

# Omega-Alpha Newsletter

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## Air Force settles on a new memorial site

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The top officers of the Air Force and Marine Corps jointly have endorsed a deal to move the site of a planned Air Force memorial from near the famed Iwo Jima statue to grounds overlooking the Pentagon and Arlington National Cemetery.

The endorsements from Gen. John P. Jumper, who became Air Force chief of staff Oct. 1, and Gen. James Jones, the Marine commandant, promise to end a long, bitter dispute between veterans of both services. Previously, the Air Force and Marine Corps had failed to agree on a way to settle what some called the "Battle of the Monuments."

Gen. Jumper's willingness to endorse the move — and the expected approval of the private Air Force Memorial Foundation — is a victory for Marine veterans who fought in court, in the media and on Capitol Hill to shift the project. They argued that the memorial complex encroached on what they called "hallowed ground." Previously, the foundation adamantly refused to relinquish the prime site at Arlington Ridge between the cemetery and the Potomac River.

A House-Senate conference on the 2002 defense authorization bill is now working on an official memorial cease-fire. The legislation would transfer the federal land at the Navy Annex to the Army, which runs Arlington Cemetery. The defense secretary would then provide four acres to the foundation for the memorial. The remaining land would be used for burial sites once the annex is vacated later this decade.

The annex, a complex of buildings that once housed Marine Corps headquarters, overlooks the Pentagon and is bordered by Interstate 395 and the cemetery.

The Air Force foundation had planned to erect its 50-foot-high building 200 yards from the bronze statue depicting Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945, after one of World War II's fiercest battles.

"We wish to jointly express our enthusiastic support of the proposal to locate the Air Force Memorial at the Arlington Navy Annex," said a letter jointly signed by Gen. Jumper and Gen. Jones, and sent to Rep. Bob Stump, Arizona Republican and chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. A copy of the letter was obtained by The Washington Times.

"Given the immense benefits the Navy Annex site has to offer, and the multiple concerns that have attended this project previously, we want to urge the committee of conference to act now and ensure success," the two generals wrote. "The time has arrived for bringing to reality this lasting tribute to Air Force men and women past and present."

Retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward F. Grillo Jr., the foundation's president, said yesterday the group is willing to accept the new site, subject to the trustees' approval.

"It is our intention, assuming that the congressional language is passed and the Air Force Memorial Foundation considers it to be in the best interest of the foundation and our contributors, to relocate," Gen. Grillo said.

He said the foundation has raised \$29 million from 130,000 individuals, organizations and corporations. Founded in 1992, the foundation was headed for years by beer magnate Joseph Coors.

In July, Ross Perot Jr., an ex-Air Force fighter pilot, became the new chairman.

The memorial will have to be redesigned, or a fresh design ordered, to fit the new site.

"You have to have a new memorial that not only represents what one wants it to represent but is also perfectly suited for the environment in which it is placed," Gen. Grillo said.

He added, "The country is at war right now, and the last thing we need is anything of an interservice controversy that this has somewhat caused in the past."

Indeed, ill feelings among some Marines and Air Force veterans festered during much of the mid- and late 1990s.

Marines noted that nearly 30,000 of their brethren were killed or wounded in taking the Pacific island so that Army Air Corps pilots had an airfield on which to land disabled bombers returning from Japan.

The Air Force had a reply. "No branch of the service has earned an exclusive right to 'hallowed ground,'" wrote retired Maj. Gen. Charles D. Link in 1999 when he served as foundation president. "There is more than enough room in the 25 acres on Arlington Ridge for the two-acre site of the Air Force Memorial."

Retired Gen. Charles Krulak, then the Marine commandant, weighed in, saying in 1998, "What people need to understand is that the Marine Corps lost, either killed or wounded, on Iwo Jima almost 30,000 people and when you look at that memorial, and then understand that some 150 yards away we're thinking about building something else, we just don't think that that's the right thing to do."

Gen. Jumper and Gen. Jones called the Navy Annex location a "win-win solution."

"It affords the Air Force Memorial Foundation an inspiring site with impressive views of our nation's Capitol on which to erect a lasting memorial to the airmen who have bravely defended our nation in both peace and war," they said.

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