

In 1941 twenty-year-old James married Grace E. Hayes, 16, began a new life and would start a family eventually having two boys and one girl. It was a good time and people were employed and dreaming again but while the US was finding its feet the War to End All Wars was quickly becoming a distant memory as Germany began to assert its power in Europe.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, now in his unprecedented third term of office, spoke strongly of US neutrality. In a speech to the American people in 1940 he declared, "I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again: your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars."



Although claiming neutrality the United States was openly supporting Great Britain and by the spring of 1939 to insure preparedness President Roosevelt began rapid expansion of military forces for the defense of the Western Hemisphere. He signed the Selective Training and Service Act (STSA) of 1940 on September 16 creating the country's first peacetime draft and formally established the Selective Service System as an independent Federal agency. The World War I conscription system served as a model for that of World War II.

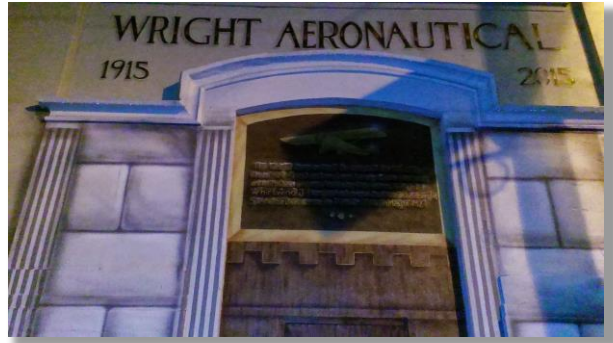
The 1940 STSA instituted national conscription in peacetime, requiring registration of all men between twenty-one and forty-five, with selection for one year's service by a national lottery. In the massive draft of World War II, 50 million men from eighteen to forty-five were registered, 36 million classified, and 10 million inducted. No one would escape the pressure of the draft.



Then December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was obliterated. On December 11, 1941, Germany declared war on the United States taking advantage of the blow in the Pacific.

With one stroke Japan seized the initiative in the Pacific. Long-made plans for offensive action by the US Pacific Fleet in the event of war had to be discarded overnight. The enemy's military forces deployed with almost explosive speed throughout the western Pacific and an early counter-offensive was quite beyond the means of The United States Army and Navy. Furthermore, overall strategic considerations demanded that we direct our major strength against Germany before turning against Japan; in the Pacific we were forced to accept a defensive role, unsatisfying as well as hazardous and ultimately very costly in American lives.

James Harrison wanted desperately to enlist as soon as the war began. All of his buddies had enlisted. In a strange twist, however, anyone under 21 would need parental permission to enlist even though they could be drafted without parental consent at the age of 18. James' mother, Carrie would not consent so James went to work at Wright Aeronautical in Dayton, Ohio, a manufacturer of radial airplane engines for commercial and military aircraft. Although he had no history or experience in aviation he "wanted to be a pilot from when he knew what an airplane was."



On his 21st birthday, July 23, 1942, James, Jr. was living in Norton, Ohio, working fulltime at the aeronautical plant as an inspector. Although he was offered a draft deferment because of his job he turned it down. He was now free to make his own decisions and one week later enlisted in the United States Army charting a course towards to officer and pilot training in the Army Air Corps. He wanted to be a dive bomber!



Six weeks of Regular Army Basic Training and a short assignment to the Regular Army would be followed in January of 1943 by and in-grade transfer to the Air Forces Classification Center in Nashville, Tennessee where James would be appointed Air Force Cadet.

