

## Ralph Case

Ralph Case grew up in West Asheville, NC. He vividly recalls the bustle and activity of Haywood Road, the main drag in his part of town. As a boy in the 1930s he made deliveries and later was a clerk for May's Market, the local grocer. As a young man he worked at Fort Mead painting buildings, but returned to Asheville when his mother died in 1941.

On December 7, 1941 he had just finished his late night shift in the spinning room at the American ENKA Company and was riding the 7:00 bus home. The driver gave him the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. He couldn't believe it.

At this time he had already registered for the draft, but given the importance of his job in a factory was classified 3B, meaning he was providing important defense work and wouldn't have to serve in the military. ENKA at the time was manufacturing rayon for tires, which "worked better than cotton," according to Mr. Case. He remembered that tires, cars, and gas were scarce. Fortunately, a bus pass from his home on Michigan Avenue to ENKA was relatively cheap.

He described the company as "supportive" of the troops. "When you left for the service they kept your job open till you got back." At the outbreak of the war, Mr. Case was 27 and married. Their small lot didn't have room for a garden, but he doesn't remember a big change in his diet, though he noted that "it was hard to get butter and bacon. Clothes was not too plentiful." He remembers Haywood Road as an active place with several grocery stores. "The street cars were still running then." Times were not then as tough on civilians as they would come to be while Mr. Case was in the service.

In December of 1942, Mr. Case recognized that it was only a matter of time before he was drafted. Several years earlier, watching soldiers drill in the sand at Fort Mead, he had decided that the Army "wasn't for me." He decided to enlist so as to have some choice in his branch of service. He chose the Navy. He continued to work right until the time he left, in part because he and his wife "weren't getting along too well just then."

In January 1942, Mr. Case reported to Charlotte for his physical, arriving early in the morning. Late that afternoon, he was still waiting to be processed: "I wondered what the heck's going on." Because of the inconvenience of the wait, brought on by mishandling of his papers, an officer said, "I'm going to give you a chance. You can either go North or South. I'm not going to tell you where, but that's your choice." Mr. Case was aware that North very likely meant Bainbridge or Chicago, and given that it was January, "that wasn't no place to go. I said I'll take the southbound." He ended up in Jacksonville, Florida, "where we still had to drill in sand."

From Jacksonville, Mr. Case went to Key West to work in a supply room. There he processed uniforms and equipment for the submarine base. Often he handled equipment for patrol bombers and scout planes. He generally knew when some kind of activity was about to happen based on the supply fluctuation. "You'd start getting certain things in and you knew something was going down."

From there Mr. Case proceeded to Miami, Florida, where he worked in another supply house, working “24 hours on/ 24 hours off” for just under a year. “We took plenty of time off,” during which he and buddies would venture downtown to shows and bars. Miami was “a great place at that time,” where folks were friendly and might even buy you a beer. He also had a cousin who had riding stables just outside the city. He and a buddy would go and ride the horses and visit with his cousin. “It was expensive on our pay, but she didn’t charge us.”