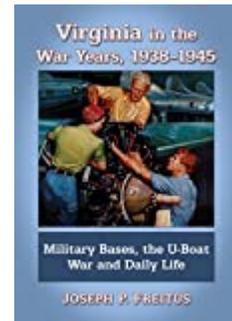


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joe Freitus. *Virginia in the War Years, 1938-1945: Military Bases, the U-Boat War and Daily Life.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2014. 208 pp. \$39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-7966-5.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Tom Brokaw called them the “Greatest Generation” yet we really know little about them except for those who were soldiers, sailors, or airmen and then only if they were overseas. Joseph Freitus is one of the few who provides us with a story about those members of the Greatest Generation who did their duty for the cause of liberty and freedom on the home front, for they were heroes and heroines also. They sacrificed much so those who served overseas could do so knowing that their homeland was safe and secure. The men and women who served on the home front successfully accomplished a myriad of tasks to ensure those who served overseas were well fed, supplied, and had the necessary tools to accomplish their missions. Author Freitus focuses on those unsung heroes and heroines who hailed from the Commonwealth of Virginia, and we are fortunate that he tells us their story.

Joseph Freitus is a retired teacher living in Williamsburg, VA, who hails from West Groton, MA. According to his bio he is a Depression-era child who grew up during World War II and as an adult fought in the Korean War. His interests are writing about real people and their stories, particularly those of the Greatest Generation. He is not a novice when it comes to writing about history or military subjects. Interestingly, his publications are not limited to those two genres. He has received writ-

ing awards from the Women’s Clubs of America, the Audubon Society, and *National Wildlife*. In short, he is well qualified to write this well-researched and interesting book.

It is unfortunate that too many Americans know so little about the history of this country. Today’s politically correct society and the rewriting of history have done great damage to our understanding of our past. This book by Joseph Freitus helps to reverse those two trends. At first glance this book appears to be aimed at the residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia; to accept that notion is to miss the author’s point, but more about that later.

Freitus begins his coverage of the war years by providing an introductory chapter that establishes the context for the narrative that follows. For example, he quotes a letter from one Mary Kitchner, who talked about the difficulties her family survived during the Great Depression. Her family lived on a five-acre farm and her father had a paying job until the Depression set in and he lost his job at the mill. As the 40s approached and the economy turned around they were looking forward to brighter times, but that dream came to an abrupt end on Sunday December 7, 1941.

With the stage set the author introduces the reader to the military situation by discussing the three services—the Navy, Army, and Coast Guard, in that order. The two chapters about the Navy and Army are a bit slow although they do contain interesting tidbits of information, such as that the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in Lexington established a training program in special engineering areas for enlisted sailors, marines, and soldiers. The organization of these chapters makes for slow reading; the author lists each community in alphabetical order and notes what the particular service did in that particular community. What he writes about the Navy and Army at VMI is virtually the same. However, if you are interested in what happened in your vicinity or you are conducting research, then this organizational structure is well suited to your needs.

The chapter about the Coast Guard is very interesting and is a good bridge between the US military services and the chapter about the submarine war. In this chapter he discusses in detail the Corsair Fleet, also referred to as the “Bucket Brigade” and the Beach Patrol. An interesting fact is that from January 1942 to June 1942 approximately four hundred merchant ships were sunk along the East Coast from Florida to New York (p. 73). This figure does not include the ships sunk in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, or off the New England coast.

The author’s section about the home front is superb. In the first chapter of this section he discusses larger issues such as wartime industries, housing, rationing, and the draft system. It is the chapters about women and African Americans at war that make this section truly amazing. The reason for this is that little attention is paid to these two groups in the literature of the Second World

War. It is highly recommended that you read the book to learn about the contributions to the war effort by women and African Americans rather than have someone, such as a reviewer, tell you about them.

The author next discusses the Civil Air Patrol, which played a pivotal role in diminishing the German submarine threat up and down and around the East and Gulf Coasts. It may have been better to wrap this chapter into the one about the submarine war. By doing so the author could have added more excitement to that chapter.

The author concludes his discussion with chapters about prisoner-of-war camps, and the POWs themselves, that were located throughout Virginia; the hurricane of 1944; and war stories, which are rather interesting and provide the reader with a personal perspective from many who lived during the period covered by the work. If the reader is a doctoral student in need of a dissertation topic, one of the personal accounts, that of RN Josielee V. Callahan, stands out. Callahan served as a nurse in one of the three US base hospitals in Russia. She not only talked about her experiences, but mentioned the American shuttle bombing missions, Operation Frantic, from England and Italy to the Soviet Union and back.

Perhaps one of the strongest parts of Freitas’s book for the researcher is the three appendices. The first one lists the military museums and their locations in Virginia; the second one lists the military installations in Virginia during the period 1938-45; and the third contains historical resources and contact information.

All in all this is a very good book to include in your WWII library, especially if you are a Virginian or a historian. It is highly recommended.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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