A faded background image of a large marine ship, possibly a battleship, at a shipyard. The ship is white with dark gun turrets and is surrounded by industrial structures like cranes. The image is semi-transparent, allowing text to be overlaid.

WORLD WAR II HERITAGE GUIDE

*of Wilmington and
Southeastern North Carolina*

THE HOME FRONT

Shipbuilding
Anti-Aircraft Training
Submarine Hunting
Fighter Pilot Training
USO Entertainment
POW Camps



World War II Wilmington
Home Front Heritage Coalition



Welcome to America's First World War II Heritage City



On September 2, 2020, the City of Wilmington was officially named the first World War II Heritage City in the country. This recognition, the culmination of a 12.5-year locally led project, established a natural preservation program through congressional legislation signed by President Donald Trump in 2019.

This national designation recognizes the countless contributions of the women and men who stepped into the workforce to support America's successful campaign during World War II and the effort taken to preserve its rich history.



This guide leads you on a self-guided tour of numerous sites in Wilmington and New Hanover County that represent the area's WWII legacy.

Photo top: Battleship NC Stage for WWII Heritage City Designation ceremony in 2019. Image courtesy of Wilmington and Beaches Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Photo middle: The National Park Service administers the National World War II Heritage City Program initiated by Wilmington. Image courtesy of the National Park Service.

Photo left: City of Wilmington staff members installed panels on gateway welcome signs.



During World War II, Wilmington was known as “The Defense Capital of the State.” Wilmington’s largest employer, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, constructed 243 cargo vessels. Strategic defense industries included fertilizer plants, pulpwood, creosote products, dairies, and concrete floating dry dock manufacturing. Wilmington was the site of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad headquarters and a P-47 fighter plane training area. The city and its surrounding area hosted training for all American military branches, along with the British Navy. Thousands of Wilmingtonians joined the fight as Navy frogmen, P-51 fighter aces, Tuskegee Airmen, submarine skippers, bomber pilots, Marine riflemen, Army artillerymen, physicians, nurses, and volunteers.

New Hanover County tragically lost 248 men as a result of their courageous efforts to defend America. Two New Hanover High School graduates received the Congressional Medal of Honor: Charles P. Murray, Jr., Army (1938) and William D. Halyburton, Jr., Navy (1943). Other decorations include two Navy pilots awarded Navy Crosses for helping sink the Japanese carrier at the Battle of Midway, one Army Air Forces pilot awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for Midway, and one Army Distinguished Service Cross recipient (posthumously) for Normandy, in addition to numerous Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, Distinguished Flying Crosses, and Air Medals.



Christening of the SS American Ranger at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, 1945. Photo courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library, North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, 1941-1946 Collection.

Preservation Efforts

Much has been done to preserve Wilmington’s historic contributions to World War II. Preservation efforts are a key determinant in receiving the World War II Heritage City Designation. Wilmington’s preservation efforts include the following:

- ★ Housing the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA, the state’s memorial to those who perished during WWII
- ★ Forming the World War II Wilmington Home Front Heritage Coalition in 2001 to identify, preserve, and interpret the rich WWII legacy of Wilmington and Southeastern North Carolina
- ★ Saving, preserving, renovating, and restoring the Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center



Composite watercolor painting of the building in 1943 by Wilmington artist Mary Ellen Golden. Image courtesy of Mary Ellen Golden.

- ★ Dedicating memorials to the 248 New Hanover County-connected dead who served in uniform in the HBHUSO/CAC lobby museum; dedicating exhibits and artifacts to outstanding local veterans; and the National WWII Memorial giclée
- ★ Naming a school and city park for two WWII Medal of Honor recipients, Murray, Jr., and Halyburton, Jr., and erecting memorials at New Hanover High School and the HBHUSO/CAC
- ★ Erecting historical markers, including for two German prisoner of war camps, and to note the German U-boat firing on the Ethyl-Dow chemical plant at Kure Beach in 1943
- ★ Holding annual Pearl Harbor anniversary commemorations on December 7th
- ★ Publishing editions of the “World War II Heritage Guide Map of Wilmington and Southeastern North Carolina”

Our WWII Sites to Visit



WILMINGTON'S CROWN JEWEL: BATTLESHIP NORTH CAROLINA

1 Battleship Road, Wilmington (off Hwy. 421)

www.battleshipnc.com

The beloved Battleship NORTH CAROLINA (1941), Wilmington's prime WWII attraction, is the state's memorial museum to the 11,000 who died, and a tribute to our armed forces. Its 15 Pacific battle (campaign) stars are the most of any battleship. Since 1961, the ship has been moored in the Cape Fear River as a major national attraction.

Enjoy scenic views from the encompassing walkway that surrounds the ship and look for Charlie the alligator. Tours are self-guided or group tours can be scheduled in advance depending upon guide availability. The gift shop offers WWII souvenirs. At Battleship Park overlooking the Cape Fear River, you'll also find the Pearl Harbor Survivors Memorial and WWII Submarine Service Memorial.



Battleship NORTH CAROLINA, the state's memorial to those who perished during WWII.



WILMINGTON'S PRIDE AND JOY: THE HANNAH BLOCK HISTORIC USO/COMMUNITY ARTS CENTER

120 South 2nd Street, Wilmington

www.wilmingtoncommunityarts.org



The Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center, a thriving, lively meeting place during WWII.

Blending history and the arts, the center hosts USO dances and other WWII events, as well as theater productions, pottery classes, corporate meetings, and wedding receptions. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The lobby's WWII home-front museum contains memorials to the county's 248 WWII servicemen who died, along with tributes, exhibits, and displays; original and repro furniture and furnishings; photomurals; wartime art and artifacts; and an original giclée of the National World War II Memorial.



Numerous structures in Downtown Wilmington are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Most buildings and homes are WWII-era structures.

“Plaqued Houses”

Various locations, Downtown Wilmington

Numerous stately “plaqued houses” downtown were temporarily converted into war worker apartments. Find a list of homes at www.historicwilmington.org/port-city-architecture by searching “WWII” and other related keywords.

Coastline Event Center/Wilmington Railroad Museum

501 Nutt Street, Wilmington

The complex spans several WWII-era Atlantic Coast Line Railroad freight buildings, and includes an event center (former ACL headquarters) and wartime exhibits.



Wilmington Railroad Museum, a popular local attraction located in a former Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Co. freight building.

Thalian Hall (1858)/Wilmington City Hall

310 Chestnut Street, Wilmington

Historic Thalian Hall was a popular destination for wartime plays, concerts, boxing and wrestling matches, and more.

Freedom Flame Memorial to Honor War Dead

310 Chestnut Street, City Hall grounds

This location serves as a memorial to Missing in Action servicemembers of all wars.

Memorial Wall to Those Who Served in the Armed Forces

301 North Water Street by Cape Fear Riverwalk, adjacent to Hotel Ballast

Main U.S. Post Office (1930s)

152 North Front Street, Wilmington

A well-preserved wartime hub of downtown activities including troop displays and information exchange, this location also housed an aircraft warning filter center.

Burgwin-Wright Museum House (1770s)

224 Market Street, Wilmington

The area’s only colonial-era structure currently open to the public, the Burgwin-Wright House & Gardens served as a WWII officers’ club.

Finkelstein’s Jewelers/Music (1906)

6 South Front Street, Wilmington

Finkelstein’s is the only downtown wartime store still in business.

Historic Bailey Theater facade/front wall

North Front Street, between Market & Princess streets, Wilmington

The area’s prestigious movie house, Bailey Theater showed Gary Cooper in “Sergeant York” on Dec. 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Wilmington Light Infantry Armory (WLI)

409 Market Street, Wilmington

This location, headquarters for a battery of the 252nd Coast Artillery Battalion, N.C. National Guard mobilized in 1940, is now part of First Baptist Church. A plaque marks the site, paying homage to the WLI who fought in the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II.

Temple of Israel (1872)

1 South 4th Street, Wilmington

North Carolina’s oldest Jewish synagogue provided services, food, and entertainment to servicemen in Rosenthal Hall.

North Carolina Shipbuilding Company (Wilmington Shipyard)

*Shipyard & Burnett boulevards on Cape Fear River —
Now international/NC Port of Wilmington*

There are several wartime buildings still in use, notably a 5-gabled mold loft and International Seamen's Center (foremen's building). The former apprentice dormitory on Burnett Boulevard still stands. Contact North Carolina State Ports Authority Customer Service at 910-763-1621 for access, as this area is not open to the public.

Workers leaving the day shift at the Wilmington Shipyard main gate during wartime. Photo courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library, North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, 1941-1946 Collection.



Wilmington Shipyard State Historical Marker

Shipyard Boulevard & Carolina Beach Road, Wilmington

Public Housing Projects built by federal and local government for shipyard and defense plant war workers:

- ★ Maffitt Village, off Shipyard Boulevard
- ★ Lake Forest (Village) near Greenfield Lake
 - Lake Forest Baptist church was relocated from Camp Davis after the war (1626 Lake Branch Drive).
- ★ Greenfield Terrace at South 14th & Greenfield streets
- ★ Hillcrest at 15th & Dawson streets
 - The area includes masonry units for war workers and Army non-commissioned officers.

Block Shirt Factory

1510 South Third Street, Wilmington

The factory manufactured one million shirts for Army and Navy and is now a residential/commercial area.

Cape Fear Museum of History and Science

814 Market Street, Wilmington

New Hanover County's Cape Fear Museum has a large collection of WWII and other military artifacts, photographs, and uniforms, and is a repository for local artist Henry MacMillan's WWII paintings. The museum actively collects WWII artifacts related to people from the Lower Cape Fear region.

Wilmington National Cemetery (1867)

2011 Market Street, Wilmington

The cemetery contains numerous gravesites of men who died during wartime and WWII veterans.

Oakdale Cemetery (1850s)

520 North 15th Street, Wilmington

The cemetery contains numerous gravesites of men who died during wartime and WWII veterans.

New Hanover High School (NHHS, 1922)

1307 Market Street, Wilmington

The oldest existing high school in Wilmington, NHHS was the county's wartime high school, sending hundreds of men into the armed forces, many of whom died in service.

Wilmington College Marker

1307 Market Street, Wilmington

The college began in New Hanover High School and nearby Isaac Bear School to educate returning servicemen at the end of the war. The school was relocated to the University of North Carolina Wilmington campus.



Masonry memorial to its 2 WWII recipients of the Medal of Honor, Charles P. Murray, Jr., and William D. Halyburton, Jr.

Congressional Medal of Honor Memorial

1307 Market Street, Wilmington

This masonry and brick garden memorial honors New Hanover High School graduates Pharmacists Mate Second Class William D. Halyburton, Jr., USNR (class of 1943), and Captain Charles P. Murray, Jr., USA (1938).

Williston Industrial School (1916)

401 South 10th Street, Wilmington

In 1923, it became the first accredited high school for African Americans in North Carolina, providing unparalleled opportunities for local youth during that era. The building is now Williston Middle School.

German Prisoner of War Camps (1944-46) Markers

- ★ Shipyard Boulevard & Carolina Beach Road (first camp), SE corner
- ★ 10th & Ann streets (main camp)
 - The location held 550 of Field Marshal Rommel's famed Afrika Korps troops captured in Tunisia in 1943.

Location of main prisoner of war camp, 1944-46.



Wilmington Army Airfield (Bluethenthal Field)

1740 Airport Boulevard, Wilmington

Currently serving as the Wilmington International Airport (ILM), some wartime runways, tarmacs, and buildings are still in use. The lobby occasionally features a wartime exhibit.

New Hanover County War Memorial (1998)

Long Leaf Park, 314 Pine Grove Drive, Wilmington

The memorial includes a partial listing of the county's WWII dead.

St. Andrews-Covenant Presbyterian Church

1416 Market Street, Wilmington

A plaque in the chapel's upstairs history corridor lists 94 members who served in armed forces and two who died. The building was a center for war-effort volunteer activities.

St. James Episcopal Church

25 South Third Street, Wilmington

A plaque in Memorial Hall is in memory of former acolyte Lt. Jimmy Lynch, P-51 pilot, killed in 1945 in Italy.

The Bottoms Historic Neighborhood

Between Market and Castle, 5th & 15th streets, Wilmington

This established a middle-class central neighborhood and surrounded the main POW camp and former Williston Industrial High School. Most current houses are pre-war.

William D. Halyburton, Jr., Memorial Park

4099 South 17th Street, Wilmington

The city park was named for a posthumous Medal of Honor recipient; the visitors center contains his Medal of Honor citation.



Wilmington's lovely nature park dedicated in memory of William D. Halyburton, Jr., who was mortally wounded saving the life of a Marine on Okinawa in 1945.

Veterans Park

835 Halyburton Memorial Parkway

The park includes sports facilities, Eugene Ashley High School (Wilmington Vietnam Medal of Honor posthumous recipient), and Charles P. Murray, Jr., Middle School. The main thoroughfare (Parkway) was named for William D. Halyburton, Jr.

CAROLINA BEACH/KURE BEACH/ FORT FISHER

Carolina Beach Boardwalk

100 Cape Fear Boulevard, Carolina Beach –
Central Business District

Some WWII era arcades and shops remain. Britts Donuts was a downtown wartime institution.

Federal Point History Center

1211A Lake Park Boulevard North, Carolina Beach
The collection includes exhibits on WWII Fort Fisher.

North Carolina Military History Museum

118 Riverfront Road, Kure Beach – Fort Fisher Air Force
Recreation Area

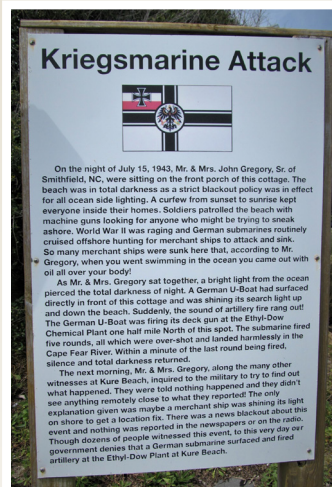
The collections contain wartime artifacts and exhibit of the Ethyl-Dow plant U-boat attack.

Kriegsmarine (German U-boat) Attack Historic Sign

333 Atlantic Avenue,
Kure Beach

Residents of the Gregory cottage witnessed the German U-boat attack on the Ethyl-Dow Chemical plant in July 1943.

*Sign marking the
Kriegsmarine attack.*



Ethyl-Dow Chemical Company Plant

Marker on east side of Fort Fisher Boulevard, Kure Beach
The chemical company produced bromide additive for aviation gasoline. Eyewitnesses say it was fired on by a German U-boat in July 1943. This alleged event may have been the only direct German assault on America.

Fort Fisher State Historic Civil War Site

1610 Fort Fisher Boulevard South, Kure Beach
The exhibit includes a wartime Camp Davis anti-aircraft artillery advanced training base. The visitor center was constructed in the middle of a wartime airstrip.



*Camp Davis advanced training base for anti-aircraft
artillery units.*

Wrightsville Beach Museum of History

303 West Salisbury Street, Wrightsville Beach

The museum includes a wartime exhibit and historic cottages, photographs, and research materials.



Take a step back in time at the Wrightsville Beach Museum of History.

Intracoastal (Inland) Waterway

Harbor Island/Wrightsville Beach drawbridge

This site marks the county's main US Coast Guard patrol base (Bluewater Grill location – 4 Marina Street) and inland barge shipping avoiding U-boats.

Roberts Grocery and Market (1919)

32 North Lumina Avenue, Wrightsville Beach

A popular beach grocery during the war, the market is still in operation.

Carolina Yacht Club (1853)

401 South Lumina Avenue, Wrightsville Beach

This private club boomed socially during wartime, especially entertaining military officers.

Carolina Temple Apartments (early 1900s)

550 Waynick Boulevard, Wrightsville Beach

A popular guest home during the war, this is Wrightsville Beach's oldest continuously operating business.

During WWII, Wrightsville Beach was a popular beach resort destination with two hotels, beaches, and an entertainment venue, Lumina, located at the end of an electric streetcar line. Photo courtesy of Wilmington and Beaches Convention & Visitors Bureau.





ENJOY YOUR VISIT!



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

City of Wilmington

www.wilmingtonnc.gov/wwii

Wilmington and Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com

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SPECIAL THANKS

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