

March 11, 2021

Dear Members,

It's been nearly a year since I wrote with the sad but inevitable news that the Society for Military History was compelled to cancel its 2020 annual meeting in Arlington, VA. Soon afterward, the Society's leadership began planning for the contingency that the COVID pandemic would stretch into 2021 and potentially affect this year's conference in Norfolk. As a result of this planning, we hosted our first-ever virtual "mini-conference" via Zoom in November as a proof of concept for a virtual meeting, extended the deadline for the submission of proposals, and postponed the 2021 meeting from March to late May.

Early indications are that these measures have paid off. "SMH 2020.5" was a great success in its own right and bestowed valuable lessons on organizing and hosting a virtual conference. The Program Committee has assembled 81 exciting panels for the 2021 meeting. And the postponement to May has made possible something that we dared not hope for only weeks ago—the prospect of hosting an in-person meeting for those able and willing to travel.

Yet we also remain committed to allowing participation for those who either cannot or chose not to travel to Norfolk. This was a pledge that I made in my remarks at SMH 2020.5, and one we will uphold by organizing SMH 2021 as a hybrid conference. This means that presenters will have the option of participating virtually, and members will be able to "attend" the conference from the comfort and safety of their homes. The [registration page](#) for physical attendance is now open; that for virtual attendance will be published later this month.

Some members have expressed concern about our decision not to conduct SMH 2021 as an entirely virtual conference. Four major considerations recommended the hybrid model to us: (1) virtual participation is an option for all members, (2) a significant portion of our membership expects to be fully vaccinated by the time of the meeting and has signaled a desire to attend in person, (3) the state of Virginia is providing guidelines for the safe conduct of gatherings such as this, and (4) in light of the above, our contractual obligations to the hosting hotel remain in force. In short, the hybrid model best allows us to balance the wishes and wellbeing of our members with our duty of care to the Society.

The choice of whether to attend in person or virtually is of course yours to make. I will offer two thoughts for your consideration, however. First, let me assure you that Bryon Greenwald and every member of the local event staff will exercise all reasonable and responsible precautions to ensure your safety should you decide to attend in person; a full list of these measures will be published to the conference website soon. Second, virtual registration will be offered at a discounted rate, but it will not be free. Since the IT requirements for a fully hybrid conference such as this are considerable, the Society simply cannot afford to offer virtual registration *gratis*. The cost of virtual attendance will depend in part on the number of attendees who pay the full rate and the number of panels with at least one virtual participant. Ultimately, SMH 2021 may operate at a net loss for the Society, but the Council believes strongly that we

owe it to our members and our field to host this meeting, notwithstanding the trying circumstances.

Whether you attend in person or via Zoom, I very much look forward to seeing you in Norfolk for what promises to be an exciting meeting!

Sincerely,

John W. Hall

President