

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

January 9, 1994

Hubert R. Dagley, II
Internal Affairs Director
The American Legion
National Headquarters
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, Indiana
46206-1055

Dear Hugh,

As you will remember, last fall we spent a good deal of time discussing one of the labels in the script for *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*. That label involved losses of lives that would have been expected in an invasion of Japan, and cited the casualty estimates given to President Truman by his most senior advisors on June 18, 1945. They were the last estimates given to him before the war's end in August.

The highest of the figures cited for the invasion of Kyushu at the June 18 meeting appeared to be those of Admiral Leahy, who said that he expected loss rates comparable to those suffered at Okinawa, or around 30%. Prof. Barton Bernstein of Stanford University, in a paper he had published some years ago, interpreted that figure to mean 30% of the 766,700 "total assault troops", Marshall had mentioned earlier in the meeting. On that basis, Bernstein thought Leahy's remarks meant casualty levels around a quarter of a million for the Kyushu invasion.

Our Museum accepted those figures, but in a more recent meeting with Bernstein, he took us to task for this, saying that he had, in the meantime, found Leahy's diary entry for that same day. We checked on that in the archives and found that Leahy's entry summarizes the entire June 18 meeting with these words,

From 3:30 to 5:00 P.M. the President conferred with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and Assistant Secretary of War McCloy, in regard to the necessity and the practicability of an invasion of Japan. General Marshall and Admiral King both strongly advocated an invasion of Kyushu at the earliest practicable date.

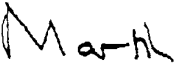
General Marshall is of the opinion that such an effort will not cost us in casualties more than 63,000 of the 190,000 combatant troops estimated as necessary for the operation.

As Bernstein pointed out to us, 63,000 represents 30% of 190,000, and that evidently is the figure that Leahy had had in mind at the meeting that afternoon.

Seeing that our earlier label text had been based on a misapprehension, we needed to revise it. I am sending you the text of the label as it now reads. It does not alter the figures Truman cited after the war, but gives a different interpretation of what he might have had in mind.

If you have any concerns or comments, I'd greatly appreciate your letting me know.

Sincerely yours,


Martin Harwit
Director

cc: Constance Newman
Mark Rodgers
Michael Neufeld

Attachment