

## **WORLD WAR II 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE**

### **Annual Report**

The World War II 75th Anniversary Commemoration Commission (the Commission) was created in the 2014 Appropriation Act (2014 Special Session I, c. 2; Item 1, Section P.1) to plan, develop, and carry out programs and activities to commemorate the 75th anniversary of World War II, including a national reunion of living veterans. The Commission is composed of four members of the House of Delegates, two members of the Senate of Virginia, and two nonlegislative citizen members. The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services and the Executive Director of the Virginia War Memorial serve as ex officio members with nonvoting privileges. Technical assistance is provided to the Commission by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Virginia War Memorial. The Commission held three meetings in 2015.

#### **Initial meeting: July 7, 2015**

Staff reviewed important dates in World War II and discussed the goals and scope of the Commission's work, including coordinating and collaborating with national partners. Staff reviewed the work of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, which included grants to localities, a document-scanning project, major museum exhibitions, a traveling HistoryMobile, and a series of seven Signature Conferences held at universities across the state.

Dr. Charles F. Bryan, Jr. highlighted the importance of World War II. In 2016, the nation will mark the 75th anniversary of America's entry into World War II, a global conflict that had been raging since September 1939. More than 16 million men and women joined the fight, with over 400,000 Americans paying the ultimate price of freedom. Although World War II was not waged on Virginia soil, the Commonwealth can lay claim to being one of the country's most important World War II-related states. Numerous military posts and bases (including the Pentagon) were located throughout the Commonwealth. Virginia industry, especially ship building, contributed greatly to the American war effort. Among southern states, Virginia ranked second only to Texas in war-related contracts. Many of the war's most famous American commanders—notably George C. Marshall, Alexander Archer Vandergrift, Douglas MacArthur, and George S. Patton—had strong ties to Virginia. More than 300,000 Virginians served in uniform, some 7,000 of whom died.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration Affairs figures, there are only about 1.2 million World War II veterans alive today, with some 600 dying and that total falls by approximately 600 every day. The dwindling number of World War II veterans should be recognized as the "final living threads to a fabled American past."

#### **Second meeting: September 8, 2015**

Brigadier General (USA, Ret.) John W. Mountcastle offered reflections on World War II, the deadliest and most significant event of the twentieth century, and subsequent commemorations of the war. By the war's end, 50 nations were involved in the conflict. At least 60 million people, and possibly as many as 80 million, died as a result of the war. As many as 25 million died in combat or in prisoner-of-war camps. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 drew the United States into the conflict on two fronts. The goal of America's war effort in the European theatre involved planning and preparations for

the D-Day invasion of German-occupied Europe at Normandy, the massive Allied operation directed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. General Mountcastle noted that more than half of the casualties of the first day of the Normandy invasion were American.

During the 50th anniversary commemoration of the war, from 1990 to 1995, approximately 6,000 local committees were dedicated to commemorative activities. Brochures were produced about military campaigns, the Army Nurse Corps, etc. D-Day commemorations have taken place in Normandy every 10 years with the participation of American veterans, whose numbers are dwindling. A limited number of veterans were present, for example, at the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings in 2014 and of V-J Day this summer. General Mountcastle described veterans of World War II as amazing men and women to whom we owe everlasting thanks. He expressed the hope that for the 75th anniversary we will be able to honor and recognize them appropriately.

The Commission adopted a logo and approved a website design ([www.VirginiaWorldWarII.org](http://www.VirginiaWorldWarII.org)). Staff summarized feedback received from discussions with members and stakeholders:

- a. Ensure that the commemoration has a statewide reach, involving museums, historic sites, colleges and universities, and localities across the state (commemorative communities). Localities would apply for permission to use the Commission's logo.
- b. Record stories and scan documents, following the model of the Civil War 150 Legacy Project and videos of veterans recorded by the Virginia War Memorial.
- c. Rather than staging a single event in 2016, hold events over the entire four-year period to commemorate World War II milestones.
- d. Identify a key scholar or military leader as voice of the commemoration.

The Commission approved holding its first major event on December 8, 2016, in conjunction with the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declaration of war. The event will focus on veterans and be held at the Robins Center at the University of Richmond.

### **Advisory Council meeting: December 10, 2015**

The Commission formed an Advisory Council composed of museum partners, tourism officials, educators, historians, and stakeholders, who came together to provide input and expertise in planning for the commemoration. Included in the Advisory Council were representatives of the United States World War I Centennial Commission, who addressed the benefits of partnering between the state's efforts to commemorate World War I and World War II.

Commission members requested Advisory Council input on seven specific topics, which were discussed in small groups. A summary of the detailed responses offered by members of the Advisory Council is below.

#### **1. What should be the overall vision for the commemoration?**

*Pay tribute to veterans, but also treat the war as a global struggle that involved the entire population and had a tremendous impact not just on Virginia and the nation as a whole, but on individual people.*

**2. What events, programs, or projects would you hope to see for Virginia's observance of the 75th anniversary of World War II?**

*Sponsor a wide variety of inclusive programs to honor veterans and educate the present generation. Coordinate efforts with local committees and make the fullest use of the many resources Virginia has to offer, such as libraries and museums. Be guided by the message that by remembering veterans of the past, we are also communicating to current soldiers that they will not be forgotten either.*

**3. The Commission's first Signature Event will be a National Veterans Tribute on December 8, 2016, at the University of Richmond. What is important to include at that event?**

*Pay a tasteful tribute to the veterans and even involve them in an inclusive program along with scholars and others, but don't wear them out.*

**4. How can the work of the Commission, or the opportunities afforded by the 75th anniversary commemoration, best serve your organization or institution?**

*Provide grant funding opportunities, and work together and plan events that will result in increased visitors to sites in Virginia and more revenue.*

**5. How can your organization or institution support the work of the Commission?**

*Partnership and collaboration are the keywords. Organizations have information and other resources to help the Commission achieve its goals.*

**6. How do we ensure that the commemoration appeals to a broad spectrum, including those who are not history buffs or have a personal connection to the war? What perspectives are important to include?**

*Using multiple media approaches, link the past to the present and encourage individuals to think about how the war affected their family.*

**7. What are the most important lessons of World War II?**

*The world of 2015 is the child of 1945. We cannot understand our world or ourselves without an understanding of World War II and its tremendous impact on nations, groups, and individuals.*

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