

Agenda  
Board of Directors Meeting  
March 20, 1990

- 1) Minutes
- 2) Report by Director Stephen E. Ambrose
- 3) Report on Eisenhower Center Scholarship by G. Bischof  
Eisenhower Center Lecture Series  
Annual Spring Conference: French Resistance  
Occasional Lectures: Series on "The Velvet Revolution"
- 4) Financial Report by Dean Bobby Dupont
- 5) Old Business:  
Board Membership  
"Wisdom of Eisenhower" publication: Production and Marketing
- 6) New Business:  
D-Day Museum  
May 1991 museum tour  
New position: Assistant Director  
Associate Director: Director of Publications  
LSU Press: Eisenhower Center Publication Series  
Biannual Eisenhower Center Book (\$1000) and Thesis (\$200) Prices  
Eisenhower Center Research grants to UNO students doing work on Eisenhower Era

March 20, 1990

To: Board of Governors, Eisenhower Center  
From: Director Ambrose and Associate Director Bischof  
Subject: D-Day Museum

On Saturday, March 10, we met in the Eisenhower Room for morning and afternoon sessions with Harry Middleton, Director of the Johnson Library and Museum in Austin, Tim Walsh, Director of the Hoover Library and Museum in West Branch, Iowa, and Richard Norton Smith, Director of the Eisenhower Library and Museum in Abilene, Kansas. We got lots of ideas and encouragement; they convinced us that it can be done and gave us advice on how to do it.

The first thing we need is a "story." What we want the museum to accomplish. A description of the audience. An outline of the displays, the theme of the museum, and so on. They suggested as a next step that we bring in the curators of their museums for consultation. They will look over our "request for proposal" and suggest design firms who will bid on the project. We select a firm; it then takes our proposal and works out space requirements, cost estimates, and the like, and prepares sketches. The production of this report by the design firm will use up the bulk of our planning grant; it will give us the most basic document we need as we go into our next phase, a "presentation booklet" for the capital fund raising campaign.

All this, and more, is spelled out in greater detail in the minutes of the meeting, enclosed.

Also enclosed is a preliminary draft of an introduction to our "story." We urge you to look it over and make changes, remarks, suggestions. As you will see, it is introductory only; we make no attempt to specify specific displays. That comes in the next stage; before we get into it, we want your input. What would you like to see? Think of museum displays you have enjoyed and learned from: put your imagination to work on behalf of this museum.

Draft  
D-Day Museum  
Eisenhower Center  
University of New Orleans

by

Stephen E. Ambrose, Director

In 1964, I took a leave-of-absence for five years from the University of New Orleans to go to work for General Dwight Eisenhower as an editor of his official papers. At our first working session in his Gettysburg office he asked me if I had known Andy Higgins in New Orleans. I said I had not.

"Too bad," Ike said. "You know, he is the man who won the war for us."

I was more than a little surprised at such a flat statement; seeing my reaction, Ike explained that without the Higgins Boats (technically, LCVP, or "landing craft, vehicle, personnel") he could not have invaded over an open beach. It was Andy Higgins and the people of New Orleans who worked in his boat yard that made the landings in Sicily, Italy, and Normandy possible.

Ever since that day I have had a deep interest in Higgins, and a keen desire to do something in New Orleans to honor the "man who won the war." I have collected papers, documents of various types, blueprints, photographs, and artifacts from the Higgins boat yard, and have had graduate students write dissertations on the man and his company. Now I want to build a D-Day Museum on the lakefront on the University of New Orleans

campus, on the site where the boats were tested and near where they were built.

The central theme of the D-Day Museum is to honor the men and women who made D-Day possible. The core idea is to build a museum that tells the biography of a day -- June 6, 1944 -- a day that changed history. The lesson that the museum will teach is what the American people and American democracy can accomplish when everyone pulls together. Teamwork was Dwight Eisenhower's favorite word; it was teamwork at home and abroad that made D-Day a success.

The Eisenhower Center, established in 1983, has been collecting oral histories from the men of D-Day, and from the workers in the Higgins boat yard, for seven years. We have some 600 in hand. On one of them, Allen Stephens of Alexandria, Virginia, expresses perfectly what we want the museum to convey. Stephens was a bomber pilot on D-Day. He crossed the Channel on his way to his target at first light. He looked down at the mightiest armada ever assembled, some 6,000 ships, and around him at the nearly 5,000 aircraft; he saw the first wave of infantry hitting the beaches, and the parachutes and gliders of the airborne troops who had gone in before dawn; he had, he relates, "a surging sense of seeing the greatest show ever staged."

That is exactly what it was. It was a bigger undertaking than building the Interstate Highway System, or the Empire State Building, or the pyramids. On one day, some 175,000 men crossed the English Channel, coming from staging points as far as 100 miles away, to converge on Normandy, to establish a beachhead,

begin the construction of artificial harbors on open beaches, build airfields, and start the process of destroying the Wehrmacht and liberating France and Europe. All this was done against skilled and determined opposition from veteran troops fighting behind the prepared defenses of Hitler's Atlantic Wall, which had been four years in the making and was itself a construction project comparable to the Great Wall of China.

The audience will consist of: veterans and their families, from all over the country and indeed from Europe; school children from New Orleans and Louisiana generally; tourists in town for other reasons but eager to do something other than walk Bourbon Street during the day; the general New Orleans community. The first two, veterans and school children, are the most obvious; the veterans' numbers will obviously decline over the years, while the school children remain steady.

An important feature is to create enough space for temporary exhibits that bring people back for repeat visits. One suggested theme of temporary exhibits is other "days that changed history." Perhaps October 14, 1066, and the Battle of Hastings; July 4, 1863, Vicksburg; January 8, 1815, the Battle of New Orleans, etc.

In addition to the displays, the museum will require administrative offices, archives and research areas, a book and gift shop, water fountains and toilet facilities, and ample parking.

In the displays, we want to include numerous ear phones, which activate on being picked up; they will play appropriate tapes from our oral histories, so that while looking at a display

on the airborne on D-Day, visitors can listen to a veteran of the 101st describing his experiences, or at a display of Omaha Beach the visitor can hear a member of the 29th Division telling how he hit the beach and got up the cliff.

The museum obviously cannot cover everything from this vast undertaking: perhaps the best advice we got was to aim to have visitors leave with two or three vivid impressions. Within the guidelines that "simple is best," there are certain "stories" that we absolutely want to tell: the Higgins Boat Yard; the way in which virtually all of the American people contributed to D-Day; the Anglo-American deception scheme preceding D-Day; the Rangers and Pt. de Hoc; the Airborne story, especially but not exclusively St. Mere Eglise; the 1st and 29th Divisions at Omaha, and the 4th Division at Utah; the Army Air Force; the Navy; the Coast Guard; Ike's decision to postpone, then to go on the Sixth (it is important to note, however, that this is not a memorial to Dwight Eisenhower; the museum intends to honor the men and women of D-Day, not the brass).

How we tell these stories is now to be worked out. The more ideas we have to work with, the better.