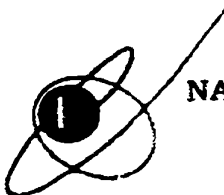


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NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560

July 15, 1994

Gen. Merrill A. McPeak
Chief of Staff
United States Air Force
The Pentagon

Dear Tony,

I am writing you in response to Tom McInerney's June 30 letter, in which he wrote about the Air Force's concerns with the Museum's exhibition of the Enola Gay. Secretary Widnall had informally mentioned the same subject to me some weeks earlier.

Let me assure you that we at the Museum share your dismay at the outcry generated by the article in Air Force magazine's April issue. The Museum has been receiving a great deal of mail from understandably aroused veterans who read the article.

I sent in a forceful rejection of the article's allegations in the May issue, and Prof. Richard Kohn, former Air Force Historian, took the magazine's attack on the Museum to task in June. Nevertheless, the space allotted by the editor for replies was too short to deal with the extensive allegations, and his comments on the replies defend his earlier views.

Two Smithsonian officials, several members of my staff and I recently met with representatives of the major veterans organizations, assembled at the suggestion of Admiral Kilcline, President of the Retired Officers Association, to whom I had expressed my concerns. Many of the attendees were unfamiliar with the exhibition, but we provided them with a detailed verbal presentation of our plans and a copy of the revised script for the gallery, to read at their leisure.

Commander Louanne Smith, who represented Gen. Kicklighter and the World War II Commemorative Committee at this meeting, reported on the reaction of service historians to the revised script, and said she had found a high degree of acceptance except from Herman Wolk who had spoken on behalf Dick Hallion. Monroe Hatch of the Air Force Association, who also was present, confirmed this opposition by Wolk and Dick Hallion and used their stand to argue against endorsement of the revised script.

The situation is puzzling, since Wolk and Dick Hallion had written us a highly complimentary critique on the first draft of our script and we had since incorporated a large number of suggested changes including improvements they had proposed. I attach a copy of Wolk's and Hallion's comments to us. But I should point out that Monroe Hatch said he had a quite different letter, which I have not seen, in which Dick now apparently expresses strong opposition to the exhibition.

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I feel, at this point, that if we could reconcile the views that the Air Force Historian has expressed to us with those I understand he has conveyed to Monroe Hatch, the essence of our differences might be resolved.

We at the Museum would be more than willing to work with you toward such a resolution. If you, in your dual role as Air Force Chief of Staff and ex-officio member of the Museum's Advisory Board, wished to call a meeting of Dick Hallion, Monroe Hatch and myself -- and, I would add, possibly Tom Kilcline -- to clarify and talk out the remaining issues, I would be more than happy to participate. Admiral Kilcline has been very helpful in putting the Museum in touch with other veterans organizations and would, I believe, have their confidence and the stature to chair a follow-on meeting with them to inform them of any satisfactory outcome.

I should add that there is significant urgency to reaching some agreement soon:

The Air Force Association, has been outspokenly critical of the Museum's exhibition not only in Air Force magazine, but also on radio talk shows, in widely circulated mailings to the media, and in letters to Congress. All this has only increased the number of bitter letters from veterans and their families. Without wishing to argue over whether this arousal of passions was necessary, I am convinced that, if it continues, it will work against the best interests of all concerned.

The U.S. Air Force, the Air Force Association, and the Museum all have a strong interest in promoting the many positive aspects of aviation. Publicizing disagreements among us can only hurt all that we think important and work for.

If you had the time and inclination to arrange for a meeting along the lines I described, it could well constitute the catalyst needed to bring this unfortunate disagreement to a suitable resolution.

Sincerely yours,



Martin Harvit
Director

Attachment

cc: Tom McInerney