



Virginia World War I and World War II Commemoration Commission



July 7, 2020, at 1:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

VirginiaWWIandWWII.org



The Virginia World War I and World War II Commemoration Commission (the Commission) met virtually with Delegate M. Kirkland Cox, chair, presiding.¹ The meeting began with introductions and opening remarks followed by presentations and discussion. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's website](#). Video of the meeting is archived on the [House of Delegates Video Streaming page](#).

A Better World Shall Emerge: 75th Anniversary of the End of WWII

Lily Jones, Division of Legislative Services

Ms. Jones presented plans for the culminating event in Virginia's statewide commemoration of the 75th anniversary of WWII, which will take place on Wednesday, September 2, 2020, in Norfolk. The Commission will host a ceremony on the deck of the USS *Wisconsin* docked at the Nauticus museum. The USS *Wisconsin* is a battleship of the same class as the USS *Missouri*, the battleship on which the Japanese document of surrender to the Allied Powers was signed by General Douglas MacArthur in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945.

The Commission originally planned to host a large public event and gathering of WWII veterans, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event has been reenvisioned as a virtual event with no audience on site. Revised plans for the event include a ceremony beginning at 9:00 a.m. aboard the USS *Wisconsin*, emceed by Greg McQuade, of WTVR CBS 6. After opening remarks and a reading of General MacArthur's September 2, 1945, speech, the ship's horn will blow at 9:08 a.m. to mark the exact time of the signing of the surrender document and the official end of the war.

A keynote address by Chris Kolakowski, director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, will be livestreamed from Wisconsin. Mr. Kolakowski is the former director of the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk. Remote greetings will be livestreamed from April Cheek-Messier at the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford and Clay Mountcastle at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond. A camera will be set up at a veterans care center to feature WWII veterans in the ceremony. The ceremony will conclude with a video summarizing the work of the 75th anniversary commemoration and a flyover.

Following the overview of the ceremony, Commission members discussed plans and logistics for the event. Senator Bryce E. Reeves asked whether there would be a United States Navy presence at the ceremony. Rick Oertel, legislative aide for veteran affairs for Delegate Cox, replied that he had initiated contact and would work with Senator Reeves to further coordinate the Navy's role,

¹ **Members Present:** Delegate M. Kirkland Cox (chair), Senator Bryce E. Reeves, Delegate Marcus B. Simon, Clay Mountcastle, BG John W. Mountcastle (USA, Ret.)

Members Absent: Senator Richard L. Saslaw, Charles F. Bryan, Jr., John Maxwell

which would include the presence of dignitaries at the ceremony and Navy sailors to line the decks of the ship. Delegate Marcus B. Simon requested that the Commission keep in mind social distancing best practices in planning the event and minimize the number of people present.

Steve Combs, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services (DVS), offered to help the Commission find a WWII veteran who was present on the USS *Missouri* in 1945 to participate in the ceremony. DVS will also help promote the virtual ceremony through its newsletter.

Michael Coleman, Office of the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, said he has contacted the Navy about participating in the ceremony but that current Navy restrictions would limit the number of persons on the ship to 10.

Summary and Final Report on the Commission's Work

Rusty Nix, Virginia Tourism Corporation, and Lily Jones, Division of Legislative Services

Mr. Nix presented a final summary of several of the Commission's ongoing initiatives. The Commission's Profiles of Honor Tour, a mobile exhibit highlighting Virginia's role in WWI and WWII, toured the state from 2016 to 2019, making 153 tour stops and reaching 47,000 visitors, including 15,000 students. The Profiles of Honor scanning project traveled with the tour, collecting more than 10,000 photos, letters, and other documents related to WWI and WWII for permanent archival and public access at the Library of Virginia.

Ms. Jones presented an overview of the events hosted by the Commission during the commemoration. On December 8, 2016, the Commission held its first signature event at the Robins Center at the University of Richmond to mark the 75th anniversary of the United States' entry into WWII. Nine hundred attendees, including 80 WWII veterans, were present to commemorate the anniversary. In 2017, the Commission commemorated the 100th anniversary of the United States' entry into WWI with a ceremony at the Carillon in Richmond and the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Midway with a symposium at the MacArthur Memorial. In 2018, the Commission worked with the Virginia War Memorial and DVS to host a major event commemorating the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day at the Carillon, which included a bell tolling, the annual Commonwealth's Veterans Day Ceremony, and an Armistice Day Festival that featured WWI-related exhibits and activities. In 2019, the Commission worked with the National D-Day Memorial to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day in Bedford on June 6. The D-Day ceremony had 100 WWII veterans in attendance.

The Commission also hosted a series of 12 teacher symposiums over the course of three years, in the summers of 2017, 2018, and 2019, dedicated to providing teachers with classroom resources related to WWI and WWII. Commission staff and presenters from 18 museums in Virginia traveled to every region in the state to host the symposiums.

Following the staff overview of the Commission's work, Delegate Cox noted that staff members will create a video summary highlighting the events of the four-year commemoration, to be shown at the September 2, 2020, final ceremony in Norfolk.

Other Business

Delegate Cox told members that this would be the last meeting of the Commission and that the commemoration would conclude with the final event on September 2. He thanked the members



of the Commission, Ms. Jones, Mr. Nix, and the Commission's first executive director, Cheryl Wilson, for their work in making the commemoration successful.

For more information, see the [*Commission's website*](#) or contact the Division of Legislative Services staff:

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