

## THE GEORGIA STATE DEFENSE CORPS AND THE GEORGIA STATE GUARD, 1940—1947

### Georgia State Defense Corps, 1940—1942

In early 1940, Georgia Governor E. D. Rivers requested the American Legion to organize a state military force to be known as the Georgia State Defense Corps. In June 1940, Governor Rivers by **Executive Order** officially designated the Georgia State Defense Corps to replace the Georgia National Guard during Federal service. War was raging in Europe, and was not going well for England and France. The Georgia National Guard, along with the National Guards of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, composed the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and rumors were strong the “Old Hickory” Division would soon be federalized.

The June 1940 authorized strength for the Georgia State Defense Corps was 6,000. By 19 September 1940, all but 45 of the authorized positions were filled; 2,955 officers and 3,000 enlisted men had volunteered to serve. On 16 September 1940, the first elements of the Georgia National Guard were federalized for one-year active duty. By November 1941 President Franklin D. Roosevelt placed the entire Georgia National Guard on active duty for one year. No one at that time could know that those Guardsmen would be on active duty for five years and many would never return home. In October 1940, just before the 1940 Gubernatorial election, Governor Rivers addressed the District and Company Commanders of the Georgia State Defense Corps by saying, “I am very proud of the State Defense Corps and commend its members; our country has had to fight for nearly everything we have attained, and we expect to uphold our traditions won by fighting.”

In November 1940, Eugene Talmadge was elected Governor of Georgia for a third term, replacing Ed Rivers. Talmadge had previously served two terms from 1933 to 1937. On 7 June 1941 Governor Talmadge signed a **Resolution** ordering “That a home guard, or state constabulary, to be known and designated ‘The State Defense Corps of the State of Georgia’ be . . . created.” On 10 December 1941, three days after Japan attacked U. S. forces at Pearl Harbor, Governor Talmadge issued a **Proclamation** that ordered the entire State Defense Corps to active duty. Colonel Ryburn G. Clay was appointed to head the State Defense Corps. The Corps was placed under command of the Commanding General of Fort Benning, BG Omar Bradley, who would later rise to prominence as the ‘soldier’s general’ in Europe.

The Georgia State Defense Corps was organized into 297 units, and designated by cities and towns and numbered 1 to 297; for example, Waycross Unit No. 72. Georgia’s plan of organizing the State Defense Corps was adopted by all States in the Fourth Corps area. As the Federalized National Guard sailed for destinations such as England and New Guinea, the new State Defense Corps was called on to fill the State role of the National

Guard. Georgia State Defense Corps volunteers guarded citizen's scattered belongings from a tornado and searched for lost children and for survivors from an airplane crash.

To fulfill their role in the defense of Georgia, State Defense Corps' units were placed at 47 vital points, including all waterworks, power plants, and big power dams, as well as all railroad bridges, airports and broadcasting stations in Georgia. There was a Boat Unit that performed shore patrol, utilizing private yachts and other private craft. There was also an Air Unit that patrolled the skies.

One volunteer who joined the State Defense Corps in 1941 was 17 year old Ivan C. Gibson, who now lives in Monroe, Georgia. Gibson helped guard the DeKalb County Water Pump Station in Decatur. He was posted at his guard station on weekends, four hours on and four hours off, from Friday afternoon until Sunday night. Armed with shotguns, Gibson reported, "One of our boys, Henry Adams, shot an escaped prisoner from the DeKalb jail that refused to halt on command." (1) He was taken to Emory Hospital, where he recovered from buck shot wounds to his legs. Gibson said they had to memorize the same General Orders that Regular Army soldiers did, and he can still quote General Order No. One: "Take charge of your post and all Government property in view . . . ". Ivan Gibson was drafted in 1943, and saw extensive combat from Normandy to the surrender of Germany.

There was no shortage of volunteers for the Georgia State Defense Corps. A 59 year-old man wrote on 21 June 1941, ". . . my Father served four years in the War Between the States . . . my oldest son served four years in the U. S. Marine Corps and my other two sons are in the 118<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery (a Georgia National Guard unit) now in Tennessee (on training maneuvers) . . . they are doing their bit and I want to do mine . . ." (2) A young stenographer at Gulf Oil Corporation in Atlanta wrote to the Adjutant of the State Defense Corps on May 2, 1941, volunteering for "any kind of job you might need me for in the Civilian Defense Program." Marcia Malone further wrote: "I feel that girls should also be ready in time of emergency to do their part, although I trust it will never be necessary. All of my girl friends feel the same as I do about it. We could certainly learn to be airplane spotters or something like that." (3)

### Georgia State Guard, 1942—1947

It is not clear precisely when the name of the State Defense Corps changed to the Georgia State Guard. However, **General Order No. 5**, dated 2 January 1942, cites the Georgia State Guard. Part of the Order (Paragraph 3) reads: "Mr. Francis Shurling, the official charged by statute with maintaining liaison between Federal and State government, declared without equivocation that the Georgia State Guard was the finest in the entire United States."

In the early days of America's entry into World War Two, Germany and Japan were making dramatic gains in Europe and the Pacific. Georgians were very concerned about raiding parties from U-boats coming ashore on the coast and German paratroop attacks. The war did seem very close to residents on the coast, as explosions could be heard far out at sea, and debris and even bodies washed up on shore. An incident on 8 April 1942 confirmed this was possible. A U-boat strafed the Brunswick coast with machine gun fire. Following this, every man in the Georgia State Guard from the eight districts around the Brunswick area were called for coast patrol duty.

In March 1943, the **Georgia State Guard Act** was passed by the Georgia General Assembly, and approved by newly elected Governor Ellis Arnall. The General Assembly believed that the mere fact that a home guard was organized with well-trained men that can assemble on short notice would be insurance against internal disturbances.

On 26 November 1943, the Georgia State Guard was reorganized from the 297 numbered units to 20 Battalions, each with lettered companies. For example, Carrollton Unit No. 95 of District 16 (Columbus) became P Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. This conformed more to the Regular Army's nomenclature. The Georgia State Guard mustered strength increased to over 11,000.

Gene Lowry was a member of the Georgia State Guard's Company C, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as a Lawrenceville high school senior. Lowry, later writing as a Colonel in the Georgia State Defense Force in 1991, stated that the City of Lawrenceville and Gwinnett County were very supportive of the Georgia State Guard, furnishing the softball field for drills, and paying for the lights during the nights drill was held. He said the men in his unit ranged from high school boys to men in their 50's, some being veterans from World War One. "Our weapons consisted of 12-gauge shotguns, single barrel with plastic stocks . . . then we were issued new weapons, the old British Eddystone Enfield, .30 caliber that must have weighed 15 pounds, also one Thompson .30 caliber Sub-machine gun and one .45 caliber Revolver", Lowry wrote. Colonel Lowry further reported that they continued to meet until the Japanese surrender in August of 1945. "Then everyone just quit attending the meetings. The war was over and we in the Georgia State Guard had done the job that was expected of us." (4)

On 8 January 1945 a Women's Division was authorized for the Georgia State Guard. Two female clerks were authorized for each company, and the Macon District enlisted the first two women. On 29 January 1945 two were sworn into Company D, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and issued Women's Army Corps (WAC) uniforms.

The Georgia State Guard was inactivated on 21 April 1947 at an authorized strength of 9,700. From 1940 to 1947, 34,000 Georgia men and women served in the Georgia State Defense Corps and the Georgia State Guard. Colonel Gene Lowry wrote: “We had protected the City of Lawrenceville and its citizens from the Germans and Japanese. We kept them out of Gwinnett County. To my recollection, there was not one incident of an enemy soldier ever being spotted in our area.” (4)

End Notes:

- (1) Telephone interview by the author with Ivan C. Gibson on 23 April 2003.
- (2) Letter from Asbury M. Nease, Sr., Tybee Island, Georgia, dated 21 June 1941; in possession of the Historical Society of the Georgia National Guard.
- (3) Letter from Marcia Malone, Atlanta, Georgia, to Oren Warren, dated 2 May 1941; in possession of the Historical Society of the Georgia National Guard.
- (4) *Best Defense*, quarterly publication of the Georgia State Defense Force, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1991.

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