

Read the article about the Selective Service System and then answer the questions that follow in the spaces provided.

From 1948 to 1973, young men were drafted into the military services to fill vacancies that could not be filled by volunteers. From 1948 to 1969, American males were selected for the draft based upon their age, with the oldest man in the age category (18- 26 years old) drafted first. Starting on December 1, 1969, the Selective Service System launched the first lottery draft.

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM
REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE
555 Form No. 2
(Rev. 2-8-59)

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SELECTIVE SERVICE LAW

Elvis Aron Presley
(FIRST NAME) (MIDDLE NAME) (LAST NAME)

SELECTIVE SERVICE NO. 40 1 86 135 1 16

RESIDENCE AT REGISTRATION 698 Saffarans
(NUMBER AND STREET OR R. F. D. NUMBER)

Memphis, Tennessee
(CITY, TOWN, OR VILLAGE) (COUNTY) (STATE)

Jan. 8, 1935
(DATE OF BIRTH) (PLACE OF BIRTH)

WAS DULY REGISTERED ON THE 19 DAY OF Jan. 1953

Grace F. Martony
(SIGNATURE OF LOCAL BOARD CLERK)

The 1969 lottery drawing determined the order in which men, born from 1944 through 1950, were called to report for induction into the military. 366 capsules, each containing a birthday (including the leap year) were put into a canister. On national television, officials assigned each birth date to a lottery number. The first capsule Congressman Alexander Pirnie drew had the date September 14, so every man born between the years 1944 and 1950 with that birth date had a lottery number of 1. Pirnie drew 366 capsules until each birth date was assigned a number. For the year 1970, numbers 1-195 were drafted. The highest lottery number called for this group was 195; all men assigned that lottery number or any lower number, and who were classified 1-A or 1-A-O (available for military service), were called to report for possible induction.

The draft was unpopular both for its impact on those drafted and as a focal point for opposition to a controversial war. Most draft exemptions were for college and graduate students. As U.S. troop strength in Vietnam increased, more and more young men were drafted for service there and more sought means of avoiding the draft. For those seeking a relatively safe alternative, service in the Coast Guard was an option (provided one could meet the more stringent enlistment standards). Since the National Guard was slated only for domestic security, service in the National Guard guaranteed protection from deploying to Vietnam. Applications for church ministry soared, as divinity students were exempt from the draft.



Congressman Alexander Pirnie reaching into a container of draft numbers (center) as others look on, including retiring Selective Service Director Lt. General Lewis Blaine Hershey (left) and Deputy Director Col. Daniel O. Omer (right) at the Selective Service Headquarters during the nationwide draft lottery] / MST. December 1, 1969, Marion S. Triskoso, Photographer. Source: Library of Congress

Doctors found themselves being pressured by relatives or family friends to exempt potential draftees on medical grounds. Physical reasons such as high blood pressure could get a man exempted. Various methods to worsen physical reasons included, in at least one case, a man who went to the movies every night on the week before the draft to

eat buttered popcorn (he was still approved and drafted). In addition, antiwar psychiatrists could often find small mental conditions to be serious enough to warrant exemptions.



“Draft Dodger Rag”, a 1965 anti-war song by Phil Ochs, circumvented laws against counseling evasion by employing satire to provide a how-to list of available deferments: ruptured spleen, homosexuality, poor eyesight, flat feet, asthma, caregiver for invalid relative, college enrollment, war industry worker, spinal injuries, epilepsy, flower and bug allergies, multiple drug addictions, and

lack of physical fitness. Draft counselors, and the Selective Service System itself, emphasized that there was no such thing as an “exemption” from the draft, only a “deferment”.

Rather than submit to being drafted, tens of thousands of young men migrated to Canada, which did not support war in Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, about 100,000 draft dodgers, in total, went abroad. Those who went abroad faced imprisonment or forced military service if they returned home. The U.S. continued to prosecute draft dodgers after the end of the Vietnam War. President Jimmy Carter issued unconditional amnesty in the form of a pardon to all remaining draft evaders, as part of a general climate of “cultural reconciliation” after the end of the controversial and unpopular war.

In 1973, the draft ended, and the U.S. converted to an all-volunteer military. Registering for the draft was suspended between 1975 and 1980, when President Carter resumed the requirement in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Even today, young American males are required to register with Selective Service, although there has not been a draft since 1973.

1. What are the ways young men avoided the draft?

2. What do you think the US government should have done to those who illegally avoided the draft?

3. If you did not get drafted during the Vietnam War, would you have volunteered to serve in a non-combat role? Would you have participated in the anti-war movement? Explain