

Early Career, Unique Teaching Experience.
by Harry Zirkelbach 02-09-2010

In the winter-spring of 1944 the Senior Engineers of the University of Detroit began to plan for
the day after June first,
the day they would be given their Bachelor degree.
Potential employers signed to interview this all male gathering.

In interviews, it became clear, no employer could grant a deferment to work in any industry.
They did seek, fight over, those unfit for the military.

For this heathy cadre, Navy military was preferred.

That physical seemed a snap; most offered a Ensign Commission, Navy Reserve. Interviews in
April, the formal acceptances early June 1944,
days following graduation. Initial training was set for late August.
For the first time, this college group was unemployed for three months.

Comparing Orders to Active Duty revealed different first duty stations.

My destination, Fort Schuyler, Bronx, New York.
I had never been more than 100 miles east of home, Erie, Pa.

I would join 34 others in a barrack. We would become a platoon,
competing for various honors that eight weeks of training.
Once faces became personalities, life a continuous joy,
in spite of training rigor, physical and mental.

The highlight of the week, all platoons would march in parade,
each three long lines. That troop appearing most military at passing the review stand, were
honored ... a noon release instead of 4:00 pm Saturday.
Extra hours in downtown New York City, a subway ride away.

These Wonders had experiences galore, shared for eight weeks,
except when silence was mandatory, which wasn't often.

It had to end.

For that, mid training, each was interviewed,
asked if they had a preferred assignment in mind.
This was like having Mom ask

“What would you like for dinner?” when you could smell it was to be spaghetti. You better not
guess wrong.

The war in Europe seemed to be ending.
In the Pacific, invasions indicated probable assignment on small ship.

Days before coming to Ft Schuyler, I had met a neighbor.
His younger brother was my age. We did not know each other well.
But, he was a Navy Officer too, going to Hawaii.
He suggested I ask for his same training, Mine Disposal. I remembered.

The interview went badly, I thought.

I had read the literature of those two three month schools,
one Explosives, the other Underwater Diving.

I made a stirring initial statement.
No matter, I was deemed unqualified by the interviewer.
After 15 minutes of my increasingly detailed statements, each rebuffed,
the interviewer rose, pointed to the door, firmly stating,
“This interview is over. Get out.”



Four days before the 800 candidates were graduated, the first assignments were posted. Four to one school, six to another, each school lengthy formal training.

One, Mine Warfare, Yorktown, Virginia, had my name first.

That interview began a lifetime of preparation for the next challenge,
and I've never forgotten.

Yes, it doesn't always work that well.
But, when challenged by authority and prevail, we discovered ourself.

No regrets, ever, when you give it your best.