

# Exploring Benefits of Naval Service

GRADES 5-12



## Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 5-8. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 45 minutes.

Serving in the military can be dangerous, difficult, and physically and mentally challenging. Joining the U.S. Navy in particular can mean many long months away from family and friends. However, many veterans describe the lessons they learned and experiences they enjoyed while on their naval vessels.

In this lesson, participants will listen to oral history excerpts of a variety of Navy sailors discussing what they gained or enjoyed most during their service. Participants will explore what benefits the Navy provides and how different aspects of the job made the experience rewarding.



## Objective

Participants will understand the formal and informal benefits of serving in the Navy.



## Materials

- Oral history excerpts, including clips by Errol Kellum, Richard Johnson, Herman Nascimento, Cornelius Brown, Veronica Cotariu, Theodore Freeman, Jose Orta, Eugene Smith Jr, Samuel Higa, Howard Hitsman, David Benedict, Agustin Ramos, Lance Cobb, Raul Gonzalez and Antonio Nibbs
- Chart paper



## Inquiry

Ask participants the following questions:

- What job do you want to have when you get older?
- Why do you want to have that job?
- What advantages and disadvantages does that job have?

Ask participants to share the reasons they want to work the jobs they chose. Record them on chart paper and discuss what the reasons have in common.

- Why might people want to join the Navy?
- What is different about the Navy than a normal job?



## Investigation

Split the participants into groups of 2-3 people. Each group will read a transcript of an oral history by a Navy veteran discussing what they gained or enjoyed most about being in the Navy. These sailors served at varied times throughout the 20th century. They worked in a range of occupations and served on board various types of vessels, including surface craft, submarines and shore duty.

The [oral histories](#) include Errol Kellum, Richard Johnson, Herman Nascimento, Cornelius Brown, Veronica Cotariu, Theodore Freeman, Jose Orta, Eugene Smith Jr, Samuel Higa, Howard Hitsman, David Benedict, Agustin Ramos, Lance Cobb, Raul Gonzalez and Antonio Nibbs.

After reading the oral history transcripts, ask groups to share how their veteran benefitted from naval service. Record these responses on chart paper and discuss the following questions:

- What kinds of formal benefits did the Navy offer sailors? Informal?
- What do these benefits have in common?
- How did the Navy help sailors feel fulfilled personally and professionally?
- What role did the other sailors on board play in the experience of each service member?
- How did the individual jobs of service members play a role in their Navy experience?



## Activity

Discuss the following questions:

- What do you enjoy most about being at school or your afterschool program?
- What downsides are there to being at school?
- In this lesson, we heard veterans discussing advantages to being in the Navy. What disadvantages might there be to being in the Navy?



## Lesson Connection

Have participants hear from Navy veterans on why they joined the Navy and discuss expectations for the Navy. Please see our lesson **Hearing from Crew Members: Why join the Navy?**



## Additional Resources/References

For more on formal U.S. Navy benefits today:

<https://www.navy.com/what-to-expect/military-pay-and-benefits>

For more on the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill):

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/servicemens-readjustment-act>



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## Documents and Images

### Oral History Transcripts

**Errol Kellum:** Well it was, it was like anything, as my father always said, “Traveling broadens you.” So you always learn something new, it was a new, new way of life and all so you just made the best of it and learned, yeah, it was always a learning experience, yeah.

Most sailors you talk to about the Intrepid was, even with our little stripes here and there and our differences and, some people slower than others to adjust to life as it changed, we all worked as a good unit, and I was proud of that, and sometimes when I come back to the ship from liberty, I look up and see that 11, and I was proud of that, and then I see the “E” for efficiency on the side of the ship and I say, boy, yeah, those things you are proud of and it makes you feel good that you’re a part of a tight unit that does a good job, yeah.

**Richard Johnson:** Oh. Oh, the food was just – in fact, we won a contest; a couple contests, food contests. Here, even in New York, we came here one time, we had a contest, during Fleet Week, (laughs) and we won. But, I don’t recall the year, but we did win. We had some good, dynamite cooks. And they can really make some good things. I still remember some of the things they used to make that were very, very good.

It’s good for you, because when I went in, I was shy, and I was a shy person, but I learned, and I became, out, and I was – and you meet people from all over, different backgrounds. And you learn to know people and to love people. And, it’s good that you, you know, it’s a good experience. You come back seasoned, you know? You have a different outlook on life. You won’t be shy. And you just carry these qualities with you that you learn, and you respect people. Respect – you learn that. And that’s what it is.

**Herman Nascimento:** Well, I think there was no particular moment that made me prouder than anything else except that, being part of the, the family of the Growler. Being proud of the missions we carried out. And that, the knowledge that, knowing that we were part of keeping the peace, keeping the guys at bay. And I think that was the proudest thing that I think I have accomplished in life is to help protect our country.

**Howard Hitsman:** Well there's a lot of things that I was proud of. I think that the way that the ship was received. I seen the way that the Randolph was received in different ports overseas. Back in those days, it was like people looked at the United States as being a war type people, and, you wasn't necessarily, welcomed. They loved your money and that kind of stuff, but I seen that that changed a lot with Intrepid on the last cruise. And again, that's after the Cold War, that's after the Cuban Missile Crisis, so everybody's gained a lot more respect for the United States and our military, not just the Navy but all branches. So when we went through the Mediterranean as an example, people received us a little bit better.

**David Benedict:** One of the best things I liked, uh, while I was on here was – all the training we did. Uh, commanding officers that came here were very good skippers. They stressed training, cleanliness and just, on and on. At one point, uh, when you come out of a shipyard you get a lot of new crew members. So they all got to be trained on what they gotta, what they have to do during General Quarters. And they're assigned, uh, a General Quarters station. And, uh, initially when the bell rings and, uh, you, "man your battle stations" was announced, we were very slow. Fifteen, twenty minutes to secure the ship, to be battle-ready. And you keep this going almost every day, while you're at sea. Sometimes twice a day, and you get better at it and better and better.

A lot of fun, a lot of boxing matches. Entertainment. I have some pictures in, uh, one of my cruise books; you see the commanding officer and the executive officer just busting their gut watching these guys perform, uh. So, it's, uh, it's a great big city. Young guys from everywhere bring their talent here. Hard working kids. I learned a lot here.

**Agustin Ramos:** Actually, I was more or less looking – I didn't want to stay in the Navy more than necessary, so I was really looking forward to getting out. And I knew that I didn't want to be a boatswain's mate, even if I stayed here. So, I mean, I did the studies and all of that, but I did a lot of mail order courses. I got my GED and I took some art courses through the mail here. And I was looking, more or less, for what I was going to do when I got out of here. And it was very, very helpful because, what I had learned, it was interesting doing the homework in the mail order courses because, on the art course, I remember there were a couple of guys that were artists, or knew, so they helped me with the – said, Well, yeah, so you're drawing a Marlboro cigarette – I remember this particular guy. He was teaching me how to look at the Marlboro cigarette pack from a different angle, and where the lines would go, and the shadows and all of that. So, it was an experience of having somebody else who knew how to do this, and the encouragement.

**Antonio Nibbs:** I was a top computer guy at every job that I went to and they all tried to steal me from... So, that training, because of Commander Black, what he did for me, it enabled me to be very successful in my after military experiences (Eric Boehm, "Did you ever thank him?"). I never got to thank him. Because once I got off the ship I didn't know how I could get in contact with him. I was like nineteen years old. But he knew, and you know the relationship between me and, and Captain Black was really [a benefit], he told me things that, but he didn't... I was an enlisted man, he's a commanding officer of the ship (uses hands to indicate the great disparity in rank). I had no military experience.

And they said, if you wanna stick around you gotta, so I went and got it. Uh, I went through the VA, the VA paid, uh, the school bill. They paid, paid me, you know some money and the company... If I got a, at least a B they, they paid a certain percentage of the... So I went and got my degree.

There's, uh, there was just one thing I didn't mention, uh, well, I loved cruising on the ship, I loved that. I mean I really loved cruising and one of the most important activities that I loved was when they had swim calls. They had swim calls, they would you know, anchor the ship, drop the anchor and basically everybody would jump off the flight deck, not the, the hangar bay, into the, into the, uh, water and swim. And then they had a rope ladder you climbed up and I mean I loved that most of all. And, as I said, the fantail was my favorite part of the ship. Uh, I'm very, very proud of, you know, my ship. I'm glad that that was my ship. Especially, I never dreamt it would become a museum.

**Cornelius Brown:** And you'd patrol from one end to the other for four hours, and the same thing for the guy up top, you know? And I never could understand why they had one inside. But when I used to get that assignment, I used to particularly have a good time, because during the construction, at one of the phases, all of the radio equipment was installed in the radio shack.

So my pastime when I used to stand watches down there was, I'd go in, and I figured out, even though I was an engineman, had nothing to do with radios, or communication, I figured out how to patch the antennas for the ship's radios into the entertainment system in the galley, and I set up a reel-to-reel tape recorder. And I'd spend like four hours when I was on duty down there, recording music on these old reel-to-reel tapes, and that's what we used to play underway, because of course when you're underway you don't have any, you know, reception for, this is—they didn't even have TVs. I don't even think we had a TV on there. But they had like an entertainment system where you could play the tapes.

**Eugene Smith, Jr:** And, but I enjoyed the Navy, I learned a lot from the Navy. I learned how to carry myself, I learned how to walk around trouble, because when you get where the trouble is, you got troubles, so I learned not to get involved in that. And all of the officers always liked me because I would do my work, and I tried to do a good job too, you know.

**Jose Orta:** I just kind of did a few things and then I was like, 'this is just not getting me anywhere.' So that's when I decided to enroll at Miami-Dade Community College. While I was in the Navy they had the VEAP program, the Veterans Education Administration Program, so for every \$2, or no, I think it was for every dollar that I contributed, the Navy would contribute \$2. The only thing was that that program maxed out my contribution at \$2700. So the total I ended up with was probably around 7 or 8 thousand dollars. I maxed it out, which really helped me for those first two years of community college. Helped pay the bills, helped pay for junior college.

**Veronica Cotariu:** You learned to share, you learned to give, and you learned to take. One of the best things, I think, about boot camp was that you became not only more accurate in what you did yourself but you became more understanding of other people. Because you know how hard it was for you to be able to get that done properly.

All in all, I would say it was a wonderful life. It was a wonderful experience. It was something that you could never have if you were not in the military. And when you talk to people and tell them, you know, 'Oh, I hated to do that.' But I didn't. They'd say 'Oh, I would've hated that life.' But you couldn't hate it. Because you liked it so much. It was just - you knew you were doing some good. And you had so many opportunities to do things, to learn things, to go places, to meet people that you'd never meet otherwise. I've never regretted that I went in. I've never regretted that I was in as long as I was.

**Theodore Freeman:** I would say, it's to have the privilege of going places, seeing things, meeting people and enjoying life. This way you had a chance to meet people, go different places, and enjoy life as it come along. Even though some place you weren't supposed to go.

**Lance Cobb:** Greatest decision I ever made. No Regrets. Still got friends in. Met some crazy people. Funny people. It's taught me to, you know, always see the silver lining. I'm rarely ever down. And I tell people all the time, y'all don't know what down is. Down is being out to sea for 88 days straight. You know, so nothing really bothers me. And I attribute that to my time serving in the military. You go with it. You go with it. You don't whine, you don't complain. You know, if this is what you have to do, this is what we're doing right now. Don't worry about tomorrow. Right now is what we're doing right now. And that's what I would say. It has taught me to focus on what you're doing right now.

**Raul Gonzalez:** Problem solving became part of the scenario, and also becoming more focused and team-oriented. I guess in a way, for myself, I developed an attitude that you can do anything you want. You can change and take charge of your life. And that's really what I looked at.

So those early stages were more like taking charge and direction of your life and then moving forward. And so on board the New Jersey you become more confident and you get involved with problem solving and working under pressure and under extreme conditions sometimes. And then coming into the low periods, you take charge of your life. And as for myself, it was take charge of your situation. I was in the Navy less than 3 years because I decided to go back to college.