

Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

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Keith Rogers, Willie McTear, and Robert Foust

Chairman Dr. Joe Heck:

Thank you, Brigadier General Heck, for seeking insights on the Selective Service System from the perspective of people who were actually drafted.

We are a few of the last 1.8 million men conscripted for what became the Vietnam War.

We'd like to keep it that way. No man or woman should be pawns in the game of war at the whim of a commander-in-chief who we now know, was a would be pardoned crook and who — with the exception of General Alexander Haig and a few others — was surrounded by crooks who went to jail.

Those were different times. Or were they?

Let's not let history repeat itself. We should do everything we can to ensure that we will forever be the last draftees in the United States Army and that no single person can reign over the nation's youthful manpower pool for whatever reason whether it's to stop the domino-effect of communism far from our soil or to let the military industrial complex run ram-shod over our lives.

We decided to put our thoughts on paper for different reasons. That effort has evolved into a satirical novel on selective service based on our true experiences.

This transpired in 2017 about the same time this commission was tasked with the issue of what to do about selective service given the legal precedence that it is discriminatory to require only young men to register for the draft.

We felt that while we are still alive we owe it to all the drafted "U.S." Army soldiers before us to offer our perspective on the history of the draft to this point.

We see this time as an opportunity for the United States of America to lead the world free from the grip of conscription's shackles.

The forthcoming "Last Draftees" (c) 2019 details the history of the draft and its impact on the nation and of those who served "their country." It is based on events that actually happened and dwells on what was going through our minds during this confusing period of history.

Call it whatever you want, conscription is both immoral and unconstitutional, which makes it unlawful.

This is a worldwide dilemma. Let us be the first nation to free our citizens from the burden of conscription.

As a nation we had to abolish slavery before going forward with life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That was during the Civil War.

Conscription is no different than slavery in that it is synonymous with forced servitude.

Time has come to abolish the draft and the Selective Service System that drives it if peace is to be our priority as a people. The 45-year history of the all-volunteer Army has worked, and it's highly unlikely that a manpower pool like that which was used to drive the military industrial complex for the undeclared Vietnam War will ever be needed, given the nation's commitment to its armed forces coupled with 21st century technology.

And if it's not right for men then it goes without saying that women should not have to register. They can join the Army today. They have that freedom, that choice to serve in a combat roll if they do so voluntarily. Ditto for all people ages 18 and up regardless of their sexual orientation.

In today's world you don't have to claim homosexuality to evade military service.

Many young men like us in the 1960s and early 1970s were bitter about induction but elected to serve rather than go to Canada or find a way to evade the draft.

For our willingness to endure the draft, many who served especially in combat, fought the animosity and outrage when

they returned home. Likewise so did those who inherited the “stigma” when they were drafted during the Vietnam era that came with supporting the effort even in the continental United States.

Never before had returning veterans been treated so disrespectfully or been dismissed with such impudence.

What I, Keith Rogers, regret is that guys like Willie and Larry and Bob and countless others have experienced and had to live with for the rest of their lives. I am thankful for them for putting their lives on the line and surviving the ordeal.

Then when my call-up came in September 1972 with the last round of 10,000 conscripts, the heartache from the loss of what would be nearly six times that – more than 58,000 – for the U.S. military was beginning to sink in.

The 1972 draft was supposed to be the fairest of them all. It was supposed to have eliminated some the loops for draft evaders. I did not disagree with that and was in favor of a level playing field. College deferments were stricken altogether under the condition that if an able-bodied young man could endure the course of a year as 1-A draft eligible without being called then your military service obligation had been complete.

I was inducted between the summer and fall terms of my sophomore year at Michigan State University.

After my Army experience in the Military District of Washington during the Watergate affair that led to the resignation of my commander-in-chief Richard M. Nixon, I switched majors when I returned to college on the G.I. Bill, opting to major in mass communications.

Much of my 40-year journalism career was aimed at giving veterans a voice by reflecting on what they endured and to keep shining the light on the Department of Veterans Affairs to help ensure veterans’ benefits were protected.

I can attest to writing story-after-story for the largest daily newspaper in Nevada about problems with veterans getting health care. With time, things improved but Vietnam veterans

are still engaged in an unending fight to be compensated for all the maladies stemming from exposure to Agent Orange defoliants.

A common problem with draftees and Vietnam-era veterans is that records were often lost in the bowels of bureaucracy so that proving your case to the VA was always uphill.

“Delay. Deny. Die,” was the broken-record lead that kept spinning around in the media.

And post-traumatic stress disorder, which we all know too well now as PTSD, wasn’t even part of the American vocabulary until years after the Vietnam conflict ended with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

My name is Willie McTear. I was a young black man originally from Newellton, Louisiana who served with the first integrated company of all draftees.

We learned quickly in training at the advice of our platoon leader that there are no white soldiers or black soldiers, only soldiers. We were there because our country wanted us there.

I was living in Las Vegas, Nevada when I was drafted on May 16, 1966. I served exactly two years until my honorable discharge on May 16, 1968. I was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division, 4th Battalion, 47th Infantry, Charlie Company, 2nd platoon.

In 1967, we weren’t prepared for what we were about to encounter: the heat, the bugs, the rains, the mud and the emotions of losing a friend to a senseless war. My close friend Ronnie never made it back to his home in Las Vegas, Nevada.

In battles in the Mekong Delta in May and June 1967 there were 26 killed in action, one missing in action, and 105 wounded. Charlie Company suffered more than 80 percent casualties.

All but my buddy Spc. Ronald Paul Schworer returned to U.S. soil either on the plane back to the West Coast or in body bags.

After the “freedom flight” landed, many of the soldiers kissed the ground. There was no parade or homecoming reception, only jeering, spitting anti-war protesters.

I was so hurt I took my uniform off. I didn't want to be part of any war.

So let's end this nonsense with a recommendation by this commission to eliminate the draft and its system.

Let the all-volunteer military continue to protect our republic but let's do it without an unenforceable law that requires any person to "register" for selective service.

My name is Robert Foust. My service number is US56718350. It stays with me like a Nuremberg tattoo.

I am a third generation draftee. My grandfather and his twin were drafted into World War I. My father was inducted in World War II. I was drafted and later sent to Vietnam. It goes without saying that I have a few thoughts on the draft.

Personally I think conscription is unconstitutional, therefore the Selective Service System violates both First and Fourth amendments, freedom of speech and the right to privacy.

The Thirteenth Amendment, which prohibits forced servitude, is also at play here. The consequences of the draft come with a high price tag, too, when you factor in subjecting the Department of Veterans Affairs with an impossible burden.

If it's worth fighting for, all will come running. If it's for corporate greed or colonization, no thank you.

Abolish the draft, make "us" the last draftees. And while you're at it, change the culture of the way America does business.

Character is a big factor in life. Having it assassinated is not right. That's exactly what the Vietnam War draft did to thousands of young men. They sent us to fight a war that was unnecessary. Most of us were not properly trained or equipped.

When we returned, we were labeled as rapist child killers or just as cold-blooded killers. We were hated, spat upon and generally ostracized from society.

I'd say that's character assassination.

The Vietnam War was basically fought to defeat conscription.

Let's make that theory work and abolish the Selective Service System, then proceed to the United Nations and garner a worldwide ban on conscription. No soldiers. No war.

In closing, I would like to thank the United States government and its agent the Selective Service System, for selecting me to serve in Vietnam. They exposed me "full fledged" to what slavery is. I've lived with that low esteem for fifty years. I didn't believe it for a minute, others did.

Has that changed? Not much. I'm now compensated at a rate equal to minimum wage. This for full disability, the same crappy rate I was paid at as a soldier serving in Vietnam. Minimum wage or less. That's a Thirteenth Amendment violation.

My dignity stolen and my worth diminished I've struggled through life as a pariah. Stop the draft! It's immoral and unconstitutional.

Keith Rogers

Willie McTear

Robert Foust