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Thinking Out Loud

By Albert Schlossberg

Onward Christian Marines . . .

"That cross makes me shudder. It is like an evil presence."

"How did the cross, the supreme symbol of universal love, become a sign of fear, of evil for this young Jewess? It soon became clear . . . it was the fruit of a knowledge which she, but not I, had, a knowledge of the immense suffering undergone by her people at the hands of Christians." (From the introduction to Father Edward Flannery's "Anguish of the Jews.")

"Retired Lt. General Victor H. Krulak, responsible for ordering the erection of

the memorial, ' . . it was intended neither to advance a particular religion nor to honor our nation's non-Christian service members any less than their Christian comrades.' " (From U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's reply to Congressman Barney Frank's inquiry.)

"The Corps' justification for doing so is that they thought the Cross would be viewed as a non-sectarian symbol . . . I think that for now the best thing to do is to let the process work itself out." (From Congressman Edward J. Markey's reply to JWV Past National Commander Samuel Samuels expression of concern over the presence of a Christian religious symbol — a 65-foot high Christian cross — at a U.S. Marine Corps base.)

"We have made a number of inquiries on your behalf. I am enclosing the letter that I have received from the Headquarters of the United States Marine Corps in response to my inquiries." (Excerpted from Senator John F. Kerry's communication to Melvin Goldstein, Past Commander, Dept. of Massachusetts, JWV.)

"It was my first introduction to the problem of anti-Semitism. Later discussion of the incident with both Christian and Jewish friends led me to a further discovery. Jews generally are acutely aware of the history of anti-Semitism, simply because it comprises so large a portion of Jewish history. Christians, on the contrary, even highly educated ones, are all but totally ignorant of it. The pages Jews have memorized have been torn from our (Christian) histories of the Christian era." (Father Edward Flannery, author, "Anguish of the Jews.")

It's been half a year since I first wrote about the 65-foot high Christian cross erected at the U.S. Marines' camp H.M. Smith's Bordelon Field, Honolulu, Hawaii. At that time, because of conversations I had had with several members of the Senate and Congress, I had confidence that the Constitutional illegitimacy of the erection and maintenance of a so-flagrant sectarian religious icon on a United States marine base would be recognized, and the cross would be removed. How wrong I was!

Almost without exception (Congressmen Frank and

Mavroulis are two), government officials have demonstrated that they lack the fortitude to touch the problem of the Christian cross at the Honolulu Marine base, even with the proverbial ten-foot pole! When President Ronald Reagan didn't answer my communications to him on this matter I then posted a letter to the President advising him that since he had ignored my letter I was no longer interested in responding to the several requests sent to me, in his name, for financial support of various and sundry organizations.

Why, I now wonder, have members of the Senate and House who usually rush to the ramparts, cloaked in the United States Constitution, on issues as disparate as abortion and freedom of the press, prayer in the schools and testing for AIDS, proved to be so reluctant to stand up to the Department of Defense on this blatant transgression from the Constitutional prohibition against "establishment of religion."

The cross was not erected after an order from the DOD or the White House! The decision to build a seven-story high Christian cross on a United States Marine base was made by a Marine Lt. General, on his own! But, sadly, none of those members of the Congress who have rushed to criticism of a Marine Lt. Colonel and a Navy Admiral for taking it upon themselves to make unilateral decisions, seems at all vexed that a giant, illuminated Christian cross dominates the vista on a United States military base.

The United States Marine Corps is not a Christian branch of the U.S. defense forces. Since its inception Jews have served in the Marine Corps in excess of our percentage of the U.S. population. In every war zone in which Marines have fought and died Jewish Marines have been there. Their dog tags identified them as being Jewish.

Without denigrating the spiritual value of a cross to Christians, it can not be considered, by even the wildest flights of imagination, to be a "secular" symbol. The motto of the U.S. Marines is Semper Fidelis, not Onward Christian Marines! It's long past time to take down the giant Christian cross at the Honolulu Marine base.