

THE DRAFT

The Confederate Draft

The first general American military draft was enacted by the Confederate government on April 16, 1862, more than a year before the federal government did the same. The Confederacy took this step because it had to; its territory was being assailed on every front by overwhelming numbers, and the defending armies needed men to fill the ranks. The compulsory-service law was very unpopular in the South because it was viewed as a usurpation of the rights of individuals by the central government, one of the reasons the South went to war in the first place.

Under the Conscription Act, all healthy white men between the ages of 18 and 35 were liable for a three year term of service. The act also extended the terms of enlistment for all one-year soldiers to three years. A September 1862 amendment raised the age limit to 45, and February 1864, the limits were extended to range between 17 and 50. Exempted from the draft were men employed in certain occupations considered to be most valuable for the home front, such as railroad and river workers, civil officials, telegraph operators, miners, druggists and teachers. On October 11, the Confederate Congress amended the draft law to exempt anyone who owned 20 or more slaves. Further, until the practice was abolished in December 1863, a rich drafted man could hire a substitute to take his place in the ranks, an unfair practice that brought on charges of class discrimination.

Many Southerners, including the governors of Georgia and North Carolina, were vehemently opposed to the draft and worked to thwart its effect in their states. Thousands of men were exempted by the sham addition of their names to the civil servant rolls or by their enlistment in the state militias. Ninety-two percent of all exemptions for state service came from Georgia and North Carolina.

The Union Draft

An act for "enrolling and calling out the National Forces" was signed into law on March 3, 1863, by President Abraham Lincoln. This, the first effective draft by the federal government, called for all men between the ages of 18 and 45 to be enrolled into local militia units

and be available to be called into national service. The draft law exempted men in some occupations, such as telegraph operators, railroad engineers, judges, and certain other government employees. Men with mental disabilities or with certain types of dependents were also exempted. Physical disabilities that would exempt a man included imperfect vision in the right eye, lack of front teeth and molars, and loss of more than one finger of the right hand or more than two fingers of the left hand.

The actual drafting of the men was the responsibility of the states, which usually used a lottery system. When the government issued a call for more troops, each state would be given a quota to fill based on its population. The number of volunteers would be subtracted from the quota and the difference would be drafted. If a draftee, volunteered before the final muster, he avoided the stigma of compulsory service and was eligible to collect a bounty of \$100 from the federal government plus additional bounties from the state and local communities. In total, the bounties could exceed \$500, which was about the average yearly wage in those days. States considered it a matter of pride to fill their quotas without having to resort to the draft.

A draftee could gain an exemption by paying a fee of \$300 or by hiring a substitute. The obvious inequity of this provision prompted the cry of "rich man's war, but poor man's fight." The bounty system also made possible the enrichment of a large number of unscrupulous persons called "bounty jumpers." These men would enlist to collect their bounty, then desert and enlist somewhere else and collect another bounty.