

## **The Draft and the Lottery During the Vietnam War**

The law states that all male citizens of the United States, male immigrants, and illegal immigrants have to register for the Selective Service System within 30 days of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. You are not joining the military but registering with the government to be available in a time where a draft would be necessary.

The U.S. first started drafting civilians during the Civil War. Back then, rich men had many other options open to them to avoid Civil War service. To dodge the Civil War draft, people could pay a less wealthy person to take their place in the draft, pay a crooked doctor to give them a bad health exam, or outright bribe draft officials.

The modern Selective Service system was established to raise an army to fight in Europe during World War I. It was used again from 1940-47 to raise troops to fight in World War II, and then again to meet the needs for the Korean War. Between the end of WWII and the Korean War, men could just be drafted to serve, regardless of the demands of a national emergency.

People were exempt from the draft if they had a deferment that kept them from going into the military. Some deferments were permanent and some were temporary. Below are some of the deferments at the time of the Vietnam War:

- **Medical Deferment** – If you had a medical condition that didn't allow you to serve in combat, for example, diabetics.
- **College Student Deferment** – If you were going to college you could get a deferment but at the end of 4 years you could be drafted. They checked your grades and if you were failing you lost this privilege.

- **Family with kids** - If you had a family and kids that needed your support you could also get a deferment.
- **Essential Civilian Job** – If you had an essential job and they needed you and your job to keep the war going to were exempt.
- **Farmer** - If you were a farmer you could get a deferment because it was essential for the war effort.
- **Join Other Military Branch** - You could join the Reserves or National Guard.
- **Conscientious Objector** – If your religion did not allow you to participate in war this could keep you from serving.
- **Get Married** – There were a lot of shotgun weddings at the time.

### The Lottery

- By the late 1960's more and more young people were dying in Vietnam and people felt that the draft system wasn't working because too many people were able to avoid being drafted.
- As a result on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969 the United States had its first draft lottery.
- This was supposed to make it more equitable for everyone and allowed people to make decisions based on their lottery draft number.
- You could still get temporary deferments but eventually, you had to go to the military unless you had a medical reason for not doing so.
- How it worked was that they had 2 big containers and in one they would have 365 capsules with a paper that had a date of the year. In the other container, they would have numbers from 1-365. The first date drawn in the first lottery of December 1969 was September 16<sup>th</sup> and the first number drawn was 139.

**That meant that if your birthday was September 16 your draft lottery number was 139. They would start with the number 1 and work their way up and if it reached 139 then you would be called to serve your country. That same year the people born on July 9<sup>th</sup> were assigned the number 1.**

- Every year all 18-year-olds went into the draft lottery. You knew from your 18<sup>th</sup> birthdate what your status would be.**
- Draft lotteries were conducted again from 1971 to 1975 (for 1952 to 1956 births). The birth year of 1952 was the last draftees.**
- Usually, the first third of the numbers had to serve in the military, the last third probably would never serve and the middle third would be in limbo.**
- In 1973 the United States eliminated the draft lottery and went to an all-volunteer military.**