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## V-12

# PROGRAM




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## V-12: The Navy College Training Program

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The V-12 Navy College Training Program was initiated in 1943 to meet both the immediate and long-range needs for commissioned officers to man ships, fly planes and command troops called to duty in World War II.

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When the draft age was lowered to 18 in November 1942, the Navy quickly foresaw a shortage of college-educated officers for its operations. Likewise, hundreds of the nation's colleges and universities feared economic collapse without students to fill suddenly empty classrooms.

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Help came from the federal government with the creation of the V-12 Navy College Training Program. V-12 accepted students already enrolled in the Navy and Marine Corps college reserve programs, enlisted men who were recommended by their commanding officers and high school seniors who passed a nationwide qualifying examination.

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Between July 1, 1943, and June 30, 1946, over 125,000 college-age men were enrolled at 131 colleges and universities throughout the United States in the V-12 program. Fifteen thousand of these men were in the Marines Corps V-12 section of the program. All those in V-12 were on active duty, in uniform and subject to a very strict form of military discipline. Approximately 60,000 of those in the program were eventually commissioned as Navy ensigns or Marine Corps second lieutenants. V-12 schools ran the gamut from the Ivy League and large state universities to small, church-associated colleges in very small towns.

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V-12 participants were required to carry 17 credit hours and nine and one-half hours of physical training each week. Study was year-round, three terms of four months each. The number of terms for a trainee depended on his previous college background, if any, and his course of study.

From the V-12 program, most of the Navy trainees went on to a four-month course at a reserve midshipmen's school, and the Marines went to boot camp

and then to the 12-week Officer Candidate Course at Quantico, Virginia. The curriculum was heavy on math and science for "regulars" -- or those entering college for the first time. "Irregulars," those students who already had some college credit, were allowed to continue in their majors with the addition of a course or two in mathematics and science.

Blacks were allowed to enroll in the V-12 program in late March 1943, nearly a year before there were any black officers in the Navy. One black who gained prominence in the Navy after his V-12 graduation was Vice Admiral Samuel L. Gravely Jr., the first black to command a Navy warship and the first black to advance to the rank of admiral. Referring to his experience, Gravely said: "The V-12 program was a turning point in my life. It gave me an opportunity to compete on an equal footing with people I had never competed with before. It gave me an opportunity to prove to myself that I could succeed if I tried."

The V-12 program thrust heavy responsibilities upon young men at an early age. At least 38 admirals and 20 generals can trace their first officer training back to the V-12 program. Other V-12s who went on to prominence in many fields include: Senators Howard H. Baker Jr., Daniel P. Moynihan and Jeremiah A. Denton Jr.; former FBI director William Webster; Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy; business leaders Stephen D. Bechtel Jr. and Harold A. Poling; football coach George H. Allen; musician Roger Williams; writer William Styron; and entertainment personalities Johnny Carson and Jack Lemmon.

The V-12 program was an unqualified success in meeting the urgent need for Navy and Marine Corps commissioned officers for duty in World War II. It also had a major impact on American education.

Commandant of the 9th Naval District Rear Admiral John Downes remarked on the uniqueness of the V-12 program just 14 days after it began on July 1, 1943. Speaking to the V-12s at Northwestern University, Downes said, "For the first time on any large scale, men are allowed to go to college, not on the basis of social prestige or financial ability, but upon their own merit."

The V-12 program provided educational and military leaders to the nation for the pivotal 40 years after the wars end.

Source : Schneider, James G. *The Navy V-12 Program; Leadership for a Lifetime*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.

Navy & Marine Corps World War II Commemorative Committee  
Navy Office of Information (CHINFO)  
The Pentagon, Room 2E352  
Washington, DC 20350-1200

The Navy V-12 program sent some 120,000 young men to college to receive up to seven semesters of college education. Many of them would not have been able to go to college had it not been for the Navy program. These veterans, therefore, want today's you men and women to know about the educational opportunities that today's Navy and Marine Corps offer. Funds to sponsor this web site come from the V-12 Endowment which was established at the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation by Navy and Marine Corps V-12 veterans.

**The Navy V-12 Program  
Background**

In fulfilling the strategy developed in the dark days of 1942 for retaking the continent of Europe from Nazi Germany and the Pacific Ocean and contiguous lands from Japan, the United States Navy scheduled a massive shipbuilding program that would extend over a number of years. The Navy knew it would need college-educated junior officers to help man these ships. Likewise, the Marine Corps saw the continuing need for new lieutenants.

In November 1942, the draft age was lowered to 18, which would have cut off college enrollment for many potential officer candidates. Because the Navy traditionally insisted that its officers be college graduates, the Navy V-12 program was inaugurated to provide undergraduate education for selected applicants. Those who successfully completed their college courses qualified for Navy midshipmen schools or Marine Corps Officer Candidate School, which led to commissions as Navy ensigns or Marine Corps second lieutenants.

Through nationwide testing and from enlisted applicants already serving on active duty, 120,000 were eventually selected to participate in the program. In uniform and in an active duty enlisted status, these selectees attended regular college classes on the campuses of 131 colleges and universities. Of the Sailors and Marines in the program, about 60,000 completed the curriculum and went on to receive commissions. Many returned to college after the war to complete undergraduate or graduate degrees.

The V-12 program led the way in commissioning opportunities for blacks. In December 1943, the Bureau of Naval Personnel prohibited discrimination in the selection of V-12 candidates. This action was fully nine months before the first African-American officer was commissioned in the Navy.

#### **Aftermath**

Navy V-12 had long-lasting results, as it produced leaders for the top echelons of business and the professions. Lawyers, educators, and engineers comprised the largest group, but the fields of medicine, dentistry, business, industry, advertising, journalism, sports, show business, and government service are well represented, too. More than 40 future Navy admirals and 18 Marine Corps generals started their military careers in the Navy V-12 program.

Among the most famous alumni of the V-12 program two were actors. Both would go on to play the role of a naval officer, Ensign Frank Pulver, in productions of *Mister Roberts*. Jackie Cooper played the role on stage and Jack Lemmon immortalized the character in the film version.

#### **Other Distinguished Navy V-12 Alumni**

**Warren Christopher - Secretary of State**

**George Allen - Football Coach**

**Howard Baker - Senator, White House Chief of Staff**

**Angelo Bertelli - Notre Dame Football star and Heisman Trophy Winner**

**Johnny Carson - TV Star**

**Louis J. Cioffi - TV Newsman**

**Peter Hackes - TV Newsman, White House Correspondent**

**Jackie Cooper - Actor, Producer, Director**

**Alvin Dark - Baseball Player, Manager**

**Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr. - Senator, Navy Admiral**

**Daniel J. Evans - Senator, Governor**

**Samuel Gravely - First Black Navy Admiral**  
**Elroy Hirsch - LA Rams Football Great**  
**Robert F. Kennedy - Attorney General, Senator**  
**Bowie Kuhn - Commissioner of Baseball**  
**Melvin Laird - Secretary of Defense**  
**Jack Lemmon III - Actor**  
**Charles McC. Mathias, Jr. - Senator**  
**James McClure - Senator**  
**William Middendorf II - Ambassador, Secretary of the Navy**  
**Daniel Patrick Moynihan - Senator, Ambassador**  
**Robert C. Pierpoint - TV Newsmen, White House Correspondent**  
**Albert L. Rosen - Baseball Player**  
**Carl T. Rowan - Columnist, TV Personality, Ambassador**  
**Pierre Salinger - Newsmen, Presidential Press Secretary**  
**William Webster - Director, CIA and FBI**  
**Thomas Wicker - Columnist**  
**Roger Williams - Musician, Entertainer**

**This information provided by the US Navy Memorial - Navy V-12 Veterans**

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