



# The REGISTER

## *Selective Service System*

THE REGISTER

May/June 2001

## Longest Serving Selective Service Member Retires After Over Half a Century

In June 2001, an 80-year-old man with the odd name of Junior Elder will say good-bye to the Selective Service System. His involvement with the drafts of three wars makes his first name misleading and his surname appropriate—he is truly the elder statesman of Selective Service and the Agency's longest serving member. He will retire from his current position as Kansas State Director, ending a 60-year military and civilian association with the Agency.

Elder was born Sept. 13, 1920, on his family's farm in Wichita County, Kan., the 18th of 20 children. The crowd of siblings came in handy when doing chores on the farm. Elder was responsible for milking a cow that never seemed to be in the same place come milking time, often causing Elder to wander around the farm in the pre-dawn hours, empty milk can in hand, searching for the "run-away" cow.

But he found his direction in life soon enough when, at age 20, he enlisted in the Kansas Army National Guard. He was assigned to the Selective Service Section and worked at the Kansas headquarters detachment as a file clerk/typist. On Oct. 10, 1940, a week after he enlisted, Elder's unit was called to active duty. He continued his assignment with Selective Service as it began preparing for the inevitable U.S. involvement in World War II. He worked in the steno pool for the unit commander and Selective Service Deputy State Director for Kansas.



*State Director Junior Elder, circa 1951.*

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# President Bush Nominates Rascon to be New Selective Service Director

On April 30, 2001, President George W. Bush sent to the Senate his nomination for Alfred Rascon to be the new Director of the Selective Service System. Most recently Rascon served as Inspector General of the Agency and has served as a Special Agent with the Immigration and Naturalization Service. He served with the Drug Enforcement Agency as an Intelligence Operations Specialist, and from 1976 to 1984 was a U.S. Army military liaison officer in the Republic of Panama. Rascon was awarded the Medal

of Honor by President Clinton for military service during the Vietnam War. Originally from California, he is a graduate of California Coast University and Excelsior College at the University of New York State.

Rascon will face a confirmation hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee and have to be confirmed by the Senate before becoming the 10<sup>th</sup> Director of the Selective Service System. At the time of this printing, a date for the Senate hearing had not yet been announced. [SSS](#)



*Mr. Alfred Rascon, Bush nominee for Director of Selective Service.*



*President Clinton presenting Rascon with the Medal of Honor on Feb. 8, 2000.*

*Photo by William Yasta, The White House*

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*Viewpoints herein do not represent official policy.*



## Member, from front page

Elder recalled how inexperienced he was after only one week in the military. “An ‘older gentleman’ engaged me in conversation and commented that my pants were rather short. I casually agreed. ‘Yup, they sure are,’ I replied.” Five minutes later Elder was informed by his first sergeant that he needed a quick lesson in how to recognize and properly address a senior officer. The “older gentleman” was the unit commander.

While serving stateside with his Guard unit during the war, Elder was married in November 1942 to his first wife, Eddie (Elder remarried after Eddie passed away). In December of 1943, three months after the birth of their first child, Kenneth, Elder was sent to England with the 250<sup>th</sup> Station Hospital. He returned to the United States in November of 1945 and was discharged from the service the day before Thanksgiving on Nov. 21, 1945.

Elder enrolled in Washburn University in Topeka, Kan., where he earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration in 1949. He earned a law degree from Washburn in 1951. His family had grown by three (Beverly, Maurice, and Pam) by the time he graduated, and they lived on \$90 a month from the Army’s GI Bill and the free housing Elder earned by managing the university’s 122 housing units.

It was during this time, Elder first was approached by an acquaintance who was organizing a Selective Service unit in the Army Reserve. After testing for and earning his commission as a second lieutenant in 1950, Elder submitted an application to the Selective Service Reserve unit, but was turned down. So he joined the Finance Corps of the Reserve instead. In October of 1950, Elder transferred to the Kansas Army National Guard after hearing of an opening in their Selective Service unit. On June 6, 1951, he was recalled to extended active duty with the Selective Service System

where he was assigned to the Kansas State Headquarters, thus beginning his 50 contiguous years of service with the Agency.



*A young business major, Junior Elder (center), studies while watching his children, Kenneth, 18 months (left) and Beverly, 9 months (right). Photo and article appeared in the Topeka Daily Capital in June 1947 about veterans returning to college after WWII.*

In 1969, Elder was nominated as State Director for Kansas by then Gov. Robert Docking, after he was recommended for the position by retiring state director and Kansas Adjutant General, Lt. Gen. Joe Nickell. On Oct. 12, 1969, Elder, a lieutenant colonel at the time, was appointed as the new state director. He was the first Kansas State Director who was not also the state’s adjutant general. On Jan. 29, 1970, Elder was released from active duty, making him Kansas’ first civilian state director. In June 1970 Elder was promoted to colonel, and in November of that same year he retired from military service.

Elder has seen quite a lot during his tenure with the Selective Service, and has held almost every position at the state headquarters. His legal background proved vital during the Korean and Vietnam Conflicts as he was responsible for the handling of conscientious objector claims and

assisted the federal district attorney with the prosecution of violators of Selective Service law.

Over six decades, Elder touched many lives. As recently as February of this year, Elder received a very touching letter from a young man who, in 1967, requested a deferment in order to serve in the Peace Corps. The young man's request was denied by both the Local and District Appeal Boards, but Elder filed an appeal to the National Appeal Board on the young man's behalf. He was granted the deferment and was very grateful for his experience in the Corps. In the letter, the young man apologized for not expressing his gratitude earlier, and explained that he was prompted to write after he discovered the letter, which Elder had written more than 30 years earlier, in a box his mother had saved.

When asked why he has stayed with Selective Service so long, Elder replied with a boyish grin and a sly laugh, "Hunger." But then he goes on to explain that the Selective Service System was "family" and he speaks fondly of the people.

Col. Paul Idol, former detachment commander with the Selective Service Section of the Kansas National Guard, worked with Elder from 1965 until 1976, just after the Agency went into "deep standby." When asked why he believed Elder has stayed with the Agency as long as he has, Idol said that he believed Elder truly loved what he was doing. "He treated everyone like family and he knew every Local Board clerk by name as well as the names of their spouses and children," said Idol. "He also kept a low profile," he continued. "As state director, if he were standing in the front office of the state headquarters when a young registrant walked in, he'd talk to him. He didn't just refer him to the secretary. Elder was the best boss I've ever had," Idol said. "He'd let you handle a situation your way, but he'd always be there with you for guidance."

Elder is also known for his sense of humor, which is apparent as he shares memories of former Selective

Service Director, the late Gen. Lewis B. Hershey. He affectionately recalls two stories involving Hershey's failing eyesight. Once when having a meal with the general, Hershey reached for the sugar bowl and put his fingers into Elder's water glass. "Hershey



takes his fingers out and says, 'Well, I guess that's not the sugar?.' Another incident involved Hershey signing a photo for Elder. Hershey penned "Lewis B." and then he stopped to say something. When his attention returned to the picture-signing he asked Elder how much he had written. He couldn't see it. Elder responded, "You got as far as 'B'." Hershey said, "Oh, okay, I think I know the rest," and he finished signing his name.

Pictured clockwise: (1) Junior Elder standing in the spot where one of the locations for Kansas' Selective Service headquarters once stood, (2) Junior Elder, 2001, (3) Letter from young man helped by Elder 34 years ago, (4) Topeka's state capitol building, (5) Letter from former Senator Bob Dole congratulating Elder on the Agency's 50th anniversary, (6) Elder pictured with his wife, Mary Jane (right), and their good friends, Paul and Cloeva Idol.



Dear Junior:

This letter is 34 years overdue, and I regret and apologize that you never received a personal "thank you" nor an expression of the gratefulness I have for a very significant thing you did for me after I graduated from WASHBURN UNIVERSITY in 1967.

I had applied and been accepted to the PEACE CORPS for an educational television project in South America. However, both the local draft board and the state draft board declined to give me a military deferment at the time.

You personally wrote a letter of appeal on my behalf to the National Appeal Board in Washington, D.C. for which reason I ultimately received a Presidential deferment. I remember that at the time I was notified of the deferment, I was told it was one of only two such military deferments granted to any PEACE CORPS volunteer.

All of the memories of this experience and what you had done for me came back when my wife Joyce and I were cleaning out my parents' home after my father had to move because of his stroke. I discovered a box of Peace Corps letters my mother had saved, including my correspondence regarding the appeal and the copy of the letter you had personally written which won the appeal. It is something I will save and always value.

I appreciate having been able to serve in the PEACE CORPS and realize that if it had not been for your consideration and intervention, I would never have had the opportunity to do so and most likely would have had to serve in Viet Nam instead.

THANK YOU! VERY, VERY MUCH!!!



 **BOB DOLE**  
UNITED STATES SENATE

October 13, 1992

Dear Juniors:

Congratulations on 50 years of work for the Selective Service System!

Kansas has been lucky to have such a competent and dedicated public servant in the State Headquarters of the Selective Service System over the past five decades. I know that you will continue to contribute to the System in the coming years.

All best wishes.

Sincerely,

  
BOB DOLE  
United States Senate

Asked what he considered to be the biggest change in the Selective Service System, Elder believes it was the introduction of the lottery system. He said that with the lottery system you no longer took the oldest man first. Elder continued, "...when you called the oldest first, you got a lot of 'help'


from mother. If her boy got a call, she knew the boy down on the corner was the same age and would ask, 'Why didn't he get a call?' So you see the old system had its own policing force."

Elder also found time to share his many talents with many organizations outside the Selective Service System. As an attorney, he championed

the causes of many senior citizens helping them with financial matters, wills, estates, trusts, and legal representation. He is a long-time and active member of the First Baptist Church of Topeka, where he held several leadership positions. He is also a member of the Optimist Club of Topeka, the Kansas Bar Association, the Boy Scouts of America, and the list goes on.

His love for Kansas is evident as Elder drives through the capital city of Topeka. He knows the significance of each town landmark and can tell you the story behind each one. While walking through the state

capitol building he describes each artifact as well as any museum curator.

“Few men have given of themselves as he has. His dedication to his community, state, and country are to be remembered and imitated by those who will follow him,” says Selective Service System Director Gil Coronado. “The Agency is losing a historical treasure and he will be greatly missed. I ask the Selective Service family to join me in wishing him and his wife, Mary Jane, good fortune in his future endeavors and a healthy, happy retirement.” 

## IN MEMORIAM: DR. VERNON D. SILLS

On April 16, 2001, Region II lost a valued member of the Selective Service family when Vernon D. Sills, Ph.D. died of heart failure.


Sills, a retired colonel from the Mississippi Army National Guard, served as the Selective Service System’s State Director for Mississippi after being nominated for the position in 1991 by then Gov. Ray Mabus. During his tenure with the military and the Selective Service System, he earned numerous awards including the Armed Forces Reserve Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Selective Service System Meritorious Service with Bronze Medal, and the Mississippi Longevity Medal (1 silver and 2 bronze oak leaf clusters).

A native of New Hebron, Miss., Sills earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Mississippi College. At age 50, he returned to college and earned his doctorate in education. He served his community as an educator for 30 years where he served as principal of Pearl McLurin Jr. High School, Madison-Ridgeland Academy, and for McComb Public Schools. Sills also served as Director of Field Services for the Mississippi Department of Health from 1974 to 1986.



*Vernon D. Sills, Ph.D.*

Sills enjoyed fishing, hunting, and teaching. He was known to have a tremendous thirst for knowledge and enjoyed sharing that knowledge with others. He was never known to have a bad thing to say about anybody. One of his favorite sayings was, “Be careful of the words you speak. Keep them soft and sweet. You never know from day to day, which ones you’ll have to eat.”

Sills will be greatly missed by his friends and family. He is survived by his wife, Meredith Coghlan Sills of Philadelphia, five children, two brothers, eight grandchildren, and one great grandchild. 

# DRIVER'S LEGISLATION SIGNED IN TWO STATES

## Arkansas



On Feb. 20, 2001, Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas signed legislation which requires young men age 18-25 years to be registered with the Selective Service System in order to receive a license or permit to operate a motor vehicle. This law goes into effect on January 1, 2002.

*Selective Service System Director Gil Coronado (far left) looks on as Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (seated) signs Selective Service driver's license legislation.*

## Georgia

On April 18, 2001, Gov. Roy E. Barnes of Georgia signed legislation which requires young men age 18-25 to be registered with the Selective Service System or to consent to registration when they apply for or renew a driver's license or state identification card. This law goes into effect on July 1, 2001.



*Gov. Roy E. Barnes of Georgia (seated), signs Selective Service driver's license legislation.*

# RFO Teams with Man's Best Friend

Capt. Rex Vehrs, a Reserve Force Officer (RFO) and Area Office Coordinator for Area Office 14 in southwest Texas, works for the U.S. Customs Service. Vehrs' partner is Bruno, a narcotics detection dog, and together they are two of the soldiers in the United States' war on drugs.




*Capt. Rex Vehrs with Bruno.*

Vehrs and Bruno patrol the Texas border with Mexico in the city of Del Rico. The team works together to detect and prevent illegal drugs and criminals from entering the country.

The two work well as a team. In their first year together, they made 27 narcotics seizures and 33 arrests. Over 600

pounds of marijuana and 2 pounds of cocaine (over a million dollars worth of narcotics) were prevented from entering the country. This work is very challenging and requires working in extreme conditions. They work in temperatures ranging from 100 plus degrees to the low teens. They work in the rain, dust, and snow. "We do whatever it takes and accept any challenge to protect America's 'front line'," said Vehrs.

In his spare time, Vehrs takes Bruno to schools and public events to educate children and adults about anti-drug programs such as DARE. According to Vehrs, Bruno enjoys his job and gives a "paw high five" and a "big wag of his tail" to all he meets. 



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