
Defense Report

AUSA



Clemency: Success or Failure

From the standpoint of the military man, President Ford's Clemency Program was certainly not a failure.

The program, which ran from 16 September 1974 thru 30 April 1975, was not an Amnesty Program. Rather, it offered both draft evaders and military deserters an opportunity to return to American society without risking criminal prosecution or jail if they acknowledged their allegiance to the United States and satisfactorily served a period of alternate civilian service.

The Department of Defense's interest and responsibility was the 10,115 military deserters, those who had taken an oath and become members of one of the services. Of these, 5,555 or 54.9 per cent, chose to return to military control and were processed under the program. Another 848 returned to military control facilities but decided not to participate, and most were separated at their own request in lieu of trial by court-martial with undesirable discharges. Forty-five others who reported in received general or honorable discharges without recourse to the Clemency Program.

In other words, as the result of the program, 6,448 persons, or nearly 64 per cent of the total number of military deserters, checked back in to the military with the vast majority participating and most of those not participating resolving their fugitive status.

Only 475 (8½%) of the participating absentees claimed to have resided outside the United States. Canada had the most, 332, while 41 had been in Sweden, 23 in Mexico, and 19 in Germany. The remainder were spread out in 26 other countries.

Of the 5,555 who were processed under the program, only 19 per cent saw service in Vietnam and only one per cent deserted from combat. Most stated that they had deserted for personal/family/financial reasons. Only 14 per cent mentioned Vietnam as being in any way responsible for their decision to desert.