

Remembering the Sacrifices of World War II Veterans & Their Families

St. Augustine National Cemetery (SANC)

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

National Cemetery
Administration



UCF

**Department
of History**

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA



Tour Stops

1- Flagpole & Gold Star Mothers

2-Jere F. Palmes (D-94) & Russell B. Palmes, Jr. (D-94 R)

3- Robert L. Garbett, Jr. (D-171)

4-Theodore Walter Wengert, Jr. (A-34 C)

5- John Sanchez Gaster (B-374) & Beatrice Muse Gaster (B-374 R)

6-George Downings, Jr. (D-57)



Purpose

- How did WWII affect responsibilities and roles within the framework of Florida's families?
- How did Families Serve and Suffer, Including Mothers?
- How Did Floridians Serve in the Armed Forces?
- How do we remember them at National Cemeteries?

Early 20th-Century Life in Florida



Florida Railroad Map, 1900, from Library of Congress

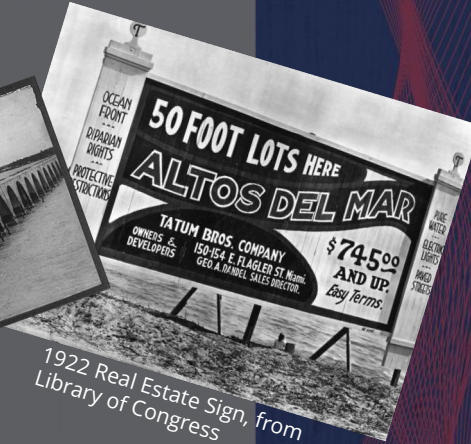


Hurricane of 1906 Hurricane Damage in Pensacola, FL, from Library of Congress

1909 H.M. Fogler's Special, from Library of Congress



1922 Real Estate Sign, from Library of Congress



A Nation Called to Duty

"December 7, 1941-
A Date Which Will Live in Infamy"

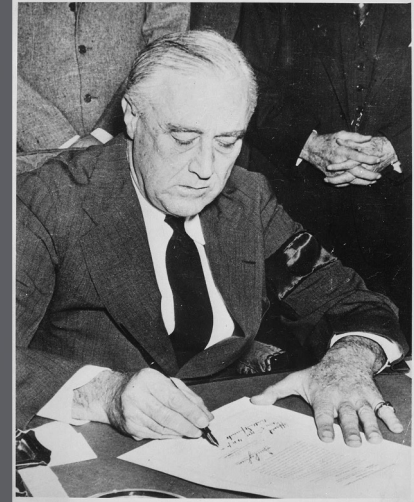
-Franklin D. Roosevelt

Major Causes of WWII

- Economic depression in Germany
- Treaty of Versailles
- Weak League of Nations
- German Invasion of Poland
- Increased aggression by Germany and Japan

Keyword

"Militarism" - The opinions or actions of people who believe that a country should use military methods, forces, etc., to gain power and to achieve its goals.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Declaration of War on December 8, 1941. Picture from National Archives.

Florida Goes to War

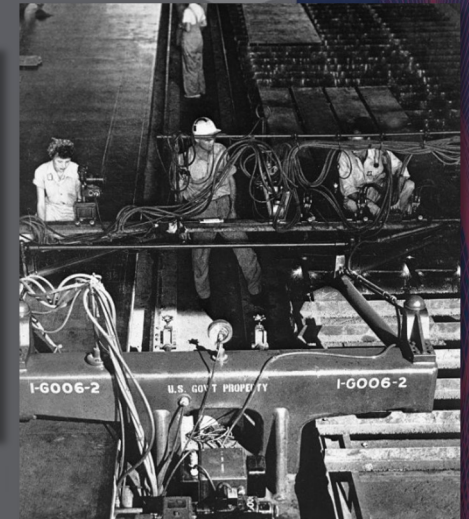
- Geography and climate well-suited for training troops
- Economic growth from government defense contracts
- Top producing citrus state by 1942
- Booming steel and shipbuilding industries



Regional aeronautical chart of Florida



Orange Groves, 1941



St. Johns River Shipbuilding Company

Florida Goes to War



- Community Victory Gardens
- International workforce for agricultural production
- Volunteer enemy aircraft watches
- Industry opportunities for women



250,000 Served in the Armed Forces

Who Served

- Men and Women
- Black and White Americans and all Races
- Immigrants, Native Born and Native Americans
- Family members, Husbands, Wives, Sons, Daughters, Brothers, Sisters.

How they Served

- Army
- Navy
- Army Air Force
- Marines
- Coast Guard
- Merchant Marine

How are Veterans Remembered?

- Headstones and markers and by their honored place in National Cemeteries
- Those who never came home and died overseas
- Others came home and lived and contributed to their community as citizens

All are memorialized and honored

Flagstaff & Gold Star Mothers 1



A World War II blue in service flag which hung in the family's window. If the service member died, the blue star became a gold star.
(Photo credit: UCF VLP)

Gold Star Mothers are those whose sons and/or daughters died during or as a result of active duty or are still missing in action.

- Founded by Grace Seibold (WWI)
- Support group for grieving
- Volunteerism at Veterans hospitals
- National organization in 1928
- Non-profit, non-political, non-denominational
- Member of Advisory Board of Veterans Administration Voluntary Service
- Last Sunday in September is Gold Star Mother's Day

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines

Nearly 80 of those who made the Supreme Sacrifice are buried at Saint Augustine National Cemetery

- Served in the Army, Marine, Army Air Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine members honored elsewhere.
- Paid the ultimate sacrifice within the various theatres of World War II.
 - New Guinea to Iwo Jima, Italy to Germany, England to Iceland.

Government Issued Headstones

To read the headstones that remember them, note they might include

- Name
- State
- Rank
- Unit or Service
- Date of Birth-Date of Death
- Personal Inscription

Let's meet some of these Veterans...

Gold Star Mother's Children

(Looking Right from the Flagstaff)
In this section, the dead of WWII who were brought home rest

Families

- Left them overseas in American Cemeteries
- Brought them home to National Cemeteries
- Buried them in local cemeteries



The flagstaff and graves at night at St. Augustine National Cemetery

Jere F. Palmes

2

1919-1945

US Army

Plot D-94, located to the right of the flagstaff

- ❑ Born August 5, 1919-to Golda Palmes whose mother helped dedicate the flagstaff
- ❑ Lived in St. Augustine, Florida
- ❑ Father, Russell Sr., a manager for a freight accounting office
- ❑ One of five siblings
- ❑ Graduated Ketterlinus High School (1937)
- ❑ Earned \$12.00 weekly as a farm hand
- ❑ Married Rebecca Botes



Jere F. Palmes

1919-1945

US Army

Plot D-94, located to the right of the flagstaff



(Picture from Hall of Valor Project)

His Military Life

- Enlisted in Florida National Guard (July 15, 1940)
- Trained at Camp Blanding, Florida
- Began federal service (November 25, 1940)
- Assigned to 222nd Infantry Regiment of 42nd Rainbow Division
- Attained rank of Captain
- Killed in action securing a crossing of the Danube River in Donauworth, Germany
- Earned Silver Star for extreme bravery in battle

Silver Star
posthumously
awarded



Russell B. Palmes, Jr.

1916-1945

US Navy

Plot D-94 R, located on the reverse of Jere F. Palmes

His Early Life

- Born on September 19, 1916, His mother was Golda Palmes also, oldest of six children
- Graduated from Ketterlinus High School (1934)
- Doorman and Floor Manager of Matanzas Theatre in St. Augustine
- Salesman and buyer for Kixie's Men's Shop (1939)
- Married Mary Whitten (1942)



Russell B. Palmes

1916-1945

US Navy

Plot D-94 R, located on the reverse of Jere F. Palmes



(USS Frederick C. Davis Sinking, 1945, Picture from Smithsonian)

Military Life

- Enlisted in US Navy January 15, 1942, shortly after attack on Pearl Harbor
- Trained briefly at Banana River Naval Air Station in Cocoa, FL
- Transferred to Key West (May 1942)
- Attended Submarine Chaser School in Miami, FL (June 13, 1942)
- Sailed from port on the *USS Frederick C. Davis* (July 14, 1943)
- Missing in Action on April 24, 1945-and his mother mourned again. Only a younger brother came home

Robert "Bob" Leslie Garbett, Jr.

3

1919-1944

US Army

Plot D-171, located near the flagstaff

- Born in Maryland in 1919
- Worked as a shipyard electrician before joining the military
- Joined Company B, 29th Division, 116th Infantry
- Married Hazel Jean Whitehouse in Oxfordshire, England in 1943



Robert “Bob” Leslie Garbett, Jr.

1919-1944

US Army

Plot D-171, located near the flagstaff

- Died on June 6, 1944 in Dog Green Sector, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France during Operation Overlord (D-Day)
- Originally interred in St. Laurent-Bayeux Cemetery in the Departement du Calvados, Basse-Normandie, France.
- Reinterred in SANC on August 24, 1948

“[Bob] took me under his wing and helped me in any way he could. He made me a watchband from his leather garrison belt because my watch was irritating my wrist.”

-Harold Baumgarten,
in *D-Day Survivor: An
Autobiography*

Those Who Came Home

- Some stayed in the Military and served in more than one conflict
- Others returned home and built businesses and families
- While others only enjoyed only a brief postwar life

Let's meet some of them...

Theodore Walter Wengert, Jr.

4

1920-2014

US Air Force

Plot A-34 C, located forward and to the right of tour stop 3

His Early Life

- Born October 4th, 1920, in the Bronx, New York
- First generation American – both parents from Germany
- Worked for Fairchild Aviation Group
- Served in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam

“Beloved Father and Grandpa”



Theodore Walter Wengert, Jr.

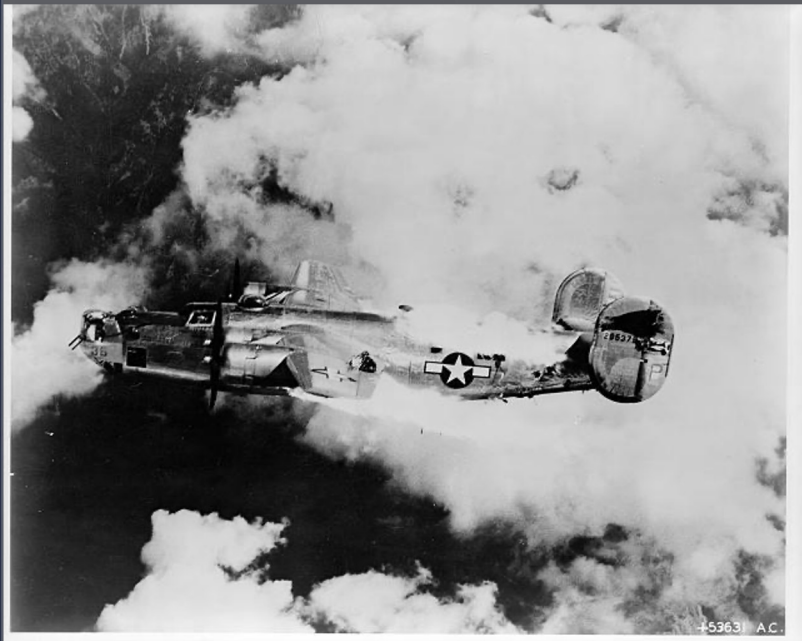
1920-2014

US Air Force

Plot A-34 C, located forward and to the right of tour stop 3

His Military Life

- 2nd Lieutenant - Flight Navigator for a B-24 plane
- Served with the 451st Bomb Group, 726th Bomb Squad, 15th A.F
- Crashed in November 1944 during a bombing mission over Germany
- Crew bailed out over Yugoslavia
- Wengert and other survivors rescued by Yugoslav Partisan guerrilla fighters



A B-24 bomber, from Library of Congress

John Sanchez Gaster

1913-1974

US Navy

Plot B-374, located near Pyramids

5

- Born in 1913 in Florida
- Joined Navy during WWII while working for the St. Augustine Record Company
- First wife Ruth and infant daughter interred in SANC in 1949
- Remarried Beatrice Muse and had a second daughter
- Owned and operated Western Auto Store and Gaster Auto Parts
- Member of the Elks Club

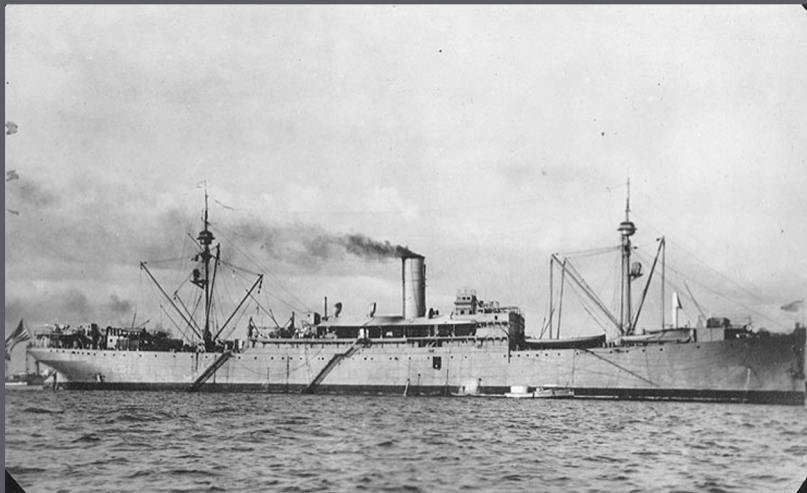


John Sanchez Gaster

1913-1974

US Navy

Plot B-374, located near Pyramids



USS Black Hawk

*From Naval History and Heritage
Command*



USS St. Paul

*From Naval History and Heritage
Command*

Beatrice Muse Gaster

5

1919-2001

Women's Army Corps

Plot B-374 R, located on the reverse of John Sanchez Gaster

Her Early Life

- Born in Georgia in 1919
- Daughter of C.J. Muse, a Veteran of the Spanish-American War and manager of a local market
- Worked as a doctor's assistant at 19
- Became a cadet nurse through the Grady Municipal in Atlanta GA



Beatrice Muse Gaster

1919-2001

Women's Army Corps

Plot B-374 R, located on the reverse of John Sanchez Gaster



Women's Army Corps during WWII
From National Parks Gallery

Her Military and Postwar Life

- Joined the Women's Army Corps in 1944
- Married John Gaster in 1949 and had a daughter
- Co-owned and operated Western Auto Store and Gaster Auto Parts with husband
- Member of the American Legion

George Downings, Jr.

6

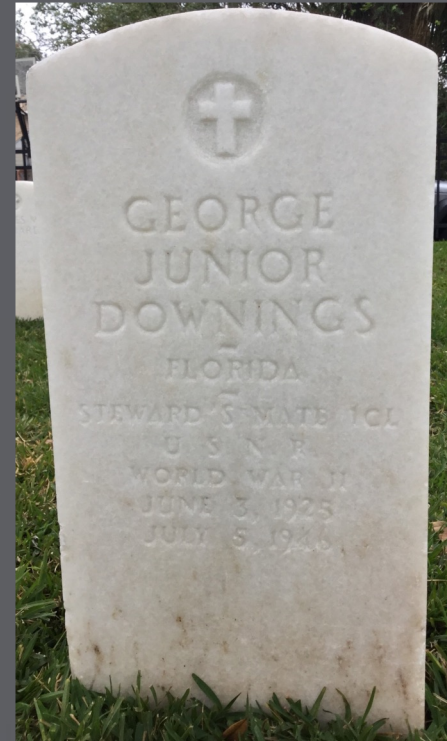
1925-1946

US Navy

Plot D-57, located to the right of tour stop 2

His Early Life

- Born in 1925
- Lived in Hastings, Florida (1930)
- Father, George Downings, Sr., a potato farmer
- Youngest of four kids
- Father died in 1939
- Mom, Lena, remarried to Raymond Walker in 1940
- George Downings, Jr. was African American

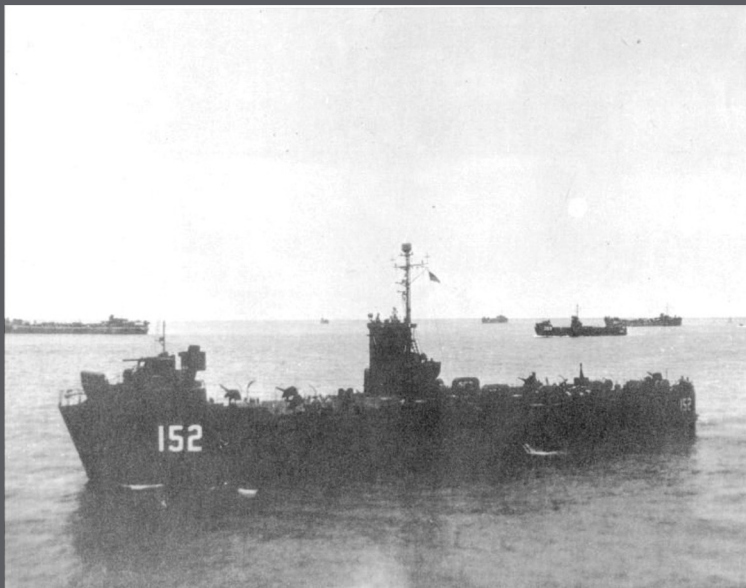


George Downings, Jr.

1925-1946

US Navy

Plot D-57, located to the right of tour stop 2



Final ship Downings sailed: USS LSM 152
(Photo from www.navysource.org)

His Military Life

George enlisted in the US Navy on March 4, 1943, and sailed on several types of Navy vessels including:

- *USS Harding* (Destroyer)
- *USS O'Brien* (Destroyer)
- *USS Moale* (Destroyer)
- *USS LSM-152* (Medium Landing Ship)

George attained the rank of Steward's Mate First Class. After returning home, George died on July 5, 1946, in St. Augustine, FL.

Exit Slip

Directions

Read the notes you completed while listening to the Veterans' biographies within 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?