



## In Delaware's Defense

World War II defense efforts are showcased at Fort Miles Museum and Historical Area in southern Delaware's Cape Henlopen State Park.



COURTESY OF DELAWARE STATE PARKS

**WHAT:** FORT MILES MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL AREA

**WHERE:** Cape Henlopen State Park, 15099 Cape Henlopen Drive, Lewes, Delaware

**WHEN:** Museum tours are offered Tuesday through Sunday (usually at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.) June through Labor Day (with lantern tours Wednesday evenings) and Saturdays and Sundays in fall and spring.

**HOW MUCH:** Entrance to Cape Henlopen is \$5 for vehicles registered in Delaware and \$10 for out-of-state vehicles. Museum tours are \$5.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Fort Miles Historical Association, [fortmiles.org](http://fortmiles.org) or 302/645-0753; Delaware State Parks, [destateparks.com/park/cape-henlopen/index.asp](http://destateparks.com/park/cape-henlopen/index.asp)

Within Cape Henlopen State Park in Lewes, Delaware, neighboring six miles of beautiful beaches and dunes with expansive views of the Delaware Bay and Atlantic Ocean, you'll find Fort Miles Museum and Historical Area. Strategically located on the Eastern Seaboard, the fort was a key piece of the coastal defense for Wilmington, Philadelphia and beyond during World War II.

During the war, a portion of Delaware Bay was mined and artillery was put in place to ward off enemy ships, including gun batteries built within the huge sand dunes of Cape Henlopen. Soldiers used 15 observation towers, which are still visible—11 along the Delaware coast and 4 along the New Jersey coast—to watch for signs of the German U-boats that had been targeting ships headed for the European theater.

It all began in 1938 when, fearful of Nazi Germany's growing aggressions, the U.S. military moved the first large artillery pieces into Camp Henlopen. Soldiers of the 261st Coast Artillery of the U.S. Army (most of them from Delaware)

were called to active duty, and Camp Henlopen officially became Fort Miles, one of the Army's top coast artillery units, in August 1941. Permanent barracks, a hospital and other support buildings were added to accommodate the 2,500 military and civilian men and women stationed at the fort during the war.

On May 8, 1945, victory over Germany was declared, and less than one week later, German submarine U-858 surfaced off Cape May, New Jersey, to surrender. The U-boat's captain and crew were taken to Fort Miles for processing as prisoners of war.

Later, Fort Miles served as a military training center and played a role in the Cold War defending against the threat of Soviet submarine operations.

Visitors to the park today can walk through the barracks area and Artillery Park and climb up inside Observation Tower 7. Guided tours of the Fort Miles Museum located within a former artillery emplacement, Battery 519, are also available most weeks. Both Artillery Park and the museum include samples of the large guns used at Fort Miles, including one of the 16-inch guns that was the largest in the U.S. arsenal at the time. Inside Battery 519, guest lecturers, films and the museum's exhibits tell the stories of Fort Miles during WWII.

Battery 519 houses the Shell Room, Powder Room, Plotting Room, Wall of Honor and several Gun Rooms. It's also home to the Art of Fort Miles Gallery, featuring paintings depicting life at Fort Miles by the late Howard Schroeder, who was stationed at the fort in 1942.

The best time to visit is on the last Saturday in April (this year on April 28 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.), when Fort Miles comes alive during Delaware Goes to War, a living history event begun in 2006. In 2017, some 3,000 event-goers mingled with German and American WWII military reenactors, listening to their war stories, seeing authentic vehicles, watching weapons demonstrations and observing reenactments of how the soldiers at Fort Miles lived in the 1940s.

—Suzan Jackson