



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Washington, D.C. 20560
U.S.A.

Sample of Smithsonian Correspondence

April 12, 1994

Honorable G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery, Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) is creating an exhibition which will address the end of that conflict in the Pacific. This exhibition, whose working title is "The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War," is scheduled to open in May 1995. This planned exhibition has received much attention, especially from veterans, and you may well receive correspondence regarding it in the near future. I would like to take this opportunity both to correct a great deal of misinformation and unfounded rumor that is circulating regarding the exhibition and to inform you of the facts of the situation.

For several years, many individuals and organizations, including veterans' groups, have requested that the Museum display the Enola Gay. Some of these individuals have criticized the Museum for not displaying the Enola Gay previously, based on the incorrect belief that the Museum looks upon the artifact as something to be kept from the public. Quite to the contrary, NASM has been in the process of conserving and restoring the Enola Gay at its storage and restoration facility in Suitland, Maryland, for more than a decade. Our conservation staff has spent thousands of man hours and significant funds to restore the Enola Gay to its original condition. The Museum's goal has been to complete enough of the restoration so that a portion of the plane could be included in the exhibition which has long been planned to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

The size of the Enola Gay precludes it from being displayed in its entirety at the Museum's Mall facility. However, "Crossroads" will include a 60-foot portion of the Enola Gay's forward fuselage, including the cockpit and the evocative name of the aircraft. Knowing what the Enola Gay represents to many

World War II veterans, we are especially pleased that they shortly will have the opportunity to see the aircraft in a restored condition, together with memorabilia of her crew and other members of the 509th Composite Group, prominently featured in the exhibition.

The planning for the exhibition and the script development have been under way for several years. The script has been carefully scrutinized for accuracy and balance by a committee of some of the nation's leading scholars, including Dr. Richard Hallion, Chief of the U.S.A.F. Center for Air Force History; Edwin Bearss, Chief Historian for the National Park Service, a decorated veteran of the war in the Pacific, and the organizer of the Pearl Harbor Commemoration in 1991; Professor Akira Iriye of the Department of History at Harvard University; Richard Rhodes, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author on the subject; and several other distinguished experts.

While the exhibition will include a great deal of information on both the decision to use atomic weapons and the results of that use, its goal is to provide a thorough and objective presentation of an event which was a turning point in the history of the 20th Century. It places that event in rich, historical context, from a moving account of the bitter fighting in the Pacific to the presentation of estimated casualty figures, both Allied and Japanese, that might have resulted from an invasion of Japan, to a factual description of the immediate destruction and long-term results of the use of atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Its basic, explicitly-stated posture is that while the use of atomic weapons is hardly something our nation would want to celebrate, neither is it anything for which we should apologize.


Additionally, let me assure you that the exhibition will treat our servicemen and women as it should: as skilled, brave, loyal and dedicated members of the United States' Armed Forces who honorably served their country. Also, as touched upon above, the discussion of the use of atomic weapons is presented in the context of the entire war and the pattern of Japanese aggression leading up to it. The exhibit will make no judgment as to the morality of that decision. If we are successful in our intent, our visitors will not have any preselected point of view imposed upon them but rather will be provided with objective information as the basis on which they may attain a deeper understanding of the factors which contributed to the decision-making process. This is the goal of all of our exhibitions.

In my almost ten years as Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, this is the first time I have ever written to Members of Congress in advance of an exhibition. However, "Crossroads" will be one of the most important exhibitions ever presented by the Museum. It has been, and will continue to be,

the subject of strong emotions and widespread attention among the public. I welcome that attention but I am concerned that the misinformation and rumor surrounding the exhibition will cloud the ability of all to assess the substance and facts. Therefore, Dr. Martin Harwit, Director of the National Air and Space Museum, and the curatorial staff responsible for "Crossroads" would welcome the opportunity to brief you on the exhibition. I am confident that once all the facts are known, there will be consensus that the Museum has created a comprehensive and objective exhibition which chronicles a decisive period in history.

If you wish to avail yourself of the briefing, please contact Mark Rodgers, Director of the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Government Relations, at 357-2962 to make the necessary arrangements. I thank you for your attention to this very important subject.

Sincerely,



Robert McC. Adams
Secretary