

August 17, 1994

MEMO FOR THE RECORD: Meeting on *Enola Gay* Exhibit

FROM: John T. Correll

Gen. Thomas S. Moorman, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, hosted a 90-minute meeting in his office yesterday to discuss the exhibit, "The Last Act: the Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II," planned by the National Air and Space Museum. The Museum director, Dr. Martin Harwit, was there, as were historians for the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Steve Aubin and I attended for the Air Force Association.

The big news, revealed by Dr. Harwit, is that the museum now plans to revise the exhibit script substantially. (This was a surprise, since on June 21, the museum had declared the previous script to be final, "minor wording changes aside.") Dr. Harwit said that those attending yesterday's meeting will receive review copies of the new script by September 1. Among the changes planned:

- A new section at the beginning of the exhibition to provide historical context for the war in the Pacific. Material on the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" in the 1930s, President Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech, material on Tojo, etc. Details of this "context" section, however, will not be ready in time for the September 1 script revision.
- Speculation about US motives will be removed. This will include such material as the series of "Historical Controversies," which the Air Force Association (among others) had characterized as anti-American.
- The exhibit will strongly affirm that the United States employed the atomic bomb to shorten the war and save lives. This is an important change, but we have a concern here. The exhibition curator, Dr. Michael Neufeld, does not personally accept this rationale for the use of the bomb. Can the exhibit credibly affirm a key point if the curator doesn't believe it? (A related problem, as Air Force Historian Dick Hallion said yesterday, is that the other curator — Dr. Tom Crouch — is on record as disagreeing with the objective of the exhibit as stated by Dr. Harwit in the August/September issue of the museum's *Air & Space Magazine*.)
- The curators have "taken out adjectives and neutralized language" as well as removing "a number of redundant graphic images" in areas where exception has been taken.
- Theatrical lighting effects have been removed from the "Ground Zero: Hiroshima and Nagasaki" section of the exhibit.

The meeting was marked by a number of hostile exchanges between Dr. Harwit and me. He said AFA does not believe the museum will make changes unless forced to do so by external pressure. With that, I agreed completely. I pointed out that on June 21, the museum had declared the exhibit plan final and disparaged as irresponsible AFA's complaints that it lacked balance, context, and fairness. Now, a month later, the museum has reversed its direction and says it agrees that major changes are needed for balance, context, and fairness. What caused the museum to change its mind? The obvious answer is that over the past month, AFA's public criticism generated more public opinion pressure than the museum was able to withstand.

Dr. Harwit and I differed on the right of the public to see the museum's emerging exhibit plan. He believes that only a handful of people should have access to the and that any comments they have should be conveyed privately to the museum staff. Our position — which I restated — is that this is a controversial program, to be held in a public museum and funded by public money, and that the public has a right to

know what's going on and to comment on in. Dr. Harwit finds it "inappropriate" that he has received thousands of strongly-worded letters objecting to his plan. Both Herman Wolk (Center for Air Force History) and I made the point that this is the way things work in a free society and there's nothing "inappropriate" about it.

(In a similar exchange, Dr. Harwit said that AFA has been very effective in mobilizing public opinion, but that affairs are reaching the point where "you won't be able to control it." I told Dr. Harwit emphatically that we had no thought of trying to "control" public opinion. If a manipulation model exists here, it's in his mind, not in ours.)

We will have to wait and see, obviously, what this new script revision brings. Further modifications — especially in areas that we had identified as problems but where the museum was dug in before — will be a welcome improvement. Even so, we're left with several questions:

- Is this a genuine, good-faith action or a ploy to buy time? Frequently in the past, the museum's standard reaction to criticism has been to claim that new suggestions are under review and will be reflected later in a modified product. In the meantime, trust us. When the immediate uproar subsides, the curators revert to their original course. That may not be the case here, but we should be watchful and wary.
- Assuming the effort is genuine, is it possible for marginal revision to transform this into an honest exhibition?
- How can curators do justice to an exhibit that — if Dr. Harwit's latest assurances are to be believed — are fundamentally at odds with their personal beliefs?

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John T. Correll