

August 22, 1994

Memorandum

TO: Rob Gray, Office of Congressman Blute
FROM: Steve Aubin, AFA Director of Communications
SUBJECT: Comments on the Enola Gay Exhibit

As museum officials work frantically to "satisfy" members of Congress and veterans, it is our view that their overall approach and response to criticism thus far has been flawed, and very well may continue to be flawed.

Window-dressing and other minor technical fixes will not solve the problem here. This exhibit is structurally flawed. Any objective observer will quickly see that balance and context are lacking throughout. What troubles us is that many people, including the director of the Air and Space Museum himself, have made substantive suggestions that would have addressed some of the structural problems, but they have been almost entirely ignored.

For instance, the director of the Air and Space Museum wrote in an April 16 memorandum to his staff that all but one third of the explicit pictures of death and suffering should be removed from section 400, "Ground Zero," a directive that was ignored by his curators in drafting the revised May 31 script. He also asked that a more balanced discussion of potential casualties be included in section 200, something that wasn't done in the May 31 rewrite. This memorandum reveals that the director has been saying one thing publicly in defense of the exhibit and another thing privately, namely that there are serious problems with balance and context.

The service historians have also provided the curators with written comments on technical and structural issues. Some of these criticisms have been addressed, others ignored.

AIR FORCE Magazine Editor in Chief John Correll analyzed both scripts and pointed out numerous issues of context and the overwhelming imbalance in the use of photographs and artifacts. His comments were ignored.

Finally, the Tiger Team made a number of substantive recommendations, most of which were ignored in the May 31 script. Curiously, at a meeting on August 16, the director of the Air and Space Museum told the military historians, AFA, and the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force that he and his curators have now adopted 70-80 percent of the Tiger Team recommendations.

The bottom line is that there has been no shortage of detailed criticism, and yet we have seen very little indication that the current team of curators take criticism (or direction)

seriously. Moreover, neither seems capable of comprehending the current problem -- which is not a matter of "neutralizing" language here and there, and adding a few points of clarification.

Here are a few broad points that you might consider bringing to the attention of the curators:

1) Section 100, "A Fight to the Finish," should be renamed "War in the Pacific" and broadened to include pre-1945 Japanese activities from Manchuria to the East Indies, broader treatment of the American casualties that were being sustained in the Pacific, American hardships on the Home Front, and aspects of Japanese resistance, to include the code of Bushido (without glorifying the Kamikaze).

2) Section 200, "The Decision to Drop the Bomb," should be renamed "The Decision that Ended the War" and revised to reflect widely accepted scholarship -- that President Truman analyzed the estimates of potential casualties and made the decision to use an awesome military weapon in order to save lives on both sides and to end the war. All revisionist speculation should be eliminated. (By the way, curator Michael Neufeld does not believe the accepted scholarship -- see attached memo.)

3) Section 300, "Delivering the Bomb," should be renamed "The Mission of the Enola Gay" and revised to ensure that an adequate discussion of strategic bombing tactics is included. It should also explain the military nature of the targets selected, and there should be more emphasis placed on the training and nature of the mission. The bizarre treatment of the 509th's leisure activities should be eliminated.

4) Section 400, "Ground Zero," should be renamed "The Dropping of the Atomic Bomb" and dramatically restructured and cut down in size. As the director suggested, two-thirds of the photographs should be eliminated and more emphasis should be given to the military casualties and the military facilities that were destroyed. The perspective of American soldiers waiting to invade Japan should be included in the personal recollections here alongside those of the survivors of the atomic bomb.

5) Section 500, the current discussion and presentation of "The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," is so out-of-place and out-of-context that it should be entirely eliminated. The speculative and sophomoric treatment of nuclear deterrence has no place in this exhibit; a more scholarly treatment of this issue can be included in the museum's later "Cold War" exhibit.

"The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" could be renamed "VJ Day and the Legacy of the Last Act." It should be a section about V-J Day, about the invasion that did not have to take place, with a focus on the surrender of the Japanese and the celebration on the U.S. Home Front. As part of the legacy, there

could also be a discussion of the American role in helping rebuild Japan (Constitution, infrastructure, etc.), a benevolent role that led to Japan becoming one of the leading economic powers in the world. That is the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.