms race.

Some of you will have seen the gleaming *Enola Gay*, the formidable B-29 that dropped the bomb, at the National Air and Space Museum at Dulles Airport.

A few of you will remember the controversy over the *Enola Gay* as the Smithsonian mounted an exhibit to commemorate the end of World War II in 1995, 50 years ago.

“The Enola Gay Controversy” occasioned one of Prof Gadfly’s most powerful teaching experiences.

The question was “How do we remember a war that we won?”

Several of you will know the iconic flag pole on the lawn at the center of the Lehigh University’s lower campus near Packer Chapel.

If you stand beneath the American flag there and extend your imagination east to Vassi's at Rt. 78 in Hellertown, swing your imagination north to Wegman's above Rt. 22, and continue to arc west and south, returning to Rt. 78, you will have an idea of the size of the densely packed urban space leveled by the Hiroshima bomb dropped from the *Enola Gay*, leveled except for one orphaned building.

Devastation then unimaginable.

The Smithsonian curator posed the dilemma well: "Do you want to do an exhibit intended to make veterans feel good, or do you want an exhibition that will lead our visitors to think about the consequences of the atomic bombing of Japan? Frankly, I don't think we can do both."

Gadfly has always loved good conversation.

That question can still start one.

It would be a good idea to remember Hiroshima today if only fleetingly.