**Sacred Scenes: American Parks and Battlefields**

**The Photography of Amanda Ransom**

Amanda Ransom is a US Army veteran, wife, and mother. She served in the Army from 2010 until 2013, when her tour was cut short because of illness. She uses photography as a therapeutic outlet and hopes to share this method of stress relief with fellow veterans and others who are struggling. She has used the camera as a tool to overcome stress and social anxiety and as an important means of self-expression. In her photographs, Ransom strives to bring awareness to America’s beauty and history. A self-taught photographer, she specializes in macrophotography and enjoys capturing beauty in the smallest details.

**The Photography of Frank Lee Ruggles**

Frank Lee Ruggles—who describes himself as the “Warrior-Artist”—drew on his creative eye and his physical endurance (acquired during paratrooper training) to document the oft-threatened natural beauty of our country during a 5,000-day, 100,000-mile journey that took him through 315 National Parks and Forests. His critically acclaimed photography documents the often-threatened natural beauty of this country. His 79 Years Project is a pictorial survey of environmental changes in our National Parks, comparing modern photographs he took with those taken in the exact same locations 79 years earlier by Ansel Adams. Ruggles currently serves as the official photographer of the US Army Historical Foundation.

**Visit the Veterans’ Art Gallery now through May 2021 to see the photography of Amanda Ransom and Frank Lee Ruggles.**

**ALSO NEW — In the C. Kenneth Wright Pavilion**

During the most recent expansion of the Virginia War Memorial — the construction of the C. Kenneth Wright Pavilion — the archives and USS Birmingham Research Library were moved to allow for more efficient space for cataloguing, processing, and researching. Within our research library are titles focused on the military service of Virginians, along with works that deal with the history of military conflicts that Virginians have participated in. Our bound volumes include rare and out-of-print books as well as unit histories, yearbooks, and rosters; in addition, our collection includes manuscript letters, photographs, and military documents. Due to space limitations, the library policy is to focus on materials that may not be readily available elsewhere. The library is a noncirculating collection and is available to anyone by appointment. You can search the library holdings online at vawarmemorial.org/learn/collections-and-library.

Rear Adm. John Matrocci (1920–2014), a longtime Virginia War Memorial board member and supporter, and his fellow members of the USS Birmingham (CL-62) Association, raised the necessary funds to establish our research library. The Birmingham’s outstanding tours of service were highly decorated and are well documented in World War II naval history. Possibly her most courageous maneuver was attempting to aid the stricken aircraft carrier USS Princeton (CVL-23) in 1944. During that effort 239 men died, 408 were wounded, and the bodies of four were never recovered. John Matrocci was among the seriously wounded.

We always welcome items for consideration in the archives. Are you a Veteran? Is your family member? We are looking for materials that tell the diverse story of Virginians who have served. Please reach out if you would like to speak about donating your materials — physically or digitally — to the archives. Contact Archivist Heidi Sheldon by email at heidi.sheldon@dvs.virginia.gov.

**IT’S NOT TOO LATE TO USE YOUR CARES BENEFIT**

A key provision of the CARES Act allows you to deduct up to $300 ($600 if filing jointly) from your income taxes even if you don’t itemize deductions in 2020. A year-end gift to the Virginia War Memorial Foundation is a great way to activate this one-time benefit. Make your gift before December 31, 2020, and help us share and preserve the stories of our brave veterans.
The winning high school essay was written by Matthew Misckowski, an 11th-grader at Deep Run High School in Henrico County. His teacher, Andrew Heare, was present for the ceremony.

When I was younger, I would sit at the floor at my grandfather’s house next to a kindly older gentleman who would tell me stories about living in airplanes. I was very young and only knew him as some old guy I was related to but it wasn’t until later that I realized I had the honor of knowing someone from the Greatest Generation. That someone was my grandfather, Michael Troyanoski.

Michael Troyanoski was a Sergeant in the United States Army Air Corps during WWII. He was a navigator, engineer, radio operator and gunner on B-17s and B-24s and flew in 37 bombing raids over Europe, destroying targets that were critical to the Nazi war machine. Later, he was stationed in South America as part of search and rescue operations in the Pacific. I had no idea that the man holding my Thomas the Tank Engine toy was a war hero who fought for the freedom of future generations. I would listen to his tales but unfortunately I could not appreciate them as I had no understanding what a B-17 was or where Germany was. Now that I am sixteen and more knowledgeable about the history and events that led up to WWII, I understand the great tragedy is that his stories would never touch my ears again as Michael Troyanoski passed away when I was 9. Regrettably, there are no recordings or handwritten notes of these stories. He had many old black and white photos of planes and places that we keep meticulously safe and treasured. Pictures of a young man in a uniform and a much too big overcoat with a duffel bag standing in line with other young men boarding the train to basic training or a B-17 limping back to home base, smoke pouring out of its engine and the gunner bubble blown to smithereens. Of these pictures show the stark reality of war while others show young men just being happy to have survived another day.

As a young man, my grandfather had big hopes and dreams but all that changed on December 7th, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Michael Troyanoski was just one of the millions of American men and women who took up arms against injustice. Some volunteered, some were drafted but all went to battle not knowing when they would come home or if they would come home. My grandfather was one of the lucky ones and made it back to the small coal-mining town in Pennsylvania where he grew up. He came home, married, started a family and took over the family business. When he talked about his time in WWII he talked about the friends he made places he saw and most of all the planes. He loved those airplanes. He never talked about the missions and the loss of life he experienced until one day my mom was helping him preserve the treasured photos and found pictures she had never seen before. Pictures of planes destroyed in battle, smoke coming from enemy ships sinking into the sea, and scarred and curled earth seen from the planes as they flew over the land they had just targeted. When asked what these were pictures of he told his other stories. The stories he did not like to share because they dredged up sadness and questions of why did he survive when so many others didn’t. But that is what the Greatest Generation did. They came home and carried on with their lives and shut away all the horror they had been through. We call them the Greatest Generation but they were a modest group of men and women. Never recognizing themselves as the heroes that they were but just as individuals doing what they had to do for God and their country.

To this day, the image of my grandfather still shins as a bright beacon, which inspires me to be the best person that I can be. And one day I hope to be half the man that my grandfather was. We call them the greatest generation because of their humility, commitment, bravery and love of their country and there will never be another group like them. I close by saying that from their stories and pictures they will continue to inspire future generations to unite, to commit and defend the honor of this country.
During World War II Who Inspires You

Why Luta Mae McGrath, “The First Lady of Ordnance,” Inspires Me

Our middle school essay contest winner was Niamh Moreno, a seventh-grader at the Basilica School of St. Mary in Alexandria. Her teacher is Jacklin McKee.

When I think about service to my country, a veteran who inspires me is Luta Mae Cornelius McGrath who was known as “The First Lady of Ordnance.” Luta Mae McGrath joined the United States Army in 1943 to fight in World War II and she served for 17 years until she retired as a lieutenant colonel (LTC). When she died at her home in Virginia in 2016, she was 108 years old and one of the oldest female survivors of World War II and the Cold War. LTC McGrath was honored by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2015, and to me her story is the perfect example of public service and courage and what women can accomplish.

LTC McGrath was born in Beattyville, Kentucky on November 21, 1907. Her father died when she was five years old, leaving her mother poor and raising three children. LTC McGrath lived in Beattyville for most of her childhood. She was a young woman when World War II began, and she enlisted in the Woman’s Army Auxiliary Corps in 1943.

In the Army, LTC McGrath was assigned to the Ordnance Corps, which is the department that supports the development of weapons. She was first stationed in Texas, and in interviews stated that while she was usually treated with respect by the male soldiers some of them resented women taking their jobs. She worked in Texas for four years where she helped the Army produce the weapons that were used to fight in World War II.

In 1947, LTC McGrath was sent to Germany. She helped to coordinate the Berlin Airlift, which was a plan to help the section of Berlin that supports the development of weapons. She was first stationed in Texas, and in interviews stated that while she was usually treated with respect by the male soldiers some of them resented women taking their jobs. She worked in Texas for four years where she helped the Army produce the weapons that were used to fight in World War II.

In 1949, LTC McGrath was assigned to the Ordnance Corps and retired after 17 years as a lieutenant colonel which was the highest rank ever achieved by a woman at that time. She and her husband retired to Amundale, Virginia where they lived the remainder of her life. The two never had children, but LTC McGrath was very active in her community and in supporting the military.

She worked for the Women in Community Service group and the Army Ordnance community gave her the nickname “The First Lady of Ordnance.” LTC McGrath was also very religious and attended mass every day at Queen of Apostles Church in Alexandria.

I cannot imagine how frightening it must have been for LTC McGrath to join the Army at a time when the entire world was at war and very few women were able to join the military. Her service in Texas helped to develop the tanks and missiles that helped the United States win the war. Her service in Germany helped to fight the Soviet Union and prevent another war. She stayed in the Army for many years and proved her commitment to her country and fellow Americans.

Both my parents served in the United States Army in Iraq, and my mother together with veterans like LTC McGrath helped make it possible for women today to serve. LTC McGrath showed leadership and bravery, and her long life is one to be very proud of.

I wish I could have interviewed LTC McGrath for this essay to learn more about her experience in the Army, but I visited her at Arlington National Cemetery, and left a flag at her grave to show my great respect for her life.

Matthew’s and Niamh’s essays can also be found on our website along with the sources quoted in their works.
Now available for your special event

The Virginia War Memorial Foundation rents its beautifully appointed indoor and outdoor spaces for private events, within the parameters defined by the Governor’s most recent executive order concerning COVID-19 safety precautions. Call Kerrie Arcand at (804) 786-2176 or send an email to karcand@vawarmemorial.org.

STRUGGLING WITH GIFT IDEAS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON?
Consider selections from our Weinberg Memorial Store. Visit on-site or online at VaWarMemorial.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS
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VaWarMemorial.org

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Richmond, Virginia 23220
OPEN — Monday – Saturday: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Sunday: noon – 4 p.m.
Shrine of Memory: open 5 a.m. to midnight daily
CLOSED — New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day
VaWarMemorial.org

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Speak Their Names
The Speak Their Names Cities and Counties Initiative ensures that the stories of Virginia’s fallen veterans from World War II and the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf — as well as those from the Global War on Terrorism — will be kept alive for current and future generations. Nearly 12,000 names, engraved in stone and on walls of glass, represent men and women from a grateful Commonwealth. The cities, towns, and counties represented here by a flame of patriotism are taking care to speak the names of those to whom we owe so much.

CITIES
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South Boston

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South Hill

MADISON

Wytheville

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Stafford

Fauquier

Stafford

Nottoway

Southampton

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If your city or county would like to support our Speak Their Names Initiative, please contact us at mmwachuri@vawarmemorial.org or 301-580-1488. Or visit VaWarMemorial.org/SpeakTheirNames.