

Burned draft card in 1969

War protester: prison inevitable

By Greg Wees

On Thursday, Feb. 14, 1969, near the end of a Hyde Park public forum on religion, a student stepped to the podium in the Nebraska Union lounge, unfolded a sheet of paper and started reading.

"I can no longer cooperate with the Selective Service," he began. "The draft serves to feed the military machine to fight the Vietnam War, which I consider unjust and immoral, as are all wars."

With that statement, Larry Zink, then a junior, committed himself to facing the consequences of his next act, which ultimately would send him to prison.

Holding his draft card in the air, Zink struck a match and lit the card. He encouraged others in the audience to follow his lead, but no one accepted.

Zink said he knew a prison term awaited him. Two days after his illegal protest, FBI agents came to Zink's home. He signed a statement admitting he had burned his draft card.

Pleaded guilty

In February 1970, Zink pleaded guilty and was sentenced under the Youth Corrections Act to serve not more than four years in federal prison. He was to be released at the discretion of his parole officer.

"I prepared myself for going in," Zink now says. "I had time to get it all together in my head."

Applying for a conscientious objector deferment was out of the question, Zink said. That would have meant cooperating with the Selective Service System, which he thought was corrupt and unjust.

He could have accepted an occupational deferment because he had completed three years of electrical engineering subsidized by a Regent's scholarship. But he refused it.

From March 1971 until May 1972, Zink served time at three prisons in the South. All were medium security prisons that "rewarded those who played along with the system," Zink recalls.

Prison in Springfield, Mo.

When he was 24, he entered the federal prison at Springfield, Mo., where he worked as a dishwasher. Several months later, he was transferred to El Reno, Okla.

"El Reno was a bad place. There was a lot of tension there," Zink says, telling about the hard-line attitude of offenders, most of who were 20 to 30 years old.

Finally he arrived at the Seagaville, Tex., prison where there were no night

guards at the gates to stop prisoners who attempted to escape. Inmates had their own rooms and keys to their own doors, he said. Thus Zink retained his privacy, a commodity he admits he regarded highly.

At Seagaville, Zink worked without guard supervision. His typing proficiency secured him a job with civil service personnel, he said.

Zink said he wondered how other prisoners would react to a draft card burner.

"Some (of the prisoners) blatantly disagreed with me, but many respected by stand," he said.

Many drug violators

Many of the young prisoners at Seagaville were convicted of drug violations, Zink said. They formed a distinct community which banded together whenever other, older inmates tried to steal their commissary money or threatened them in other ways.

The majority of the younger prisoners were middle class, educated and had ties with the outside, Zink recalls. They were willing to take prison administrators to court and, by doing so, were able to ease hair code and book restrictions.

"There wasn't any training or work release for prisoners such as myself," he emphasized. "We weren't there to be rehabilitated, we were just there to be punished."

After one year and three months in prison, the National Parole Board in Washington, D.C. accepted his parole officer's recommendation for suspending the rest of the sentence. Zink was freed.

He now is learning to operate an offset printing press in the basement of the Agricultural Communications Bldg. on East Campus. He also is taking upper-level psychology courses, but said he will not complete remaining requirements for an electrical engineering degree.

Disagrees with amnesty plan

Zink said he disagrees with President Gerald Ford's conditional amnesty offer, and said he was surprised by it.

"I thought he would do more, go farther. But he moved too fast," he said. "Ford should have left the issues open to public discussion."

"It would be best for everyone involved to get complete amnesty, to recognize that there is no wrong involved in the decisions they made," he said.

"The Vietnam War was a rotten, stinking war that divided the country and didn't do a bit of good for anyone...I still believe that," Zink said.

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