Over the years, a handful of men persistently wrote to anyone they thought would listen and might act. In one of his letters, a member of this group referred to himself and his comrades as "only five old men." But those five were to prove remarkably influential on the fate of the exhibition.

These men's correspondence defined many of the complaints that would repeatedly arise in veterans' accusations. Here I will raise those issues, more or less in turn, though they often appeared intertwined.

**ISSUE 1: NEGLECT OF THE AIRCRAFT**

As far as I can tell, William A. Rooney, of Wilmette, Illinois, who had been so outspoken in his early correspondence with Bob Adams, had not written in more than three years. But on May 11, 1990, he took to his keyboard again, this time addressing himself directly to the three members of the regents' executive committee, including Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist.

I am addressing this letter to you because of certain facts that seem not to be taken into consideration by the management of the Smithsonian. . . .

Messrs. Harwit and Adams seem to ignore that by their actions, a great number—into the millions—of Americans who fought in World War II will never see this aircraft on display. With most now aged 65, they will be
dead before the Smithsonian acts. It is this constituency that the Smith­
sonian seems to ignore. I am one of these.1

On behalf of the executive committee, Secretary Adams replied on June
25, in a two-page letter in which he described the substantial progress that
had been made on the restoration of the Enola Gay. To convince Rooney,
he enclosed a number of photographs.2

That Rooney was not persuaded is evidenced by his next letter,
addressed on September 10 to Congressman Sidney Yates, chairman of the
House Appropriations Committee’s subcommittee that was most influential
in deciding on the Smithsonian’s budget. Rooney again accused the Smith­
sonian of neglecting the Enola Gay, and then recalled the vow he had made
to Adams, more than three years earlier.

I have told the Smithsonian that it is my intention to see the Enola Gay
proudly restored and displayed and that I intend, once again, to see Gen.
Paul Tibbets sit in the pilot’s cockpit and wave out of the pilot’s window as
he did on that historic day, August 6, 1945. Gen. Tibbets and I are now
[respectively 75 and] 73. We do not have much time and we deserve bet­
ter than to have the Smithsonian take this occasion from us.3

Rooney’s two letters defined the first of the issues. Did the Smithsonian
owe the veterans an exhibition that would satisfy their nostalgia, or even
celebrate them, on this fiftieth anniversary of the mission of the Enola Gay
and the virtually coincident end of World War II?

Rooney clearly felt we did.

All of us at the museum, certainly I as its director, felt that the veterans
were owed their day of glory. Doubtlessly commemorations would and
should abound across the country on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of
this long and terribly costly war. But did this mean that every organization
had to follow a set format without exception?

The National Air and Space Museum had a large number of historical
artifacts that could be displayed on this fiftieth anniversary, including the
Enola Gay, which we were spending great effort to restore to go on public
view. We were at the same time also restoring a Japanese Okha piloted sui­
cide bomb, to illustrate the costly resistance through kamikaze tactics
Allied troops were facing toward the end of the war. We had both a Little
Boy and a Fat Man bomb casing we planned to place on display. With these
and a host of smaller artifacts, the museum was in a position to mount an
extraordinary historical exhibition on conditions at the end of World War
II and the mission of the Enola Gay in the closing days of the war.

No other organization in the world was as well equipped to do this as
we were. Should we be denied the opportunity to provide the public a truly
thoughtful display that included many recently declassified documents on
World War II that now provided new insights? Or should we simply
become one more site of commemoration and celebration?