

REPORT TO THE CHAIRMAN  
NATIONAL ARMED FORCES MUSEUM  
ADVISORY BOARD

23 Report to the Chairman National  
Armed Forces Museum Advisory  
Board (1967)

The Belmont Conference  
December 4 - 6, 1967

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the period December 4 - 6, 1967, a group of scholars met at Belmont, the conference center of the Smithsonian Institution in Howard County, Maryland, at the request of the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, and under the chairmanship of Mr. John Nicholas Brown, Regent of the Smithsonian and Chairman of the National Armed Forces Museum Advisory Board (NAFMAB).

In addition to Mr. Brown, the principal conference participants were as follows:

Dr. Philip A. Crowl  
Chairman, Department of History  
University of Nebraska

Colonel Trevor N. Dupuy (Conference Moderator)  
Executive Director, Historical Evaluation and Research  
Organization (HERO)  
McLean, Virginia

Dr. Archibald Hanna, Jr.  
Curator, Yale Collection of Western Americana  
Beinecke Library  
Yale University

Dr. Richard M. Leighton  
Professor of National Security  
Industrial College of the Armed Forces  
Washington, D. C.

Dr. Louis Morton  
Professor of History  
Dartmouth College

Mr. Harold L. Peterson  
Chief Curator, National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C.

Dr. Theodore Ropp  
Professor of History  
Duke University

This report has been prepared by, and is submitted by, the seven individuals listed above.

Also present for parts of the conference and making contributions to conference sessions and informal discussion were Mr. Frank Taylor, Director of the U. S. National Museum and Acting Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and Mr. Mendel L. Peterson, Chairman of the Department of Armed Forces History of the Museum of History and Technology. Mrs. Barbara Tuchman, historian, had planned to attend part of the conference but was prevented by illness from doing so. The notes that she made on conference background papers are included herewith as Appendix C. Present throughout the conference were Colonel John Magruder, III, Director of NAFMAB, Mr. James S. Hutchins, Assistant Director of NAFMAB, and Mrs. Gay Hammerman of the HERO research staff.

This Belmont Conference had been called to consider problems related to the National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center authorized by Congress in Public Law 87-186.\* Because the public law is very broad in scope, the National Armed Forces Museum Advisory Board and the Smithsonian Institution felt the need to have its objectives more precisely defined and the concepts of the museum and study center that are called for in the law related in a meaningful way to current national trends and contemporary scholarly thinking. Our guidance was therefore sought.

In our deliberations we were aware of a request made by the Secretary of the Smithsonian during the Conference's first informal discussion session, to examine without preconceptions the validity of the concept of an armed forces museum and study center. We were also aware of his injunction to consider the problems of maintenance and custodial care for large masses of objects and documents. Possible problems of public support for such an institution had been brought to our attention, and we were also aware of the problems of attracting qualified scholars to the study center. The timing factor brought into play by the approach of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution was also part of the background of our thought and discussion.

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\* The term National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center is used herein to denote the institution authorized by the public law, comprising both a museum and a study center.

In this setting we discussed the broad concepts of an armed forces museum and study center and the specific objectives that we wished to recommend. A brief description of our meetings is attached as Appendix A. A summary of our conclusions is presented on the following pages.

## II. THE CONCEPT

In conformance with Public Law 87-186 and in the light of the above considerations, we believe that there should be established a museum and a study center. The museum will, on a centralized, national basis, portray the contributions of the armed forces to American growth and development. The study center will deal in a scholarly manner with these and related issues.

The museum and study center should seek to show graphically, through the museum's displays, the history of American military experience in the context of the various periods in which it has occurred, and should also provide, through scholarly research, greater understanding of the role of military power in a democratic society and in international affairs.

The purposes of the museum and study center call for physical facilities of the kind outlined in Sec. 3. (b) of Public Law 87-186. These include a large open area for outdoor exhibits, and buildings suitable for indoor museum displays and the scholarly activities of a study center.

The museum and study center will have an immediate opportunity to make a significant contribution to the commemoration of the coming Bicentennial of the American Revolution. The imminent approach of the Bicentennial, therefore, suggests the need for early action to establish the Armed Forces Museum and Study Center if a maximum contribution is to be made.

## III. THE MUSEUM

The role of the museum should be essentially educational. The museum should provide viewers with an understanding of and identification with the past, and to this end should utilize the most modern display and exhibition concepts and techniques.

The museum should focus on the role of military institutions within American society in peace and war. It should portray such concepts as the role of the armed forces in American history, the impact of war on American society, the effect of economic, political, and social change on military developments, and civil-military relations.

Exhibit objects should not be presented merely as curios, but rather as significant links in a continuing chain of human events and technology. Visitors to the museum should leave with a heightened understanding of the armed forces that is based on greater factual knowledge of their contributions to national development. In the interest of objectivity, no event in American history should be excluded from portrayal on grounds that it might be considered controversial.

One aim of the exhibits should be to help the citizen of today identify with a man of the past whose surroundings, implements, and struggles he is viewing. In this way, it is expected that the study of history will become more meaningful and that the individual's sense of being rooted in the past - and thus of personal identity - will be strengthened. It is expected that a feeling of participation will be increased by outdoor exhibits, with their life-size scale, open-space setting and relative lack of intrusion by crowds and historically unrelated material.

#### IV. THE STUDY CENTER

The study center will be primarily concerned with scholarly research on the armed forces in American history, the military aspects of national security, and the meaning of war and its effect on civilization. It should serve as a national center for research, a forum for discussion, a clearing house of bibliographical and historical information, and a reference library to support scholarly activity in these and related fields.

Programs of the study center should include the following:

- a. A writing and publications program for the permanent staff designed to support the center's research objectives.
- b. Publication of significant historical documents relating to the armed forces.
- c. A grant and fellowship program for both junior and senior scholars. Their work could be related to any of the activities of the center and museum.

- d. Provision of a reference information service to assist any person engaged in responsible scholarship.
- e. Educational programs and activities, to include lectures, symposia, and conferences.
- f. Appropriate research related to the holdings of the museum.
- g. Consideration in due course of the publication of a scholarly journal devoted to a broad study of military history and its relationship to national security policy.

As a matter of priority, in support of the above programs, the study center would have a library to perform the following functions and services:

- a. A general and basic collection of military reference materials, manuals, and the like. This should include books frequently consulted, avoiding duplication of collections already available in the Washington area.
- b. A highly developed reference and bibliographical capability, to include annotated and evaluated bibliographical finding lists, a national or international index relating to United States military history, a national union catalog of military history manuscripts, and a catalog of locations of relevant museum objects.
- c. Special collections of papers particularly relevant to the research program of the center, and which are not appropriate to the holdings of other specialized depositories.
- d. A program for keeping track of the personal papers of all individuals of significance in American military history.
- e. Expansion in due course of the bibliographical capability into an information storage and retrieval system, if there appears to be a requirement for such action and if the state of the art makes it a feasible project.

The following considerations should affect the size and nature of the study center staff, subject to decisions by the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution as to the relationship between the future museum and the present Department of Armed Forces History in the Museum of History and Technology:

- a. The staff should be small, with the minimum number of people required to operate and direct the approved programs.
- b. The staff should be interdisciplinary in nature, with the scholars selected from specialists in the fields of strategy and military doctrine, international relations, economics, cultural anthropology, and social psychology.
- c. Every effort should be made to recruit first-rate scholars for this permanent staff, with assurance of participation in the publication program with full authorship credit.

#### V. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions should be initiated as soon as possible:

- a. Acquisition of the land that will be required for the recommended support for the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, sufficient in area for ultimate development of the over-all armed forces museum program.
- b. Preparation to participate as appropriate in the Bicentennial commemoration. (See Appendix B for specific recommended functions.)
- c. Appointment of a senior scholar as Director or Temporary Director of the study center, with the initial responsibility of establishing the center and the supporting reference library. An additional mission of this scholar could be to assist in the planning for the role that the museum and study center will play in the Bicentennial celebration.
- d. An advisory committee should be established, responsible to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, to provide a link with the scholarly community and to report to the Secretary the results of periodic reviews of the activities and programs of both the study center and the museum.
- e. At an early date there should be undertaken a preliminary national survey of existing educational, archival, and



museum collections, and of other resources in military history and military affairs.

Philip A. Crowl  
Trevor N. Dupuy (Conference  
Moderator)

Archibald Hanna, Jr.  
Richard M. Leighton  
Louis Morton  
Harold L. Peterson  
Theodore Ropp

## APPENDIX A

### DESCRIPTION OF CONFERENCE MEETINGS

The Belmont Conference proceedings opened with an informal discussion the evening of December 4. The conference chairman, Mr. Brown, first outlined the background of the National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center, and asked the participants to help NAFMAB develop the optimal plan for such an institution. The Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. Ripley, then spoke of the need to uphold the principles of the Smithsonian in planning for the museum and study center, stressing the traditional Smithsonian concern for, and involvement in, thought, discussion, research, and publication. The Secretary also raised two specific questions, which he asked the participants to bear in mind during their deliberations. First, he asked them, as an aid to open-minded discussion of the problems involved, to imagine that there was to be no museum and study center, and then to start afresh examining and validating, or invalidating, the reasons for such an institution and the various ways it could be constructed. The Secretary also asked that the participants address themselves to the problems of housekeeping involved in museum administration, to the problems that can arise from giving custodial care to large numbers of bulky artifacts, and to the need for a valid and rewarding research program that exploits the artifacts and is related to their collection.

During this discussion, Dr. Ropp suggested that the Australian War Memorial at Canberra be investigated as a possibly useful example of an institution comparable to the prospective National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center. The War Memorial, which Dr. Ropp has visited, combines an indoor museum, outdoor museum (including reconstructions), and research center.

The conference sessions of December 5 followed an agenda based on background papers that had been prepared by the NAFMAB and HERO staffs and circulated to participants before the conference. Secretary Ripley's two questions of the previous evening were also raised at the opening of the discussions and kept before the participants during the day. The agenda comprised the following topics:

- a. The Role and Philosophy of the Study Center
- b. The Role and Philosophy of the Museum
- c. A Specific Case: Bicentennial of the American Revolution

- d. Structure, Staff, and Holdings for the Study Center
- e. Programs for the Study Center
- f. Suggested Preliminary Actions

After the close of discussion on the afternoon of December 5, a draft summary of the participants' conclusions and recommendations was prepared by a committee composed of Colonel Dupuy, Dr. Leighton, and Mrs. Hammerman. This draft was read to participants and guests during the informal evening discussion of December 5. The morning of December 6 was devoted to a thorough revision of the draft by the participants, and approval of the revised draft.

## APPENDIX B

### SUGGESTED PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMEMORATION OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

It is visualized that in support of the Bicentennial celebration the National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center would act as an agency of the Smithsonian Institution, which in turn would be responsive to programs established by the National Bicentennial Commission. Some specific functions that the museum and study center could carry out are as follows:

- a. Assurance of historical authenticity of the commemorative activities in the vicinity of Washington, D. C.
- b. Publication of appropriate books and pamphlets based on collections of the Smithsonian Institution and the Armed Forces Museum and Study Center.
- c. Publication of Revolutionary War documents, including official and personal papers.
- d. Collection of materials in support of the publication program, and in support of displays, exhibits, or other activities directed or requested by the national Bicentennial Commission, as assigned by the Smithsonian to the National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center.
- e. A lecture series related to the celebration activities.
- f. A program of seminars and conferences on specific military aspects of the American Revolution.
- g. Exploration, possibly with the Service Center for Teachers of History, of the American Historical Association, of the possibility of conferences with high school teachers on suitable programs relating to the Bicentennial.
- h. Exploration of possible cooperation with the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution of suitable cooperative activities.
- i. Support as appropriate of the Commission's national program in such matters as the design and preparation of traveling exhibits.

- j. Demonstrations and displays on the grounds of the National Armed Forces Museum and Study Center, including demonstration of such factors as the relationship between weapons and tactics in the battles of the American Revolution.

## APPENDIX C

### SUMMARY OF NOTES CONTRIBUTED BY

MRS. BARBARA TUCHMAN

Following is a summary, prepared by the HERO Staff, of Mrs. Tuchman's informal marginal notes, made on conference background papers when illness prevented her from attending the conference. These notes were unfortunately not received in time to be read at the conference, and thus are not reflected in the conference report. Mrs. Tuchman has not seen or approved them in the present form. They are submitted here as a possibly useful addition to the record of the conference.

1. In American history, what militarism has existed has not come from the Armed Forces. As an example, the impetus for the Spanish-American War clearly came from elsewhere in American society. The armed forces were not ready for war. The museum and study center have an opportunity to explore this matter and show where militaristic feeling has come from in U. S. history.

2. On the matter of a time-gap necessary for achieving historical perspective, at least 50 years is needed for real historical perspective. This does not necessarily mean that museum exhibits could not legitimately depict events 10 years in the past.

3. Much needs to be done to get the average person to face up to the fact of war, to the unavoidable fact that a large proportion of mankind's time, energy, and attention has been devoted to it throughout history. An honest way to depict war without seeming to rationalize or glorify it is to show the viewer some of its true sources - often in himself. Of course in Europe, particularly Germany, the military establishment and its cult fostered militarism, but through World War II this was not true of this country. Probably one contributing factor was the fact that up to World War II our armed forces were always under strength and on a shoe-string budget.

4. In addition to the various disciplines mentioned as a source of scholars for the study center, humanists should be included. A great deal can be learned about the public opinion mood of a period from its literature; as, for example, the poems of Kipling, Housman, Henley, and Yeats reflect the rising militarism at the turn of the century. The British poets of World War I are also extremely valuable sources on the human experience of the war. There is more to be learned about the nature of war and man's relation to it in literature than anywhere else.