

# WWII Propaganda Posters by Mr. Pat

**Propaganda** posters played an important role in World War II for civilian life. At first glance, a propaganda poster appeared to be just another poster, but they were considered “weapons on walls.” They contained short, but powerful phrases, that were accompanied by graphic, colorful, and meaningful pictures showing anything from Hitler bent over with a giant “X” on his butt to a garden growing in someone’s backyard. Propaganda posters filled various roles in society from boosting **morale** among workers, reminding you not to waste food, informing you not to talk about war knowledge in public, to encouraging you to **enlist** in the army.



the men came back.

One of the most famous posters in America was titled, “We Can Do It”, and was only meant to be hung up for three days. The poster, drawn by J. Howard Miller, was used in the Westinghouse Electric factory to help boost the morale of women workers during wartime. It only became famous decades later. At the time, the woman wearing the bandana was nameless. Later she was given the name *Rosie the Riveter*. *Rosie* portrayed a hardworking and strong woman who could do anything a man could do and was meant to empower women to work harder in their replacement roles in factories and other jobs. During 1940-1945 many young American men went off to Europe and the Pacific to fight in the war. This left other jobs vacant. Women took over a larger portion of the workforce, an estimated 10% increase. The women never intended to stay in these jobs but rather return to their home lives when

Many men enlisted after seeing such propaganda posters as the “I Want YOU” poster. This poster contained a more realistic depiction of Uncle Sam, who embodied the American Spirit. You can think of Uncle Sam as the mascot of America. In the poster, Uncle Sam is pointing outside of the poster directly at whoever is looking at it. This was meant to put a more personalized request on enlisting soldiers to join the army. Instead of saying simply that “America needs more soldiers,” the poster is talking directly to you and telling you that America wants you and needs you to help your country.



Every country had its own propaganda posters to fulfill the needs of society. Posters in America **dehumanized** the Japanese in order to make workers producing bullets not think about how their work was killing other people. Posters in Japan boosted morale among the population by showing giant Japanese samurai towering over the world. German posters encouraged civilians to support and cheer on their army by showing the prowess of their tanks and aircraft technology. British posters reminded people to look carefully when crossing the road during the **blackout**. For all their different purposes, propaganda posters were an effective way to constantly remind and teach civilians how to act and what to do during wartime.



## Glossary

**blackout** – keeping windows covered at night so the lights from their windows would not give away the position of the city to German bombers flying overhead after dark

**dehumanize** – to think of as not human, or less than human

**enlist** – join the army

**morale** – emotional or mental condition in context of cheerfulness or confidence especially during a hard time

**propaganda** – information, ideas, or rumors purposefully spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, etc.

# I Want You!

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“Grandpa, can you tell me the story of how you joined the army when you were only 15 again?”

“Sure, but ain’t you tired of hearing that one?”

“I never get tired of your stories, Grandpa. Please tell it again.”

It was December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and America declared war the following day. It had been on all of the newspaper headlines, “WAR! OAHU BOMBED BY JAPANESE PLANES.” It seemed like everybody in America, the whole world even, was stunned. In our little town, we didn’t know what to think. We were just angry. My best friend, Steve, who lived down the street, decided he was going to enlist to get some payback. He was 16, a year older than me, but still not old enough to join the army yet. Heck, I was angry about the Japanese attacking us too, but I was 3 years away from being 18, the age you were old enough to enlist. I also wasn’t sure I wanted to go off to war and leave my mom at home by herself.

As we were walking down the street, Steve talking about his big plans, a new poster on the side of the movie theater caught my eye, “I WANT YOU FOR U.S. ARMY...nearest recruiting station: 804 Main St.” When I saw that big poster looming over us, something clicked inside of me. It was a picture of Uncle Sam pointing his finger at me, telling me *he* wanted *me* to join the army. America wanted *me*. The stern look on his face made me think of the seriousness of the war and the terrible attack by the Japanese again. I couldn’t get it out of my head. I can’t exactly explain what feelings welled up inside of me as I silently stood picking that poster apart with my eyes, but I suddenly knew what I wanted to do. Steve could tell something was up with me, so he stopped talking. I looked at him and told him I was ready.

On the bottom of the poster was stamped the address to the nearest recruiting station. That was on the other side of town. We had some time to think as we made our way there, to think about how we, a 15 and 16 year old, were going to get ourselves enlisted into the army. I didn’t think my mom or Steve’s parents would be willing to lie about our age to the recruiters, but we both looked older than we were. Old enough to join the army, though? That might be a stretch.

Steve had heard stories about some of the other underage boys around town talking their way into the army. He told me some story about Irwin Smith who wrote the number “18” on a piece of paper and put it under his foot in his shoe. When the recruiter asked Irwin if he was over 18, 16-year-old Irwin confidently replied, “Yessir!” He was standing over the number 18, so technically, he wasn’t lying. Steve and I decided to try this out, seeing as how it worked for Irwin.

Well, long story short, it was pretty easy to enlist. We told the recruiter neither one of us had parents or other family to vouch for us, and the paper in our shoes made us “over 18”, heh. The army was eager to have us. After signing up, it was just a matter of weeks before we finished basic training and got shipped off to the frontlines in Europe.

I could tell you a hundred other stories about fighting the war, but let’s save those for another time when you’re a bit older.

## Sources

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