

The American Legion

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★ 1608 'K' STREET, N. W. ★ WASHINGTON, D. C. 20008 ★



OFFICE OF THE
NATIONAL COMMANDER

DATE: January 18, 1995

MEMORANDUM TO: Department Commanders and Adjutants

FROM: National Commander William M. Detweiler

SUBJECT: National Air And Space Museum Exhibit

As of today, The American Legion has resumed active opposition to the National Air and Space Museum's exhibit on the historic B-29, the Enola Gay, entitled "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." This action follows many months of efforts on the part of our organization to reach an agreement with NASM, and conforms to the mandates included in NEC Res. # 22 (May 1994), National Convention Res. #391 (September 1994), and NEC Res. #26 (October 1994.)

A statement for release to news organizations and in response to media inquiries you may receive is enclosed. In addition, I have enclosed a document which provides additional background on our efforts to work with NASM to correct the exhibit, and a copy of a recommendation made to and approved by the National Commander's Advisory Committee on January 4, which describes our position and the strategy for implementing it.

I have met with several Members of Congress and the Senate, as well as with the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, to brief them on our position. I also have released our position to the national news media.

It is imperative that you be aware of this position and make your members aware of it as soon as possible. You and they are encouraged to contact the appropriate Members of Congress on this issue.

The American Legion



For God and Country

POSITION STATEMENT
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
CONCERNING

THE NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM EXHIBIT ENTITLED
"THE LAST ACT: THE ATOMIC BOMB AND THE END OF WORLD WAR II"
JANUARY 18, 1995

WILLIAM M. DETWEILER, NATIONAL, COMMANDER

I have today conveyed to the Secretary of Smithsonian Institution, Michael Heyman, The American Legion's renewed opposition to the National Air and Space Museum's planned exhibit on the end of World War II. Our position calls for:

- 1.) The exhibit to be canceled immediately;
- 2.) Congress to conduct hearings into how the nation's most visited and revered museum could mount such an exhibit;
- 3.) The historic B-29, the Enola Gay, to be reassembled and loaned, or ownership transferred, to an institution that will display it outside any political or philosophical context.

The American Legion has come to this position both reluctantly and deliberately, and only after several months of intense research and many hours of face-to-face, line-by-line exhibit script reviews with curators of "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." We entered into the agreement with NASM to review and comment on the exhibit in good faith. But recent events have led us to conclude that the fundamental political and philosophical underpinnings that plagued the exhibit from the beginning remain.

This exhibit, in our opinion, so closely parallels the design, content and conclusions of the Nagasaki Peace Museum as to defy coincidence. Moreover, we have been informed by the Director of the National Air and Space Museum that, despite an agreement reached between NASM and The American Legion in September 1994, NASM has decided to return doubtful casualty estimates to the exhibit, thereby resurrecting the suggestion that the President of the United States acted from racist and political motives.

Equally important, in the view of our 3.1 million members, is that this exhibit, if completed, will plunge the National Air and Space Museum even deeper into the waters of controversy that now threaten to engulf it. The exhibit as now constituted pleases no one -- not the historians, not the veterans and, I believe, not the American People.

The American Legion has consistently sought to work for the development of an accurate exhibit to commemorate the end of World War II. We believe that is achievable without destroying the Air and Space Museum; without sullyng the reputation and memory of the World War II generation; and without resurrecting old animosities. We intend to do all in our power, working with the Congress, the Administration and our members, to do that.