

Donald Trump's Draft Deferments: Four for College, One for Bad Feet

By [STEVE EDER](#) and [DAVE PHILIPPS](#) AUG. 1, 2016

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Back in 1968, at the age of 22, [Donald J. Trump](#) seemed the picture of health.

He stood 6 feet 2 inches with an athletic build; had played football, tennis and squash; and was taking up golf. His medical history was unblemished, aside from a routine appendectomy when he was 10.

But after he graduated from college in the spring of 1968, making him eligible to be drafted and sent to Vietnam, he received a diagnosis that would change his path: bone spurs in his heels.

The diagnosis resulted in a coveted 1-Y medical deferment that fall, exempting him from military service as the United States was undertaking huge troop deployments to Southeast Asia, inducting about 300,000 men into the military that year.

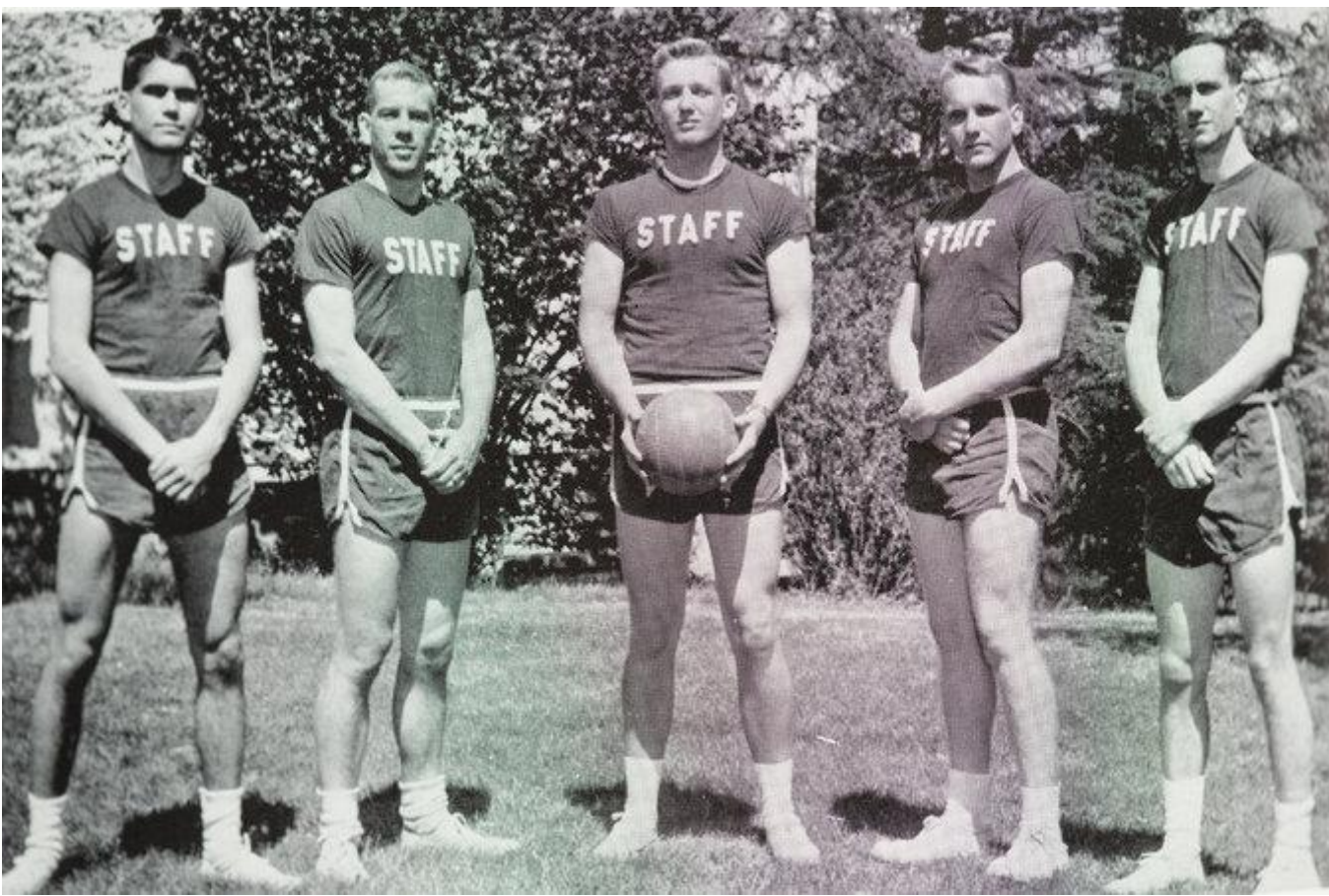
The deferment was one of five Mr. Trump received during Vietnam. The others were for education.

His experience during the era is drawing new scrutiny after the [Muslim American parents](#) of a soldier who was killed in Iraq publicly questioned whether Mr. Trump had ever sacrificed for his country. In an [emotional speech](#) at the Democratic National Convention last week, the soldier's father, Khizr Khan, directly addressed Mr. Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, saying, "You have sacrificed nothing and no one."

Mr. Trump's public statements about his draft experience sometimes conflict with his Selective Service records, and he is often hazy in recalling details.

In an interview with The New York Times last month, Mr. Trump said the bone spurs had been "temporary" — a "minor" malady that had not had a meaningful impact on him. He said he had visited a doctor who provided him a letter for draft officials, who granted him the medical exemption. He could not remember the doctor's name.

Photo



Donald J. Trump, center, as a high school senior in 1964 at the New York Military Academy. Credit New York Military Academy

“I had a doctor that gave me a letter — a very strong letter on the heels,” Mr. Trump said in the interview.

Asked to provide *The Times* with a copy of the letter, which he had obtained after his fourth student deferment, Mr. Trump said he would have to look for it. A spokeswoman later did not respond to repeated requests for copies of it.

The Selective Service records that remain in the National Archives — many have been discarded — do not specify what medical condition exempted Mr. Trump from military service.

Mr. Trump has described the condition as [heel spurs](#), which are protrusions caused by calcium built up on the heel bone, treated through stretching, orthotics or sometimes surgery.

Mr. Trump said that he could not recall exactly when he was no longer bothered by the spurs, but that he had not had an operation for the problem.

“Over a period of time, it healed up,” he said.

In the 2015 biography “*The Truth About Trump*,” the author, Michael D’Antonio, described interviewing Mr. Trump, who at one point slipped off a loafer to display a tiny bulge on his heel. And during a news conference last year, Mr. Trump could not recall which heel had been involved, prompting his campaign to release a statement saying it was both.

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Mr. Trump, who has hailed his health as “perfection,” said the heel spurs were “not a big problem, but it was enough of a problem.”

Video

Donald Trump's Draft Experience

Mr. Trump's public statements about what kept him out of serving in Vietnam sometimes conflict with his Selective Service records.

By STEVE EDER and TURNER COWLES on Publish Date August 1, 2016. Photo by Ty Wright for The New York Times. [Watch in Times Video »](#)

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“They were spurs,” he said. “You know, it was difficult from the long-term walking standpoint.”

In December, his longtime personal physician, Dr. Harold N. Bornstein, [announced](#) that Mr. Trump had “no significant medical problems” over four decades and that, if elected, he “will be the healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency.” Dr. Bornstein made no mention of the bone spurs but did note the appendectomy from Mr. Trump's childhood.

The medical deferment meant that Mr. Trump, who had just completed the undergraduate real estate program at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania, could follow his father into the development business, which he was eager to do.

The story of Mr. Trump's draft record has been [reviewed](#) by other publications, starting in 2011, when The Smoking Gun [published](#) his Selective Service documents. But a Times examination of his history, including interviews with Mr. Trump and experts on the era, revealed new details.

For many years, Mr. Trump, 70, has also asserted that it was “ultimately” the luck of a high draft lottery number — rather than the medical deferment — that kept him out of the war.

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But his Selective Service records, obtained from the National Archives, suggest otherwise. Mr. Trump had been medically exempted for more than a year when the draft lottery began in December 1969, well before he received what he has described as his “phenomenal” draft number.

Because of his medical exemption, his lottery number would have been irrelevant, said Richard Flahavan, a spokesman for the Selective Service System, who has worked for the agency for three decades.

[Graphic](#)

[Donald Trump's Selective Service Records](#)

[For many years, Donald J. Trump, asserted that it was “ultimately” a high draft lottery number that kept him out of the Vietnam War, rather than a medical condition. But his Selective Service records, obtained from the National Archives, suggest otherwise.](#)

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM CLASSIFICATION RECORD		YEAR OF BIRTH 12/18		SHEET NO. 1	
NAME	TRUMP, DONALD J.	DATE OF BIRTH	12/18/43	CLASSIFICATION	1-F
ADDRESS	100 W. 57th St. New York, N.Y. 10019				
EDUCATION	Columbia University				
EMPLOYMENT	None				
REMARKS	None				

[OPEN Graphic](#)

“He was already classified and determined not to be subject to the draft under the conditions in place at the time,” Mr. Flahavan said.

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In a 2011 television interview, Mr. Trump described watching the draft lottery as a college student and learning then that he would not be drafted.

“I’ll never forget; that was an amazing period of time in my life,” he said in the interview, on Fox 5 New York. “I was going to the Wharton School of Finance, and I was watching as they did the draft numbers, and I got a very, very high number.”

But Mr. Trump had graduated from Wharton 18 months before the lottery — the first in the United States in 27 years — was held.

The fact that a candidate seeking the presidency received military deferments or otherwise avoided fighting in Vietnam is not unusual. Voters have shown themselves willing to look past such controversies, electing [George W. Bush](#), who served stateside in the Air National Guard during the Vietnam era, and [Bill Clinton](#), who wrote to an Army R.O.T.C. officer in 1969 thanking him for “saving me from the draft.”

Mr. Trump likened his history to that of Vice President [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#) and other prominent politicians, who also received several deferments. Mr. Trump said he had strongly opposed United States involvement in Vietnam.

“I thought it was ridiculous,” he said. “I thought it was another deal where politicians got us into a war where we shouldn’t have been in. And I felt that very strongly from Day 1.”

[Document](#)

Donald Trump's Draft Card

After his 18th birthday in June 1964, Donald J. Trump registered with the Selective Service, as did all men his age. It was the summer after his graduation from New York Military Academy and Mr. Trump recalled filling out his papers with his father, Fred Trump, at the local draft office on Jamaica Avenue in Queens.

63

1. NAME IN FULL <i>Last</i> TRUMP <i>First</i> DONALD <i>Middle</i> JOHN				SELECTIVE SERVICE NUMBER 50 63 46 580					
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE <i>Street and Number or RFD Route</i> 85-14 Midland Parkway				3. DATE OF BIRTH June 14, 1946					
<i>City, Town, or Village</i> Jamaica		<i>County</i> Queens		<i>State</i> N. Y.		<i>Zip Code</i>		4. PLACE OF BIRTH <i>City</i> Queens	
5. MAILING ADDRESS (If different than Item 2) <i>Street and Number or RFD Route</i> same as above				State or Country N. Y.					
<i>City, Town, or Village</i>		<i>County</i>		<i>State</i>		<i>Zip Code</i>		6. DATE OF REGISTRATION June 24, 1964	
7. Name and address of person other than a member of your household who will always know your address Mrs. Maryann Desmond 172-70 Highland Ave., Jamaica, N. Y.									
8. Description of Registrant									
COLOR OF EYES blue		COLOR OF HAIR blond		HEIGHT (APPROX.) 6 2 ft. in.			WEIGHT (APPROX.) 180		
OTHER OBVIOUS PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT WILL AID IN IDENTIFICATION: birthmark on both heels									
Form Approved Budget Bureau No. 33-R099.7						SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM REGISTRATION CARD			
SSS Form No. 1-A (Original) (Revised 5-28-63) (over)									

9. OCCUPATION student		10. NATURE OF BUSINESS, SERVICE RENDERED, OR CHIEF PRODUCT							
11. FIRM OR INDIVIDUAL BY WHOM EMPLOYED Fordham University									
12. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Bronx, N. Y.									
13. Active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States or a cobelligerent nation since Sept. 16, 1940:									
ARMED FORCE OR COUNTRY none		SERVICE NO.		DATE OF ENTRY		DATE OF SEPARATION			
14. Present membership in a reserve component of the Armed Forces:									
ARMED FORCE none		SERVICE NO.		DATE OF ENTRY		GRADE			
ORGANIZATION		I affirm that I have verified the foregoing answers and that they are true: X Donald John Trump (Signature of registrant)							
I certify that the person registered has read or has had read to him his answers; that I have witnessed his signature or mark; and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:									

[OPEN Document](#)

Even if his views on Vietnam are broadly shared today, both his record and his statements on the war have proved fraught for Mr. Trump during his campaign. Last summer, he faced a backlash when he declared that John McCain, the Republican senator who had been a prisoner of war during Vietnam, was “not a war hero,” explaining, “I like people who weren’t captured.” Then a series of audio clips surfaced from the 1990s, including one in which Mr. Trump [told Howard Stern](#), the radio show host, that avoiding sexually transmitted diseases while dating “is my personal Vietnam.”

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Mr. Trump has [acknowledged](#) feeling somewhat “guilty” for not serving in Vietnam and has stressed that if he had been called, he would have gone.

After his 18th birthday, in June 1964, Mr. Trump registered with the Selective Service System, as all men his age did. It was the summer after his graduation from the New York Military Academy, and Mr. Trump recalled filling out his papers with his father, Fred Trump, at the local draft office on Jamaica Avenue in Queens.

The next month, Mr. Trump received the first of four education deferments as he worked his way through his undergraduate studies, first at Fordham, in the Bronx, and then as a transfer student in the real estate program at the Wharton School, in Philadelphia.

He received subsequent student deferments during his sophomore, junior and senior years.

At Fordham, Mr. Trump commuted from his parents’ home in Queens and played squash, football and tennis. He remembered Fordham for its “good sports.”

At Wharton, Mr. Trump began preparing in earnest for his career in real estate by buying and selling fixer-upper townhouses in Pennsylvania and driving home to New York on weekends to work for his father.

During the Wharton years, he said, he had less time for sports but stayed physically active, playing pickup golf at public courses near campus.

Photo



Mr. Trump addressed the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Charlotte, N.C., last week. Credit Todd Heisler/The New York Times

At Penn and other universities, Vietnam dominated discussions. Mr. Trump said Wharton, with its business focus, had been somewhat different. Although he “hated the concept of the war,” he said, he did not speak out against it.

“I was never a fan of the Vietnam War,” he said. “But I was never at the protest level, either, because I had other things to do.”

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As Mr. Trump's graduation neared, the fighting in Vietnam was intensifying. The Tet offensive in January 1968 had left thousands of American troops dead or wounded, with battles continuing into the spring.

On the day of Mr. Trump's graduation, 40 Americans were killed in Vietnam. The Pentagon was preparing to call up more troops.

With his schooling behind him, there would have been little to prevent someone in Mr. Trump's situation from being drafted, if not for the diagnosis of his bone spurs.

"If you didn't have a basis to be exempt or postponed, you would have been ordered for induction," said Mr. Flahavan of the Selective Service.

Many men of Mr. Trump's age were looking for ways to avoid the war, said Charles Freehof, a draft counselor at Brooklyn College at the time, noting that getting a letter from a physician was a particularly effective option.

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"We had very little trouble with people coming back saying, 'They wouldn't accept my doctor's note,'" Mr. Freehof said.

Mr. Trump had a 1-Y classification, which was considered a temporary exemption. But in practice, only a national emergency or an official declaration of war, which the United States avoided during the fighting in Vietnam, would have resulted in his being considered for service.

Neither occurred, and Mr. Trump remained 1-Y until 1972, when his status changed to 4-F, permanently disqualifying him.

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"For all practical purposes, once you got the 1-Y, you were free and clear of vulnerability for the draft, even in the case of the lottery," Mr. Flahavan said.

Still, Mr. Trump, in the interviews, said he believed he could have been subject to another physical exam to check on his bone spurs, had his draft number been called. "I would have had to go eventually because that was a minor medical — it was called 'minor medical,'" he said.

But the publicly available draft records of Mr. Trump include the letters "DISQ" next to his exam date, with no notation indicating that he would be re-examined.

Since Mr. Khan publicly addressed him in the Democratic convention speech last week, Mr. Trump has been pressed about his sacrifice, including by George Stephanopoulos on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday.

“I think I’ve made a lot of sacrifices,” Mr. Trump said to Mr. Stephanopoulos. “I work very, very hard. I’ve created thousands and thousands of jobs, tens of thousands of jobs, built great structures. I’ve had tremendous success. I think I’ve done a lot.”

Kitty Bennett contributed research.

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