

The First Draft of Jackson County

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The first registration of men between the ages of 20 and 44 in WWII took place soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941, and America's entry in the war against Japan and Germany.

The national debate over involvement in the war already raging in Europe, of Lend-Lease agreements with Great Britain and later the Soviet Union and a national draft for rebuilding the military ended abruptly with the loss of American lives that day.

The Jackson County Draft Board ordered the county-wide registration on Feb. 16, 1942, through the Selective Service at the Courthouse, Maquoketa. The announcement on the front pages of county newspapers signaled the dramatic changes about to take place in the lives of virtually every household in Jackson County.

Bellevue's two weeklies, the Herald and Leader carried the names of young men from the Bellevue, Springbrook, La Motte, Green Island and St. Donatus communities. Bellevue resident Herman Pogeman was No. 3 on the county list.

These men were not the first to enter the service from the community, but they became the first to be selected through a national draft enacted by Congress. Already the newspapers carried reports of servicemen in training or being assigned to active duty. There were rapid calls for additional draft registrations after the 1,106 men called for in the first draft registration in February.

On the front page of the April 30, 1942 edition of the Leader subscribers could see just how serious the manpower drain was going to become and how massive the call up really was.

The Selective Service was now seeking registration of men ages 45-65 in the fourth nation-wide call.

The county's draft allotment of this older category was 191 men. None of these draftees ever saw combat let alone training. In fact, some among those registered in this round were World War I veterans. The registration took place in Bellevue's Town Hall and was led by Herman J. Kueter, cashier at First National Bank. He was assisted by Paul Felderman, Charles Cheney, C.R. Bylund and John Dye, all Legion members.

The local draft board's responsibilities to the Selective Service included intake of potential inductees. The local board was also empowered to hear hardship cases, on a case by case basis, within a range of guidelines. Conscientious objectors, special categories of exempted occupations, these and other considerations were part of the process.

Paging through the old volumes of the newspapers in those first weeks and months following Pearl Harbor there was something different about this call to arms than the First World War.

The patriotic hoopla, the almost innocent enthusiasm, associated with America's entry in WWI was missing.

From 1939 on, with Hitler's savage assault on Poland followed by lightning quick invasions of Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway and France, inductees had few illusions about the enemy, or the horror of war.

Efforts to sharpen, and simplify, the issues of war, the enemy, the job ahead resulted in mobilization of the press, cinema and virtually all types of public information.

There was plenty of racial stereotyping. The Japanese and the "Yellow Peril"; Germans were portrayed as goose stepping thugs and the Italians, well if they could just lose one more war they'd win.

The induction process affected families as well as the servicemen who went off to World War II. To help both soldiers and sailors and the families they left behind there were several organizations along with the Red Cross created during World War II to help ease the anxieties and fears and provide a measure of contact. We'll look at how families stayed in touch in a coming edition.





