

WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR II?



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Introduction

When World War II broke out in Europe in 1939, the combined forces of the US Army, Navy, and Marines were over 334,000 individuals. Although the United States did not formally enter the war until December 1941, recruitment efforts intensified already in 1940. In 1941, the number of military personnel in those three branches of armed forces increased to over 1.8 million. In 1945, the year when the war ended, the combined number of personnel representing the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guards was over 12.3 million. Throughout the duration of the war, over 16 million men and women served in the US armed forces. Around 39% of all US servicemen and servicewomen were volunteers. But the majority, nearly 61%, were drafted. The servicemen and servicewomen represented all economic and social backgrounds. Most of them were ordinary civilians who prior to the war had no or very limited military training.

In this activity, you will explore the challenges that the process of creating massive armed forces out of ordinary Americans posed. You will examine a cartoon authored by Jon Kennedy. Kennedy was a cartoonist for the *Arkansas Democrat* from 1941 to 1943 and again from 1946 to 1988. His cartoons covered current political, social, and economic topics and commented on local, national, and global events.

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Jon Kennedy depicts his enlistment in the U.S. Army, 1943 (Jon Kennedy Cartoon Collection, 1935-1988)

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Questions:

1. In this cartoon, Jon Kennedy depicted his own enlistment in the U.S. Army. How did he represent himself?
2. Why did Kennedy draw himself as a boy (child) in a basket?
3. Who are the two men in the background? What are they doing?
4. Why did the two men from the draft board drop a basket with Kennedy by “The Army” door?
5. Look at the title of the cartoon: “Take ‘Im or Leave ‘Im.” How do you understand this title?
6. What problems and challenges with mass recruitment during World War II do you think Kennedy wanted to highlight through this cartoon?