

# PRESS RELEASE

## CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Divisions of Boating and Waterways, Historic Preservation and Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation

---

**For Immediate Release**

April 11, 2022

**Contact:**

Amy Hart  
State Historian II  
Amy.Hart@parks.ca.gov  
(805) 471-2049

## **New WWII History Exhibition to Open at the Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History**

Morro Bay, CA.—Morro Bay State Park— A new exhibition opening at the Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History examines the impact of World War II on the Central Coast, and especially on the San Luis Obispo Coast District of California State Parks. This exhibition, sponsored by the Central Coast State Parks Association, will launch on April 27<sup>th</sup> and will remain on display through summer 2022.

World War II was a global event that impacted the Central Coast in myriad ways—from the influx of soldiers who trained at Camp San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay, to the expulsion of residents of Japanese descent from their coastal homes, to the gripping fear of a potential attack on the coast that initiated coastal “black outs.” The new museum exhibition created by State Parks staff, titled “WWII and the Central Coast,” explores this history through exhibit panels, audio recordings, and tactile displays that engage visitors in the experience of WWII along the Central Coast, and especially within our local State Parks. Montaña de Oro State Park, Morro Bay State Park, and Morro Strand State Beach all served as training grounds for soldiers who practiced amphibious landings before going on to fight in Europe and Japan. The 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, an all-Black Coast Artillery Regiment, was headquartered at Morro Bay State Park, where they guarded the coastline from potential attack while facing discrimination in a segregated military. Residents of Japanese descent who farmed the coastal terraces of present-day Montaña de Oro State Park were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to internment camps following Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s issuing of Executive Order No. 9066. The crew of the torpedoed *SS Montebello* escaped the sinking ship by coming ashore near present-day Estro Bluffs and Harmony Headlands State Parks. Through examining the events of WWII that took place at our local State Parks, this exhibition endeavors to broaden historical perspectives and bring to light some of the lesser-known stories of this period of local and international turmoil.

The exhibit launch will be celebrated on **Wednesday, April 27, from 5-8pm** at the Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History. California State Parks and the Central Coast State Parks Association has teamed up with the Historical Society of Morro Bay, the Morro Bay

Maritime Museum, and the History Center of San Luis Obispo County to produce an event focused on WWII history in Morro Bay. The Central Coast State Parks Association will provide appetizers and refreshments for visitors, who will be able to tour the new exhibit and learn about local history from State Parks interpreter staff beginning at 5pm. From 5:30-6:45pm, presenters Stuart McDowell (author, [Sinking of the SS Montebello](#)) and Cal Poly History department lecturer Dr. Margaret Bodemer will put the dramatic events of WWII on the Central Coast into perspective. Stuart McDowell will examine the story of the *Montebello*, an oil tanker sunk off the coast of Cambria by a Japanese submarine only two weeks after Pearl Harbor. Dr. Margaret Bodemer will explore how a more inclusive engagement with history produces a fuller picture of the past and reinscribes the contributions of many diverse actors and groups, such as the African American soldiers stationed on the Central Coast. Together, these presentations will provide an engaging account of local historical events and a thought-provoking examination of the diverse experiences of war. This event is part of "[WWII Commemoration Week](#)," a weeklong series of events commemorating the impact of WWII on the Central Coast, presented by the History Center of San Luis Obispo County. This event is free of charge and open to the public.

For more information on the exhibit and launch event, please contact Amy Hart at [amy.hart@parks.ca.gov](mailto:amy.hart@parks.ca.gov) or call (805) 471-2049.

##

**California State Parks** provides for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. Learn more at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Blog](#) | [Periscope](#) | [Flickr](#)

