

# DRAFT OPTIONS PACKET

## DRAFTED

**More than 1.7 million young men made the same decision.** About 38 percent of these draftees (648,500) ended up serving in Vietnam.

Before the lottery was established in 1969, local draft boards determined who would serve. This system was criticized for inequities: The poor and uneducated were disproportionately called for duty, while wealthier children with connections obtained exemptions or deferments. Even after the beginning of the lottery, student deferments and lawyers specializing in the draft made it possible for wealthier children to avoid induction.

Draftees, meanwhile, were more likely to die in combat than volunteers. Though they accounted for just 25 percent of the fighting force in South Vietnam, they accounted for 30.4 percent (17,725) of combat deaths.

In 1973, the draft ended and the United States converted to an all-volunteer military.

## VOLUNTEER

**Some 8.7 million men made the same decision** to volunteer. Of course, not all of them were hoping to avoid combat; many men volunteered precisely because they wanted to help win the war. But many others volunteered to reduce their chances of being killed. A volunteer could choose his branch of service and hope to get lucky with a non-combat assignment.

Volunteers were, in fact, less likely to die in Vietnam than draftees. Though draftees accounted for just 25 percent of the fighting force in South Vietnam, they accounted for 30.4 percent (17,725) of combat deaths.

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## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

**Many people made the same choice.** An estimated 172,000 people won conscientious objector status during the war. Still more applied for it but were rejected.

It wasn't easy to become a conscientious objector. Opposition to the war in Vietnam was not considered adequate grounds. An applicant for conscientious objector status had to appear before his local draft board to explain his beliefs, which could not be based on politics, expediency or self-interest; the beliefs had to be religious, moral or ethical in nature, and the applicant had to show that they had influenced his life prior to when he filed his claim.

The draft board would decide whether to approve the application based on the evidence presented. Approved conscientious objectors were classified in two categories: "1-A-O" conscientious objectors, who were opposed to any military position that required the use of arms, were assigned to noncombatant military posts; "1-O" conscientious objectors, who opposed both combatant and non-combatant military roles, were assigned alternative civilian service.

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## FLEE TO CANADA

**An estimated 30,000 young men made the same choice.** About 10,000 more fled to Sweden or other countries. These "draft dodgers," often accompanied by their wives or girlfriends, constituted what has been called the largest political exodus in U.S. history.

Those inclined to evade the draft didn't have to leave the country. Many potential inductees intentionally failed physical exams by altering their blood pressure or by manipulating some other measurement of their physical or mental health. Others pretended to be homosexual. Some simply went to jail rather than submit to the draft.

Still more young men avoided military service during the Vietnam War through entirely legal means. Student deferments were perhaps the most popular method: Until 1971, when President Nixon ended them, a student deferment was available to any man who could show he was a full-time student making satisfactory progress toward a degree. And there were still other legal means of avoiding the draft, like family hardship exemptions or ministerial service.

Those who did choose to flee the country were the object of special scorn from supporters of the war and veterans groups. However, in 1977, President Carter pardoned all draft evaders. The draft itself had ended four years earlier, in 1973, and the United States converted to an all-volunteer military.