

2 January 2023

Denis Masy, Mayor
7 Rue Général de Gaulle
Bruyères, France

My Dear Mayor Masy,

It was a great pleasure meeting you and the members of the City Council during my October visit to Bruyères for the annual celebration of the Liberation of the City. The ceremonies are always moving tributes to those who sacrificed, not only for the freedom of France, but for the freedom of all those who cherish liberty.

As we discussed during our meeting, I am submitting (in both English and French) a proposal for the incremental development of a museum that I suggest be called the "Heroes of the Vosges Museum." It would tell the stories and preserve and display the artifacts of the Nisei liberators and the brave volunteers of the FFI. The role played by the FFI in the City's liberation is perhaps less well known and should be well documented and recognized for future generations.

The proposed museum would serve not only to preserve important artifacts but would create a "Destination Attraction" for Bruyères, Biffontaine and Belmont. If successful, it could potentially provide a source of revenue for the region by attracting visitors from around the world.

The museum could eventually include a gift shop and a canteen for visitor in addition to its primary function as a display of the history of the region including the many conflicts that occurred in the Vosges. From the Celts and Romans to the great battles of WWI and WWII, the museum could provide a great educational experience for both domestica and international visitors.

To the end of starting the process of creating a museum, I respectfully request that you and the City Council consider the enclosed proposal and offer your comments and suggestions and ultimately your approval to proceed.

With best regards to all,

Carl Williams

HEROES OF THE VOSGES MUSEUM

The Incremental Development of a Museum of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) and French Forces of the Interior (FFI) in the Vosges

A Proposal for Consideration by the City of Bruyères, the Vosges Department and Republic of France

The residue of ancient conflicts saturates the very air and soil of the fog-shrouded Vosges. Indeed, it is a part of everything that is the Vosges.

The Vosges is a place where one cannot pass without breathing in its essence and hearing the faint distant echoes of cannon. And, when the wind is just right, one still may hear the dim cries of those whose blood has transformed these forested hills into hallowed ground.

And in this sacred place, now frequented only by the living, remain the spirits of its defenders, ever ready to again arise in its defense. C Williams, October 2022

INTRODUCTION

No community in France has devoted more energy and resources to honor a small group of American World War II (WWII) soldiers than has the City of Bruyères. Located in the Vosges Mountains in the Alsace-Champagne-Ardenne-Lorraine region, Bruyères, along with its neighboring cities of Biffontaine and Belmont, became the site of one of WW II's most savage battles – a battle fought largely by Americans of Japanese descent.

In mid-October of 1944, members of what would become WW II's most highly decorated combat unit, liberated Bruyères, Biffontaine and Belmont from some of Germany's most experienced and fanatical soldiers (Schutz-Staffel (SS) Police Regiment 19, among others) who were deeply entrenched in the dense forested hills surrounding these communities.

The 100/442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), along with supporting units that included the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion (FAB) and the 232nd Combat Engineer Company (CEC) not only liberated these communities but went on to rescue, at great cost, the “Lost Texas Battalion” that had been encircled by the enemy and faced imminent annihilation.

To their everlasting credit, the people of Bruyères have never forgotten the sacrifice these young men made and the terrible conditions under which they fought. Many memorials and monuments are found along the difficult track taken by the liberators -- each step having been paid for dearly in blood and lives.

Visitors from around the world come to Bruyères and the surrounding communities to learn of the exploits of these young soldiers who fought heroically in spite of the fact that many had left their families confined within the barbed wire of American internment camps.

In 1947, the grateful but still ravaged City of Bruyères, built on Hill 555 a simple stone monument in honor of their liberators. (Exhibit 1)

In 2017 a second monument (The Torch Monument) was erected on Hill 555. (Exhibit 2)

These Japanese-American liberators, celebrated each October in Bruyères, reclaimed the region from the German invaders and returned it in peace to the people of France.

Sadly, left out of these celebrations is the vital role played by the young French men and women of the FFI who, true patriots of France, put their lives on the line in support of the Americans.

According to General De Lattre, *“[Traditional military values] were not and could not be the characteristics of the F.F.I. units. Condemned to be born and live in secret, placed outside the law by the enemy and by*

the enemy's accomplices, they had above all developed the revolutionary military virtues, those of partisans. By force of circumstances the personalities of the leaders had played a determining role and had stamped each maquis with a different brand.”

In the Vosges, young men and women lead the Nisei liberators through the torturous trails that crisscrossed the mountains. They reported on enemy numbers and positions, and, with often primitive weapons, destroyed enemy assets. Suspected FFI families suffered constant deprivation and threats from the Germans. Any young man found to be “out of bounds” by the German occupiers, was subject to summary execution.

Many of these irregular “soldiers,” gave their young lives to free their country and without them, France would have undoubtedly waited considerably longer for liberation. The parents of these young men and women became one with the grieving families of Nisei soldiers lost in battle.

According to General Patton, the rapid advance of his army through France would have been impossible without the fighting aid of the FFI.

The FFI should be honored for their bravery and sacrifice along with their Nisei compatriots who, in unison, drove the invaders from French soil.

ADDRESSING TWO PROBLEMS

The Nisei Soldiers

In 1945, as members of the 100th/442nd returned to the United States, many of them arrived at their homes carrying artifacts of their European tour. Along with these “souvenirs” of war, many brought home their military records, photographs from their deployment, letters from loved ones, and even military paraphernalia. Some men

even carried home artifacts, carried lovingly throughout their tours, that had their origins in the internment camps or from their families in Hawaii.

On the Mainland returning soldiers rarely spoke of their military experiences and their families tended to be largely uninformed of their deeds. Artifacts were placed into cartons and simply stored as these men assumed civilian lives. Many married or resumed their family lives. Most wives, children and grandchildren knew little or nothing of the heroic role these men had played in becoming the most highly decorated unit of its size and length of service in the history of American warfare.

Few of these Nisei soldiers remain alive today. As they pass into history, many of these artifacts sit hidden away undisturbed in dusty corners. As their largely uninformed children dispose of these men's property, few appreciate the historic value of these treasures and it is feared, many will be discarded as refuse. Some Japanese-Americans believe this is already happening and the such losses are irreversible.

The Vosges Region

Cities such as Bruyères depend heavily on day tourism and like many other communities, suffered during the recent pandemic. Once adequately supported by textile and wood products industries, Bruyères is left with few significant sources of revenue.

No hotels operate in the village and only limited numbers of camping sites are available. Tourists who visit make use of hotels in places such as Epinal and St Die and find lodging at private home and apartment rentals in nearby communities.

The absence of hotels, reduces the demand for restaurants and only a limited number of eating establishments remain in operation -- catering to local customers.

With little revenues from commerce, limited income from the city's rentals and no significant attraction other than the annual October celebration of the City's liberation, Bruyères must be considered an impoverished community.

Is there a partial solution short of large infusions of job-creating capital?

Bruyères appears to need a "Destination Attraction" that can draw both American and French visitors. Such an attraction will stimulate related economic activity and could encourage the opening of a hotel and additional restaurants. As tourism increases, local shops would benefit as well and additional jobs would be created in the local economy.

A POTENTIAL DUAL SOLUTION

With the twofold goals of preserving important Nisei and FFI artifacts and improving the general economy of Bruyères, it is proposed that a museum be developed that would eventually grow into an important "Destination Attraction" – an attraction that would stimulate visits from both international and domestic travelers.

To avoid over-reaching, it is proposed that the city start with a modest effort by identifying a small secure location and storage facility to which artifacts collected in the US and France may be secured, catalogued, stored, and subsequently displayed. The operating cost of this proposal will be addressed in a subsequent section.

Once the initial site is established and based on the popularity of the museum effort, the city may seek to preliminarily identify a suitable location for the construction of a dedicated museum building, consider

retaining a fulltime historian/curator and begin marketing the museum both in France and in the US. It is suggested that the museum be named, **“The Heroes of the Vosges Museum”** to reflect that both Japanese Americans and French members of the FFI are to be recognized.

SHARED DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITY

Under this proposal there would be shared responsibility between the city and an unpaid volunteer US representative who would be formally identified by action of the city council. Please see **“DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES”** enumerated below.

The city would also formally identify a local leader who would be responsible for the city’s roles (identified below) and who would report periodically to the Mayor and City Council. That individual may be authorized to appoint any number of unpaid volunteer advisors to assist the designee.

DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES

Bruyères/Vosges

- 1. Approve the museum proposal through the City Council.**
- 2. Formally identify and approve an unpaid US volunteer to perform the duties and responsibilities identified below.**
- 3. Formally identify and name an unpaid city representative to lead the project for the region.**
- 4. Engage the Peace and Freedom Trail organization in a leadership or advisory role.**
- 5. Notify and seek the assistance (political and financial) from the city’s National representatives i.e., Deputy and Senator.**
- 6. Identify and submit proposals for any possible economic grants that may be offered by the Republic of France.**

7. **Seek financial contributions and donations from the French private commercial sector. (e.g., Cofiroute, AXA, BNP, Carrefour, Credit Agricole, Air France and Bouygues etc.)**
8. **Identify and retain a secure start up property that is or will be made suitable for the temporary museum displays and identify space for the secure storage of artifacts not initially on display.**
9. **Contact and solicit artifacts and donations from agencies of the Republic of France including, but not limited to, Tourism, Economic Development, Rural Assistance, War Memorial Organizations including museums focused on the history of French Military and Resistance groups.**
10. **In 2023-2024, undertake advance planning for a permanent site for a full-scale museum that conveniently serves the Bruyères, Belmont and Biffontaine area.**
11. **Create a special “Heroes of the Vosges Museum” bank account to which solicited funds will be periodically deposited by the US Representative.**
12. **Market broadly the development of the museum throughout France via media interviews, letters to media outlets, speaking engagements, etc.**

US Representative

1. **Contact as many Japanese Americans as possible and solicit artifacts and donations for the museum. [As of 2019 there were approximately 1.5 million Japanese Americans in the United States. The largest concentrations of this demographic can be found in Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Seattle, San Diego, Sacramento, Chicago, and Washington DC.]**
2. **Contact and solicit support from the Japanese Government and reenactor groups.**
3. **Solicit support from all the major Japanese-American organizations including, but not limited to, JAACL, Go for Broke, JANM, FFNV, Internment Camp Site Organizations, The National Museum of the US Army (442nd Curator), KHON TV in Honolulu, and the 100th Infantry Battalion Veterans, etc.**

4. Seek and apply for grants that may be available from governmental and historical societies.
5. Establish a website for the Heroes of the Vosges Museum that includes the City-approved plan and background along with instructions on donating artifacts and a means for making donations to the project.
6. Establish a bank account in the name of the project and deposit all donations received.
7. Seek one or more major benefactors or donors willing to make substantial contributions to the museum with assurances of prominent recognition.
8. Seek donated museum architectural design assistance for both the temporary and future permanent museum sites.
9. Seek donated curator services familiar with the Vosges history of WW II and the 100th/442nd and the FFI.
10. Collect, assemble, and bulk ship artifacts to Bruyères.
11. Periodically wire collected funds to the special Heroes of the Vosges bank account in Bruyères.
12. Market the museum development through interviews, speaking engagements and letters to media outlets.

FIANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – COST AND BUDGET

It is difficult at this juncture to estimate even the initial and annual costs for the temporary start-up location much less for a permanent museum at some later date. However, this is a crucial matter as the city of Bruyères has few discretionary resources and is unable to meet and new obligations.

An effort must be made both in France and the US to raise seed funds to start the project and to seek benefactors or significant donors as soon as possible. While both the Bruyères and US Representatives will function as no-cost volunteers, it is less likely that others, working toward the ultimate goal of a full-time free-standing museum, will offer their services at no cost.

Nevertheless, several significant potential costs can be identified:

1. Rent for an existing building or portion of one including storage and parking.
2. Operating costs for utilities and services.

- 3. Rehabilitation and retrofitting modifications in preparation for museum displays.**
- 4. Display cases, lighting, and equipment for the artifacts.**
- 5. Graphic artists services.**
- 6. Bilingual curator services.**
- 7. Translation services**
- 8. Bi-lingual volunteer museum docent/attendant (s)**
- 9. Maintenance and janitorial services**

TIMETABLE

It is recommended that the initial project completion schedule coincide with October 2024 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Bruyères. While ambitious, this provides two full years to seek funds, prepare a temporary site and to market this additional attraction as part of the 2024 celebration.

NEXT STEPS

- 1. Mayor and City Council consider and approve plan.**
- 2. Mayor and City Council designate Bruyères and US Representatives.**

EXHIBIT 1



1947 Monument to the 100th/442 Regimental Combat Team

EXHIBIT 2



2017 Torch Monument with 100th Infantry Battalion Color Guard