



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON DC

Office Of The Assistant Secretary

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SAF/FMC  
1130 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington DC 20330-1130

Mr. C. V. Glines  
History of Aviation Collection  
PO Box 830643  
Richardson, TX 75083-0643

Dear Mr. Glines

I have read the Second Yamamoto Mission Association Newsletter #13 - The Last One, dated August 1996. On page eight, paragraph 17 of the chronology of events states *"We cannot understand why Chairman of the Board, Leroy Baseman, failed to cast the tie breaking vote \*\*\* and thus, there was not a majority/minority recommendation to the Secretary of the Air Force."* I will answer that question in this letter and also add further information to the accumulated history resulting from this classic and remarkable mission.

First, a few comments about the mechanics of the AFBCMR process in general and in this case in particular. Cases before the AFBCMR resulting in a unanimous ruling are routinely approved at lower levels in the Secretariat hierarchy and rarely, if ever, elevated beyond the Assistant Secretary level. Conversely, cases with a split vote, either for or against approval, are more often elevated to the Assistant Secretary level. It is a rare case that finds it's way to the Secretary of the Air Force, regardless of which way the members of the AFBCMR voted. It was clear to me the Rex Barber application was one of these rare cases even before the AFBCMR met. While I did not discuss the case with Dr. Rice before the Board meeting, I knew the extent and level of interest and discussions among many people of differing loyalties plus Senator Gore's staff involvement would send this case to Dr. Rice. It should also be noted the Secretary gets an advisory from the Air Force General Counsel's office as relates to any legal, evidentiary, or other matters the Secretary should consider. In the final analysis, the Secretary is not bound by the findings of the AFBCMR. In this case as in all other cases forwarded to him, Dr. Rice was bound only to consider the AFBCMR's conclusions and recommendations in formulating his own decision.

Before addressing my "vote", I would like to provide some anecdotal items for your record. I was surprised how polarized the other four members of the Board were beginning at

our first deliberation session and growing more apart and firm through the end of the sessions which numbered five over two months. From the outset, I knew I could not get a unanimous recommendation. The presentation of Rex Barber's case in every aspect, i.e., oral argument, quality of witnesses, written submission, etc., was the best I have seen of any case in my twenty years on the Board. It convinced Mr. Beach and Mr. Kemp that the preponderance of evidence supported Rex Barber's claim. They were not troubled with "*changing history*" or the fact that Lt Col Lanphier was not alive to make his case. On the other hand, I believe Dr. Gold and Mr. Kaiser were troubled by both of these issues although they cite their view of the evidence as not overcoming the possibility that Lt Col Lanphier could have hit Admiral Yamamoto's plane as well as Rex Barber.

Dr. Rice lists four points critical to his deliberations. The second notes that while the evidence concerning Lt Col Lanphier's part in this mission "*remains equivocal*" there is "*substantial evidence*" that he did fire upon and hit Admiral Yamamoto's aircraft. I have never discussed with Dr. Rice his conclusions and decision in this case. His memorandum was written over a year after the Board made its recommendation and only weeks before Dr. Rice left office as the Secretary of the Air Force. I certainly have no basis to question Dr. Rice's judgment nor decision but I personally place more emphasis on the word "*equivocal*" and less on the word "*substantial*". My reading of the evidence is not the same as his. I did not find clear and convincing evidence that the Yamamoto bomber was hit by two pilots in sequential attacks. You should note, the Board hearing this appeal was not involved with the drafting of the Secretary's decision memorandum.

Let me turn now to the principal reason for this letter - did I or did I not vote, and if not, why not? I believe any objective reading of my views as recorded in the Record of Proceedings would unequivocally suggest I was persuaded in favor of the applicant. Such comments as "*new and credible evidence*", "*applicant presents a persuasive argument for his claim*", "*evidence leads me to find suspect, and perhaps fatally flawed, the Air Force Historians version of the attack*" are just short of full affirmation. So, if this is the case, the SYMA asks why I did not cast the tie breaking vote. My answer simply is that I believe I did cast the tie breaking vote. I believed the applicants best chance to have his appeal realized was by convening a Victory Credit Review Board, the legal entity whose records would have to be changed to grant this case. I believed this VCRB would have significantly more and better documented evidence on which to base a judgment than the 1978 Board and that the VCRB would find in the applicants favor. I had no way of predicting, but I thought Dr. Rice would accept a three vote majority opinion to refer to a VCRB (remember both Mr. Beach and Mr. Kemp said if the case is not granted then they would agree to send it to a VCRB) easier than a split vote by the AFBCMR to grant or deny. And as I stated in my opinion "*I believe such a Board is the most appropriate body to analyze and render a judgment on the applicant's contentions in the context of, and in relation to, the standard of proof applied by Victory Credit Review Boards in awarding credit for thousands of other combat actions in all theaters of action*". One last point, I also thought there was a strong possibility that should a VCRB fail to appropriately consider the applicants case, the AFBCMR would have the opportunity to step in again.

I hope I have answered the questions raised by the SYMA and through this letter contributed to the honored history of this truly remarkable air warfare feat. All of those who participated should be justifiably proud of their service to the United States.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leroy T. Baseman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and "B".

LEROY T. BASEMAN  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
(Cost and Economics)  
Panel Chairman, Air Force Board for the  
Corrections of Military Records