The Vietnam Draft: In Their Own Words
- Draft Motivated Enlistees-Why did they enlist and serve?

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Abstract

This essay examines why Vietnam veterans, who were draft motivated enlistees, enlisted when drafted or threatened with the draft. Data is taken from 63 oral history interviews conducted by The Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas Tech University and is analyzed using the phenomenological research approach. The background of this paper briefly explains the Vietnam Draft and the draft avoidance options available to those men who were drafted. The results section utilizes quotes from the oral history interviews to show the main themes of why men chose to enlist when faced with the draft. The discussion section discusses these themes in a wider context and brings up areas for further research.

Keywords: Vietnam War, draft, enlistment, draft motivated enlistment, Vietnam veterans.
# Table of Contents

- Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
- Aim/Object ............................................................................................................. 2  
- Method .................................................................................................................... 2  
  - Limitation of Oral History .................................................................................. 3  
  - Phenomenological Research Method .................................................................. 4  
- Material .................................................................................................................... 5  
  - The Vietnam Archive .......................................................................................... 5  
  - The Vietnam Archive’s Oral History Project’s Interview Methodology ............. 5  
- Informant Selection ................................................................................................. 6  
- State of Research .................................................................................................... 7  
- Chapter One: Background ...................................................................................... 12  
  - Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 ......................................................... 12  
  - Draft Dodgers ...................................................................................................... 13  
  - Classification ....................................................................................................... 13  
  - Draft Boards ........................................................................................................ 14  
  - Draft Motivated Enlistment ................................................................................. 15  
- Chapter Two: In Their Own Words ....................................................................... 17  
  - Avoiding the Draft .............................................................................................. 17  
    - Student Deferment ............................................................................................ 18  
    - Canada ............................................................................................................. 20  
  - Why Did They Serve? ........................................................................................... 21  
    - Patriotic Duty to Serve Country and Stop the Spread of Communism ............. 21  
    - Family Values and Military Service History .................................................. 23  
  - Draft Motivated Enlistment ................................................................................. 25  
    - Enlisted Purposely to Stay out of Vietnam ...................................................... 25  
    - Enlisted to Avoid Being Drafted into the Marine Corp .................................. 26  
    - Enlisted to get Time, Education, Training and/or Wanted Placement .......... 28  
- Chapter Three: Discussion ..................................................................................... 31  
  - Further Research ................................................................................................ 34  
  - Summary .............................................................................................................. 35  
- References ............................................................................................................. 37  
- Interviews ............................................................................................................... 37  
- Literature ............................................................................................................... 43  
- Appendix I ............................................................................................................. 46  
  - Vietnam Draft Lottery ......................................................................................... 46
Introduction

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, America experienced a baby boom; men returning home were eager to either pick up where they left off or start new families. In the period following WWII an estimated 78.2 million children were born in America in the years between 1946 and 1964.¹ This generation had high hopes placed upon them by their parents. They were a generation of hope, “they were the Dr. Spock generation, the Sputnik generation, the Pepsi generation, and eventually the Woodstock generation.”² Despite the hopes pinned upon them by their parents and the possibilities opening up to them in the post-WWII world, this generation grew up accustomed to the existence of the draft. Some looked forward to their chance to serve their country, while others saw it as a necessary evil. However, most young men never thought much about their service obligation, for many of them it was something that happened to someone else, somewhere else. Most believed it would never happen to them.

Growing up in post-Cold War America with the only war in personal memory being the First Gulf War, the Vietnam War seemed long ago and inconsequential. Historical education in many schools only went up to World War II and ended with D-Day, the last American war victory. Despite the fact that many young people had parents or grandparents who served in the Vietnam War; its history was, for the most part, not discussed in schools or even within the popular press. To be fair, Hollywood produced television dramas such as China Beach (1988-1991) and films such as Rambo (1982), Full Metal Jacket (1987) and Platoon (1987), however these examples were written and produced for an adult audience who had lived through the tumultuous years of the Vietnam War, not for young children or pre-teens. For these reasons, children and young adults born in America the 1980s and 1990s have been largely ignorant of the Vietnam War and the implications of it.

Growing up with a baby-boomer father who is a Vietnam veteran and a subject of the draft lottery who was drafted and served, I knew of the war but I didn’t know about the war. The only experiences of war related to my sister and I were amusing anecdotes of his active resistance while serving in “Nam”. He told us of such activities as hiding a snake in his commanding officer’s trunk, wearing a red baseball cap (backwards!) instead of the standard issue M1 helmet or Boonie hat, signing up for the Communist Party, as well as refusing

security clearance and promotion. To this day he has never discussed why he allowed himself to be drafted or related much of his experiences during the war. After speaking to others who have fathers or grandfathers who served in Vietnam, I realized that my experiences with my father are not unique, unlike the World War II generation, the “Greatest Generation”, many of those who served in Vietnam do not look back in pride upon their time in the military. If anything, they reminisce with distaste and ill feelings toward their government. Why did this generation of draftees, who grew up with choices and experiences radically different from their parents’ generation, chose to enlist and serve when faced with other options such as desertion?

**Aim/Object**

This C-essay will examine why these men enlisted when drafted or threatened with the draft. To gain a better understanding of these men’s actions the following questions will be addressed:

- What actions, if any, did these men take or contemplate taking to avoid being drafted?
- How did moral, familial or political obligations figure in to these men’s decision to enlist when faced with the draft?
- What advantages of being a draft motivated enlistee encouraged these men to enlist instead of just serving as a draftee?

This essay will be limited to American men drafted to be soldiers who subsequently enlisted, thus those drafted in other nations, such as Australia, or those drafted to fulfill other purposes in the Vietnam War, such as doctors or nurses, are not included in this work.

**Method**

While the Vietnam War occurred more than thirty years ago, it is still relatively recent in the scheme of history. The feelings of those who lived through this time and the actions they took were commonplace and therefore taken for granted at the time. However, now they seem compelling, of interest, as well as offer a vivid insight into a way of life or thinking.³

This essay will primarily utilize interviews of Vietnam veterans conducted by The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University within the framework of their Oral History Project. I chose to use oral history sources as it gives a voice and a place in history to ordinary people as well as has the ability to capture and preserve information that may not otherwise had been recorded. Oral history can provide good background information, personal insights and anecdotes rarely found in official documents. Oral history has the possibility to

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connect one with the history of oneself, one’s family or even one’s nation or community, but it can also shed new light on and provide different perspectives on well-known events.

**Limitation of Oral History**

The topic of limitations must be addressed when one utilizes primarily oral history sources. One problem with oral history is that it often asks people to justify actions and ideas which they never thought would need justification or explanation. Furthermore, while interviews can be effective in recreating the past and gaining insight into the thoughts and feelings of those involved, these same sources have an element of hindsight about them which can be viewed as bias. Another fact a researcher needs to keep in mind is that works utilizing oral history are not actually products of the age under investigation; they are in fact the products of the here and now. Any interview and subsequent analysis will be influenced by memory and wider cultural interpretations of the time under investigation.

Most of oral history's deficiencies are attributable to human faults. Interviews are susceptible to bias, no matter how many precautions are taken by the interviewer and interviewee. The situation of an interview renders each party affected by the other. While both parties may attempt to maintain impartiality, this is near impossible. The final product of said interview is often colored by the historian’s own background and the terms in which he or she learned to analyze the past.

However, even the informants’ memories are subject to bias. They are filtered through their memory, subsequent life experiences, exposure to the media and may also be influenced by nostalgia or post traumatic stress. Interviewees may also be unwilling to honestly discuss mistakes or errors even years after the fact. Some of the subjects interviewed by the Vietnam Archive staff were well aware of this inherent bias and commented upon it in their interviews.

I’m in the process of filing benefit claims with the Veterans Administration. In the course of doing that I acquired as many official records of what my unit did and where it was during the course of my tour, . . . I was quite surprised to find that my very clear and still distinct memories did not jive with some of the stuff that I found in these records. Details about what my company did or did not do; what the battalion was doing or was not doing; where it was at certain times, things of that nature. So I’m going to tell what I remember. . . . But also you have to understand that I do have PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and that for most of the last thirty years I have tried to forget that it ever happened, basically.

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5 Tosh, 312.
6 Grele, 43.
7 Tosh, 318.
Phenomenological Research Method

In utilizing oral history interviews, this essay employs the phenomenological research method which “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon.”9 Phenomenological research is distinctive as it attempts to portray the experiences of people through textual expression.10 By utilizing this method it is my hope to reduce individual experiences with the Vietnam War draft to a universal pattern, to “grasp of the very nature of the thing”.11

Through analyzing the various veteran interviews it is hoped that I can find the pattern of the experience of being drafted, for each and every individual. The description of this pattern will contain what Clark Moustakas, an expert on humanistic and clinical psychology, calls the “what” of what they experienced and “how” of how they experienced it.12 This will be achieved by reflecting on the essential themes which constitute the basic nature of being drafted for the Vietnam War, and a written description of the phenomenon which constitutes an interpretation of the veterans’ meaning of their lived experiences.13 Analysis of the data will be discovery oriented focusing on meaning, in the form of themes or topics, which produce a general description of the experience.

As with all methodologies, it is of upmost importance that researcher does not take into account when analyzing, as much as possible, their own experiences. However, within this approach, in addition to writing a description of what the participants experienced, researchers also write about their own experiences and the context and situations that have influenced their experiences. This insight into the researcher’s background illuminates any eventual bias the research may have to the reader.14 As for informant bias, phenomenology addresses this as well. A person’s view of his or her experience will change over time. This is because as people age and have more experiences, their interpretations and feelings concerning past events will not remain the same.15 Phenomenology actually predicts that oral history informants can possibly change their account with successive retellings as retelling the story

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11 Van Manen, 177.
13 Creswell, 59.
14 Creswell, 61.
could cause a reevaluation and reinterpretation of the events in question.\textsuperscript{16} A historian using phenomenology should also be alert for different perspectives in the view of the informant, as “in one sentence the informant could be trying to reconstruct his or her perspective at the time of the historical event, and the next sentence could be a present-day evaluation.”\textsuperscript{17}

**Material**

**The Vietnam Archive**

The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University’s objective is to collect and preserve the documentary record of the Vietnam War, preserve the records of individuals and provide a greater understanding of their experiences. In 1999 the Vietnam Center and Archive initiated the Oral History Project. The mission of this project is to create and preserve a more complete record of the wars in Southeast Asia by preserving, through recorded interviews, the recollections and experiences of all who were involved in those wars. Anyone, from any country of origin, is welcome to participate in the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project, regardless of their country of service and whether or not the participant was a civilian or in the military at the time.

**The Vietnam Archive’s Oral History Project’s Interview Methodology**

The Archive asks that all participants complete two questionnaires: the Biographical/Assignment Questionnaire\textsuperscript{18} and The Veteran Questionnaire\textsuperscript{19} or Wartime Civilian Questionnaire\textsuperscript{20}. The Biographical Questionnaire is concerned with basic biographical data and information on one’s military and/or civilian career, with a concentration on service in Southeast Asia. The Veteran and Wartime Civilian questionnaires provide further in-depth information about the interviewees’ experiences. The purpose of these questionnaires is to help the staff perform necessary research in preparation for the interviews. Depending on location interviews are conducted in person, over the phone, or by using appropriate internet technologies.

\textsuperscript{16} Kirby, 30.
\textsuperscript{17} Kirby, 30.
\textsuperscript{19} The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, “The Vietnam Center and Archive: The Oral History Project – Extended Veteran Questionnaire.” www.vietnam.ttu.edu/oralhistory/participation/forms/veteran.pdf (accessed March 1, 2010).
The interviewers guide the interviewee with questions. The interviews are uncensored, unedited, and are designed to be as authentic a rendering of the narrator's Vietnam War experiences before, during, and after the war. After conducting the interview a transcript of the interview is created which is sent to the interviewee for review. Since the purpose of the transcript is to convey as closely as possible the tone, nature, and content of the oral interview, the Archive avoids editing transcripts for grammar, syntax, or other esthetic reasons.

All interviews are digitally recorded using a digital audio recorder and sometimes on video when the situation permits. Recordings are transcribed and both recordings and transcripts are made available to students, scholars, and the general public at the Vietnam Archive in Lubbock, Texas, as well as on the internet through the Virtual Vietnam Archive, where I have accessed them.

**Informant Selection**

Informants for this work were selected in the following manner: A search was conducted on the Virtual Vietnam Archive’s Search Page for the keyword “draft”. The media form was narrowed to “Oral History” and “Limited to Items Available Online”. Of the 783 oral interviews available online, 320 hits total came up with these search parameters. These 320 hits were further limited by a process of doing individual keyword searches for each hit, in which each document was subsequently opened and a search was conducted for the words “draft” and “enlist” to determine under which manner the interviewee served. There is a small risk that I may have missed an example or two by using these limited search parameters, however I believe it would be extremely difficult for a veteran to discuss how he joined the service without using the words draft or enlist.

Each hit was then organized according to what manner of service (enlisted, drafted, draft motivated enlistment, other-medical) and which year of induction. In an effort to limit this study to only men who enlisted knowing that they more than likely would have to serve in Vietnam, the period under consideration was limited from 1964 (the Gulf of Tonkin Incident) until 1970 (the latest interview induction date). From the original 320 hits, 63 were draft motivated enlistees. Using the phenomenological method as a review tool I have read the 63 interviews which met my criteria for inclusion and have analyzed them looking at the reasoning behind their enlistment. Due to length constraints and relative relation to the

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research questions this paper only contains quotes from a limited number of informants, however the information gained from all 63 interviews was considered when choosing meaningful statements and analyzing themes and information. Statements were chosen which best represented the general feelings and themes related to the research questions.

**State of Research**

Much research has been conducted concerning the history of the Vietnam War, considering the rather young age of the conflict. However, much of the research conducted has centered on the political background and consequences of the war, as well as how warfare was carried out. There has been significant research into the individual experiences of the soldiers themselves. However, much of this has dealt with their personal experiences in Vietnam during the war and afterwards, coming home to a nation that no longer supported the war or the troops.

The Vietnam Draft is of particular interest to many researchers, with several focusing, both directly and indirectly, on the personal dilemma of the draft as well as the concept of draft motivated enlistment. Robert S. Erikson and Laura Stoker, professors of Political Science at Columbia and Berkeley, have examined how men’s draft status influenced their political ideology and attitudes towards political issues. 22 This work utilizes data from the Jennings-Niemi Panel Study of Political Socialization, which surveyed high school seniors form the Class of 1965 both before and after the draft was instituted. What makes this research applicable to my research is that the class of 1965 were losing their educational deferments around the time of the 1969 draft, thus those who had not previously been subject to the draft and draft boards suddenly found themselves vulnerable. The data analyzed by Erikson and Stoker has shown that most men, from this group, who entered the military claimed to have enlisted voluntarily (draft motive enlistees) rather than be drafted. Erikson and Stoker use the motivation of self-interest to support the class of 1969’s actions, explaining that those with lower lottery numbers were more likely to have been drafted or to enlist expecting to be called up, “[m]any of these soldiers evidently enlisted to select from the menu of military fates rather than accept a likely draft into the army.”23 The authors argue:

Their 1969 lottery number shaped their fate. This was true even for those still able to postpone their enlistment until the end of their student deferment. Those with a high number could go on with their lives

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23 Erikson and Stoker, 7.
without fear of a military call-up. Others were likely to be called; they had to decide whether to preemptively enlist, wait for their draft notice, evade, or resist. Still others saw themselves somewhere on the fence.  

Joshua D. Angrist, professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has researched the draft lottery and voluntarily enlistment. His research centers on the racial make-up of those who were drafted or were draft motivated enlistees. He aims to disprove the view that the burden of Vietnam military service fell disproportionately upon the poor and minorities. His research shows that men with draft numbers that put them at a higher risk of conscription are overrepresented among men who voluntarily enlisted in the military, but that the effect of the lottery is stronger for Whites than for non-Whites. His research found that voluntarily enlistment, armed forces eligibility criteria and the failure of draftees to avoid conscription jointly determined the racial composition of those who served. He maintains that overrepresentation of Blacks among new entrants may be a consequence of inability to avoid conscription as well as the increased ability of Black to meet armed forces eligibility criteria, as well as their higher valuation of military service as an alternative to civilian life. Angrist’s research shows that men with lottery numbers that put them at high risk of being drafted were more likely to enlist voluntarily in the military. Data shows that Whites were more likely than non-Whites to have enlisted voluntarily in response to the risk of being drafted. An implication of the results from both models is that demographic groups that are most likely to view military service as unattractive are also most likely to enlist in response to a draft.

Books, journals or projects dealing exclusively with why people enlisted voluntarily when faced with the draft are rare or do not exist at all, however there are many encompassing works which take up the subject and report on it in part. Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam by Christian G. Appy, a war historian and professor of History at the University of Massachusetts, discusses, in part, the draft experiences of working class Americans. The substance of the book is drawn from over 100 interviews and oral histories the author conducted with Vietnam veterans who served as combat soldiers. He maintains that 80 percent of soldier came from blue collar families, the majority of which were drafted, however many of those drafted enlisted because they were about to be drafted. Appy reveals the narrow boundaries of choice experienced by poor and working class men in America that

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24 Erikson and Stoker, 7.
often resulted in men enlisting for socio-economic reasons. The feeling of inevitability about the draft, coupled with economic hardships at home and the prospect that enlistment might lessen the chances of going to Vietnam all pointed in the same direction for many young men. He argues that, many working-class men enlisted during the Vietnam War-era because, "[w]ith the prospect of a dead-end job, little if any chance for college, and the draft looming on the horizon," most "saw enlistment as a way of `getting over' the unavoidable."27 Appy proceeds to explain that "white, working-class men did not regard military service as an opportunity so much as a necessity (nothing else to do, draft pressure, duty, job security) or an escape (to avoid trouble, get away, leave school)."28 He adds: "For black volunteers, economic and social improvement were often decisive motivations."29

_Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam_ by Kyle Longley, a professor of History at Arizona State University, uses diaries and oral histories of Vietnam combat soldiers to challenge the stereotypical representations of those who served in the Vietnam War and to encourage further research into the experiences of Vietnam veterans.30 Longley devotes a large portion of Chapter 1 to the draft and to the “draft induced” (draft motivated enlistees). He includes some individual quotes relating to personal choices involving draft induced enlistment but unfortunately these quotes are not discussed in a larger context. The reasons given by Longley for volunteering for enlistment include attempting to end uncertainty and giving a sense of control over the branch and location of their service. He comments upon young men’s choices about avoiding the military, and maintains that “the commonalities of the social constructions of masculinity, which include factors such as the importance of family and community and the shaping of perceptions by political and entertainment role models, all affected the decisions of the millions of young men who came of draft age during the Vietnam War.”31

Oral history has become an increasingly popular and common tool of historians; some institutions have taken it upon themselves to start recording the experiences of Vietnam veterans, much like what has been done with World War II veterans, in hopes of preserving their experiences for future generations. Some universities, government organizations and museums have established programs devoted to collecting these stories, while many books have also been published on the subject. _Vietnam Voices: An Oral History of Eleven Vietnam_
Veterans by James F. Behr, a Vietnam veteran and history teacher, includes a chapter “How I got into the service” which deals entirely with how the eleven veterans came to be in the military.32 The problem examined in the book is, according to the author, “‘Why did American men fight in the Vietnam War?’ Our fathers and uncles had fought and died in World War II. Our older brothers had fought in Korea. It was now our turn. There was still a sense of duty in America.”33 Behr maintains that young men were expected to serve their country. Men could enlist, enlist while waiting to be drafted or be drafted. “The important thing was that you performed your service”34 The author defends his use of oral history by discussing the importance of preserving the history of Vietnam War veterans. “Veterans of the Vietnam War are still alive. They can be interviewed and their thoughts and feelings, emotions and experiences can be saved…we do not have to rely on ‘letters and diaries that have survived’”.35

In A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam by historian James Ebert uses 50 oral history interviews as well as primary sources such as diaries and letters to relate the experiences of soldiers as infantrymen.36 Ebert feels that there is much to learn by using oral history when writing history, by “allowing these Vietnam combat veterans to have a say in what history records about them.”37 Written in chronological order, the reader gets an insight into how these men ended up in the infantry.

The majority of men who were called to serve in Vietnam went dutifully. Some volunteered with the intention of serving in combat; others enlisted for precisely the opposite reason. But somewhere between the extremes of aggression and avoidance lay the personal motivations that attracted nearly eight million Americans to enlist during the Vietnam era. For some there was the allure of adventure or travel. Others saw the service as an avenue for social and economic advancement, attracting young minority members and the poor of all races with promises of education, technical training, and self-respect. For still others, the military was expected to provide direction and discipline.38

Ebert comments that the young men who served had been raised to be patriotic, to believe in America and see the world “polarized by ‘good guy-bad guy’ imagery, and left it up to their government to distinguish who was whom.”39 Most of the men he interviewed never thought that they would actually have to worry about being sent to Vietnam. Some of his informants were draft motivated enlistees, those who identified themselves as such

33 Behr, 3.
34 Behr, 3.
35 Behr, 5.
37 Ebert, x.
38 Ebert, 4.
39 Ebert, 2.
commented that the reason they ended up in the military was that they did not have money for
draft avoidance techniques like college enrollment while others wanted the luxury of choice;
choice of branch of military and of training.

*Voices from Vietnam: Eye-Witness Accounts of the War: 1954-1975* by professors of
History at Texas Tech University, Richard Burks Verrone and Laura M. Calkins, uses oral
history interviews from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University to illustrate what
happened in America and Vietnam during this time period.40 The aim of the book, besides
providing insight into veterans’ experiences is to encourage others to “ask the questions that
need to be asked.”41 The authors stress that each man’s story is different, despite similarities
in their experiences. The authors devotes a large part of Chapter 2 “Going to War” describing
the various ways young men came to find themselves in the military, taking up both being
drafted and draft motivated enlistment. They found that the overwhelming cause of young
men voluntarily enlisting was to exert some control over their future.

*Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women who Fought There* by
journalist Mark Baker, was first published in 1981, less than ten years after the War’s end.42
It relates the rather explicit and “recent” experiences of soldiers with the draft and their time
in Vietnam. The book is organized in a manner where the reader follows the men’s
experience chronologically, from their recruitment until their return to the United States
following their tour, by using excerpts from different interviewees to describe each phase.
One aspect of Baker’s book which sets it apart from other books of its kind, is that Baker did
not clean up any of the language taken from his oral interview; he includes all profanity and
racial slurs uttered by the interviewees, most of who were drafted or draft motivated enlistees.
Baker’s book has been surrounded by controversy due to its explicit descriptions, many
readers and critics question the authenticity of Baker’s work and his informants. Baker
addresses the problems of oral history informants and their recollections:

> It must be assumed that included here are generalizations, exaggerations, braggadocio and – very likely-
outright lies. But if these stories were told within a religious framework, the telling would be called bearing
witness. The human imperfections simply authenticate the sincerity of the whole. The apocryphal aspects
have more to do with metaphor than with deceit. . . This book is not the Truth about Vietnam. Everyone
holds a piece of that puzzle. But these war stories, filled with emotion and stripped of ambition and romance,
may bring us closer to the truth than we have come so far.43

40 Laura M. Calkins and Richard Burks Verrone, *Voices from Vietnam: Eye-witness Accounts of the War:
41 Calkings and Verrone, 10.
42 Mark Baker, *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There*. 1 ed. (New
43 Baker, M. xv-xvi
Chapter One: Background

Selective Training and Service Act of 1940

The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 (Title 50 Section 301) was passed by U.S. Congress on September 16, 1940 and signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The passing of this act marked the first peacetime conscription in the United States and established the Selective Service System as an independent federal agency. The original act required that all able-bodied and mentally fit American males between 21 and 30 register with the local draft board and were subject to two years of compulsory military service. Later the ages for registration were changed to 18 to 45. The implications of this act were that from 1948 until 1973, when the act was repealed, men were drafted in both war and peacetime to fill vacancies in the armed force that could not be filled by voluntary enlistment.

The system had worked reasonably well during the Korean War, but the law’s post-war provisions allowed General Lewis Hershey, the long-time director of the Selective Service System, wide discretions in setting up guidelines for local draft boards as to which men to call up and which to defer or exempt from the draft. Until 1967 a policy called “channeling” was in place. This policy allowed draft boards to defer young men who were in college or undergoing postgraduate studies on the theory that these men could be drafted upon their eventual graduation. However, in reality, this policy did not work as well as expected as many college students delayed their graduations until after their twenty-sixth birthday, when they were too old to be drafted.

Following complaints and a public backlash, Hershey changed the deferment policy to allow for college deferment until the age of twenty-four or four years of study, whichever came first, while deferments for post-graduate school were limited to medicine and a few other fields. Following this allotted time men were subject to the draft unless they had joined ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) during their time at college and had accepted a commission in the armed forces upon graduation, joined the Enlisted Reserve, or National Guard.

45 Addington, 134.
46 Addington, 134.
Draft Dodgers

At the beginning of the war the government took strong measures against draft resisters. David J. Miller was convicted in March 1966 for destroying his draft card and given a suspended sentence if he would accept a new one. He refused, was brought to court again, and sentenced to two-and-one half years in jail in April 1967.47

Hershey’s 1967 changes in draft/deferment policy only served to increase draft evasion and defiance among the draft age population. Student demonstrations against the ROTC and the draft were common as were public burnings of draft-registration cards. Draft-eligible men fled to other countries, such as Canada or Sweden, while others went underground in order to avoid being drafted. The idea of fleeing to Canada or other foreign nations appealed to many who were facing the draft, and it has been estimated that between 30,000 and 50,000 young men fled to Canada during the war.48 Others used fraudulent medical or ethical grounds for exemption. It is estimated that by the time Nixon took office in January 1969 there were more than half a million draft evaders.49

Classification

One's classification, in both the regular draft as well as draft lottery, was determined by a local draft board. This classification was based on one’s circumstances as well as beliefs and determined if one was available for induction, totally exempt from service, and/or eligible deferment. Between the years of 1948 and 1976, men were sorted into the following (most common) categories in accordance with US Code of Federal Regulations Title 32, Chapter XVI, Sec. 1630.2.50

1-A - Available for unrestricted military service.

1-O Conscientious Objector- conscientiously opposed to all military service based upon moral, ethical or religious beliefs which play a significant role in life. Objection to participation in war is not confined to a particular war. Fulfills service obligation as a civilian service worker.

47 Melvin Small, *Antiwarring: the Vietnam war and the battle for America’s hearts and minds.* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2002). 34.
49 Addington, 134.
1-A-O Conscientious Objector – conscientiously opposed to training and military service requiring the use of arms. Fulfills service obligation in a noncombatant position within the military.

1-S(C) Student Deferred by Statute (College). Induction could be deferred either to the end of the student’s current semester if an undergraduate or until the end of the academic year if a senior.

2-S Deferment because of collegiate study. Deferment lasted until graduation or until the registrant reached the age of 24. Discontinued in December, 1971.

Draft Boards

The Selective Service System operated about 4000 local draft boards throughout the country. Quotas for the number of inductees were set at a national level by the Department of Defense and men were drafted according to projected enlistments and needs. The Department of Commerce and Labor defined and controlled draft deferments in terms of critical occupation and essential activities; however local draft boards had significant liberty in selecting men for service, thus creating inequities in the system.51 As the draft boards operated independently and often without government oversight, widely different policies developed in the nation’s four thousand draft boards. The interpretation of draft/deferment rules was often affected by the board members’ personal values and ideologies.52

The draft boards generally met once or twice a month. During each meeting members of the draft boards had to assign classifications for hundreds to thousands of young men from their area. Due to the immense workload and the limited time allotted, board members often heavily relied on the recommendations of clerks or other lower-grade civil service employees.53

While the draft/deferment system and policies were unpopular and seemingly unfair, the government deemed them necessary for troop procurement. For, without the draft the Army and the Marines would not have been able to maintain enough men to meet their responsibilities, not only in Vietnam, but around the world as well.54 In an effort to make the draft more impartial and placate the public, President Nixon and his congressional supporters

51 Calkins and Verrone, 42.
53 Baskir and Strauss, 24.
54 Addington, 134.
decided that the best solution to the draft/deferment problem would be to initiate a draft lottery system [See Appendix 1].

**Draft Motivated Enlistment**

Another experience with the draft and an important contributor to American military manpower was the existence of “draft motivated volunteers,” men who actually volunteered for military service to avoid being drafted under less favorable circumstances. Individuals who went this route often cited the fact that they could exercise some control over their military fate. They also contend that they sometimes were talked into joining the military by a recruiter. They were encouraged to join so that they would be ‘guaranteed’ a particular branch and job within that branch, something they could not get if they were randomly drafted.  

It has been estimated that 60 percent of all college-graduate enlistees were draft-motivated and not true volunteers. Competing against one another, all branches of service tried to convince the potential draftee that he had a lot to gain by enlisting. Various officer recruiting programs, especially the ROTC and the Judge Advocate General Corps, encourage university students to sign with them, often promising safe assignments and deferred enlistments. If a draft-vulnerable young man had sufficient education and high enough IQ to meet their tougher enlistment standards, he could also reduce his chances of engaging in combat by joining the Coast Guard, Navy, or Air Force, however, the Coast Guard, Navy and Air Force were well aware of these facts and exploited it to the fullest.

The Army, home for 90 percent of all inductees, offered many opportunities for avoiding combat. Their recruitment ads hinted broadly that enlisting was the only way to avoid infantry duty in Vietnam: “Make your choice now- join, or we’ll make the choice for you.” Despite the recruiters making promises and providing opportunities to those who enlisted in the Army, there were no guarantees. Throughout the war years, enlistees were only promised that they would be enrolled in the training programs of their choice, but not that they would be assigned to any specialty.

It is crucial that modern researchers keep in mind the uncertainty faced by these young men after the assignment of their draft numbers. Although the official induction ceilings were often reached midway through the year, the highest draft number that would be called up was

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55 Calkins and Verrone. 44.
56 Baskir and Strauss, 54.
57 Baskir and Strauss, 54.
58 Baskir and Strauss, 55
59 Baskir and Strauss, 55.
generally not known until later in the year. For example, the 1971 ceiling for induction (125) was first called in May. But 125 was not officially declared to be the induction ceiling until October and men with numbers as high as 170 were called for pre-induction examination. It has been estimated that draft-motivated volunteers constituted approximately 42% of 1971 enlistments, 24% of 1972 enlistments and 15% of 1973 enlistments.  

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60 Angrist. 585.
Chapter Two: In Their Own Words

This chapter contains the results of my research. As stated before, this study looked at oral history interviews of 63 draft motivated enlistees and will examine them from a phenomenological point of view, by this I mean I will present the dominant themes for each research question category. According to psychologist Donald E. Polkinghorne findings of a phenomenological study should contain a copious number of quotes from informants to ensure that they are “indeed supported by and derived from the data”.62 It is important that as the author of this work I am aware of the implications of including one particular part of an interview and not another, and that the goal of inclusion is to suggest possibilities rather than draw conclusions.63

While this section is the “results” of my research I feel that just providing quotes or meaningful statements would not be sufficient, nor reader friendly, instead I will present my results in a manner that gives them some meaning and historical context. The following results, in the form of meaningful statements, are categorized according to dominant themes provided by the informants in their interviews.

Avoiding the Draft
The interviews made clear that there weren’t many options for young men hoping to evade the draft. As one veteran commented,

I didn’t want to go because I mean not for any reason it’s that everybody didn’t want to go, I think. That was just a general consensus. I didn’t feel like it was dangerous, immoral, or illegal I just didn’t. The military was foreign to me, either I really had nobody close to me personally that was involved with any military or war, except my brothers and they were in and out before I even knew that they were in. Anyway, I guess my point is I really didn’t have a strong opinion just except that everybody basically would want to do something else other than that if they could, but everybody knew that was coming.64

63 Kirby, 35.
According to one veteran, draft avoidance was not an uncommon occurrence among eligible young men, "Everybody was trying to do some kind of dodge for the most part except for a few people that would volunteer."  

Many men interviewed felt as if they had only four options when they were in the terrifying position of being drafted: go in and serve, go to jail, try to be an objector of some sort, or live as a fugitive in Canada.  

I was scared to death to get drafted. I wanted nothing to do with the war. I was scared to death to go to Vietnam. I didn’t want to be killed. I didn’t want to kill anybody else.

Student Deferment

One method of fighting the draft was applying for a deferment. Deferments of different sorts were one possibility for draft avoidance; however a deferment was in fact just that, a temporary deferment of service. Until 1971 and the advent of the draft lottery, being enrolled at a college or university often entitled one to a 1-S or 2-S student deferment. However to be eligible for this deferment certain criteria must be met. This criterion was federally mandated and locally interpreted by the draft board. Knowing that a (possibly partial) draft board was in charge of their fate scared many young men.

I was scared to death. My draft board, . . . met every year before we started college, . . . I would get this A [1-A classification] in the mail saying I was available for the draft and I’d have to petition the draft board as soon as I started school to prove that I was in school so every year I went through this."

For many interviewed the 1-S or 2-S did not offer any illusion of total service evasion, as even if the deferment criterion was exactly met, many of these young men still faced the possibility of being drafted once they graduated or dropped below full time status. Some knew that eventually they would have to serve, “it was just assumed that we would be going to the military just as soon as we graduated.”

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66 Hubenthal, "Interview with John Hubenthal," 36.


“For many the feeling wasn’t, ‘You may be drafted.’ It was more like ‘You will be drafted.’” Because of this ideology, many of the young men attempted to remain at school for as long as possible, having the motto, “stay in school at any cost” hoping that the war would end before they finished their degree. One veteran related:

[I] graduated from the University of Florida eventually, in 1971 almost ten years to the time I started school there, changed majors four times while I was in college, one reason I was in college for so long and the other reason was I was trying to avoid the draft by keeping my 2S classification and when that ran out my friendly draft board there in Gainesville . . . informed [me] that I was not only ready to be prime meat for that but I was number one on the list.

Among those who did study there was an immense amount of pressure and stress, there was a fear of graduation and a fear of dropping out. “You couldn’t do anything, if you dropped out of school for any length of time, they’d nab you.”

And when you went through college, you always had in the back of your mind, “You have one of two choices; you can stay here, study, make your grades and stay in school, but if you flunk out or decide to stop, you’ll get drafted.” I’ll never forget, I guess it was my sophomore year, I had one of my friends who had been going to school, wasn’t doing well, he decided he was just going to drop out. I guess in February or something, he shows up in an Army uniform because he’d been drafted. And he’d gone through basic training and the advanced training and he was [trained] as a mine detector. I remember we were all there and told him good-bye and so forth. Then I bet you it wasn’t a month later the campus newspaper had on the headlines that he had been killed in Vietnam. In fact, what had happened was he’d gotten off the boat, probably went out on his first mission, made a mistake, and a mine blew up and killed him. That was just stunning to me at the time because it really made the situation very real. If you’re not in school, you could be in ‘Nam and you could be dead within weeks.

Not all men interviewed felt that they were cut out for higher education. Some had no wish to go at all; some did not have the financial means or grades to enroll or maintain a full-time status, while still others dropped out before graduation for various reasons. However, the odds were much worse for those who did not, for their various reasons, partake in or complete higher education, “just about every adult male that didn’t go to college, went there.

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71 Hubenthal, 33.
73 Grigsby, 1.
74 Grigsby, 5.
75 Taylor, 11-12.
For this reason, the draft made for some very limited decisions about what a young man could do with his life.77

Many veterans related that they joined the military for just this reason, “I went to the University of Texas at Arlington to college for about two years and then I dropped out of there and knew I was fixing to get drafted and so I joined the military.”78 Another veteran commented, “I had a choice between enlisting or waiting to be drafted and I got tired of waiting so I just went in on my own.”79 Other men purposely dropped out and waited to be drafted just to get their service time behind them.

Well I wasn’t real excited about going, but I fully expected to be drafted. So, I decided after about my third year in college that I would just drop out and get it behind me, and then come back and finish my education after that.80

Canada

Geographical location often played a role in many young men’s draft avoidance considerations; many of those interviewed who lived along the border stated that they thought long and hard about their options. Going into Canada would have been quite simple for many, “going to Canada, . . . was easy because we lived in Detroit; we’d just walk across the bridge, and you’re there.”81 However once one entered Canada as a draft dodger there was no returning without facing serious legal mitigation.

Others interviewed rejected Canada right away as they did not want to leave their country. American was still their homeland, despite inflicting the draft upon these young men, “This is
my country. Nobody’s going to run me out. ... It [Canada] was not an option. Not even a good option. It wasn’t an option. Other young men excluded the Canadian option on the basis of never seeing their loved ones again. On veteran commented, “I’m close to my mother and I didn’t want to leave her.” Men such as him chose to serve rather than to permanently break ties with their nation and in effect desert their family and friends.

Why Did They Serve?

Patriotic Duty to Serve Country and Stop the Spread of Communism

I, there was just this part of me, I think, that believed that it was the right thing to do, that we were stopping communism, communism and we were trying to promote democracy in the Republic of South Vietnam. 

People should have freedom of choice,” and that’s what I went there for is to stop communism. Patriotism. . . . Patriotism, I believe in patriotism, but I went to stop communism, not to serve my country; serve my country secondly.

Informants commented that during this time the media and especially the government were spinning the war as a war against communism, that it was every young man’s duty to defend his homeland against the communist threat in the East and to prevent the realization of the “domino theory”. The ideology behind the “domino theory” was that if Vietnam fell to communism then the rest of Asia would certainly also fall, each nation falling faster than the previous, until communism flourished and created a legitimate threat to the United States and the rest of the Western “free world”.

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82 Hubenthal, 36.
Several interviewed stated that as young men they “had no idea why we were over there. . .
. All [they] knew was that we were there supposedly fighting Communism.87 However,
many, at least in the beginning of the war, felt that “the war was being fought for a good
reason . . . there was good reason to be in Vietnam.”88 One veteran commented, “As the war
was portrayed on television it sure looked like to us at the time that we were helping these
people in South Vietnam.”89 They may not have wanted to go but several felt that it was their
duty as an American to serve. “Hey, my country is calling. I don’t like it, but you know, I
wish I could get out of it, but you know, this is what I got to do.” 90

This was their country, and when their country called, they answered. They were not
going to shirk from their “patriotic duty as a young man and go fight against the Communist
insurge [sic] in Southeast Asia”91 “help the United States stop the spread of Communism”92
and “promote democracy in the Republic of South Vietnam.”93 Many willingly signed
enlistment papers, knowing full well that they were to be shipped off to Vietnam. These
enlistees accepted this fate knowingly, many with the ideology, “Hey, I’ve lived here all my

87 David Holdorf, "Interview with David Holdorf," Interview by Stephen Maxner, transcribed by Sherri
Brouillette. Virtual Vietnam Archive. David Holdorf Collection, (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
88 Kunkleman, 2.
89 John Sweet, "Interview with John Sweet," Interview by Steve Maxner, transcribed by Brooke Tomlin.
Virtual Vietnam Archive. John Sweet Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, 7 Aug.
90 Michael McGregor, "Interview with Michael McGregor," Interview by Laura Calkins, PhD., transcribed
by Laura Darden. Virtual Vietnam Archive. Michael McGregor Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas
91 Michael Harris, "Interview with Michael Harris," Interview by Stephen Maxner, transcribed by Tammi
Lyon. Virtual Vietnam Archive. Micheal Harris Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University,
92 William Charles Moore, “Interview with William Charles Moore,” Interview by Steve Maxner,
93 Carney, 50.
life and I’m an American and if I get drafted, that’s my duty.’ 94 Some seen it as their responsibility as Americans to serve, if someone had to do it, it might as well be them.

I wouldn’t want to ever meet the guy that took my place if I didn’t do it. . . . I went and did it and came out okay. I wouldn’t want to know if the guy that took my place went and did it and didn’t come out okay. 95

**Family Values and Military Service History**

Family values played an important part in many young men’s decision to serve instead of evading the draft. “Back then, everybody, your uncles, everybody, your cousins, older cousins, uncles, everybody had served in World War II or in Korea.”96 For many young men it wasn’t a question of serving it was a family dictated obligation, “When you have four uncles in the military in a time of war, in a time of war you go to the military and serve. . . . it is something that you have an obligation to do.” 97

You had to do what you had to do like my father did and basically I wasn’t contemplating going to Canada or anything. [Packman adds: I would not have felt guilty about not being drafted but I accepted it as something that I had to do.] 98

Serving history within a family could be very important for a young man, some men interviewed had military service history going back to the Revolutionary War, choosing not to serve was not an option,

Yeah, my family has served in almost every war that this country has had. My third great grandfather was wounded at the Battle of the Fallen Timbers with Mad Anthony Wayne in 17, I think, 94. Ever since then, my great grandfather fought with the 14th Iowa infantry in the Civil War. I have a very, very distant cousin that was killed in the Civil War. My grandfather served in World War I, my dad in World War II. Somehow we missed Korea, but I seemed to be one of the few members of my family, of the entire genealogy who served in Vietnam. But we’ve always served, it seemed like the thing to do. 99

This family dictated service obligation had a bearing on many of young men’s decisions when mulling draft avoidance “I wasn’t raised to go to jail, I wasn’t raised to evade the draft

96 McGregor, 26.
97 Noller, 13.
99 Spawr, 2.
and I wasn’t raised to go to Canada. That just wasn’t done in our family at that time.”100 For many sons of World War II veterans, evading or dodging military service was not even an option, at least in the eyes of their fathers.

[H]e was just so adamant about no son of his was not going to desert or go to Canada. He made it a whole issue of my manhood and everything that I was going to serve in the Army or the military and that was the final.101

Serving when called upon and not evading was a question of honor for many families.

Our family was... military. We’re not generals and colonels and stuff we were all enlisted. None of us were officers, but we all took this for granted that you had to go into the service. It was never a thought of saying ‘No, I want to take off for Canada,’ which is about miles away from my house. A lot of people did that to get away from the draft. You got drafted... . . . It was such an honor to be in the service. I mean you got drafted or you enlisted.102

Many young men were raised to believe that they had “a responsibility to do what’s expected of [them], at least up to a certain point”103 to not “question authority”104 and that if it was their “turn they needed to go”105 and do their duty “to God and country”106 just as their forefathers did. “[M]y father told me that, if you're country calls you, you have to serve. I thought, “That’s the only choice I have now.”107 Beliefs such as, “You had to do what you had to do like my father did”108 was quite common among the men interviewed.

I remember my father talking about saying that anybody who volunteers for the military’s got to be out of their mind. That’s not the way to do it. But he also said, ‘But if they ever call you, if your country ever calls you and tells you they need you to serve, you have to answer.’109

101 Carney, 3.
104 Russel Hiett, 11.
107 Taylor, 14.
108 Packman, 12.
109 Taylor, 3.
Some men, whose fathers or brothers had not served in World War II or the Korean War, felt that their families used guilt to persuade them to accept their being drafted or to enlist upon being drafted.

My father had, who was a college teacher, got out of going to WWII because of a deferment in teaching, and I guess a little guilt that the family had not participated in WWII or Korea, so, it was my turn.\footnote{McBane, 2.}

**Draft Motivated Enlistment**

**Enlisted Purposely to Stay out of Vietnam**

I didn’t want to die, myself. But the other thing was knowing that you are very likely going to be put in a position where you have to kill someone else... I was drafted for two years, three days into the service I had an officer tell me that if I would sign up for an extra year that I wouldn’t have to go to Vietnam.\footnote{Kunkleman, 4.}

Many of the men interviewed stated that as young men, upon receiving their draft notices, they went down to their local recruiter to see if there was any way they could get out of active service without actually draft dodging. For many the most popular alternative was the National Guard or Army Reserve; however admittance to these branches was extremely difficult during this time in history, these branches had “waiting lists a mile long”\footnote{M. Thomas Powers, "Interview with M. Thomas Powers," Interview by Dr. Laura Calkins. Virtual Vietnam Archive. Milton Thomas Powers Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, 2 June 2004). 11. http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/virtual/servlet.starweb?path=virtual/virtual/materials%5Fnew.web&search1=ONUMN%3D0402 (accessed March 9, 2010).} and, according to many interviewed veterans, only a small number of people, often from specific socio-economic groups, were able to gain access to the few coveted possessions in the Guard or Reserve.

Everybody was trying to do some kind of dodge for the most part except for a few people that would volunteer and one of the most popular dodges in my community at the time was joining the National Guard or Army Reserve. But you couldn’t do that unless you had some kind of political influence or some kind of an in that would get you into one of those units because they were all jam packed with people at the time.\footnote{Taylor 14.}

I went to the reserve units in Houston, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Army Reserve, and maybe the Air Force Reserve, . . . Inquiring as to availability to get into a reserves unit and, basically, I was laughed at, essentially, as there was a waiting list, a long waiting list!\footnote{Jerry Benson, "Interview with Jerry Benson," Interview by Stephen Maxner, transcribed by Christina Witt. Virtual Vietnam Archive. Jerry Benson Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, 25 Sept. 2000). 2. http://www.virtualarchive.vietnam.ttu.edu/starweb/virtual/virtual/servlet.starweb?path=virtual/virtual/materials%5Fnew.web&search1=ONUMN%3D0060 (accessed March 9, 2010).}

Other military branches such as the Coast Guard or Air Force seemed to be better alternatives than the Army or Marines for some of the men, “You always eat in a mess hall. You always sleep on sheets. You always have showers. I mean we used to call it the country
club. And at the other end of the spectrum you have the Marine Corps.” 115 For others the Navy seemed like a better alternative than the Army as “they had less forces in-country Vietnam than most [other branches].” 116

We had calculated that the Navy was the safest place to be, Army and Marines clearly weren’t it, you’d get killed being a grunt and Air Force, no you’d have to fly over North Vietnam and so the Navy seemed the safest. 117

However, to many young men’s disappointment, this was often not the case. Despite being promised by recruiters that they would be state-side or at least in another part of the world, many ended up in the Southeast Asia warzone.

Some recruiters played on the benefits, such as the GI Bill benefits, which financed higher education after one’s service, or delayed enlistment to entice enlistees. Some even promised that by the time a young man finished basic training the war would be over and there would be no need to send more men to Vietnam. Often the recruiters would promise the young men one thing but deliver another, leading to what many men interpreted as lies and a generally feeling of betrayal.

I went down to the Army recruiter, whose last name I shall never forget as long as I live because if I find him I’m going to help him remember and I was looking for what could I look forward to, so came the series of lies at that point. 118

Many of the men took the recruiters at the word and enlisted without double-checking what the recruiter actually promised. Naivety was high and a feeling of “certainly, those nice Army recruiters wouldn’t deceive me at all” 119 was rampant among many young men, who later found themselves sorely deceived.

**Enlisted to Avoid Being Drafted into the Marine Corp**

The Marines are known as being the toughest branch of American service, both physically and mentally, they are first ones there and stay in the line of fire for as long as it takes.

The Marine Corps is shock troops, assault troops... They’re riflemen. They’re fighters. They’re not, you know, none of this pansy nation building crap...They’re the shock troops, and as a consequence they also had and have a reputation for being much, much tougher in terms of training and also for having a higher mortality rate in combat. 120

For much of the Vietnam War period the military was drafting for both the Marines and the Army. Traditionally the Marine Corp has been an all-volunteer branch of the service, however, like the Army, the Marine Corp face enlistment problems during the Vietnam War. One way the Marines succeeded in fulfilling their quota was by inducting draftees into their

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115 Hubenthal, 51.
116 Harris, 2.
117 Hiett, 7.
118 Hiett, 10.
119 Taylor, 14.
120 Hubenthal, 50.
ranks. If you were drafted, did not enlist voluntarily, you did not have a choice of service branches. This fact caused many young men frightened of serving in the Marines, to enlist in the Army before being drafted.

Now, at that time being drafted into the Army was considered bad enough but the prospect of being drafted into the Marine Corps was you know, it’s like many, many times worse in the minds of virtually everybody in my generation.  

Most young men understood that if they were drafted into the Marine Corp, instead of into the Army, their service commitment would more than likely be much much more difficult. “[T]he word was that if you want a living hell, be a drafted Marine. They hated you for not joining and it would be a very difficult situation.”

The process for picking the Marine draftees was random. There are varying accounts by veterans, but all have an element in common, impartiality.

Another thing that motivated me about joining the Army instead of being drafted was the rumor was that the Marines were not making their quota for the military and that they were having to come down to Jacksonville and they would line up draftees and they’d randomly select draftees to have to go into the Marine Corps.

The first field sergeant that came up that was a DI (Drill Instructor), the first thing he said was, “All RAs [Regular Army] take one-step backwards. . . .  He went up and down and just kind of said, “You, one step forward, you one step forward.”

They announced that the Marines were drafting that day. I thought, holy shit, that’s all I want to—I don’t even know what I’m doing there. They came down and they went every other guy. The guy in front of me went and the guy behind me went and I went to the Army. Every other guy. So you can see that it was a cannon fodder mentality, but you didn’t know it then, but I recognize it now.

He [a Marine Corps non-com] came down the line of us, all of us conscripts, and basically counted off every tenth man. . . . “You! Step out!” One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. “You! Step out!” And was going around the building taking every tenth guy and all these guys were going to be drafted into the Marine Corps.

“They pulled like six of us outside before the induction and they said ‘We’re drafting into the Marines this morning. One of you six guys is going to be a Marine, any volunteers?’ . . . They took the fourth guy alphabetically.”

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121 Hubenthal, 50.
122 Taylor, 15.
123 Taylor, 15.
124 Carney, 30.
126 Hubenthal, 50.
Enlisted to get Time, Education, Training and/or Wanted Placement

By far, the most common reason given by the interviewed veterans for their voluntary enlistment in the face of the draft was the idea of enlisting to get something out of their time in their service, to “make the best of a bad situation”\(^\text{128}\) and “go under [their] own terms.”\(^\text{129}\) Many understood that they were going to be drafted no matter what and they wished to have a say in the matter and perhaps choose what educational program or training they were to receive, in hopes of staying out of harm’s way as much as possible and to acquire skills which would be useful after their time in the military. “My thought was, that if I’m drafted then they get to choose what I want to be and that didn’t sound good.”\(^\text{130}\) While volunteering for the draft cost a young man at least one more year of commitment, usually three years instead of two, many thought that this time was worth it as they would have some, albeit little, control over their military destiny, over their MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) and over which branch they served in.

Confusion about life in general was a motivating factor for many young men. “In those days we didn’t have any choice. We had a draft.”\(^\text{131}\) They had the draft hanging over their heads, many weren’t enrolled in higher education and didn’t know what to do with their life but were aware that they were going to be drafted no matter what. Some of these young men chose to volunteer, rather than be drafted, in hopes of getting their “head[s] together”\(^\text{132}\) or getting some more time to get their affairs in order, “I went down to the Marine guy and they gave me a 120 day delay.”\(^\text{133}\) There wasn’t always a set amount of days until the enlistee had to report for active duty, but for many, any delay was better than no delay.

I went down and talked to the Army recruiter and pretty much signed a letter of intent or something they called it that I was going to join the Army, but what we were going to do was we were going to wait until my

\(^{128}\) Hobbs, 14.


\(^{130}\) Calbreath, 2.


\(^{133}\) Powers, 10.
draft notice came, and then he would contact them and say that I had joined and that would cancel out the
draft part of it and then I would go on in.\textsuperscript{134}

Others felt that they would have to serve sooner or later and would just as well get their
commitment out of the way so they could move on with their life.

My feeling about it was: “If I’m going to go do this, let’s do it while I’m...I’m young, I’m strong, I’m, you
know, in reasonable condition. The time to do this is earlier not later, was my thinking.”\textsuperscript{135}

Enlisting in the military usually meant not only a longer serving time but a longer training
time. Some young men volunteered for exactly this reason. While they wanted more
education, they also wanted to stay out of the warzone for as long as possible. “I decided I
wanted to get something out of my military time. . . . and so I said [to the recruiter], ‘Well, what’s the longest school you can get me in?’”\textsuperscript{136}

Staying out of the warzone was very important for many who feared battle. By enlisting
they got some say in their military occupations and were able to actively make some decisions
about their placement.

Part of my decision behind joining for three years was that I didn’t want to be a warrior, I didn’t want to go to
war. If I had to go to Vietnam which I figured I was going to, I wanted to go and do something that would
keep me as safe as possible, that much I knew.\textsuperscript{137}

Some young men had career goals and hoped that their time in the military could help them
along the path, instead of just being a temporary break in their studies, “might as well get
some training courtesy of the government.”\textsuperscript{138}

Becoming a pilot or working within aviation was one of the most common goals, as the
skills transferred back to the private sector. “I wanted to become an airline pilot, . . . I
enlisted into the Army, becoming a helicopter pilot.”\textsuperscript{139} “I envisioned myself carrying a rifle
through rice paddies and I didn’t think that was too desirable, so I enlisted in Helicopter
Mechanic School.”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{134} James Holt, "Interview with James Holt," Interview by Jonathan Bernstein, transcribed by Tammi Mikel
Lyon. \textit{Virtual Vietnam Archive}. James Holt Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, 12
\textsuperscript{135} Hubenthal, 49.
\textsuperscript{136} Schaffer, 6.
\textsuperscript{137} Calbreath, 4.
\textsuperscript{138} Vern Greunke, "Interview with Vern Greunke," Interview by Richard Verrone, transcribed by Jennifer
McIntyre. \textit{Virtual Vietnam Archive}. Vern Greunke Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
\textsuperscript{139} Paul Garrity, "Interview with Paul Garrity," Interview by Jonathan Bernstein. \textit{Virtual Vietnam Archive}.
Paul Garrity Collection. (The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, 3 May 2002). 1-2.
\textsuperscript{140} Hobbs, 14.
While many may have enlisted just to escape an uncertain fate and to receive important career training, most were still not fans of the military and eager to stay in after their allotted time was up. Thoughts such as, “I’m going to do my two years, whatever it takes to get through and I’m out of here” \(^{141}\) or, “I volunteered but . . . I had had [sic] at that point no intention of staying in the Army any longer than I had to. I was doing it basically to beat the draft at that time” \(^{142}\) as well as, “I basically felt that I was going to have to go over there, try to get a job that’s away from most of the action and put in my time and get out of the service”\(^{143}\) were quite common sentiments among veterans.


\(^{143}\) Holdorf, 3.
Chapter Three: Discussion

Oral history is a challenging medium to utilize when conducting research on an event that involves a large amount of people. One single interview can provide an enormous amount of information; however, information that may be significant and “true” for one informant may not be “true” for another who experienced the same event. Every person experiences life and events differently, these differences in perception are dependent upon one’s experience from earlier in their life. The advantage of oral history is that by collecting and comparing oral histories from a significant number of informants, one can construct an overview or a pattern of an event.

I found phenomenology to be a good tool for examining these oral history interviews as it is flexible and inclusive. It is impossible to analyze the interviews and find a single answer as to why these men did as they did when faced with the draft. Every person is unique and has different life experiences, for this reason the life changing decision of becoming a draft motivated enlistee was dependent upon many factors. The question of why they enlisted when drafted or threatened with the draft gave varied, complex, and personal answers among all of the informants; some veterans provided a short reply with one or more reasons to their actions while other veterans commented at length and returned to the topic throughout their interview. By reading and analyzing these interviews using phenomenology I was able to identify the recurring themes which represent the patterns of these men’s shared experience when confronted by an unsure future.

Actions taken

The baby boom generation grew up with the reality of draft always hanging over their heads, despite this fact, when their time came to serve many, if not most, tried to find some way around their obligation. Their opposition to the draft and serving stemmed from different reasons, political, ethical, moral but above all else, fear, a human fear of being grievously wounded or killed fighting in a war which had little no political meaning to most young men.

The realities and horrors associated with serving in Vietnam awakened feelings of fight or flight in many young men, anxiety and fear were commonplace. Some succeeded in their applications for Conscientious Objector status; others emphasized medical problems in order to be rejected by the draft physical board, while still others gathered enough courage to leave the United States. However, despite the fact that some succeeded in avoiding the draft, the men interviewed for the study were not granted deferments or couldn’t do what needed to be
done to avoid active service. Most related that the feeling of hopelessness was rampant during that time. They felt as if they had no real choice. In the end, one would either have to defy the draft or to serve.

The dominant themes of avoidance deduced from this study included student deferments and contemplation of entering Canada as a draft dodger. Studying was a relatively simple method of avoiding the draft for as long as possible. However, when their deferments ran out enlistment seemed a better alternative than being drafted. Many interviewed stated that they enrolled only after their deferments expired. This statement is confirmed by Card and Lemieux:

Throughout most of the Vietnam War, men who were in college could obtain deferments that delayed their eligibility for conscription. It was widely believed by contemporaneous observers that college deferment was an effective means of draft avoidance, and that draft avoidance led to a rise in the college enrollment rates of young men.\footnote{David Card and Thomas Lemieux, “Going to College to Avoid the Draft: The Unintended Legacy of the Vietnam War,” \textit{The American Economic Review} \textbf{91}, no. 2 (2001): 101. JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/pss/2677740 (accessed October 12, 2010)}

Avoidance options were even more limited for those who could not or did not want to enroll in higher education. There was a feeling of hopelessness in knowing that they could be called up at anytime. Many, tired of waiting for the draft notice or just wanting to get their service done with and move on with their life, enlisted. The less educated were particularly hard hit by the draft. Erikson and Stoker comment that prior to 1969 draft motivated enlistments came almost entirely from those who were not college bound. They go on to say that the stock of non-college bound recruits was exhausted by 1969, that most had already enlisted, been drafted or deemed ineligible for military service.\footnote{Erikson and Stoker, 7.} This research is corroborated by Card and Lemieux’s:

Among men born between 1945 and 1947 (50 percent of whom served in the military), we estimate that men with a college degree were only one-third as likely to serve as those without a degree. Considering that a high fraction of men with low levels of education were found unfit for service, this ratio confirms that college attendance was a powerful, albeit imperfect, way to avoid the draft.\footnote{Card and Lemieux, 98.}

Evading the draft by entering Canada was a thought that went through most of the informants’ minds at one point or another during this time period. Desertion was an illegal act, but survival is a strong instinct in humans. The fear of being shot and killed had a powerful sway over many young men, yet they still chose to serve. Desertion or fleeing to Canada closed more doors than it opened; by not serving a young man compromised his future. Patriotism figured often in to decision about not leaving the U.S. as did family members’ disappointment and the fact of just plain missing one’s family. People would rather
stay and fight, and perhaps die, rather than risk abandoning their lives to escape to another country.

**Obligations**

The Vietnam generation grew up in the 1950’s and 60’s, surrounded by the realities of the Korean War, and the ever present threat of communism. The media and culture during their childhood and adolescent years spread the fear of “the Reds” and idolized fictional war heroes in John Wayne movies which inspired patriotism even among the most jaded. Those born in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s were raised by parents who lived through or served in World War II, many of whom believed that the government could do no wrong and that their sons should do as their government wished. The theme of patriotic duty to stop the spread of communism as well as the theme of family values of military and service history strongly influenced the choices of those interviewed. Nearly every man commented upon his family’s service history (or lack their of), as well as their childhood/adolescent memories of the Bay of Pigs Invasion.

This generation of men often felt torn as to their supposed responsibility to serve in Vietnam. Many did not understand what the war had to do with them personally, they were “politically naive”, they didn’t have “an opinion as to whether it [the war] was right or wrong or good or bad or moral or immoral.” Veterans contend that accurate information about what the war was really about was hard to come by, and years of indoctrination by parents and government were difficult to overcome. However, whether the media and government’s portrayal of the war was accurate was, for the most part, inconsequential to many at the time.

Family pressures were immense and often overwhelmed whatever personal feelings the men may have had at the time. Serving was a duty that needed to be done. You did what you had to do just as your father did and his father did before him. You had a responsibility, you didn’t need to volunteer but you needed to serve if called.

Patriotism and a “hatred” for communism inspired some to give up hopes of avoiding the war and fight for “freedom,” not only for the Southeast Asia but for the continuing “freedom” of America. However, despite their pre-existing ideologies and thoughts, it didn’t take very long in Vietnam to realize that their beliefs may have been wrong.

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147 Montemore, 6.
Advantages

The dominant themes for why the men interviewed chose to enlist were: staying out of Vietnam/combat, avoidance of the Marine Corp, and acquisition of time/education/training or placement. The one common denominator all of these themes have in common is the military recruiter. Recruiters have historically been known to make outrageous yet attractive offers to young people interested in the military. Recruiters have a quota to make and often made promises to entice enlistees, promises which more often than not were not entirely truthful or attainable; this process was no different during the Vietnam War. Many enlisted after hearing promises that they would not have to go to Vietnam or at least would not be in the line of fire if they enlisted.

Being drafted and randomly assigned to service in the Marine Corp was especially feared. The American Marine Corps is notoriously tough; most veterans interviewed commented that those who they knew were drafted into the Marines were not treated well. They were not Semper Fi and did not want to be on the front lines. There was a general feeling that those unfortunate young men who were forcefully drafted into the Marines were cannon fodder.

For many draft motivated enlistees the biggest fear was the fear of not being in control of their own destiny. If they left their fate to chance and went along with being drafted they could be shipped off to the front lines or they be randomly chosen to be a Marine. Nearly all commented that they wanted to make best of bad situation and get something from their time going on their own terms. They felt as if they had no choice and wanted to get something from this experience, such as time, training, and placement. This control over their military career was important for these men; it gave them a feeling of security in an insecure time. Erikson and Stoker’s research echoes this sentiment; they found that most of their respondents who entered the military claimed to have enlisted voluntarily rather than via getting drafted. They acted in this manner so that they would be able to “select from the menu of military fates rather than accept a likely draft into the army.”

Further Research

There is much room for further research within the topic area of the Vietnam War and oral history. Large amounts of time and money have been spent recording the memories and experiences of World War II veterans however the veterans of the Korean War and the Vietnam War have been largely ignored. Most of the World War II veterans have already

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148 Erikson and Stoker, 7.
passed on as have many from the Korean War. The veterans of the Vietnam War have already started to pass on or succumb to diseases of age such as Alzheimer’s and dementia, for this reason it is crucial that oral historians begin to invest time and money in recording the experiences of this generation so that future generations have a better understanding of how these men (and women) personally experienced the chaotic time period of the Vietnam War.

Summary
The goal with this essay was to examine why Vietnam veterans, who were draft motivated enlistees, enlisted when drafted or threatened with the draft. To better understand the veterans’ actions when faced with the draft the following questions were addressed: what actions, if any, did these men take or contemplate taking to avoid being drafted? How did moral, familial or political obligations figure in to these men’s decision to enlist when faced with the draft? What advantages of being a draft motivated enlistee encouraged these men to enlist instead of just serving as a draftee? This essay utilized interviews of Vietnam veterans conducted by The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, within the framework of their Oral History Project, to address and answer the questions listed above. The information gained from these oral history interviews was analyzed using the phenomenological research approach and was presented in a manner focused on meaning, in the form of themes or topics, which produce a general description of the experience of being a draft motivated enlistee. Data was collected from 63 interviews with draft motivated enlistees who served between the years of 1964 and 1970.

Avoiding the draft was almost impossible, however attempts draft avoidance was not uncommon. One of the most common avoidance techniques employed by those interviewed was student deferments; however this deferment mainly applied to those who were interested in and could afford higher education. Many of those interviewed also considered defecting to Canada at one point or another, although this was just a consideration, none of those interviewed actually made the move. Obligations influencing the choices of these young men included: the feeling of patriotic duty to serve one’s country and fight Communism, family military history, and family values which stressed responsibility to one’s own country. According to those interviewed being a draft motivated enlistee had some advantages over being just drafted. Some of those who enlisted when faced with the draft did so just to avoid serving in Vietnam. Recruiters often figured into this choice by promising the enlistee that he would not have to serve in Southeast Asia or that the war would be over by the time he got there. These statements by the recruiters were almost always false and the enlisted men ended
up serving in Vietnam. Choice of branch of service and training was another strong motivating factor among those who enlisted. Many wanted to avoid the Marine Corps while others wished to have a say in the matter and perhaps choose what educational program or training they were to receive, in hopes of staying out of harm’s way as much as possible and to acquire skills which would be useful after their time in the military.
References

Interviews


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Literature


Appendix I

Vietnam Draft Lottery
The first draft lottery of the Vietnam War, the first drawing since 1942, was held on December 1, 1969 at Selective Service Headquarters in Washington, DC. This drawing applied to men born between 1944 and 1950 and determined priority for induction for 1970. The reinstatement of the draft lottery replaced the "draft the oldest man first" method which had been in place prior to the reinstatement of the lottery.149

Each lottery consisted of the assignment of a random sequence numbers (RSN's or draft lottery numbers) to all dates of birth. The lottery was conducted in the following manner: 366 blue plastic capsules containing birth dates were placed in a large glass container, drawn by hand, opened, and the dates inside were posted in order via radio, film and live TV. The first capsule, drawn by Congressman Alexander Pirnie (R-NY) of the House Armed Services Committee, contained the date September 14, which meant that all men born on September 14 between 1944 and 1950 were assigned lottery number 1 and were the first to be called up for the draft. The drawing continued in the following manner until all days of the year had been paired with sequence numbers.150 The highest lottery number called for this group was 195, all men assigned that lottery number or lower and who were classified 1-A or 1-A-O were considered to be available to be called up for possible induction.

As the year progressed men with the lowest RSNs were called for induction first. The Defense Department determined an official RSN ceiling once manpower needs were met, only men with lottery numbers below the ceiling could have been drafted.151 On April 23, 1970 President Nixon called for broad draft reforms and issued an Executive Order that effectively ended all occupational deferments and most paternity deferments, with "extreme hardship" as the only exception to the rule.152

In practice, the Selective Service relied on the screening process employed by local draft boards and the elimination of men with draft deferments to select from men with low lottery number. Men were selected for induction from the draft-eligible, non-deferred "high priority

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151 Angrist, 585.
pool" according to several criteria, the most important of which were the pre-induction physical and the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT).\textsuperscript{153}

In the following years the draft lottery was conducted in a similar manner, however the eligible birth years were limited so that men born in on a certain date in a certain year were eligible to be drafted, and a particular male’s exposure in the draft pool was reduced from 7 years to 1 year, while one's maximum eligibility would begin on a man's 19th birthday and end on his 20th birthday. The drawing on July 1, 1970, for draftees for 1971 applied only to men born in 1951. The drawing held the following year applied only to men born in 1952.\textsuperscript{154}

The Selective Service Act was due to expire in mid 1971 but Congress extended it for two years following a House (239-99) roll-call vote and a debate in the Senate lasting from May 6th through June 24th 1971. Deferments were discontinued in 1971 for college freshmen; however upperclassmen retained their draft deferments.

The unpopularity of the war in Vietnam among draftees, draft-eligible men as well as the general population led to Nixon calling for the termination of the Selective Service System and the introduction of an all-volunteer army.\textsuperscript{155} In mid-1973, a few months after US troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam, the Selective Service Act expired and it was not renewed by Congress. Following this date the United States began a policy of voluntary enlistment. A total of 8.7 million Americans served during the 8 years of the Vietnam War,\textsuperscript{156} while over two million men were inducted into military service via the draft between 1965 and December 1972, when Nixon ended all draft calls for the war.\textsuperscript{157} By the end draftees made up almost 90 percent of the infantry and a disproportionate number of the more than 56,000 war dead.\textsuperscript{158}

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\textsuperscript{153} Angrist, 585.


\textsuperscript{155} Small, 1.


\textsuperscript{157} Calkins and Verrone, 42.

\textsuperscript{158} Baker, A. xii.