

# *The* **AMERICAN** **LEGION** *Weekly*

---

*December 19, 1919: p. 10*

## **Americans in Name Only**

**Native Born Slacker Has  
a Niche in Hall of Shame**

**By MARQUIS JAMES**

**T**HE publication which opens its columns to a discussion of the slacker issue rushes in where pussy-footers—to use a word of one of the greatest Americans of them all—fear to tread. It becomes its unpleasant duty to face the fact that while approximately three out of four aliens, exclusive of enemy aliens, within our shores sought to escape military service in behalf of their adopted country, four out of seven native “Americans” of fighting age emulated this disgraceful example.

Members of The American Legion find more respect for the illiterate foreigner whose English primer was the Drill Regulations, whose first lessons in Americanism were learned in the School of the Soldier, and whose introduction to the English language was the commands of the Manual of Arms; members of the Legion find more to respect in these men than in the native-born “American” of proud Revolutionary lineage who refused to volunteer, and tried to dodge the draft, in countless instances successfully.

Of the 24,000,000 men enrolled in all three registrations, 2,600,000 were aliens who had never asked to be citizens. At the time of the first two registrations it was possible for these men to obtain deferment by asking for it. One hundred per cent could have got it; seventy-eight per cent did get it. The other twenty-two per cent accepted the role of fighting man in the nature of volunteer.

Of the one hundred per cent of American citizens enrolled, sixty-three per cent obtained deferment, and thirty-seven per cent answered the call.

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY



USMC I.D.

The man who by accident of birth first opened his eyes to the light of day beyond the seas is the better American of the two, though he may not have the right to cast a vote in the direction of the affairs of the country for which he fought. Indeed, the other is no American at all—except by legal technicality. In his slacker soul he is a man without a country.

We all know them, individually and as a class. They are in every community, in every trade and profession, in every walk of life; in hut and hall they cling to the firesides they lacked the courage to defend. Not so many in huts, though, as in halls, for many are prosperously provided with this world's goods, a prosperity acquired while others were hiring out at work in which there was no great commercial future, and at the rather cheap wage of a dollar a day.

I have one such young man particularly in mind. He was, and still is, I believe, a member of the writing profession, and at the time of our declaration of war he was on the staff of a newspaper which had been at war with Germany for three years. Most of his associates went to the early training camps, others enlisted in the guard regiments; and it is recorded in the casualty lists that three of them were killed in action, and several were wounded. Not all of them rushed into the conflict as to a game to be played; some went conscious of the risks, and regretting that their ambitions and hopes of the future had been thwarted and deferred by the Prussian lust for world dominion. Anyway they went, while the other young man evaded the issue until the call of the first draft. He was caught in it and in due time summoned by his draft board for examination. He returned from the examination in great distress. War was terrible! He had been forced to undress in the presence of the examining doctors and several other men!

For a time he deliberated an exposé of the system which forced respectable young men to remove their clothes in the presence of strangers. In the end he pleaded and was granted exemption on the ground that he was the sole supporting herself. I forget all that this speci-

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY

men did during the war, but I do know that he delivered himself of a good many screeds deploring the decadence of the drama and such important win-the-war efforts. If there is a moral to this incident, it is that he succeeded in keeping his clothes on, but he is stripped naked of respect in the eyes of the men who knew him. And, anyway, the Army did very well without him, as it did well without a good many others of his ilk.

**T**HE slacker has not stood alone in his treachery. Slacker fathers have raised their hands in paternal protection of slacker sons, while manlier fathers bade manlier sons fall in step with duty. Slacker sweethearts have sped to the arms of slacker swains and joined them in the hasty exchange of wedding vows, while truer women sent truer men away, content to endure the absence which makes the patriotic heart grow fonder.

These men and women are not real Americans, and no accident of birth or citizenship can make them so.

The slacker of the cheapest type is the man who rushed into marriage and pleaded exemption on the ground of dependent wife and expected child. We all remember how the marriage license bureaus were thronged with the parties to such marriages of convenience in the months of April, May, June and July, 1917.

It is comforting to recall how the government met this situation. A clean-cut distinction was drawn between marriages contracted before and after the passage of the universal service law. Decisions were left to the district boards in the draft organization, which for the most part showed the slacker bride little more sympathy than she deserved.

It would be interesting to know what per cent of these ulterior purpose matches have proved a success from a domestic point of view.

There were a number of gentlemen so susceptible to the strain of the times that it actually affected their ages, adding a year or two to their ages or making them a like amount younger. The change was such as to bring them just out of reach of the draft, one way or the other. When Uncle Sam called on all men between eighteen and forty-five

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY

to come forward and register, there were thousands who admitted being smoked out. They had successfully dodged the first call for men between twenty-one and thirty-one, but the second more inclusive summons caught them skulking, and they admitted it.

Where the spirit of treachery was in the blood by inheritance, the problem was more difficult. The affectionate parent whose love for his son so transcended his love for the flag that he chose to see someone else's boy fight his boy's battles had resort to devices which were not so easily defeated. And more especially is this the case when the slacker parent was a man of some wealth or some influence in his community. This does not mean that the wealthy as a class sought to evade their duty, not even the "idle rich" of the great cities. There are too many conspicuous examples to the contrary. There are, however, probably as many slackers among the moneyed class as among others, and they were in a better position to get away with it than those without money or influence.

The following table shows the extent of deferment and exemption in the draft, first and second registrations:

Total registrants.....	10,679,810
Total deferments.....	6,973,274
Married men exempted.....	4,270,030
Single men exempted.....	2,325,999
For dependencies.....	3,903,733
For alienage.....	1,033,406
For physical defect.....	521,606
For reasons unclassified.....	434,815
For farming (skilled help).....	138,487
For factories (skilled help).....	122,542
For farms (heads and assistant heads)..	128,490
For factories (heads and assistant heads)..	12,325
For special vocations.....	76,497
Morally unfit.....	18,620
Noncombatants.....	15,557
Young ministers of the gospel.....	18,067
Medical and gospel students.....	16,673
Single men, supporting parent.....	236,533
Single men supporting brother or sister..	32,898
Single men with adopted children.....	14,816
Men recently married.....	37,955

All the above men were between twenty-one and thirty-one and were placed in classes below Class I. This meant *exemption*, whether it came under the head of deferment or exemption, because none except those in Class I was ever called to the colors.

The small town financial baron, or the small financial baron in the large town, or the man who enjoyed a little power or prestige in politics or public affairs—

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY



*What the farm deferments hath wrought...*

those are types of parent slackers most generally known.

The "industrially indispensable" ranked second only to the malingerers who claimed non-existent physical defects. It was almost a sure sign when a young man was discovered going to a great deal of trouble to demonstrate how "necessary" he was to the home industry of the nation, that the facts of the case were just the opposite; and similarly, the government had no end of trouble keeping some men, in reality industrially indispensable, on the job here at home.

**T**HE "back to the farm" movement received a mighty impetus along in the summer of '17 when it was learned that crop producers would receive deferred classification. The country banker who owned a farm he had never seen since the day he motored out to foreclose the

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY

mortgage found that farm a convenient refuge for his draft-dodging son, if he were so disposed. Instances like this gave officials many knotty problems to solve.

The shipbuilding yards, munitions plants, essential as they were, likewise proved a haven for slackers, where novices drew down top-notch wages while patriotic workmen insisted on shouldering a rifle.

The junior member of the large firm dealing in something an army could use became an active candidate, sometimes, for those dollar a year jobs in Washington. Such men underestimated their value to the country. They really should have been drawing a dollar a day—in a training camp. These slackers cast discredit on a really worthy move on the part of public-spirited men over fighting age who rendered valuable services without compensation. The same is true of the "experts" who, through political influence, managed to render important services in the government bureaus that should not have taxed the intelligence of a school girl or the endurance of a boy scout.

Without starting an argument regarding the relative patriotic performances of the various callings, there is one that stands out in the slacker scandal above others, for the simple reason that by all logical conclusion one naturally would suppose that its members, claiming to be sportsmen by trade, would be the last to seek grounds for exemption. We refer to professional athletics.

The crowning example of this form of audacity came last summer when two men met in a squared circle at Toledo to determine which of them should be known as the champion prize-fighter of the world. The purse was more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. There are four million other men with fighting records in the United States. They may be narrower of chest, but they are stouter of heart and they did their fighting for a purse of thirty dollars a month and on a training table diet of slum and tin willie.

Such men are going to find it difficult to recognize a slacker's claim to the title of

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY

world's champion fighter, under the rules of the late Marquis for Queensberry or anybody else.

The profiteering spirit that has cancered the profession of athletics is a thing that has long been deplored by the writers for the sporting pages. Contrast the war records of non-professional with those of professional athletes, taken as a class. True sportsmen heard the call to the bigger game and heeded it. College athletic fields were turned into drill grounds while the country was at war, but the baseball leagues went full swing, save for the early finish last year.

Neither professional athlete nor the magnate who employed him, however can point with pride to that fact. It was not a concession on their parts; it was a point of honor forced down the throats of these sterling patriots by an aroused public opinion. Athletes and magnates whose pockets were touched let up a loud yowl at the high-handed proceedings, and, in order to plead some remote connection with the war, inquired how they were going to pay for their Liberty Bonds.

Let's see, the Liberty Bond assessment in the Army and Navy used to run as high as ten dollars a month out of the pay of a buck private or an apprentice seaman, didn't it? And then, sometimes the man didn't get the bonds—or at any rate haven't gotten them yet.

There was the conscientious objector. The spiritual difficulties in the way of going to war is a topic which best may be discussed by the thousands of ministerial students and clergymen of every church and creed, who, though exempt by law, preferred to do their duty as fighting men. They can bear the best evidence as to what extent fighting for a nation's honor is damaging to the soul. But the average layman, leaving theological issues out of the discussion, often finds less to condemn in the actions of the so-called conscientious objector than in several other brands of native born "American" slackers. The 1917 census had it that there were in the United States 55,000 men between twenty-one and thirty-one belonging to sects opposed to war; yet 65,000 asked for deferment on this ground, and 56,000 got it. The conscientious objector was not

## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY

world's champion fighter, under the rules of the late Marquis for Queensberry or anybody else.

The profiteering spirit that has cancered the profession of athletics is a thing that has long been deplored by the writers for the sporting pages. Contrast the war records of non-professional with those of professional athletes, taken as a class. True sportsmen heard the call to the bigger game and heeded it. College athletic fields were turned into drill grounds while the country was at war, but the baseball leagues went full swing, save for the early finish last year.

Neither professional athlete nor the magnate who employed him, however can point with pride to that fact. It was not a concession on their parts; it was a point of honor forced down the throats of these sterling patriots by an aroused public opinion. Athletes and magnates whose pockets were touched let up a loud yowl at the high-handed proceedings, and, in order to plead some remote connection with the war, inquired how they were going to pay for their Liberty Bonds.

Let's see, the Liberty Bond assessment in the Army and Navy used to run as high as ten dollars a month out of the pay of a buck private or an apprentice seaman, didn't it? And then, sometimes the man didn't get the bonds—or at any rate haven't gotten them yet.

There was the conscientious objector. The spiritual difficulties in the way of going to war is a topic which best may be discussed by the thousands of ministerial students and clergymen of every church and creed, who, though exempt by law, preferred to do their duty as fighting men. They can bear the best evidence as to what extent fighting for a nation's honor is damaging to the soul. But the average layman, leaving theological issues out of the discussion, often finds less to condemn in the actions of the so-called conscientious objector than in several other brands of native born "American" slackers. The 1917 census had it that there were in the United States 55,000 men between twenty-one and thirty-one belonging to sects opposed to war; yet 65,000 asked for deferment on this ground, and 56,000 got it. The conscientious objector was not



## AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY

recognized in the draft law, but the religionist was.

At least, he had the courage of his convictions, and chose an alibi, the consequences of which were bound to be unpleasant. He did not hide behind a woman's skirts, nor did he invoke official or parental pull to berth himself on a farm, or in a civilian desk job, or a shipyard or gas-mask factory, and then live a daily lie, adopting the victimized tone of one who is to be consoled because the peculiar nature of his talents kept him from fulfilling his desire and joining one of the fighting services.

This is an old story, familiar in some form to the residents of every community in the United States. We all can supply the names of individuals to fit in with the general types sketched above. We meet these men in our daily business, political and social contacts, and gradually they are retrieving any standing they may have lost through the part they played during the war.

Having made the world safe for democracy across the sea, the ex-service man is now faced with the task of keeping this democracy safe for Americans at home. His conduct at Boston, at Omaha, and at Gary, Indiana, is sufficient to indicate he is proving worthy of the task. And while keeping an eye on the active enemies of society, among whom the alien slacker predominates, it would be well to keep at least half an eye on the man who has proved himself a passive enemy of society by deserting his country in a pinch.

He is the native born slacker, the "American" in name only.

