



## **Fighting World War II on the Georgia Coast: World War II Home Front Museum Opens December 8, 2018**

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga, October 10, 2018 – The opening of the new World War II Home Front Museum on St. Simons Island will bring to life Coastal Georgia’s extraordinary contributions during World War II and recount how this quiet coastal region was transformed when the United States went to war.

The Home Front Museum tells the story of an important chapter in Georgia’s history when residents of small communities like Brunswick and St. Simons, in Glynn County, worked together and sacrificed for the greater good. More importantly, it tells the story of America – of the brave men and women on the home front who supported those on the battlefields in the fight for freedom and democracy.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared, *"There is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States—every man, woman, and child—is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, and in our daily tasks."*

Developed by Coastal Georgia Historical Society and designed by Gallagher & Associates, lead exhibit designer at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, the Home Front Museum details this region’s multifaceted role during the war. Galleries of immersive exhibits recreate iconic home front scenes such as an A & P Food storefront and a military recruitment office. Interactive experiences allow visitors to try their hand at plane spotting, directing fighter pilot squadrons using radar technology, and building and joining the crew of a Liberty ship.

The Coastal Georgia home front story reflects the experience of many Americans during World War II - civil defense activities such as blackouts, food rationing and buying war bonds, and sending sons and daughters off to join the nation’s military. In other ways, Glynn County was unique. It was the location of three critical wartime facilities: an airship base, a radar training school, and a Liberty shipyard. The Georgia coast also experienced a devastating German U-boat attack on April 8, 1942, when U-boat 123 torpedoed two tankers just 13 miles off the coast of St. Simons Island, killing 22 merchant mariners and covering the beach with oil for weeks after.

The industry and innovation of the American people during wartime is represented in this home front story. Two Naval Air Stations (NAS) were built in Glynn County. NAS Glynco, in

Brunswick, was one of five strategically placed airship bases along the East coast, allowing airships to protect supply convoys in relay style from Florida to Maine. Once the system of airship escorts was fully implemented, the U-boat threat to shipping ceased – a critical lynchpin to winning the war.

NAS St. Simons took over the island's airport and several resort facilities to train fighter pilots before transitioning into the Navy's advanced radar training school. Radar was one of the most important tools used by the Allies during World War II, and the radar training school at NAS St. Simons was often the final phase of training for key members of a radar team. Navy and Marine Corps officers who showed an aptitude for coordinating complex radar operations were singled out and sent to St. Simons to become Fighter Directors - the officers who used radar to direct pilots to intercept enemy aircraft. Using primary sources, historical photographs, and extensive interviews, the new Museum recreates the NAS St. Simons' Combat Information Center training room as an interactive gallery. At this training station, visitors will see if they have what it takes to be a Fighter Director.

The Navy wasn't the only new wartime presence, as the massive J.A. Jones Shipyard, run by the J.A. Jones Construction Company, began building Liberty ships - cargo vessels that provided vital supplies to battlefields around the world. The loss of thousands of merchant ships made the speedy construction of replacement ships essential to Allied victory. Shipbuilding had the greatest impact on Glynn County, employing more than 16,000 men and women who built 85 Liberty ships in under three years. While workers came to Brunswick from other areas of the country, 80 percent were from towns throughout Georgia.

“Many home front stories focus on how industry changed in the context of the war. The Coastal Georgia story is representative of that, but it also goes beyond that basic history,” said Mimi Rogers, Curator of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society. “The area remained on the front lines of America's home front defense throughout the war, with a dedicated volunteer civilian corps, flying U-boat reconnaissance, spotting enemy airplanes, and engaging in other activities to protect our coast. That's a story that is often forgotten. I think it's important that those memories and stories be channeled into an experience that shows young people not only how the U.S. coastlines were threatened, but also how a community came together for national defense.”

The World War II Home Front Museum is located in the Historic Coast Guard Station on St. Simons Island, a beloved community icon listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This historic building will resonate with local residents who remember the Coasties who served from 1936 – 1995, and also with visitors who will learn about the Coast Guard's service in World War II after the branch became an active part of the U.S. War Department in 1941.

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### **About Coastal Georgia Historical Society**

Founded in 1965, the mission of Coastal Georgia Historical Society is to tell the inspiring stories of Coastal Georgia through the collection and historic structures entrusted to its care. The purpose is to preserve and share these cultural resources, which illuminate the past and give meaning and value to the present and future. As the only American Alliance of Museums

accredited history institution in the Coastal Georgia region, the Historical Society impacts the lives of over 250,000 annually through its museums and programs.

The Society's facilities include the St. Simons Lighthouse and Museum, the World War II Home Front Museum, and the A.W. Jones Heritage Center.

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