

The American Legion

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★ 1808 K STREET, N. W. ★ WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006 ★



OFFICE OF THE
NATIONAL COMMANDER

Date: January 4, 1995

Memorandum to: National Commander's Advisory Committee
From : William M. Detweiler
Subject : Recommended Final Position on NASM Display

Based on lengthy discussions with officials of the Smithsonian Institution, extensive independent research, and failure of Institution officials to meet certain agreed-upon conditions of mutual cooperation, it is my recommendation that The American Legion actively oppose the National Air and Space Museum and its controversial exhibit, "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II."

It is my recommendation that our position call for:

- 1.) The exhibit to be canceled
- 2.) NASM's role and intent in the controversy to be investigated by Congress
- 3.) The Enola Gay to be immediately re-assembled and loaned, or ownership transferred, to an entity willing and able to display it without controversy.

American Legion opposition should center on the primary motivations that led the organization to involvement in review of the exhibit script.

- 1.) Inaccurate and unfavorable portrayal of the nation and its fighting forces, and inaccurate or incomplete historical data.
- 2.) Continuing erosion of public confidence in the museum as a result of the controversy.

In the first instance, the script continues to dwell on the civilian casualties sustained in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nakasaki, without providing the historic, military and cultural context by which to judge Japan's responsibility for such casualties; it treats lightly (nine lines of text) the attack on Pearl Harbor and glosses over the horror and suffering of the Pacific campaigns and essentially ignores the atrocities committed by the Japanese against Asian populations; it continues to question the legitimacy of the decision to use the atomic weapon and second guesses the motivation of the Nation's leaders, and gives only brief mention to the probably casualties of a land invasion of the Japanese home islands.

NASM Recommendation
January 4, 1995
Page 2

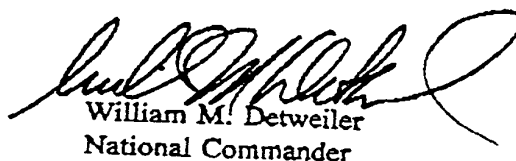
In the second instance, the exhibit is suspect from all perspectives. The curators, the process, and the Institution's administration have been, and continue to be, soundly criticized for the way the exhibit was originally conceived, how it was presented, the lack of veracity on the part of officials, the role of the Japanese in the exhibit, and the role of dissident historians and veterans groups in creating or revising the exhibit text.

It is my recommendation that our opposition take the form of:

- 1.) A face to face meeting with Smithsonian Officials to declare our final position
- 2.) A face to face meeting with selected members of congress to explain our opposition and the nature of our critique and evaluation
- 3.) A Washington, DC press conference to announce our opposition
- 4.) A letter to the President of the United States
- 5.) A letter to Senate and Congressional Leaders
- 6.) A copy of the leadership letters, under separate cover to all members of congress.
- 7.) A letter to the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution
- 8.) Continued maximum exposure of the Legion's position in the public media
- 9.) Maximum communication of our position and the status of the exhibit to our members in internal publications.

Finally, it is my recommendation that the opposition strategy be implemented immediately, and completed, to the extent possible, by the 1995 Washington Conference, and that a report of progress be made during the Legislative Conference.

Respectfully Submitted:


William M. Detweiler
National Commander