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# D-Day veteran to narrate LSO concert at Bedford memorial

Peter Thomas, whose voice is heard on 'Forensic Files,' will also read poem

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World War II veteran Peter Thomas says standing near the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford is "like standing on the cliffs of Omaha Beach. ... It's a very, very special place."

Thomas was just 18 years old when the D-Day invasion occurred at Omaha Beach; his unit went in on June 6, the day after the initial wave of U.S. Forces

did. In the aftermath of the attack, he says he was struck by the sacrifices the troops had made.

"It was just unbelievable," Thomas says. "I'll never forget what they've done."

When he returned to the U.S. after the war, Thomas penned a poem about D-Day, called "Omaha Beach," and will be reading it this weekend at the D-Day



Thomas

memorial's first-ever symphony orchestra concert, "Sweet Freedom's Song."

The concert, which will be put on by the Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra (LSO), is scheduled for 8 p.m. Saturday and will feature patriotic tunes and music from "Saving Private Ryan" and the HBO miniseries "Band of Brothers," as well as marches by John Philip Sousa and a sing-along led by Lynchburg-based soprano Marcia Jones Thom.

Before the concert begins, LSO will be holding a 6 p.m. reception at the Bedford Tourist Information Center, just down the road from the memorial's

entrance. Attendees at the \$75-per-person event will get the chance to meet LSO conductor Bruce Habitzruther and Thomas — who, in addition to being a D-Day veteran, is also an accomplished voice-over artist and has been narrating Court TV's "Forensic Files" for eight years. His voice has also been heard in commercials for IBM, Exxon, Revlon, Coca Cola and American Express, among others.

While growing up in Florida, Thomas says his British parents (his father was a minister, his mother a teacher), emphasized the importance of diction and memorization.

"My dad used to say it's more than

your voice," Thomas says. "It's in your head ... what you're thinking about on (each) line."

That's what Thomas has to do when working on an episode of "Forensic Files." He's given a script, but never gets to see what the program will look like when it airs.

"I just have to imagine what the pictures are going to be like," he says. "You have to see the pictures in your mind when you speak."

He used the same technique when auditioning to narrate the 1995 documentary "One Survivor Remembers,"

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which tells the story of a Holocaust survivor.

Thomas didn't tell producers that his unit had liberated a concentration camp during World War II, but as he was reading the lines, he says he went "back to April '45 and remembered going into that little town and seeing that concentration camp. ... It's such a horrible memory."

That experience brought depth to his reading, and Thomas got the job. The film later went on to win an Academy Award.

Thomas first got involved with the D-Day memorial in Bedford when he was asked to read "Omaha Beach" at the groundbreaking ceremony. He now sits on its Board of Directors and tries to visit a few times a year.

"I love the place," he says. "I think it's the closest thing to going to Omaha Beach. ... Nothing compares to Bedford. There's a spiritual quality to it."