Raynor Bond-Ashpole
12/12/18
Viet Nam Wars - Nguyen
Oral History Project Reflection

Though certainly not easy, the Oral History Project was an opportunity for me to simultaneously collect otherwise unpreserved history and gain a deeply personal account of the Vietnam War and its surrounding aspects. There were multiple challenges—compounded by me having to the project by myself—but I believe I overcame all of them. For me, this project was an exercise of adaptability, and I believe I fared well, all things considered.

Having had to do the entire project by myself, it was certainly a challenge—but one that was tolerable. The most difficult tasks arising from this handicap was the creation of the questions and the transcription. It would've been nice to have another person to bounce ideas off of regarding the questions and having to transcribe the *whole* interview by myself was lackluster, but I think both endeavors went well—despite being time-consuming.

Even with the struggles I had before and after the interview, my biggest challenge was during the interview. I had gone into the interview very prepared for discussion on Roger's experience with Agent Orange—how he was exposed to it, compensations he received after the war, etc.—but I had found myself much more interested with his interaction with draft. Unfortunately, the draft was easily the part of the Vietnam experience I had least prepared myself for. Yet, I found myself enthralled in Roger's story regarding it—he desperately did not want to enter war and saw it as a "waste of time." However , owing to the suspension of educational deferments in 1968, he and others of the class of 1967 "caught it in the neck." I was struck by how he described it: "a massacre of that generation." In the moment, I decided that I would change my main topic and had to improvise many questions on the draft. As I was listening to Rogers's answers I was simultaneously formulating more questions concerning the

draft. It was interesting being able practice some adaptability in order to gain enough information for the research paper.

I was also struck by the emotional parts of the interview—they did not occur necessarily where I expected. I expected Roger to be uncomfortable discussing either his experiences in Vietnam or the effects of Agent Orange, but he was actually more distraught about events immediately before and after the war. There were two memorable moments when he choked up. The first was at the mention of his first wife, who sent him a "Dear John" letter-- a concept that I had previously believed was effectively the invention of TV shows like M*A*S*H*. The second was as he was discussing the feeling of isolation that defined his first few years after he returned from Vietnam. Beforehand, I hadn't considered the possibility that the most traumatic experiences concerning the Vietnam War could have occurred outside of Vietnam. It was very sobering and afforded me a much fuller perspective of the Vietnam War.

Regarding my methods during the interview, I decided that I was going to let Roger speak as much he felt comfortable, for the most part. This effectively made the interview very large swaths of Roger talking interspersed with me asking questions. I am very satisfied with this approach as it has given me a lot of material. I did notice that were points where I perhaps should have interrupted him and steered us back on-topic—there is a significant portion of the interview where he is talking about his work life after Vietnam that will not be particularly helpful to my research. I also realized after the interview that I should've been more comfortable with silence and let Roger process information for more time. Instead, I occasionally moved onto the next question, not being truly cognizant of the atmosphere.

Overall, I believe that the project went well. It was my first experience collecting an oral history, and I believe it will certainly help me in my study of history in the future. I am glad that

it gave me a personal perspective on the Vietnam War that I had never heard in such an intimate setting before. It truly felt like I was “doing history” throughout the whole interview and process.

The Effects of the Draft on Colleges and Universities in the Vietnam War Era

Raynor Bond-Ashpole

The Viet Nam Wars – Nguyen

12/12/18

With 1,857,304 draftees throughout the entire conflict, the Vietnam War was in many ways defined by the draft.[1] Yet, the domestic implications of the Vietnam War were just as consequential as the battles fought abroad. Perhaps nowhere were these consequences felt as much as the college campus, which constantly had to grapple with the realities of the draft. Male college enrollment rose 12 percent from 1960 to 1969—these specific realities were felt by an undoubtedly large proportion of Americans.[2] Through the existence of student deferments, the university and college became a form of protection from the draft, albeit one only open to those who could afford it. The fabric and atmosphere of college campuses changed as students sought to become acquainted with deferred status rather than the war. Entire institutions and procedures were created for this express purpose. Furthermore, certain classes of students'—particularly the undergraduate classes of 1967, 1968, and 1969—interactions with the war changed dramatically with vain attempts to make the draft seem more equitable. This forced graduates to confront the draft. Some continued to use methods to evade conscription, while others, such as Roger Schwartz, entered the war in at the end of the 1960s. By virtue of being in college in the late 1960s, each male college student had a complicated and intimate relationship with the draft, usually one of fear combined with great familiarity.

The most infamous legal option of draft avoidance, student deferments became the last resort of many young people avoiding war. Before 1968, the student deferment system was fairly simple-- if one was enrolled full-time in an undergraduate or graduate institution, they qualified for the Class II-S deferment. Additionally, to those who benefited from it, it was typically not seen as draft evasion, nor did it tend to carry the connotations of class warfare claimed by

---

[1] "Induction Statictics," *Selective Service System*, n.d., https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Induction-Statistics.
[2] "COLLEGE ENROLLMENT LINKED TO VIETNAM WAR," *New York Times*, September 2, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/02/us/college-enrollment-linked-to-vietnam-war.html.

contemporary African-American leaders and later historians. An article written in May 1967 by an Indiana University senior named Peter Schellie— a member of the class that Schwartz states "caught it in the neck"[3] due to the Selective Service Act of 1967 passed a month later -- concedes to the argument that there were a myriad of social forces such as "low income… poor parental educational back ground, low-quality educational preparation for college, and lack of motivation" led to minority students and students of low socio-economic status to go to college at a lower rate, leaving them without the option for student deferments.[4] Yet, Schellie gives a very cut-and-dry assessment of the student's position among this reality: "While it goes with out saying that those dilemmas are serious, most college students feel that they should not be penalized because we have a social problem. Call it rationalization, muddy thinking, or just the selfishness of youth, there it is."[5] Students were aware of the class-fueled implications of their draft avoidance, yet it seems that they tended to not confront them. This is not to discredit the university as the frequent epicenter of anti-war protests—the support for student deferments went hand-in-hand with anti-war sentiments.

Schiele ends his article by positing that most American college students do not intend to avoid the draft, and are rather looking to serve their country in ways that require a college degree.[6] A look at Schwartz's account, among others, cast a dubious light on this assumption. Schwartz recalled a conversation with his father from when he was a college freshman:

> I should've gone into ROTC, everybody should have gone into ROTC… I called my father, when I was a freshman, I said 'Dad, I want to go into ROTC. I don't know about this war, I think it is going to maybe catch me." And he said don't do

---

[3] Raynor Bond-Ashpole, *Interview with Roger Schwartz*, n.d.
[4] Peter Schellie, "Selective Service as Seeen By the Student," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 48, no. 9 (May 1967): 440–42, 440.
[5] Schellie, "Selective Service as Seeen By the Student,"440.
[6] Schellie, "Selective Service as Seeen By the Student,"442.

> that, don't tie yourself in the army like that. This war will be over by the time you get out of college… I kept on reminding him of that advice that he had given me for years, I never let him forget it! (*Laughs*)[7]

In the Vietnam War years, the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was a chief vehicle of draft avoidance, with 177,400 cadets enrolling into the Army ROTC in 1967.[8] In enrolling in the program, cadets avoided the unpredictable assignments that defined the draft. By having agency, ROTC-trained officers were considered to have safer interactions with the war than those who entered through the draft. This was true to the point that Schwartz regretted not joining the ROTC for the rest of his life. Even now, he advocates for current college students to join the program in the case of a present draft.[9] As educational deferments were stripped away, ROTC became even more valuable, as those in the program could continue to attend college for all four years. When the draft threatened to affect freshman with the phase-out of student deferments in 1971, Harvard students considered commuting to participate in Worcester Polytechnic Institute's ROTC program.[10] Others considered taking a semester off to enlist in the National Guard, which would guarantee a short and domestic term of service. Throughout the war, college students were ready to use any resource available to avoid the draft.

One of the most significant shifts in student conscription was the Military Selective Service Act of 1967—a rebranding of the Selective Service Act of 1948-- which limited graduate school deferments of new graduate students to one year. Those already in graduate school kept their deferments, alongside those planning to study medicine. The National Security Council had decided that the propagation graduate degrees outside of medicine did not serve national

---

[7] Bond-Ashpole, *Interview with Roger Schwartz*.
[8] https://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/20/us/rotc-shunned-no-more-grows-increasingly-selective.html
[9] Bond-Ashpole, *Interview with Roger Schwartz*.
[10] https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1971/9/29/freshman-deferments-end-as-nixon-signs/

security.[11] The bill was in part a response to the charge the student deferment system was inherently unequal—that the conflict was turning into a "minority war" as white and middle/upper class young men went to college to evade it. Schwartz spoke of the sense of surprise that caught the class of 1967: "So by 1967 [before the passing of the Selective Service Act], the pressure was on us, but not so bad, everybody went to graduate school, everybody figured they got a student deferment… They could not wait to get their hands on us. It was a massacre of that generation... all of our protection was over."[12] Even current undergraduates were left in uncertainty. At the beginning of the school year, the Harvard Crimson reassured undergraduates that they would automatically receive deferments for the year, but reported on the ambiguity that faced that year's seniors:

> As do most problems concerning college seniors, this dilemma brings only shrugs of uncertainty from state and University Selective Service advisers and career counsellors. They know no more than the news media do, and they are extremely sensitive about misleading someone with false predictions.[13]

There was a clear sense of uncertainty surrounding the government's policy concerning the draft. Certainty only revealed itself when the draft letters appeared. Within two weeks of finishing his first year of law school, Schwartz received his induction notice, arriving in Vietnam a year and a half after being notified. Those in the classes of 1967, 1968, and 1969 most likely had to rely on other methods if they wanted to avoid the draft. Some fled to Canada. Others, such as James Fallows, President Carter's first chief speechwriter, feigned physical ailment or mental instability

---

[11] Thomas Frusciano, "Student Deferement and Selective Service College Qualification Test, 1951-1967," *Educational Testing Service*, November 1980, 52.
[12] Bond-Ashpole, *Interview with Roger Schwartz*.
[13] Boisfeuillet Jones Jr., "The 1967 Draft Act: Where You Stand," *The Harvard Crimson*, September 28, 1967, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1967/9/28/the-1967-draft-act-where-you/.

to achieve and unqualifiable classification. Even during this period, class divisions in the dreaft were still very apparent—as Fallows observed, relatively few white, upper class young men ended up going to Vietnam. The use of draft evasion made the conflict a working-class war. Yet, many graduates, such as Schwartz accepted their fate:

> I decided to be drafted because I wanted to be a lawyer, I was in law school. I wanted to come back—I took a chance, I wanted to come back, be a lawyer in the United States as a citizen. And If I'd gone to Canada I assumed that would be it, I would no longer be a US citizen. Of course that changed, they were all forgiven… I would not have been a traitor, I would not have gone to Canada. I believed in the United States with all its flaws and I stayed loyal to the country… once you join the military you take an oath to defend the country and defend the Constitution and you do it, no matter what. You do it, no matter how you've been offended… you defend the country, that's all.[14]

Even as nationwide trust in the government and the public assessment of the war was faltering, Schwartz and others—particularly working-class men--- decided that they would have to take the chance to achieve social mobility after they returned from Vietnam. Out of this gamble, alongside genuine patriotism, these men entered the conflict.

Behind the sentiments of catching "it in the neck" is the beginning of the lottery system in 1969, ascribing more certainty for those in college at the time. Through executive order on November 26, 1969, Nixon instituted a reimagining of the draft that randomly picked those subject to it. The "draft lottery" was televised on December 1st. 366 capsules, each representing a date, were mixed in a wooden box and then poured into a large bowl.[15] Each date was picked out

---

[14] Bond-Ashpole, *Interview with Roger Schwartz*.
[15] David Rosenbaum, "Statisticians Charge Draft Lottery Was Not Random," *New York Times*, January 4, 1970.

and assigned a number— the first date was assigned Number 1, the second Number 2, and so on. Those of draft age who were born on the dates assigned Numbers 1 to 195 were at risk of induction. This method was later charged to be non-random, as a disproportionate amount of November and December birthdays were below the cutoff.[16] In the years following, this system was used exclusively for new 19-year olds—those who had just reached draft-age-- until the Selective Service System was suspended in 1976.[17] At first, this new system did not affect college students in any new, as student deferments continued. If anything, it gave students a sense of comfort, particularly if their number was above the cutoff. If it was below, the young men, were given much more stability and time to prepare. Even as deferments ended after September 1971 for new freshman, the government had already begun to drastically lower the number of people inducted. More importantly, in each lottery after 1971, the lottery—and the entire draft system itself—only affected those with a draft number of 95 during their 20th year.[18] By 1973, the year most post-1969 students who were unprotected by student deferments turned 20, America only inducted 646 men, withdrawing from the conflict and ending the draft before the year's end. Nevertheless, students still considered drastic precautions, such as joining the ROTC, to avoid the draft. However, by 1973, students could finally study without the fear of induction.[19]

The draft did not just affect students—faculty-student relations and university procedures were also fundamentally changed by the draft. In most years of the war, college students were required to either pass standardized tests or achieve a certain class rank to maintain their deferred

---

[16] Rosenbaum, "Statisticians Charge Draft Lotter'y Was Not Random."
[17] "THE VIETNAM LOTTERIES," *Selective Service System* , n.d., https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/lotter1.
[18] David Card and Thomas Lemieux, "Going to College to Avoid the Draft: The Unintended Legacy of the Vietnam War," *The American Economic Review* 91, no. 2 (n.d.).
[19] "THE VIETNAM LOTTERIES."

status. In 1966, it was also required that college students earn at least a C average to evade draft eligibility.[20] The mere use of academic aptitude to decide the fate of students put professors into an uncomfortable position. After the Selective Service System's suggestion to use class rank to determine those eligible for student deferments, Harvard Sociology Department Chair John R. Seeley asked in a 1966 memo, "Are [professors] willing (and able) to function professionally in a situation wherein they hold life-and-death probability powers over their students?"[21] The use of class rank threatened to fundamentally shift the paradigm of the university. Seeley posited that professors would begin to not give grades at all in order to protect students. To circumvent this dilemma, Harvard and many other educational institutions used the Selective Service Qualification Test. According to Schwartz, these "were simple tests and everybody [at Muhlenberg] passed them."[22] The qualifying grade for undergraduates was 70%, and in both 1966 and 1967, 81% of test-takers nationwide received a passing grade.[23] While the vast majority of students continued to evade the war, it is clear that to some students, this test truly was a barrier to continued deferment. Furthermore, as Schwartz recounts, professors took an interest in protecting students beyond advocating for test-based requirements: "...the professors were starting to think, "Well, if we don't take care of these kids, we're gonna lose them, we're gonna lose them to the draft."' When the war started, Schwartz's college, alongside most other colleges, typically granted letter grades of B or C—A's were fairly rare, denoting particularly high achieving students. As the war progressed, and the pressures of the draft became more

---

[20]Joseph Fry, "Unpopular Messengers: Student Opposition to the Vietnam War," in *The War That Never Ends* (University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 224.
[21] Laura Hatt, "LBJ Wants Your GPA: The Vietnam Exam," *The Harvard Crimson*, May 23, 2016, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2016/5/23/lbj-wants-your-gpa/.
[22] Bond-Ashpole, *Interview with Roger Schwartz*.
[23] Frusciano, "Student Deferement and Selective Service College Qualification Test, 1951-1967," 48-49.

apparent, the nationwide percentage of C's compared to A's began to switch.[24] This began a long-standing trend, in which number of A's granted continued to rise and the number of C's fell in proportion. The conception of the average GPA of American colleges and universities therefore rose. This is perhaps the most unexpected, yet enduring, effect of the Vietnam War on colleges and universities. Students also became well acquainted with draft-counseling centers, a fixture of every city and university town. These centers kept as many as 90% of their clients away from the draft.[25] These centers were also present in college career centers— even as their educations saved them from the horrors of war, students were intimately acquainted with the reality of the imposing draft.[26] The very fabric and organization of the American college and university changed to make this grappling with reality bearable for students.

The use of the draft also led to anti-draft protests on campuses, already the epicenter of the antiwar movement. In May 1966, University of Chicago students staged a two-day sit-in to protest the school's cooperation with the Selective Service System through the release of grades and class rank.[27] The sit-in ultimately failed but demonstrations continue nationwide until the implementation of the lottery system in 1969. In addition, some students publicly burned their draft cards to show their severe grievances with conscription and the war as a whole. The anti-draft movement was a small part of the broader student anti-war movement, in which students protested all connections universities had to the war, particularly the presence of ROTC programs—which were eliminated from many colleges by the end of the 1960s—the napalm-producing Dow Chemical Company's frequent use of student-bodies as a recruitment pool, and the use of university property for defense-related research. Because of their acquaintance with--

---

[24] Catherine Rampell, "A History of College Grade Inflation," *New York Times*, July 14, 2011, https://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/the-history-of-college-grade-inflation/.
[25] Fry, "Unpopular Messengers: Student Opposition to the Vietnam War," 228.
[26] Shapiro, "Freshman Deferments End As Nixon Signs New Draft Legislation."
[27] Fry, "Unpopular Messengers: Student Opposition to the Vietnam War," 228.

and protection from-- the draft, college students was a generated a plethora anti-draft activity, intent on maintaining their distance from the war as long as possible.

The draft affected all aspects of American life during the Vietnam War, whether one was pulled into the war or evaded it throughout the conflict. The draft particularly affected universities and college, which fundamentally changed as students became more and more frightened by the prospect of going to war. Explicit support systems and procedures—some which continue forty years later—were established in the face of the draft. Anti-draft protests occasionally gripped campuses. Moreover, almost every single student on these campuses was concerned with the possibility of induction. It was an inescapable product of the atmosphere that undoubtedly defined higher education in the late 1960s—the draft triggered profound shifts in the consciousness of both students and professors, and both began working towards the former's survival.

Bibliography

Bond-Ashpole, Raynor. *Interview with Roger Schwartz*, n.d.

Card, David, and Thomas Lemieux. "Going to College to Avoid the Draft: The Unintended Legacy of the Vietnam War." *The American Economic Review* 91, no. 2 (n.d.).

"COLLEGE ENROLLMENT LINKED TO VIETNAM WAR." *New York Times*. September 2, 1984. https://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/02/us/college-enrollment-linked-to-vietnam-war.html.

Frusciano, Thomas. "Student Deferement and Selective Service College Qualification Test, 1951-1967." *Educational Testing Service*, November 1980.

Fry, Joseph. "Unpopular Messengers: Student Opposition to the Vietnam War." In *The War That Never Ends*. University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

Halloran, Richard. "R.O.T.C., SHUNNED NO MORE, GROWS INCREASINGLY SELECTIVE." *New York Times*. July 20, 1987.

Hatt, Laura. "LBJ Wants Your GPA: The Vietnam Exam." *The Harvard Crimson*. May 23, 2016. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2016/5/23/lbj-wants-your-gpa/.

"Induction Statictics." *Selective Service System,* n.d. https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Induction-Statistics.

Jones Jr., Boisfeuillet. “The 1967 Draft Act: Where You Stand.” *The Harvard Crimson*. September 28, 1967. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1967/9/28/the-1967-draft-act-where-you/.

Rampell, Catherine. “A History of College Grade Inflation.” *New York Times*. July 14, 2011. https://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/the-history-of-college-grade-inflation/.

Rosenbaum, David. “Statisticians Charge Draft Lottery Was Not Random.” *New York Times*. January 4, 1970.

Schellie, Peter. “Selective Service as Seeen By the Student.” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 48, no. 9 (May 1967): 440–42.

Shapiro, Peter. “Freshman Deferments End As Nixon Signs New Draft Legislation.” *The Harvard Crimson*. September 29, 1971. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1971/9/29/freshman-deferments-end-as-nixon-signs/.

“THE VIETNAM LOTTERIES.” *Selective Service System* ,n.d. https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/lotter1.