

WORLD WAR II 75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE

The Honorable M. Kirkland Cox, Chairman

July 7, 2015

10:30 a.m.

Members present: Delegate Richard L. Anderson, Delegate M. Kirkland Cox, Delegate John M. O'Bannon, Delegate Marcus Simon, Senator Charles J. Colgan, Sr., Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr. Charles F. Bryan, Jr., BG John Mountcastle, USA, Ret., and Jon Hatfield (ex officio)

The World War II 75th Anniversary Commemoration Commission (the Commission) held its first meeting in Richmond on July 7, 2015. Delegate Cox was elected chairman and Senator Ruff was elected vice-chairman.

Staff briefing

Cheryl Jackson

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. It is composed of four members of the House of Delegates, two members of the Senate of Virginia, and two nonlegislative citizen members (BG Mountcastle and Dr. Bryan). 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 is funded by unexpended balances from the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission in the amount of \$1,000,000.

Ms. Jackson reviewed important dates in World War II and discussed determining the goals and scope of the Commission's work, including coordinating and collaborating with national partners. Ms. Jackson reviewed the work of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission (the Sesquicentennial 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.

Members asked for more information about the Sesquicentennial Commission grant program, which was administered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation and which provided 1:1 matching grants to local partners to market and promote sesquicentennial events and programs, including funding new Civil War Trails interpretive markers. The grants were available on a reimbursable basis, and each recipient was required to collaborate with at least three partners, including the local tourism office or destination marketing organization. In total, the grant program awarded \$253,000, which was matched by an additional \$344,000 from recipient organizations and partners.

Members also expressed interest in repurposing the Civil War 150 HistoryMobile and requested additional information on plans for its use after the conclusion of sesquicentennial activities.

Importance of World War II and opportunities to commemorate its 75th anniversary *Charles F. Bryan, Jr.*

Dr. Bryan gave members a quiz that highlighted the importance of World War II. The year 2016 will mark the 75th anniversary of America's entry into World War II, marking a turning point in a 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.

Dr. Bryan discussed the last great reunion of Civil War veterans from the north and south, which took place in July 1938, on the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. At the time, the nation was aware that the last living links to a turning point in our nation's history were slipping away. Some 1,900 Union and Confederate veterans, many in uniform, came to Gettysburg to share stories and be honored. President Franklin Roosevelt attended and gave a speech at the dedication of the Peace Monument on Oak Hill. One year later, only two Civil War veterans remained alive.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration Affairs figures, there are only about 1.2 million World War II veterans are alive today, with some 600 dying and that total falls by approximately 600 every day. As was done for were Civil War veterans in 1938, the dwindling number of World War II veterans should be recognized as the "final living threads to a fabled American past."

Discussion of plans

Members discussed the goals of the commemoration, including tourism, education, and local programs held statewide. There was a strong consensus that the reunion event should be held in late 2016, as the aging of veterans works against a longer planning time. Members discussed the scope, location, and duration of the reunion event, and directed staff to collect ideas and develop a proposed event outline for discussion at the next meeting.

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be held September 8, 2015 at 11:00 a.m. in Richmond