

National Air and space Museum
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560

August 17, 1994

General Monroe Hatch
Executive Director
Air Force Association
1501 Lee Highway
Arlington, VA 22209-1198

Dear Monroe:

I would like to thank you once more for attending the meeting the National Air and Space Museum had arranged to brief veterans organizations on the script for the exhibition *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*.

The responses the Museum received from the different organizations were uniformly helpful and I thought I should send all of the organizations represented at that meeting a summary update of the impact the changes you recommended have had on the script. In addition to the changes listed, a further set has also been undertaken in response to many more detailed comments we received from historians attached to the military services and the DOD. A fully revised script is now being assembled and will be sent out to you on September 1. Any comments you might have in response to this new script would again be appreciated.

I would like to emphasize one aspect of the update mentioned at its very end. A number of organizations have asked for a heavier emphasis on the context of the War leading up to *The Last Act*. In response, we have assembled a team of our curators, all military aviators, one a World War II veteran. They will assemble a large-format photo-exhibition that will precede the exhibition described in our current script. It will concentrate on the roots of the war, the prehistory of Japanese expansionism in the 1930s, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the early days of the war and the years of bitter fighting that led up to the spring of 1945. This photo-exhibit will provide the backdrop and set the mood for the exhibition described in the present script. I do not expect that we will be in a position to give you further information on this new addition by September 1, because we are only just getting started on it, but it should be taking shape during September and we will be glad to answer questions about it in a few weeks.

Sincerely yours,
SIGNED
Martin Harwit
Director

Attachment

Script Update

The National Air and Space Museum is currently engaged in assembling an exhibition to open in May 1995, *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*. This exhibition originally grew out of the many requests we had from World War II veterans to exhibit the *Enola Gay*, while they were still alive and able to come see the plane whose mission may well have saved their lives.

Plans for that exhibition are now quite advanced, but have been widely debated, most recently among the veterans who had asked us to put the aircraft on display. In response to their concerns, the Museum invited representatives from a number of veterans organizations to meet with us on July 13. At that meeting we provided an overview of the exhibition, conducted a question-and-answer session and gave those participants who had not yet seen it, a copy of the revised exhibition script, with a request to let us have their detailed comments. We have now received itemized written responses from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, The Retired Officers Association, the Military Order of the World Wars and the Disabled American Veterans. In addition, I have a letter from Monroe Hatch from the Air Force Association, and the Museum has also had discussions with the American Legion.

The letters from the DAV and MOWW requested changes that have been readily accommodated, through changes in wording or deletions to the script.

The letter from TROA, while acknowledging that “There is no question that there should be a display of the significant damage and tragic loss of life resulting from the use of the first nuclear weapon”, feels that the exhibition portrays the Japanese as victims rather than aggressor – a perception that we certainly have no wish to convey. We have carefully re-examined the script and have eliminated extraneous material, in order to draw closer attention to just those differences that arise on the ground, after nuclear rather than conventional bombing. We have also eliminated wording, images or objects that might be misconstrued as portraying the Japanese as victims.

Specific other comments from the VFW and TROA have largely also found accommodation in the script, though there are two general areas in which I believe we need to retain the material recommended for deletion. One such theme is President Truman’s decision to drop the bomb, and the alternatives that we open to him. The comments we received judged these sections to be speculative. We have, therefore, eliminated a great deal of the discussion, and instead are adding copies of archival documents from 1945 to show that deliberations on the various options did take place at the highest levels of the government before President Truman arrived at a final decision. As part of their recommendation on this topic, the VFW also asked for an elimination of a series of side-bars that focussed on Historical Controversies. We agree that these served no urgent purpose and have taken them out.

A second set of items that were suggested for deletion were the post-war nuclear arms race, questions of nuclear proliferation, arms control, and mutually assured destruction. The question was raised whether these were suitable themes for an exhibition that deals with the *Enola Gay*. Like so many other matters, this is a question of judgement. But I note that Gen.

Tibbett's book *Flight of the Enola Gay* does discuss these issues, indicating that the officer most closely associated with the *Enola Gay* considered them important. I realize that our treatment here is not complete. But leaving the topics unmentioned altogether, would probably be criticized even more than including them.

The aspect of the exhibition that has come under most consistent attack and is the most difficult to handle is the matter of 'balance'. In my mind it may be best expressed in Monroe Hatch's sentences, "You can't give visitors to the museum and students of history a balanced perspective of World War II if you only show the 'last act'Four years of heavy fighting and massive casualties had taken a heavy toll. Those years should form a backdrop of the "Last Act", but the current script treat of the overall context of the war in the most cursory way". This is echoed in Bob Currie's letter for the VFW, which suggests the inclusion of added material on such matters as the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, President Roosevelt's Day of Infamy speech, an explanation of the meaning of 'unconditional surrender', and "General Tojo's early overriding political control of Japan as differentiated from the Emperor". Quite independently, the Museum had been conducting man-on-the-street interviews in Georgetown, last month, and similarly became convinced that most visitors would need additional information on the origins of World War II and the early years of bitter fighting, in order to fully understand the events that led up to the summer of 1945 and *The Last Act*.

To date, we have concentrated on just *The Last Act*, precisely because our original intention was to focus on a display surrounding the mission on the *Enola Gay*. But in response to these AFA and VFW requests we are now planning a major photo exhibition that visitors to the *Last Act* would have to walk through before entering the gallery. These images and their labels would concentrate on the roots of the War, Japanese expansionism and aggression, and other topics that were left out in the initially conceived exhibition more narrowly focused on just the *Enola Gay* aircraft and mission.

The Museum is assigning three curators to this added exhibition which will precede but seamlessly blend into the current gallery. All have been military officers. They are Col. Thomas Alison (USAF Ret.), Col. Don Lopez (USAF Ret.), and Capt. Tim Wooldridge (USN Ret.). Tom Alison is our curator of military aviation. Before retiring from the USAF he was the first pilot to log over 1000 hours in the SR-71. Don Lopez is a World War II fighter pilot ace who flew against the Japanese in China. Tim Wooldridge was a naval aviator with extensive service aboard aircraft carriers.

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