

“Greetings” Memories by Ron Fogle

The word "Greetings" which I used in the 2026 July distribution newsletter email reminds me of the letters I received in the mail 60 years ago in 1966 from "Uncle Sam" instructing me to report for military service. Letters, being plural, is correct in that I received two letters that year. That first draft action and subsequent release put me on the draft board's "radar" which caught up to me later. As it turned out, I was able to get into the Seabees through the Direct Procurement Petty Officer program that had been authorized to begin in '66.

My recent research revealed that 1,841,640 personnel were drafted from 1964-1973 out of 2.7 million that are reported as serving in that war. The number of personnel who physically served in Vietnam was about 2.4 million while about 658,500 of those were draftees. I'd assume the different counts of those listed as serving in the war and in Vietnam may be those supporting but not actually "boots of the ground". These could be Naval fleet, Air Force, e.g. Thailand & Guam for fighter jets and bombers, etc. And maybe this includes those held in reserves, such MCB11 in 1969 when about half went to Vietnam in detachments and the other half was in Okinawa. The total personnel who served during the Vietnam War era was about 9.1 million. Therefore, about 38% of those serving in Vietnam were draftees while about 20% represented those who served during that era. These numbers aren't what I'd deem verified; they are the results of web searches. Although, the number of draftees did come from what appeared to be a valid source that also broke down the tally by branch of service. Interestingly, 1966 had the highest number of draftees in that 1964-'73 reporting period with over 380,000.

This leads to the memory about the "Greetings" letters and being drafted twice in 1966 as mentioned above. I was first drafted in March from which I was released due to being enrolled in college full time. The college deferment requirements at that time required a minimum of 12 credit hours to be considered full time. The previous fall semester in 1965, I had taken less than the required 12 credit hours. This happened due to I was working days and taking night classes, which ended up being short of the minimum. Not being enrolled during the summer when working created a situation for the draft catch up with me again.

The first draft in March included me and three high school classmates: John, Fred and Roy. Two of the classmates in that draft were assigned to the Army and the other to the Marine Corps. The two Army guys went to Germany; one as a medic and the other as an RTO for a tank unit. They never went to Vietnam even though those MOS were highly needed in the war. The Marine went through his training, sent to Vietnam and KIA in November of 1966. His name is on the Vietnam Wall, panel 12E, line 58. I always honor him and those we lost in our 1967 deployment any time I visit the wall in DC or a traveling wall.

I also think a lot about the percent of draftees that are indicated above. Many veterans I've spoken to over the past decades have stated that although they would be listed as "volunteers" as I am, they had joined one of the service branches or the Reserves, National Guard. etc. due to the draft. Some, like me, were able to join a branch of service after getting their draft notice.

After the draft lottery was introduced in 1969, one would know their draft number which was randomly selected using days of the month and individual birthdays. As an example; a day

of the month was randomly selected to match the day of the year. So, June 15 may be assigned number 45 and the next day could be 240. As I recall, most then sort of knew whether they'd be drafted or not. The lottery also changed the deferments and eliminated college enrollment as qualifying. As an example, my wife's brother, who was four years younger, had a draft lottery number based on his birthday that was so high, he could pretty much bet on the fact that he wouldn't be in the draft quota. Of course, if your number was fairly close to the expected draft quota, then all bets were off. Since I wasn't affected by any of that I don't remember exactly how those registered for selective service knew; but I do recall my brother-in-law knowing the estimated draft requirement (quota) associated with his draft number bound to his birthday.

I've spoken to so many veterans over the many years who said they went ahead and enlisted once they knew their draft quota and lottery number. Plus, several who, like me, got draft notices but were able to enlist and be released from the draft. So, while the draft data indicates close to 40% for Vietnam, I believe that number is not reflective of the reality. Many may not have been actually drafted, but I believe the impact of the draft was on the minds of most. That prompted many to take action to get into a service branch of their choice and avoid being drafted.

Early in the war, being married and with children deferred you from the draft as it did for one of my high school classmates who got married very early and had a child. Otherwise, being in college full time or having certain jobs or professions may get one deferred. Select jobs such as medical personnel, teachers, certain medical conditions, industrial (e.g. tool & die makers), agriculture (e.g. food producers) and National Security were typically some positions eligible for deferment. Many of the college, occupational and family deferments were eliminated either by the draft lottery or Executive Order in 1969. Some limits were placed on how long one could be enrolled in college and/or working towards graduate degrees. The draft lottery was supposedly to make the draft fairer. Prior to the lottery, there was a lot of talk about the draft being unfair. One of the claims at the time was the war was being fought by the poor because they couldn't afford options that provided deferments, e.g. college.

I recall that those of us I knew back then who graduated during the Vietnam War had that on our minds and seemed to impact many decisions about work, college, and other life situations. We lived through it and maybe had to grow up a bit faster because of it. I'm proud that I served, but in all honesty, I don't know that I'd have volunteered if the situation hadn't been the way it was. I had three older brothers who served; two due to being drafted; the oldest into the Marines and served in the Korean War and the second oldest into the peace time Army. My next oldest brother spent time in college ROTC but got a teaching waiver and did not actually serve any active duty. My dad was registered for selective service during WWII, but his age and maybe six children kept him from being called up. Also, we had an uncle killed in WWII during the Battle of Okinawa. We've visited my uncle's grave at the Punchbowl Crater in Honolulu, Hawaii.

My story is no different than probably millions of others, but I thought some of it may be of interest. So, the next time you see the word "Greetings" at the start of a letter, maybe you'll have a different perspective.