

Answering the Call of Duty

Local female veteran shares her experiences during WWII

Until 1941, the military was only open to men. As the United States became further involved in WWII, and more men were called to the front lines, the U.S. military opened voluntary enlistment to women, and over 400,000 women answered the call of duty. One of those volunteers was Lafayette native Aline Arceneaux.

Arceneaux, 96, is a retired commander of the United States Navy. Her 30 years of service include 3.5 years active duty in WWII. When asked why she joined the military, her story is simple. Her brother served in the Navy and was based in Corpus Christi, Texas. After visiting him on the base, she decided that if the United States ever opened the military to women, she would follow in her brother's footsteps and enlist in the Navy. Staying true to her word, she enlisted in 1941.

One of her most vivid memories from her years in service is from her basic training in North Hampton, MA. Her unit was marching on the parade grounds in the sweltering heat and suffocating humidity, and many of the women were falling out. Arceneaux, however, had no problems adjusting, thanks to her south Louisiana roots. "The girls were passing out right and left, but me being from south Louisiana, I was fine," she proudly noted.

During the war, Arceneaux worked for the Bureau of Ships in Washington D.C. Her duty was to ensure that submarine parts and equipment were delivered to their destinations on time. She enjoyed her role in the war because she had an un-pursued interest in engineering, which was fostered by working with the submarine parts. Her favorite part of her job was reading the patrol reports, which were records of what happened during ship patrol. That was how she kept up with the details of the war.

When the war ended, she returned to south Louisiana and her pre-war career as a schoolteacher. But, she wasn't ready to break completely from the military. She enlisted in the Navy Reserves, where she served as "acting" commander until her retirement. When asked about her chuckle as she explained her "acting" commander role, she stated the simple truth, "Women were not allowed to be commanders."

But don't expect her to be bitter about it. She's proud of the role she and other women served during her tenure, humbly stating, "I'm glad they gave us an opportunity to serve."

The Carencro Veterans Memorial is hosting a Veterans Day Celebration on Nov. 11 from 10-11:30 a.m. to honor our local veterans, with a special tribute to WWII veterans, like Ms. Arceneaux. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, visit Carencro.org or [Facebook.com/CarencroVeteransMemorial/](https://www.facebook.com/CarencroVeteransMemorial/).