

## National Service, 1965–72

### A scheme of selective National Service

On 5 November 1964, Cabinet decided to introduce a compulsory selective National Service scheme. In announcing this decision to Parliament, Prime Minister Robert Menzies referred to 'aggressive Communism' developments in Asia, such as 'recent Indonesian policies and actions' and a 'deterioration in our strategic position', as being influential in the decision being reached (see *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 25th Parliament, 1st Session, pp. 2517–2724). The Government had concluded that Australia had inadequate Defence manpower and aimed to increase the strength of the Army to 33,000 by the end of 1966 by introducing national service.

The *National Service Act 1964*, passed on 24 November, required 20 year old males, if selected, to serve in the Army for a period of twenty four months of continuous service (reduced to eighteen months in 1971), followed by three years in the Reserve. The Defence Act was amended in May 1965 to provide that conscripts could be obliged to serve overseas, and in March 1966, Prime Minister Holt announced that National Servicemen would be sent to Vietnam to fight in units of the Australian Regular Army.

Between 1965 and December 1972 over 800,000 men registered for National Service. Some 63,000 were conscripted and over 19,000 served in Vietnam. Although registration was compulsory a process of selection by ballot determined who would be called up. Two ballots were conducted each year. The ballots selected several dates in the selected period and all males with corresponding birthdays were called up for national service. The ballot was conducted using a lottery barrel and marbles representing birthdays. The barrel and marbles are held in the National Office, Canberra, in series MP1357/63.

### Opposition to conscription

From 1966 opposition to conscription swelled and was often enmeshed with opposition to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Evasion of national service was not uncommon. Some cases were prosecuted harshly leading to much publicity. National Service was a significant issue in the Federal election campaigns of 1966, 1969 and 1972. The Australian Labor Party consistently opposed it and was committed to recalling troops from Vietnam.

With the election of an ALP government in December 1972, Prime Minister Whitlam announced the end of peace time conscription as one of his government's first administrative decisions. Those

National Servicemen who did not wish to complete their term of service were discharged immediately. The National Service Act was amended in 1973 to abolish the obligation to undertake National Service.

## Record holdings of the 1965–72 National Service scheme

The National Archives holds many records about the introduction and administration of this last National Service scheme. Selected records are listed in the tables below.

### The introduction and administration of National Service

The records listed below are all held in the National Office, Canberra. Records about the administration of national service in each state are generally held by the office of the National Archives in that state. Significant policy and administrative records are generally held by our office in Melbourne, as the central office of the Department of Labour and National Service which administered national service was located there.

#### Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<a href="#">National Service training for aliens – part 1</a>	1952–65	A446, 1970/95527
<a href="#">National Service training for aliens – part 2</a>	1965–66	A446, 1970/95528
<a href="#">National Service training for aliens – part 3</a>	1966	A446, 1970/95529
<a href="#">National Service training for aliens – part 4</a>	1966	A446, 1970/95530
<a href="#">National Service Training Scheme – general representations</a>	1962–66	A463, 1962/3685 part 1
<a href="#">National Service Training Scheme – general representations</a>	1966–67	A463, 1962/3685 part 2
<a href="#">National Service Bill 1964</a>	1964	A432, 1964/1293
<a href="#">National Service Training Scheme – policy</a>	1964–66	A463, 1964/5143 part 1
<a href="#">National Service – policy</a>	1964–67	A4940, C162 part 2
<a href="#">National Service Bill 1965</a>	1965	A432, 1965/1082
<a href="#">National Service training scheme – exemptions and deferments – general representations</a>	1965–67	A463, 1965/972 part 1
<a href="#">Australian military aid to South Vietnam</a>	1965–66	A4940, C4643 part 3

### Records about National Service registrants

All males liable for National Service were required to register by completing a registration form. Many of these records which provide information about name, address, date and place of birth, marital status, next of kin, and employment and education history are held by offices of the National Archives. Records for registrants are usually held in the State in which they registered. The records are not held in one sequence arranged by family name – they are grouped by registration number within intakes. Some examples of relevant series are listed below.

## Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Medical reports of National Service registrants rejected on medical grounds</u>	1965	ST2316/1
<u>Registration and medical forms – National Service registrants rejected on medical grounds</u>	1965–70	ST3216/1
<u>Registration forms – National Service registrants excluded by ballot</u>	1965–69	ST3235/1
<u>Registration forms – National Service registrants excluded by ballot</u>	1965–69	ST3236/1
<u>Personal files of National Service trainees</u>	1965–70	ST3237/1
<u>Registration forms – National Service registrants excluded by ballot</u>	1965–70	ST3269/1
<u>Registration forms – National Service registrants excluded by ballot</u>	1965–70	ST3323/1
<u>Registration forms – National Service registrants excluded by ballot</u>	1965–72	ST3455/1
<u>Personal files of unregistered applicants liable for National Service</u>	1965–73	ST3550/1
<u>Personal files of National Service trainees balloted into the Army</u>	1965–72	ST3819/1
<u>National Service registration forms and related correspondence [SA]</u>	1965	AT1338/1
<u>National Service files, single number series [SA]</u>	1965-73	D3946
<u>Index to National Service Training Case Files. Alphabetical - in the name of the party [SA]</u>	1965-72	D4267

## Brisbane

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>National Service registration forms and related correspondence [SA]</u>	1965	AT1285/1
<u>National Service registration forms and related correspondence [SA]</u>	1969	AT1282/1
<u>National Service registrants files, single number series</u>	1965-1972	J1687

## Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>National Service registration forms and registration training files</u>	1965–73	B518

## Perth

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>National Service registrants case files</u>	1965–72	K1090

## How to obtain more information

[Search the collection](#) to find more information about the records listed in this fact sheet.

Other fact sheets relating to compulsory military training are:

- *Fact sheet 160 - Universal military training in Australia, 1911–29*
- *Fact sheet 161 - The Conscription referendums, 1916 and 1917*

- *Fact sheet 162 - National Service and war, 1939–45*
- *Fact sheet 163 - National Service, 1951–59*

Information relating to the military service of those called up for National Service will be found on personal service records of the respective service. Refer to the following fact sheets:

- *Fact sheet 30 - Navy service records*
- *Fact sheet 32 - RAAF service records*
- *Fact sheet 136 - Army service records*