

September 19, 1994

**MEMO TO:** The Military Coalition and Associate Members

**SUBJECT:** Further Actions on Enola Gay Exhibit

**FROM:** The Air Force Association

Most of you have seen the August 31 revision of the script for the "Last Act/*Enola Gay*" exhibition planned by the National Air and Space Museum. This memorandum describes what we believe are the further actions that veterans groups should expect. The curators, understandably, want critics to state their objections as "line-in/line-out" revisions to the existing script. The Air Force Association does not intend to cooperate with that ploy. It leads only to changes at the margin. That is not enough. The curators must make **structural, contextual, and ideological changes** that go substantially beyond adding sentences and dropping photos.

The Air Force Association has received a considerable volume of letters, telephone calls, and other comments on this issue since our reports began appearing last spring. The common denominator of these contacts is that veterans are opposed to the museum's revisionist actions. There is, however, a spread of opinion about what must be done to set things right. Many veterans demand that the exhibition be cancelled and that the *Enola Gay* be given to another museum. Others are waiting to see if the museum's first conciliatory step, represented by the August 31 revision, will lead to further progress. We have heard no opinion that the museum's present position is acceptable. The Smithsonian will make a big mistake if it tries to skate through this with only limited changes.

■ **The Issue of Trust.** Over the past year, both the Director of the National Air and Space Museum and the curators of "The Last Act/*Enola Gay*" exhibit have assured veterans and other interested parties that the concerns of veterans would be addressed. Time and time again, promises have been broken. We have come to the conclusion that the Air and Space Museum has not been well served by the team of curators assigned to the *Enola Gay* exhibit. We remain highly skeptical that the current team is willing to make serious, substantive revisions that will address issues of context, balance, and historical accuracy. The present curators should be transferred from the "Last Act/ *Enola Gay*" exhibition and replaced with curators who are veterans of military service.

■ **Spread "The American Perspective" Around.** The curators have just gained 4,000 more square feet of space and propose to use it for an add-on section, "The War in the Pacific: An American Perspective." If the *American* perspective had to be added as an afterthought, what perspective does the rest of it have? So far, this "American perspective" addition exists only as a promise in a press release, which says the new section will consist of about 50 photos and a Grumman F6F-3 aircraft. It is difficult to see how that will lead to much improvement in balance. The basic exhibition remains organized as before, leading visitors, step by step, to the "emotional center" in Unit 400 ("Ground Zero"), where the psychological rug is pulled out from under them abruptly. We are not exhibition experts, but is it not possible for the museum to use this new allowance of floor space to achieve real balance by reorganizing, regrouping, replanning, and spreading the "American perspective" throughout the program?

■ **Eliminate — as Promised — the Anti-American Speculation.** In a meeting on August 16, attended by two Air Force Association representatives, Dr. Martin Harwit, Director of the National Air and Space Museum, promised that the new script would end the one-sided speculation about US objectives and motives. As AFA's analysis of the latest script (the August 31 revision) points out, the anti-American speculation is still there. Compare, for example, the uncritical coverage of Japan's alleged quest for peace in 1945 with the curators' endless questions about whether US demand for unconditional surrender prolonged the war.

■ **1931 - 1945 — a Fifteen-Year War of Aggression.** Contrary to the suggestion of the Air Force Association, the curators are still cutting the historical context short. They are reluctant, apparently, to change from the setup they had before, "War in Asia and the Pacific: 1937 - 1945." That eliminates some key history. To understand how war came to Asia and the Pacific, it is imperative to begin in 1931 and show the march from Manchuria onward and the drive to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Despite the adjustments made thus far, the script still underplays how the Japanese behaved before their victims began hitting back.

■ **Nine Hundred a Day.** An element needs to be added in Section 200 to make it clear that the urgency of the decision was not driven by American impatience or Presidential petulance. One way to establish the point is to emphasize that the US casualty toll in the Pacific was rising at the rate of 900 a day while the war dragged on.

A Half Century's Worth of Purple Hearts. [Display medal as artifact.] As the US prepared for the invasion of Japan in 1945, Purple Heart medals — awarded to members of the armed forces who are killed or wounded in action — were ordered in massive numbers in anticipation of the casualties to come. Thanks to the mission of the *Enola Gay*, the Purple Hearts weren't needed. The supply of unused medals lasted through the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and all of the actions and contingencies — including the Persian Gulf War — for the next 50 years. The medals awarded in Desert Storm required minor refurbishing because of age.

■ **Present Military Actions As Such.** The curators' lack of military experience shows. So does their antimilitary attitude, which we have noted and reported before. They are reluctant to accept the mission of the *Enola Gay* as a valid military action and to present it as such. This is part of a broader pattern in which the curators emphasize the sociological rather than the military aspects of warfare. This point was made also in the comments forwarded September 8 by the Office of the Air Force Historian: "There is a disturbing tendency to emphasize that most of what was accomplished by the B-29 campaign (prior to dropping the atomic bombs) was the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. . . ." The curators seem blind to the military effect. As Senior Historian Herman S. Wolk said: "Nowhere in the script is it mentioned that the bombing campaign resulted in lowering output as follows: power generation by 50%; overall industrial output, 60%; oil, 85%; aluminum, 91%; and nitric acid, 83%."

■ **Subdivide and Reallocate Section 400. New Title: "The War Ends Suddenly."** As restructured, this section would have five sub-units.

- "Imperial Japan: Defiant and Still Dangerous." Force of millions waiting in the home island. Commitment to fight to the death. Photo of War Minister, General Anami. The determination to keep fighting continues into August — even after the first atomic bomb has fallen.
- "A Warning Declined." Photo of Prime Minister Suzuki. "*Mokusatsu*" to the Potsdam Proclamation. However you interpret the word, they still said "no." They were holding out for a better deal.
- "Ground Zero: Hiroshima and Nagasaki." We agree that it should be included — but not as the excessive "emotional center" the curators had in mind. Reduce the volume of it and stop the emotional manipulation. *What needs to be done here seems clear to almost everyone except the curators — which is, in itself, an extraordinary indication of what's wrong.* From Script # 1 to Script #3, the curators have decreased "Ground Zero" photos from 75 to 51, artifacts from 26 to 18. (That's far short of the reduction targets proposed internally by Dr. Harwit last April.) **Twenty pictures and a half dozen artifacts would be ample.** These photos and artifacts should not unduly emphasize women, children, and religious objects.
- The Surrender. The Number One consequence of the *Enola Gay's* mission — given short shrift to date by the curators — was that it brought on the end of the war. Nine days after Hiroshima, six days

after Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered.

□ The Invasion That Didn't Occur. The bomb saved lives on both sides.

■ **The Surviving Victims the Museum Forgot.** The curators are so attentive to the *Hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bombs ) that a museum visitor might think these Japanese survivors were the only ones for whom the suffering continued after the war. They are featured, not only in gruesome photos and wall labels but also in "video testimony." (Emphasis added; choice of word not likely a coincidence.) It is true, as the script says, that the Japanese survivors "still bear the mark of their experience in the form of keloid scars from flash burns." The exhibition should also remember those who bore the mark of their experience by spending the rest of their lives in wheel chairs, having lost their legs in a war their nation did not start. **For every *Hibakusha* in the program, we expect to see a disabled American veteran comparably featured.**

■ **Replace the Political Manifesto in Section 500.** Little of the material in this section has a legitimate place in this exhibit. The last half should be discarded entirely. What remains of section 500 should be reworked to eliminate the revisionist angst and recast with some positive additions.

□ *A New Partnership in the Pacific*. Show the extraordinary US postwar aid to Japan in rebuilding. That was a far more significant part of the aftermath of the war than things now covered in this exhibit. Show Hiroshima and Nagasaki as they are, 50 years later.

■ **The Underlying Problem of Attitude.** Museum officials seem to regard the previous planning documents for this exhibit — the three concept plans and the first two drafts of the script — as bygones, no longer relevant. Our sense is that many veterans do not regard those documents that way. They ask, as Charles Krauthammer did in his August 19 column, "How could such prejudicial rubbish have been penned in the first place?" Last spring, all hands at the Air and Space Museum were defending a script that said, "For most Americans [*World War II in the Pacific*] was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism." That was eventually changed — not because the curators disagreed with it, but because they were unable to fight off *Air Force Magazine's* attack on what they had said.

In this exhibition, museum officials seem to operate in an active guilt-assessment mode where the United States is concerned. None of their "aftermath" and "legacy" attention is directed at the postwar reluctance of the Japanese to acknowledge the reality of Japan's 1931-1945 aggression although as late as 1994, that reluctance still took the form of refusal on the part of some prominent Japanese.

What we hear from our members is that it is no longer enough to clean up this exhibition script. **It is also imperative that the Smithsonian leadership and the Board of Regents carefully review the procedures and personnel assignments that produced such a biased, unbalanced, anti-American script in the first place.**

■ **Clarification of Japanese Participation.** We believe that everyone will be best served by full disclosure of Japanese participation in this project. In our meeting with Dr. Harwit and the curators last year (November 23, 1993), we were told that recorded messages from the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would probably be part of this exhibition. Since then, Japanese participation has been given a low profile.

Because of information received from Japanese sources, however, we know that the Museum translated the May 31 version of the script — and probably all versions — into Japanese. That translation was shipped by express delivery to Hiroshima and Nagasaki for review well before most US veterans organizations received their copies. This suggests more than incidental courtesy to interested parties. Indeed, we also understand that the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been guaranteed two

minutes each of unedited video time to say whatever they want to as part of this exhibit. We further understand that the museum plans to publish a Japanese edition of its companion book for the exhibition.

**The Companion Book.** The Air Force Association faxed the following query, to which no answer has yet been received, to the Air and Space Museum August 29: "At a meeting in the Pentagon earlier this month, Dr. Harwit said the script for 'The Last Act' was copyrighted because of the tie-in with a book. What can you tell [us] about this? . . . Who is the author? Do Dr. Harwit's latest assurances about the content of the exhibition script also apply to the book?"

We call on the Smithsonian to disclose details of this book project to veterans groups. Our concern is based on the experience of a previous "companion book," *Legend, Memory, and the Great War in the Air*, published in conjunction with the museum's anti-military exhibit on World War I. In some places, that book was more radical than the exhibition itself. Because of the Smithsonian's imprimatur, however, it gained space on bookstore shelves and in libraries nationwide. If the Smithsonian is about to launch yet another message about the *Enola Gay* in some different format, that would be of definite interest and concern to us.

■ **Continuing Consultation and Review.** Even if veterans groups can negotiate this exhibit onto an acceptable track — and that remains to be seen — continued monitoring will be required. Museum officials have been willing to make changes only when forced to do so by outside pressure. These changes, it is clear, are not to their liking. Veterans groups should be allowed to periodically review script updates as new changes occur.