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He Marches but Didn't Serve

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Michael Bloomberg's Vietnam-era draft record remained a riddle yesterday as the mayor-elect tried to get off on the right foot with veterans.

A flag-waving Bloomberg marched alongside Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the annual Veterans Day parade from the Madison Square memorial in Manhattan, with interest in the event boosted by the events of Sept. 11.

Before the parade, where they soaked up cheers, Giuliani's surprise successor avoided the question of whether he'd attended or marched in the parade before.

"When I was a kid, everyone I knew marched, uh, or went out and cheered at Veterans Day parades. And I think it's a shame for many years lots of people didn't," Bloomberg said. "Perhaps now we're getting back to remembering why we have freedom."

The billionaire mayor-elect's flat feet, sporting tassled black loafers yesterday, apparently kept him out of the armed forces in the 1960s.

Months ago, his aides said he'd requested records from the federal government to support his contention that he'd gone for an Army physical and was surprisingly rejected. Existing records indicate no such exam.

While seeking the Republican nomination in August, Bloomberg said he had tried to join the military. He wrote in his autobiography that he "had a commitment from an Army unit that would make me a second lieutenant after Harvard."

But an Army official asked about Bloomberg's account said recruits couldn't enlist through a specific unit at the time in question.

Asked yesterday if Bloomberg received the documents he said he requested, spokesman Ed Skyler said: "The problem is one group of records was destroyed. And one we requested by letter from the Department of Defense or something and we never heard back."

Available documents, as reported previously by Newsday, indicated Bloomberg received a student deferment, followed by a 1-Y classification that prevented service in peacetime.

Preparing to march, Vietnam vet Frank Miller Sr., 50, of Broad Channel, didn't seem to mind that the incoming mayor never served in the military. "The president didn't serve either, remember?" he said.

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