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Suzanne Blair Thorndike
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Dear Suzanne,

It appears that we have failed to persuade the NASM Director, Don Engen, to have Excalibur III returned for the 2003 opening of the Dulles Extension. I do not know what was said in the letter to you from Don or a staff member, but my conversation and note from him was not favorable yet friendly and sympathetic.

After receiving all of your family letters, I had a visit with Don which had to be short because of other commitments he had. At that time, he had three of the four letters, and the fourth one followed soon after. Unfortunately, he had already staffed the request, and as expected, outside influence does not move members of the Aeronautical Department, so he abided by their finding. I had hoped from the beginning that he would make this decision on his own to recall the airplane and that would be the end of that.

After my visit with Don Engen, I followed it up with a memo pointing out the strong elements that appeared in all the family member's letters plus a few of my own. I since learned from other sources that from the time that the new building will be turned over to NASM, only about one-quarter of the planned space will be accessible for the year before the year 2003 opening, and it is only that portion that can be used initially for exhibiting aircraft. That really is a short time in which to prepare. This makes the portion from Engen's note to me more understandable; "But as you know, immediate action for Excalibur III cannot be in the cards." My understanding is that airplanes currently at the Garber Facility are to be moved to the new location, leaving all those on loan to a later time. He did follow that sentence with "I will personally remember that we want this airplane back on display at Dulles -- and not forget it." He means well, but I fear that he may retire as soon as the initial opening takes place. But, hold on to your letter from him for possible future use. I am doing that for all of yours at this end and Engen's notes to me.

I am disappointed as I know all of you must be. I feel that we have done all that we can at this point. I know that I will not be satisfied until the airplane is returned, and I hope that this remains in family member's minds as well for future opportunities to act on this.

I do not know how often you visited the Virgin Islands when your father lived there. He and Maureen got us to come down in 1978 and have been doing so each winter except for the past few years because of medical problems. Ramona is now doing fine and we have just returned from St. Thomas and St. Croix after two weeks. The water and sky are still as blue as you may remember. The economy has certainly slowed, particularly on St. Croix, and it is sad to see so many empty building and hotels. One wonders what is in the island's future? St. Thomas always does better, but there are problems there as well, particularly with empty hotels prompted by hurricane damage and lack of funds form insurance companies to rebuild. Business there is primarily based upon the daily cruise ship tourism. But both islands are nice places to visit, and we always have a great time.

One good thing that this had brought, Suzanne, and that is to be in touch again after all these years. Perhaps our paths may one time come together. I truly wish that I had been more successful in this endeavor.

Regards,



Robert C. Mikesh