

UCF's Veterans Legacy Program



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery
Administration



UCF

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Department
of History



Educator Plan (Lecture & Details) for SANC Mini-Tour: WWII Veterans

Suggested Grade Level(s) & Duration

9-12. 45 minutes

Goal

Students will be able to analyze the impact of WWII on Veterans and their families living in Florida.

Essential Question

How did WWII affect responsibilities and roles within the framework of Florida's families?

Next Generation of Social Studies Standards 2023

American History Standard 1: Use research and inquiry skills to analyze American history using primary and secondary sources.

SS.912.A.1.1

Describe the importance of historiography, which includes how historical knowledge is obtained and transmitted, when interpreting events in history.

SS.912.A.1.2

Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period.

SS.912.A.1.3

Utilize timelines to identify the time sequence of historical data.

S.912.A.1.4

Analyze how images, symbols, objects, cartoons, graphs, charts, maps, and artwork may be used to interpret the significance of time periods and events from the past.

American History Standard 6: Understand the causes and course of WWII, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the United States' role in the post-war world.

SS.912.A.6.1

Examine causes, course, and consequences of WWII on the United States and the world.

SS.912.A.6.4

Examine efforts to expand or contract rights for various populations during WWII.

Civics & Government Standard 2: Evaluate the roles, rights, and responsibilities of United States' citizens and determine methods of active participation in society, government, and the political system.

SS.912.CG.2.1

Explain the constitutional provisions that establish and affect citizenship (13, 14, 15, 19 Amendments).

SS.912.CG.2.2

Explain the importance of political and civic participation to the success of the United States Constitutional Republic.

- Students will discuss various ways in which United States citizens can exercise political and civic participation.
- Students will identify historical examples of political and civic participation (e.g., Civil Rights Movement, Women's Suffrage Movement).

SS.912.CG.2.3

Explain the responsibilities of citizens at the local, state, and national levels

- Students will identify various responsibilities held by citizens (e.g., voting, volunteering, and being informed, respecting laws).

SS.912.CG.2.4

Evaluate, take, and defend objective, evidence-based positions on the issues that cause the government to balance the interests of the individuals with the public good.

- Students will examine situations when individuals' rights have been restricted for the public good (e.g., limits on speech or rationing of goods during wartime, enactment of the Patriot Act).

Geography Standard 1: Understand how to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technology to report information.

SS.912.G.1.4

Analyze geographic information from a variety of sources including primary sources, atlases, computer, and digital sources, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a broad variety of maps.

Geography Standard 2: Understand physical characteristics and cultural characteristics of places.

SS.912.G.2.1

Identify the physical characteristics and the human characteristics that define and differentiate regions.

Geography Standard 6: Understand how to apply geography to interpret the past and present and plan for the future.

SS.912.G.6.4

Translate narratives about places and events into graphic representations.

Holocaust Education Standard 1: Analyze the origins of antisemitism and its use by the National Socialist German workers' Party (Nazi) regime.

SS.912.HE.1.3

Students will recognize German culpability, reparation, and military downsizing as effects of the Treaty of Versailles.

Directions

Read the script that correlates with each slide. Suggested time for each slide is provided.

Slide #1

Remembering the Sacrifices of World War II Veterans & Their Families: St. Augustine National Cemetery (SANC).

Slide #2 (1 minute)

Here is an aerial view of St. Augustine National Cemetery. Look over the map and the stopping points listed in the key. What do you notice? What do you think you will learn from this tour? Take a minute to turn and talk with your partner and discuss.

Slide #3 (1 minute)

As you participate in this mini-tour of St. Augustine National Cemetery, focus on this essential question: How did WWII affect responsibilities and roles within the framework of Florida's families?

Slide #4: Introduction: Early 20th-Century Life in Florida (2 minutes)

In the late 19th century, Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway system and Henry Ford's invention of the Model T helped make Florida a tourist destination. People enjoyed visiting the state with balmy temperatures and beautiful waterways so much they soon wanted to own their own ray of sunshine. Business boomed—especially after World War I. Land developers began to fill swampy areas to accommodate the influx of residents and investors. Agriculture played an important part in Florida's business boom, as areas like the cattle and citrus industries flourished. But it soon took a turn. Over-inflated real-estate prices, multiple hurricanes, and Mediterranean fruit fly infestations on citrus caused Florida's economy to suffer. It became more desperate as the Great Depression began in 1929. The stock market crashed, and banks did not have cash in reserve. The unemployment rate in Florida grew to 24.9%. Families were in dire need of help.

Slide #5: A Nation Called to Duty (1 minute)

As the Great Depression continued in the United States, other nations had similar economic woes. Germany was in the midst of a depression and felt that reparations stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles following World War I were an unfair burden. These issues contributed to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party's rise to power throughout the 1930s. Militarism defined both German and Japanese society. The League of Nations was weak because not all countries participated. The United States initially wanted to isolate itself from problems overseas; but on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked a US naval base located at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called on Congress to declare war against Japan, which they did on December 8, 1941.

Slide #6: Florida Goes to War (2 minutes)

Wartime brought revolutionary change to Florida's economy via defense contracts, industrial development, and increasing population size. Florida's geography and climate were well-suited for military training. During WWII, over 170 military installations were established in the state. These included bases like Fort Blanding, which became the fourth largest city in Florida. In Miami, the military contracted nearly 300 hotels to house over 78,000 troops, which brought tourism through the stationed soldiers' visiting families. Overall, Florida's population grew by 46% during the 1940s, largely due to military personnel coming and staying to build post-war livelihoods.

One of Florida's chief exports was citrus. By 1942, Florida's citrus production rate had exceeded that of California's. The US government bought almost all Floridian citrus fruit from 1942-1945, solidifying the state's claim to citrus fame. Florida agriculture boomed as great strides were made in the cotton industry, new insecticide discoveries, and the invention of frozen orange juice concentrate. Florida's booming agricultural contributions were only rivaled by its shipbuilding industry, concentrated in coastal cities like Jacksonville, Tampa, and Panama City. The Sunshine State almost became known as the Steel State!

Slide #7: Florida Goes to War (cont.) (2 minutes)

Over 250,000 Floridians joined the military war effort, but residents all over the state worked hard to support the cause. Families participated in the countrywide practice of creating Victory Gardens, which along with rations helped maintain the food supply. 75,000 Bahamians and Jamaicans came over as hired workers to help keep up with the massive amounts of agricultural production. Children volunteered to watch for enemy aircraft and entire cities regularly conducted blackouts to protect against possible attacks. Women took up new roles in the workforce through industry, agriculture, and military service.

Slide #8: 250,000 Served in the Armed Forces (1 minute)

The 250,000 Floridians who served included men and women and all races. Immigrants, Native Born and Native Americans also joined the Armed Forces. These veterans were husbands, wives, sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters.

They served in all of the Armed Forces including the Army, Navy, Army Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine.

Slide #9: How they are Remembered (1 minute)

All Veterans who served can be remembered with Headstones in National Cemeteries. World War II veterans who died during the war and others who served and came home. After the war, some continued to serve in the armed forces, others went home and worked in their community and had families

Slide #10: Flagstaff and Gold Star Mothers (2 minutes)

As we begin the tour of St. Augustine National Cemetery, the flagstaff stands sentry over those laid to rest and acts as a beacon calling for people to visit. On the evening of August 26, 1975, a ceremony took place to dedicate the first illumination of the flag. Mrs. Golda Palmes, a Gold Star Mother, was chosen to hold this honor.

During the First World War, families displayed a blue star flag inside their windows to honor family members serving active duty. Each star represented one service member within the household, some families displayed multiple stars. A Gold Star Mother is one whose son or daughter dies during active duty or is missing in action. The blue star is covered with a gold one to show a Veteran paid the ultimate sacrifice. The first Gold Star Mother was Mrs. Grace Seibold, whose son, George Vaughn Seibold, went missing in action during World War I. She met with other mothers who had lost children, and also volunteered in hospitals to help wounded Veterans. In 1936, the United States Congress designated the last Sunday in September as Gold Star Mother's Day. Today, the National Organization of American Star Mothers, Inc., continues to foster camaraderie among mothers who have lost children during military service.

Slide #11: Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines (2 minutes)

250,000 Floridians served in the Army, Marines, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. The last two sea going services operate as part of the armed services in wartime. The Merchant Marine took very heavy casualties delivering supplies overseas. The Coast Guard helped guard the merchant ships delivering supplies. Because their casualties remain buried at sea, we do not always see their graves.

These quarter of a million Floridians served and sacrificed across the Globe-New Guinea to Iwo Jima, Italy to Germany, England to Iceland, because the American war efforts encompassed the globe including operations in all major oceans and land masses.

Slide #12: Government Issued Headstones (1 minute)

After the US Civil War, the government issued headstones to Veterans who died during the war and in its aftermath . Initially, these headstones were placed in national cemeteries, like this one. Later, Veterans families who were buried in private cemeteries received these markers. While the format for these headstones change, they usually have information such as the name of the Veteran, the state they lived in, and their rank and unit. The marker may include the Veteran's date of birth and death and a personal inscription requested by the family.

Slide #13: Gold Star Mothers' Children (2 minutes)

Looking to the right of the flagstaff, we have the children of Gold Star Mothers. These Veterans gave their lives in service to us all in World War II. The government gave all Gold Star families an option to bring their loved ones home from overseas. The Veterans in this section were brought home from temporary graves overseas a few years after the war's end. Some families asked the government to bring them home to local cemeteries and they did so.

Slide #14: Jere F. Palmes (1 minute)

Location: D-94 (Forward and to the right of Flagstaff)

Jere F. Palmes, son of Gold Star mother Mrs. Golda Palmes, was born on August 5, 1919. He lived with five siblings in St. Augustine. His father, Russell Palmes, Sr., worked in a freight accounting office. Jere graduated from Ketterlinus High School in 1937. He then worked as a farm hand in Florida for \$12.00 weekly.

Slide #15: Jere F. Palmes (1 minute)

On July 15, 1940, Jere Palmes enlisted in the Florida National Guard. After he trained at Camp Blanding, Florida, he was assigned to the 222nd Infantry, 42nd Regiment, known as the "Rainbow Division." It earned this name because it banded Veterans from so many states to fight together against the enemy. Jere ultimately attained the rank of Captain. On April 25, 1945, the 42nd tried to secure a path across the Danube River in the city of Donauworth, Germany. Jere F. Palmes was mortally wounded during the attack. He was posthumously honored with the Silver Star for his extreme bravery during combat. The Silver Star citation awarded to him indicates that Jere Palmes leapt atop an enemy tank to rally his fellow troops forward.

Slide #16: Russell B. Palmes, Jr. (1 minute)

Location: D-94 R, reverse side of Jere F. Palmes

Russell B. Palmes, Jr. was born September 19, 1916, and was the oldest sibling in the Palmes family. He was born in New Mexico, and as an infant relocated with his family to St. Augustine, Florida in 1920. The Palmes family is therefore representative of the increased interest many American families had in moving to Florida after World War I. After graduating from Ketterlinus High School in 1934, Russell worked at the Matanzas Theatre in St. Augustine, Florida. In 1939, he became a salesman and buyer for Kixie's Men's Shop. He married Mary Whitten in 1942.

Slide #17: Russell B. Palmes, Jr. (1 minute)

Russell B. Palmes enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve on January 15, 1942, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He sailed aboard the *USS Frederick C. Davis* beginning in 1943. At the time he died, Russell was the Chief Storekeeper for the ship. The ship was sailing the Northern Atlantic to provide protection for the United States Eastern Seaboard against German U-boats. On April 24, 1945, one day before Russell Palmes' brother Jere died in Europe, the *USS Frederick C. Davis* was attacked by a German U-boat and sunk in the North Atlantic Ocean. Russell's body was never recovered. He is memorialized on the reverse side of his brother Jere's headstone.

Both of the Palmes brothers were survived by their younger brother, W. Wade Palmes, who also fought in World War II as a Private First Class in the US Army. He came home from the war and lived to the age of 64. He was interred at St. Augustine National Cemetery in 1991.

Slide #18: Robert L. Garbett, Jr. (1 minute) *Location: D-171, back nearer flagstaff*

The hardest Veteran stories are the ones of soldiers who don't make it home, but they often leave a profound impact on the lives they touched along the way. Let's end our tour by learning about Robert Leslie Garbett, Jr. Originally from Maryland and employed as a shipyard electrician, Robert Garbett, Jr. was born on March 18, 1919, and joined the US Army in 1941. He served with Company B, 29th Division, 116th Infantry. While serving in Oxfordshire, England, Robert fell in love with Ms. Hazel Jean Whitehouse; the local newspapers announced their wedding in 1943.

Slide #19: Robert L. Garbett, Jr. (2 minutes)

On June 6th, 1944, allied troops stormed the beaches of Normandy, France, to combat German forces in what became known as D-Day. This incredibly deadly battle was successful but claimed the lives of roughly 10,000 allied soldiers. Robert bravely fought in this battle but was killed on Omaha Beach. His body was originally interred at the St. Laurent-Bayeux Cemetery in Normandy, and was reinterred in the St. Augustine National Cemetery in 1948 so he could lay to rest in his own country. Robert was only 25 years old when he died, but he is an example of a Veteran whose impact remains felt today. One of his combat friends, Harry "Hal" Baumgarten, fought alongside Robert on D-Day and survived. In his 2006 autobiography, *D-Day Survivor*, Hal credits his survival to Robert's advice to not wear his military jacket in the water to avoid drowning. Because he listened to Robert's advice, Hal survived five wounds and came back home to serve his community as a teacher, doctor and Veteran advocate.

Click link for a longer biography by Ryan D. Rasmussen: PLEASE ADD—He's from VLP Institute 2023

Slide #20: Those Who Came Home (1 minute)

Self-Explanatory. Take a minute to reflect on how military service may have affected the Veterans that returned home. Why would somebody re-enlist? Why would they not re-enlist?

Slide #21: Theodore Walter Wengert (1 minute) *Location: A-34-C (flat marker along west wall, forward and to the right of tour stop 3)*

Theodore Walter Wengert, Jr. was born in the Bronx, New York in 1920. Both of his parents were German immigrants, making Theodore a first-generation American citizen. Theodore Walter Wengert is representative of a generation of individuals from immigrant families who fought for the United States in World War II. In the early 1940s, he worked for Fairchild Aviation Group, and later joined the US Air Force. After his service in the Second World War, Theodore served in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He lived to be 93 years old, and is currently the oldest World War II Veteran interred at SANC. His National Cemetery headstone remembers him as a “Beloved Father and Grandpa.”

Slide #22: Theodore Walter Wengert (1 minute)

A member of the 726th Bomb Squad, 451st Bomb Group, 15th Air Force during World War II, Theodore routinely participated in bombing runs over enemy territory. In November 1944, Theodore and his crew, flying in a B-24 bomber plane, went out on a mission to bomb a German synthetic oil refinery. Theodore served as the mission’s flight navigator. During the return flight, his plane dropped out of formation over Hungary and the crew could not be contacted via radio. Ultimately, Theodore and his crew had to bail out via parachute. They were rescued in Yugoslavia by anti-Axis guerrilla fighters called “Partisans,” who eventually helped them safely return to their base.

Slide #23: John Sanchez Gaster (1 minute) *Location: B-374, near pyramids*

Born in 1913, Floridian John Sanchez Gaster enlisted in the US Navy during World War II while working at the St. Augustine Record Company. He served on ships including the *USS Black Hawk* and the *USS St. Paul*. After the war, John owned and operated two auto stores and became a member of the Elks Club (The Elks Club is a fraternal order and social organization active across the US, though it does have a history of perpetuating racial discrimination and racist attitudes). In 1949, John’s wife, Ruth, and his infant daughter died due to complications from childbirth. Both Ruth and the baby were buried in St. Augustine National Cemetery, which is customary for military spouses. Their headstone sits to the right of John’s. Later in 1949, John remarried to Ms. Beatrice Muse, who shares a plot with her husband at SANC. John Gaster died on June 20, 1974.

Slide #24: John Sanchez Gaster (1 minute)

Take a second to look at these pictures of the two ships John served on during the Second World War: the *USS Black Hawk* and the *USS St. Paul*.

Slide #25: Beatrice Muse Gaster (1 minute) *Location: B-374, reverse side of John Sanchez Gaster*

John Gaster’s second wife, Beatrice, served in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II. Born as Harriett “Hattie” Beatrice Muse in 1919, she grew up in Georgia as the daughter of a Spanish-American War Veteran who managed a local market. She was one of eight sisters. By the time she was 19 years old, she had begun going by her middle name “Beatrice” and became a cadet nurse in Atlanta.

Slide #26: Beatrice Muse Gaster (1 minute)

After two years of accelerated nursing training, Beatrice joined the Women’s Army Corps in 1944. She married John Sanchez Gaster in 1949. They built a family and life together, raising their daughter and co-

owning/operating their auto stores. Although widowed in 1974, Beatrice continued her dedication to the military by joining the American Legion, which is the United States' largest wartime Veterans service organization. She died on November 20, 2001.

Slide #27: George Downings, Jr. (1 minute)

Location: D-57 (Forward and to the right of tour stop 2)

George Downings, Jr. was born in Florida in 1925. His mother, Lena, and father, George Sr., originated from South Carolina. George, the youngest child, had three older siblings, Laurie (born circa 1917), Nathan (born circa 1922), and Cliff (born circa 1924). His father worked as a farm laborer in St. Augustine, a career that George Downings, Jr. would also take up prior to his military service. In 1939, George's dad passed away due to hypertension. His mother married George's stepfather, Raymond Walker, in 1940.

Slide #28: George Downings, Jr. (1 minute)

In 1943, George enlisted in the US Navy. His service included time on several vessels including three destroyers (the *USS Harding*, the *USS O'Brien*, and the *USS Moale*), as well as a medium landing ship that was used to transport tanks and other vehicles, the *USS LSM-152*. An African American, Downings worked as a Steward's Mate First Class within the Messman's Branch. This involved feeding, serving food to, and cleaning up after White officers. These roles were given to African American individuals and other people of color, a consequence of systemic racism and policies of segregation in the United States Navy during the mid twentieth century. George Downings, Jr. was honorably discharged from the Navy on Christmas Day, 1945. He died on July 5, 1946, in St. Augustine, Florida at the age of twenty-one.

Please note that there are some inconsistencies in the historical record concerning George Downings, Jr.'s name. For example, while many sources identify him by the name included in these notes, his headstone at SANC refers to him as 'George Junior Downings.' Additionally, some sources pertaining to his life, including census records and Navy muster rolls, alternately use the names 'Downings' and 'Downing.' These inconsistencies in the record are important to note, as they illuminate the humans behind them. Historical sources are created by people who make mistakes, simply don't know some pieces of information, or are influenced by certain biases.

Slide #29: Exit Slip (15-20 minutes)

Read the notes you completed while listening to the Veterans biographies during the mini-tour. Write a one paragraph summary about one selected Veteran answering the following:

- Which Veteran did you most personally connect with?
- Which military branch did they serve in and what did they do?
- How did their service impact the people around them?

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