

Excerpt: Ensign George A. Hopper, Jr. Fallen Hero Profile

George A. Hopper, Jr. was born on January 30, 1919, in Torrance, California. His parents, George A. Hopper, Sr. and Ruth Davis Hopper, owned a cafe in Banning, California. Hopper grew up in Banning, along with his younger sister, Kathryn, in the family home at 217 North 4th Street.

Hopper attended grammar school and high school in Banning. He was an average student, and competed on his school's basketball team. He also learned to love golf. He spent his summers cooking in his parents' cafe.

Following his 1936 graduation from Banning High School, Hopper borrowed some money from his parents and enrolled at San Bernardino Valley Union Junior College (SBVUJC). He continued to be an average student, but stood out in sports. He was named captain of the SBVUJC gymnastics team. Hopper usually stayed out of trouble, but was arrested once and fined for disturbing the peace after getting into an argument over gambling with some locals in Crestline, California. Despite this, Hopper's friends and family considered him a model citizen. The local undersheriff of Banning even wrote him a letter of recommendation when he decided to join the U.S. Navy.

Every summer between 1936 and 1939 Hopper took part in the Citizens' Military Training Camp in Monterey, California. There he gained military training without actually joining the service. In his spare time he learned how to fly and earned a civilian pilot's license. These experiences may have played a role in Hopper's decision to become a military pilot.

Hopper enlisted in the U.S. Navy on March 27, 1941, almost nine months before the U.S. entered World War II. Hopper was transferred to Pensacola, Florida, where he became an Aviation Cadet and began flight training. By October, he had earned his wings as a naval aviator and was commissioned as an ensign.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, Hopper was training with the Advanced Carrier Training Group, Pacific Fleet. With the U.S. now at war, Hopper quickly finished his training, and prepared to leave for his next assignment as a fighter pilot with the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet.