

World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards

SOURCE: National Archives Records Administration

http://www.archives.gov/research_room/genealogy/military/wwi_draft_registration_cards.html

Historical Background

On May 18, 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed authorizing the President to increase temporarily the military establishment of the United States. The Selective Service System, under the office of the Provost Marshal General, was responsible for the process of selecting men for induction into the military service, from the initial registration to the actual delivery of men to military training camps.

The Selective Service System was one of "supervised decentralization." The office of the Provost Marshal General in Washington was responsible for formulating policy and transmitting it to the governors of the 48 states, the District of Columbia and the territories of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Under the administration of the PMGO it was the states, territories and the District of Columbia which managed the operation of drafting men for military service in WW I.

Under the office of the Provost Marshal General the Selective Service System was made up of 52 states (or territories) and 4,648 local boards. These organizations were responsible for registering men, classifying them, taking into consideration needs for manpower in certain industries and in agriculture, as well as certain special family situations of the registrants; handling any appeals of these classifications; determining the medical fitness of individual registrants; determining the order in which registrants would be called; calling registrants; and placing them on trains to training centers.

District boards were established by the President (one or more for each Federal Judicial District). The average district board had jurisdiction over approximately 30 local boards, each with an average registration of 5,000 men. The district boards had appellate jurisdiction over the decision of local boards in some claims and original jurisdiction in others. Local boards were established for each county or similar subdivision in each state, and for each 30,000 persons (approximately) in each city or county with a population over 30,000. The local boards were charged with the registration, determination of order and serial numbers, classification, call and entrainment of draftees.

During World War I there were three registrations. The first, on June 5, 1917, was for all men between the ages of 21 and 31. The second, on June 5, 1918, registered those who attained age 21 after June 5, 1917. (A supplemental registration was held on August 24, 1918, for those becoming 21 years old after June 5, 1918. This was included in the second registration.) The third registration was held on September 12, 1918, for men age 18 through 45.

Records Description

The information included on each registration differs somewhat but the general information shown includes order and serial numbers (assigned by the Selective Service System), full name, date and place of birth, race, citizenship, occupation, personal description, and signature.

The registration cards consist of approximately 24,000,000 cards of men who registered for the draft, (about 23% of the population in 1918). It is important to note that not all of the men who registered for the draft actually served in the military and not all men who served in the military registered for the draft. Moreover these are not military service records. They end when an individual reports to the army training camp. They contain no information about an individual's military service.

After the signing of the armistice of November 11, 1918, the activities of the Selective Service System were rapidly curtailed. On March 31, 1919, all local, district, and medical advisory boards were closed, and on May 21, 1919, the last state headquarters closed operations. The Provost Marshal General was relieved from duty on July 15, 1919, thereby finally terminating the activities of the Selective Service System of World War I.