LIVE FROM WASHINGTON
Lottery Night 1969!

With their futures hanging in the balance, millions watched, crossed their fingers and held their breath

BY WESLEY ABNEY

Forty years ago, on the evening of December 1, 1969, CBS News pre-empted the regularly scheduled broadcast of *Mayberry RFD* to pick up a live feed from Washington correspondent Roger Mudd at the Selective Service headquarters. "Good evening…Tonight for the first time in 27 years the United States has again started a draft lottery," said Mudd in whispered tones as the ceremony proceeded in the background.

For all its life-changing, big-moment drama, as theater the drawing for the 1970 draft was a low-budget affair, staged on a nondescript set with an odd assortment of office furnishings pushed together. All 366 blue plastic lottery "capsules" had been unceremoniously dumped into a large glass container perched precariously atop a plain library step stool. A somber-looking official sat at a small table cloaked with black fabric, ready for the lottery ceremony to begin. To pick each lottery number, someone would simply reach into the water cooler–sized jar to pull out a capsule. Tucked inside was a birth date that would be read aloud and assigned its lottery number, starting with No. 001.

New York Congressman Alexander Pirnie, the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, had been invited by longtime Selective Service Director General Lewis B. Hershey to draw the first

"SINCE 1969 I HAVE BEEN telling friends that the only lottery that I have ever won was the 1969 draft lottery. I remember being in the den of my dorm watching TV with all the other residents, most all eligible for service. I was a junior. My number came up quickly. I knew that from that moment on my life's highest priority was dealing with the draft and the Vietnam War. School, family and friends took a back seat." **—Tom, No. 030**

NATIONAL ARCHIVES; BACKGROUND: COURTESY OF THE SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM ARCHIVES

NUMBER 001 New York Congressman Alexander Pirnie draws the first date in the first Vietnam-era draft lottery, as Gen. Lewis Hershey stands at his side and Col. Daniel Omer waits to announce the birthday as No. 001.

MY GENERATION
Rhode Island college student Paul Murray, left, is the first of several "youth delegates" chosen to draw dates, in an attempt by President Richard Nixon to show support among young people for the draft lottery.

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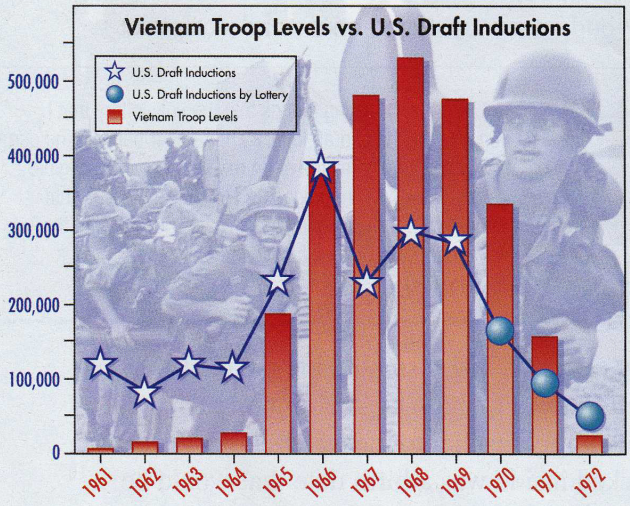
number. Pirnie stepped up, pulled out a capsule and handed it to the official at the table, who opened the capsule, unrolled the paper and announced: "September 14…September 14 is 001."

The small slip of paper was then fastened in the 001 position on a large board listing numbers from 001 to 366, a slot for each birthday, including February 29 for leap year babies. Atop the board was the heading: Random Selection Sequence, 1970.

For the millions of young men and their families watching on TV or listening over the radio, it was the one time they instinctively didn't want to have the lucky number. The Selective Service had estimated that those with numbers in the lowest one-third would likely be drafted; those in the upper one-third were likely safe; and those in the middle might or might not be drafted. That night, if a man got a low number, he quickly had to size up his immediate future.

After the first pick, Pirnie stepped aside and yielded the spotlight to Selective Service Youth Advisory Council delegates, who then took turns drawing five or six capsules apiece. President Richard M. Nixon insisted that young people from across the country participate in the lottery to show that draft-age men and women were involved in the process. Paul Murray, a student from Rhode Island, was the first delegate up: "April 24…April 24 is 002." "December 30…December 30 is 003." And so it went.

Reporter Mudd explained to his viewers how the ceremony unfolding behind him was much less elaborate than the one in 1940, when the United States prepared for World War II. "Twenty-nine years ago, for instance, Secretary of War Harry Stimson was blindfolded with a swatch of upholstery that had been clipped from one of the chairs used in the signing of the Declaration of Independence." Back in 1940, as warplanes flew



INFOGRAPHIC: BAKER VAIL PHOTO: © BETTMANN/CORBIS

Inductions By Conflict	
WWI	2,810,296
WWII	10,110,104
KOREA	1,529,539
VIETNAM	1,857,304

in formation over the Selective Service building, inside the lottery numbers were mixed with a wooden paddle that was supposedly carved from one of the rafters of Independence Hall. Stimson drew the first number and handed it directly to the president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who then read it to the assembled audience. The only carry-over from the 1940 event, explained Mudd, was General Hershey himself, who back then "was the new Selective Service executive director, and who tonight opened the ceremonies as the outgoing director."

The feisty 76-year-old general was a favorite target for antiwar protesters. In October 1967, in response to campus demonstrations, he had issued the so-called "Hershey Directive" recommending to all local draft boards that men interfering with military recruitment on a college campus should be subject to immediate reclassification of draft status. Hershey was picketed at Columbia, booed off the stage at Howard, and his car pelted with eggs in Wisconsin. He was satirized at peace rallies by a street performer who called himself "General Hersheybar," dressed in bogus military regalia with a toy fighter jet dangling from his cap.

Although Hershey had recently been reassigned from his post at the Selective Service, he was allowed to remain on the job long enough to preside at the first drawing of the revived lottery. The drawing came just five days after President Nixon had signed changes to the draft law, calling for the national lottery.

An estimated 850,000 young men would learn their draft futures in the first lottery. Every male aged 19 to 26, whose draft status had not already been resolved, had a stake in the outcome, as it would determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970.

The biggest change in the 1970 draft was that it reversed the age priority—instead of taking the oldest men first from the 18- to 26-year-old eligible range, local boards would now call the 19-year-olds first. The good news was that most men's uncertainty over their draft status would be shortened. Prior to the 1970 changes, there was no system to determine the order of call by age—everyone between 18 and 26 was vulnerable to being drafted. Young men might wait years to learn their draft future. Since older men in the draft-age range were called first, younger men trying to move forward with careers or marriages and family could only wait and wonder if their lives would be interrupted by required military service.

Under the previous system, in addition to each draft board applying the "oldest men first" priority in meeting the local manpower quota, it also decided who would be granted deferments, such as whether a man qualified as a conscientious objector, was entitled to a family hardship deferment or was making satisfactory progress toward a college degree. Those dissatisfied with their draft status could appeal the local board's decision, through the draft system and the courts, for months or years. By 1969 the rate of draft status appeals had doubled over that of the Korean War.

The Vietnam War's growing unpopularity led to greater scrutiny of the draft process. Increasingly, politicians, labor unions and university leaders pointed to racial bias, class or income bias and drastic differences in the practices of local draft boards, which became the target of antiwar protests in the mid-1960s. Demonstrators

"I WAS ABLE TO ATTEND COLLEGE via a generous scholarship through the Navy ROTC. Following my graduation in January 1970, with a degree in journalism, I was destined to go into the Navy. Even so, the lottery was a memorable day, night and morning after. I was No. 2, April 24, and that was a cause for a celebration. I remember the bar where we started drinking, but the march down State Street will be forever lost in a fog. Being No. 2, whenever the cry went up for lottery numbers, I was always the winner, and the beer was free for me. Even though the lottery didn't determine whether I served in the military, it impacted many of my friends. I ended up serving two tours in Vietnam, and being in the Navy taught me how much I was capable of doing, and that nothing was impossible. Those were great years—and not so great years—all rolled into one." **—Jim, No. 002**

"IN 1969, I WAS IN MY FOURTH year at college. I lived in a small apartment building…and everyone in the building crammed into my room to watch the lottery on my old black and white TV. Someone brought a six pack of beer that was to be awarded the 'winner,' i.e. the person having the lowest number of all the guys in the building. Well, unfortunately I won the six pack with No. 23. It was such an insignificant prize for something so potentially awful, but somehow I felt OK about it. At least I didn't have to wonder what to do, as some of my friends had to with numbers around 180. I drank the six pack, joined the Army Reserves (after graduating in 1970), and retired 31 years later as a sergeant major." **—Gary, No. 023**

WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER?
Find out how you and other prominent figures would have fared in the 1969 draft lottery at www.HistoryNet.com.

COURTESY OF THE SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM ARCHIVE

PUSH BACK Protesters surround the Selective Service building in 1969 calling for the end of the draft. The lottery, and other draft law revisions, were viewed by President Nixon as a way to take some steam out of the student-led protests sweeping the nation.

staged sit-ins at draft board proceedings, protesters burned records in a number of major cities, and a radical priest doused records at the Baltimore draft board with duck's blood.

The simplest way to solve the problems of the draft system was to get rid of it, and convert the military to an all-volunteer force. Volunteers alone, however, could not maintain the necessary troop levels in Vietnam. President Nixon, unable to abolish the draft system during his first year in office because of the war's manpower demands but hoping to defuse the unrest, had moved instead to reform the draft in 1969 while proposing the switch to an all-volunteer force. He had pushed for the change in age priority, and called for a national lottery. Following massive antiwar protest marches in Washington in October and November 1969, Congress had approved the move to a lottery system, and Nixon signed the new law on November 26.

Nixon hoped the lottery would at least restore the perception of fairness to the draft process and reduce campus protests by essentially eliminating draft vulnerability for students with the highest numbers. Those with numbers in the middle, however, had to stand by and watch the tally of numbers rise month by month as draft quotas were met.

The Order to Report for Physical Examination letter was the first step of being drafted into the armed services. The lottery numbers of 19-year-olds were called at a rate of about 30 per month during the first half of 1970, so someone with a low number would likely be summoned to the physical exam by February 1970, and be either deferred or inducted into the service by May. If an individual's number wasn't called during 1970, chances are he would not be called at all—unless he had an expired college deferment.

If a man was fit for service, he was classified 1-A, which meant he was available for military service immediately. If he was fit for service, but did not want to go to war, he had 10 days to file a claim

"A 19-YEAR-OLD FROM A MIDDLE CLASS family in New Bern, N.C., was simply not equipped to handle or understand all the various sides of the war issue, and I do not even today. Like everyone else, I did my best to avoid the draft. . . .However, in the summer of 1969, I found myself at Cape Cod, Mass., where I was exposed to both drug parties and to young platoon leaders barely two years out of college coming home on leave from Vietnam or getting out of the Army. Seeing my friends getting further involved in the 'drug of the day' did little to impress me, but I was moved by the calm confidence of these returning vets, only 3-4 years older than me. At summer's end, I chose to enlist in the Army. After a year in infantry training, I was sent to Vietnam, where I sloshed through rice paddies and served with some of the most memorable 'buddies' I have had the privilege to be around. Thanks to my time in Vietnam, I have been able to face many challenging decisions with the same calm confidence displayed by the young platoon commanders I so respected in the summer of '69." **— Mike, No. 217**

for exemption, postponement or deferment. A conscientious objector was classified 1-A-O, "available for noncombatant military service only." The Order to Report for Induction letter was the official notification that an individual was drafted. The highest lottery number called for a physical in 1970 was 215, and all men with the No. 195 or lower, classified 1-A or 1-A-O, were called to report for possible induction.

In 1970 a person could qualify for a deferment if he could prove he was a full-time student, progressing toward a degree. He could continue in school and be deferred until he was over 26, too old to be drafted. After 1971, however, Congress changed the draft laws, and college students could have their inductions postponed only until the end of the current semester, or for a senior, until the end of the school year.

The last date drawn in the 1970 lottery, No. 366, was June 8. "This has been a very systematic, almost mechanical, lottery," reported Roger Mudd. "There's been little excitement here but for one or two brief occasions. Four or five of the youth advisory council members declined to participate, claiming that they thought they were being used by the Nixon administration to give a youth approval to the lottery system." The next day, a newspaper story reported: "David L. Fowler, representing the District of Columbia, stepped up to the microphone and said he had been 'notified' not to draw and walked out. Nevertheless, Gen. Lewis B. Hershey, 76, Selective Service director who has been accused of heavy-handed draft policies, rose and shook Mr. Fowler's hand." Neither Hershey nor any of the other officials moved to cut off the statements of the other participants who spoke out. About a dozen demonstrators were reported picketing outside, denouncing the draft, the lottery and the war.

Probability studies of the 1970 lottery results indicated that the selection process was not entirely random as intended—birth dates occurring later in the year were disproportionately likely to be chosen early. This was most likely a result of insufficient mixing of the capsules. A court challenge ensued, but the lottery results were upheld. In the subsequent lotteries, a different procedure was utilized to ensure the capsules were fully randomized.

On January 27, 1973—the day the Vietnam cease-fire was announced—the administration stopped the draft, six months before the draft law was to expire on July 1, 1973. The last draft lottery was on December 7, 1972.

Except for a one-year hiatus, the draft had remained continuously in effect from World War II until it was abolished in 1973. General Hershey, still refusing to relinquish his Army career that began in 1911, was involuntarily retired on April 10, 1973, just as the draft he ran for so long gave way to the all-volunteer military. ☆

"AS LONG AS I WAS AN UNDERGRADUATE, I was deferred, but my low lottery number meant that I would be first to go after graduation. At the time I was 5'11 3/4" and only weighed 135 pounds, and I was told that if I weighed 127 pounds I would be deferred. The summer after graduation, I went on a diet and lost a few pounds before my draft physical. The night before my physical, I weighed 127, but was very concerned I would be inducted, so I went to a health club and sat in a steam room off and on for hours....When I was weighed, I was 115 pounds and they gave me a 1-H classification and told me I had to come back in 6 months." **—Mark, No. 069**

"ON THE DAY THE LOTTERY NUMBERS were announced, everyone was very quiet on my dorm floor. I found out my number was 303. I had lucked out. One of my closest friends, Glen, wasn't as lucky. His number was 36. But Glen was the eternal optimist. I'll always remember his reaction: 'So I'll go...and I'll come back.' He was the first on the floor to go to Vietnam. He wrote me often from his outpost...and even sent me back one of his green army shirts with his name sewed on above the breast pocket. I went on to be a correspondent for *Newsweek* and covered the war at home. In the end, Glen kept his word. He went to Vietnam. He came back, and thankfully in one piece...physically. But mentally he was never the same...he simply stopped writing and disappeared. I still have that shirt today, a reminder of how the lottery changed both our lives." **—Peter, No. 303**

Author Wes Abney's birthday was picked as No. 210 in the 1969 lottery drawing. He then flunked his physical—he swears unintentionally! After a recent visit with an old friend brought back vivid memories of anxiously watching the lottery, Abney decided to create a website where people could share their own stories. He invites draft lottery participants to add their memories at: **www.vietnamwardraftlottery.com**