

World War II 75th Anniversary Commemoration Commission

Delegate M. Kirkland Cox, Chairman

September 8, 2015

11:00 a.m.

Commission members present: M. Kirkland Cox (Chairman), Frank M. Ruff, Jr. (Vice-Chairman), Delegate John M. O'Bannon III, Delegate Marcus Simon, Brigadier General (USA, Ret.) John Mountcastle, Jon C. Hatfield.

Call to Order

Chairman Cox called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of World War II

Brigadier General (USA, Ret.) John W. Mountcastle, Ph.D.

General 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, with great loss of men and matériel, 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.

Although 855,000 WWII veterans are still living, their numbers are falling by 492 per day. Commemorations of WWII offer opportunities to say thank you, while we can, to aging veterans of the conflict for their courage and sacrifice.

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.

Video: "Soaring Valor: Gary Sinise Brings World War II Veterans to National Museum"

The video “Soaring Valor: Gary Sinise Brings World War II Veterans to National Museum” was shown. Chairman Cox noted that it is full of ideas to inspire our events and make them even more special and asked members to make note of particular ideas that resonate with them.

Staff Updates

Cheryl Jackson, Executive Director

1. Logo and website

Ms. Jackson introduced Rusty Nix, HistoryMobile tour manager, who used to work at the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford and has been providing assistance with logo and website design. Ms. Jackson and Mr. Nix submitted concepts for the logo and website for consideration. Chairman Cox and members praised staff for their quick work and invited input from members. It was noted that the website will evolve and grow and that it allows users to upload pictures of themselves or family members who fought in the war.

Senator Ruff made a motion to approve the concepts for the logo and website. Delegate Simon seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

2. Economic impact of sesquicentennial events

Ms. Jackson presented highlights of the recent Chmura Economics & Analytics analysis of the impact of sesquicentennial events. The study estimated the total economic impact of the events at \$290.3 million. The state received approximately \$8.4 million in tax revenue. The Signature Conference series, which attracted 6,254 attendees, had a total economic impact of \$3.7 million. Forty-one percent of conference attendees were local residents who traveled 50 miles or less to attend, 43 percent were from Virginia but traveled more than 50 miles to attend, and 16 percent of conference attendees came from out of state. The Signature Conference series may provide a useful model for events marking the 75th anniversary of World War II.

3. Feedback from discussions and review of recommendations

Ms. Jackson summarized feedback from recent discussions and meetings on the World War II 75th Anniversary Commemoration Commission (the Commission):

a. Hold a statewide commemoration to involve 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, etc., as voice of the commemoration.

After talking with a number of stakeholders, consensus for the first major event is for December 8, 2016, in conjunction with the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declaration of war. Holding the reunion event on that date both avoids conflict with major events that will be occurring December 7 at the World War II Memorial on the National Mall and allows invitees and attendees to extend their visit and take part in both events. Members stressed that it is important that it be a large-scale event with speakers who will draw a crowd.

Staff recommends using the Robins Center at the University of Richmond (UR) for the event. Staff and logistics of the Robins Center are excellent, and ground-level entry and other features pose fewer accessibility problems than at other sites. The event will begin with an Honor Parade, veterans will receive a special commemorative coin, and there will be opportunity for digitization and videotaping of veterans' stories.

General Mountcastle expressed the hope that the December 8 event do more than duplicate Pearl Harbor commemorations taking place December 7. Rather than simply remembering the attack, December 8 would be a more inclusive event because the whole nation went to war that day. Delegate O'Bannon asked whether the commemorative event can be tied to Richmond, where a huge munitions plant was located during the war. In response to questions, Ms. Jackson noted that the event would be planned initially for 2,000 participants, but can easily be scaled up or down, depending on registration. Veterans would be seated on the ground level, and the concourse level would be open for displays, oral history and archiving stations, etc. The event will be free and open to the public. Lunch will be provided for veterans and one guest.

Executive Director Jon Hatfield responded that staff of the Virginia War Memorial would be happy to work with the Commission. Delegate Simon added that the World War II commemoration also presents an opportunity to collect first-person accounts of the Holocaust; for that, we could work with the Virginia Holocaust Museum.

Delegate O'Bannon made a motion that the event proceed as outlined. Senator Ruff seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

4. Recommendations for Advisory Council

Ms. Jackson reviewed ideas for membership on the proposed Advisory Council, which hold its first meeting before the end of the year to bring together experts and stakeholders to further the work of the Commission.

A motion to approve the Advisory Council recommendation was made by Delegate Simon and seconded by Senator Ruff. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.