

Primary Source: Enlisting for Service in World War II ^[1]

This interview is from the "Remembering World War II. World War II Veterans Oral History Preservation Project." Veterans of the war that were interviewed for this project recounted what it was like to be enlisted, conscripted, or drafted into the military.

To begin with, I'll talk about how I got into the Navy and before 1941, actually in 1941, I was 17 years old and going to high school in the 11th grade and I had never had a job other than carrying newspapers. I carried the Charlotte News, which is an afternoon paper long ago absorbed by the Charlotte Observer.

On Sunday, December 7th, I was listening to music in our living room and the news flash came over that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Well first of all I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was or what it was. So I sat and listened to the news for a while. It sounded pretty bad. It got worse as the afternoon went on. They talked about damage, bad damage, lots of casualties, so forth and so on.

My parents had laid down in the bedroom and were taking a nap, Sunday afternoon nap. So I went back, woke them up, told them what was happening. Well they came rushing up to the living room and we listened to the news the rest of the afternoon. About 2:00 or 3:00 I said, "Well this looks bad to me and I'm going to join the Navy." Well they hit the ceiling. They said, "No, you're not, you're going to finish high school and you're going to go on to college."

Well this argument went on for the rest of the day and into the night. About 11:00 in the evening, I convinced them to agree that I could go into the Navy. Well the only reason they did is that they thought first of all I would not pass the physical and secondly they said if you do get in, you'll never pass boot camp because they'll kill you and wash you out in boot camp.

My daddy had been to World War I and he said that too. He was a small man the way I am and he said they had just about killed him and he was in the Army. So he said you know you're not going to pass, but you can go up there and try. So Monday morning, he went to work at 7:30, dropped me off at the Navy recruiting office in downtown Charlotte and let me out. I started walking up the steps to go in. He drove off.

I thought, "My gosh, I'm a fool. I'm going to get up there, there's not going to be a soul there. The Navy recruiting office won't be open and I'll be the only one." I got up there and there were 100 guys already in line. The recruiting office had been open. So you know the volunteers were just flocking in. Well anyway, I went through the line, got up to where they examined me and the recruiter said, "Well you don't weigh enough, you're almost there, but you don't weigh quite enough and you don't have your parents' approval."

He said I should go home and get my parents' written approval, eat a bunch of bananas and come back and I might pass. I was back the next day and I'd eaten a bunch of bananas and I had my parents' approval and I passed. They took me. They said go home and they would let me know in a few days when to report. Well it was only about two days later that I got a postcard which said report to the Navy recruiting office.

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