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Photos: Registering for the draft in Omaha, 1940; "Waves" poster by John P Falter

JOINING UP



Registering for the draft in Omaha, 1940. (Courtesy Bostwick-Frohardt Collection, owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to Western Heritage Museum, Omaha)

“I wanted to enlist to be a pilot and, you know, ‘kill ’em!’”

Thomas McGrath

I was alone, I did not know any other conscientious objectors in my community. I don't think there were any others. I was a naive young man, and I thought to myself, "What if I'm wrong and all these millions of other men are right? What if I'm wrong about conscientious objection?" So in that respect I compromised and agreed to be drafted into the military, as long as I wasn't required to bear arms.

K. Roy Bailey, Schuyler

Rural school teacher,
later U.S. Army medic,
Pacific Theater

Well, growing up on the farm in the thirties wasn't very pleasant. I remember the banks going broke, the Depression, and then there were the dry years. I just didn't have a very good experience with living on a farm, and there weren't any jobs when I graduated out of high school, so I decided to join the navy. Part of their propaganda was "Join the navy, see the world, and learn a trade." The pay was \$21.00 a month which sounded pretty good at that time. So I figured that would be a good opportunity to get off the farm.

John Zimola, Wahoo

U.S. Navy firecontrolman,
cruiser USS *Louisville*, Pacific Theater
(enlisted in 1939)

I wanted to enlist to be a pilot and, you know, "Kill 'em! Kill the Japs! Kill the Germans! Kill everybody!" I thought it was such a fantastic, fascinating way to . . . do things, to fly an airplane. I had a tough enough time driving a car!

Thomas McGrath, North Platte

Union Pacific Railroad worker,
later U.S. Army Air Forces
glider pilot, European Theater

I had the idea when I went into the service that I wanted to be on something with a lot of guns, like a battleship or a cruiser or a destroyer, but while at Great Lakes [Naval Training Station], I was seventeen years old and like all seventeen-year-old kids, I was a chow hound. The fact that I couldn't go back and get seconds, I thought I was starving to death, so when they asked for volunteers for sub-

marines, the first thing they said was if you wanted to see action fast, that was the way to go. Then the next thing was the better pay. I perked up my ears at that because I was getting \$21.00 a month. Then when they came to the part that said that all men in submarines got two and a half times as much per day of subsistence as any other service, and that all the cooks were specially trained, and they had open icebox[es] twenty-four hours a day, I couldn't volunteer fast enough. That's how I got into submarines.

Robert Mathewson, Lincoln

High school student, later
U.S. Navy motor machinist's mate,
submarine USS *Rasher*,
Pacific Theater

They were advertising that they wanted women in the WAAC and they were telling the advantages and so forth. I had always wanted to travel, and I knew that I was never going to make enough money to do that at what I was doing, or what I would . . . eventually do if the [Martin Bomber] plant closed. I applied to the navy, and when I took the physical, of all things, they told me I didn't have enough teeth! I thought, "Well, I wasn't going to fight with my teeth, or I wasn't going to type with them, or anything else," but that's what they told me Then I applied to the WAAC and took the test and the physical, and I was sworn in on the 19th of January 1943 at Omaha.

Annabelle Peshek, Omaha

Women's Army Auxiliary Corps,
later Women's Army Corps

The war was a thrill. Most of the people wanted to be in the war, believe it or not, because at that time it was the thing. What the country does — it's a horrible thing to say — but what the country does is they get everybody all worked up. You hated the Japanese. You hated the Germans. So it's a hate trip that they put you on. It's just the same thing you have today with prejudice. It's a hate trip. They'd say, "Hey, you've got to hate that man." If they can get you to do this, you'll do anything.

Bob Boyte, Lincoln

High school student, later
U.S. Navy fighter pilot, carrier
USS *Ticonderoga*, Pacific Theater

What Did You Do in the War?

[B]eing in the air corps, getting your silver wings, was one of the greatest things that could happen. If you had a chance for a million dollars, or that, I think most of them would take the wings It was the greatest. You had girls chasing you all the time.

Floyd Marian

What had happened in early 1942, with all this rush to get men in a hurry and into training, along about June or July 1942, they realized, all of a sudden, that they [the army] had about a quarter of a million people that they considered functionally illiterate. They couldn't read a military order or they couldn't read at all, or they couldn't write. It looked like it would be a tremendous loss to throw a quarter of a million people out They needed some instructors or teachers So I was sent down along with some other people. We were trying to lift them up to about the third, fourth, or fifth grade level educationally, so that they could function with some simple math, [so that] they could understand orders if they were written fairly simply. They could read some of our army field manuals, because they were written down on a lower level. They reviewed the work this battalion was doing . . . then they said, "Hey, wait a minute. Those instructors are 1-A people. Let's find ourselves some limited service personnel . . . that could still be good instructors, and let's get those fellows back in their old units that are good combat material." So, boom! Back to the infantry I went.

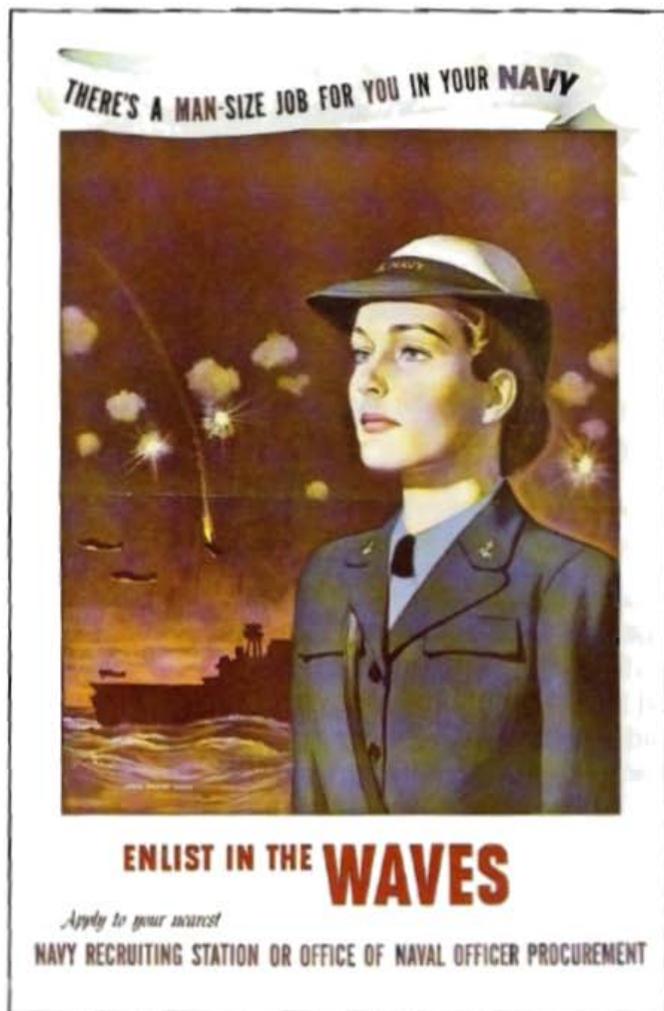
Otis Mattox, Unadilla

High school teacher, later U.S. Army
infantryman, European Theater

All along the way, I'd been having to do a little surgery. The first case was there in Charleston, South Carolina, in that shipyard. A black man came in and he had a big gash in his head. The doctor was a southerner, and at that time they didn't think much of the blacks, and he said, "Doc, will you sew up that nigger?" And I said, "Yes, sir. I will." So I had my first chance of sewing a person up Of course, I had practiced sewing up meat.

Carroll Wilson, North Platte

Loan officer, later U.S. Navy
hospital corpsman



"Waves," by John P. Falter. Incentive Poster. (NSHS Collections - R. Bruhn Photo)

The "head" was the bathroom. The "deck" was the floor. The "ladder" was the steps. I remember one incident that made me chuckle after I learned what it meant. Somebody would be at the bottom of the stairs [while I was coming down] and they would holler, "double on the ladder!" The first time I heard, "double on the ladder!" I waited for somebody, so two of us could go down at one time! Then when we got out to drill and they said, "double on the run!," I knew that "double" meant you go faster.

Norma Te Selle Prophet, Lincoln

U.S. government employee in
Washington, D.C., later WAVES

Then I transferred to Fort Lewis, Washington, and while there, I heard that they were going to employ a U.S. Army Hostess for a service club for the enlisted personnel. So I applied. It was at Mount Rainier Ordnance Depot in Fort Lewis, which was a staging area for going overseas. I worked there for several months when they needed a director for the main, number one service club at Fort Lewis . . .

I was there four years and then I became supervisor of the seven clubs at Fort Lewis. We really were working awfully hard, because we were working alone. We didn't have any assistants at that time [T]here seemed to be no budget . . . for U.S. Army Hostesses.

Judy Greene Tyrell, Hastings

U.S. Army Hostess

It was on the way back [to Camp Robinson, Arkansas] from those maneuvers — and that would have been probably in July 1941 — when as we were going through Memphis, Tennessee, somebody in the group apparently whistled at some girls on the golf course. I don't know who that possibly could have been. Anyway, that was pretty normal for soldiers, but General Ben Lear happened to be playing golf there at the same time and saw this “terrible” act of soldiers waving and whistling at girls. He thought that was beneath the dignity of the soldiers and the army. So we arrived back at Little Rock — now Little Rock was probably 150 miles west of Memphis — so we had driven perhaps 300 miles When we got back to Little Rock and it was evening then, I'm going to say it was six or seven, maybe eight [o'clock], and we were given orders not to unload our trucks, but [instead] we were to immediately return to Memphis. So we started back and we didn't get all the way because one guy fell asleep and wrecked a truck. They decided to find a place to stay, so we just got out our pup tents . . . and slept on the ground, east of Little Rock someplace.

The next day we drove back to Memphis and we were told to put up our tents at the airport. I can still remember walking down the streets of Memphis at high noon as a non-commissioned officer The officers and the non-coms — I was a corporal at that time so I was included — we marched down the street and up into this building where General Ben Lear had his office. He was kind of a mean-looking man. Our company commander, and that would be Harold Winqvist from Holdrege, was the one who was in charge of this whole group, so he's the guy who bore the whole brunt. I can see him standing at attention, facing up to General Ben Lear, who really gave him what the army calls a “chewing out.” Then we were told after that was over . . . to go to the airport and stand inspection. We stayed there until the next morning, I think, and then we drove back. The punishment was that we were to walk fif-

teen miles — everybody was to walk fifteen miles of the distance — and they did that in what they called a shuttle. Some people drove, and some walked. You walked five miles, then you rode five miles, then you walked five miles again and so on.

What had happened then was that the papers had picked this up. They were looking for news and they sent photographers out. National papers carried the story. I can remember the picture in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of our people walking . . . and so it was a national incident. We were called from then on the “Yoo-hoo Battalion” or the “Yoo-hoo Boys.” We survived and I think General Lear was hurt by the incident because he was a Lieutenant General, and I don’t think they demoted him, but he lost his command over this incident. So we had fun, and we have had fun with it over the years.

Harry Dahlstrom

Outside of the death of one’s own child, I think sending a boy to war would be the most difficult. I remember my mother sat up late that night and wrote a letter to each one of the boys and to their father, so they would have it as quickly as the mail could deliver it. It wasn’t long after Pearl Harbor that the troop trains began going through our town and that’s probably the most vivid memory I have because where we lived we could see the trains from our front door. They were long, long passenger trains, the old-fashioned coaches where the windows opened and the boys hanging out the windows

[My brother] Bob was on the first troop train I ever saw. I’ll never forget that. The whole town turned out to see that troop train. We couldn’t find him. We were on one side of the train and he was on the other. [We waited] Until the train was about ready to pull out and I crawled under. You weren’t supposed to do that. My mother didn’t get to see him and neither did my sister. I was the only one who got to see him because the train pulled out immediately after I got around to the other side. There was such a terrific change in Bob the next time I saw him. He was just a boy when I saw him on that troop train. He was probably nineteen years old. When he came back he was shaken and ill and had been through an awful lot.

Marialyse Hager Knobel, Fairbury
High school student