



# The Veterans Consortium

DISCHARGE UPGRADE PROGRAM™

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Thank you for reaching out for assistance through The Veterans Consortium Discharge Upgrade Program. Included are resources to help you apply for a discharge upgrade.

- **DD-293:** The DD-293 is the application for a discharge upgrade. The DD-293 is used to apply to the Discharge Review Boards (only if it has been less than 15 years since your discharge). It is important to provide a statement that the discharge was either improper, meaning that they made a mistake during the discharge process, or inequitable, meaning that the discharge was unfair. You do not need to write everything on the form, feel free to attach more pages.
- **SF-180:** The SF-180 is the document to request your military personnel and service records. Be mindful of where to send the request. The last page of the document has the addresses. Look at the branch and year you were separated to determine where the form should be mailed. If there are two different numbers, fill out two separate requests and mail them accordingly:
  - For **personnel records:** Check the DD-214 box and the Other box. Next to the Other box, write a request for “full and complete personnel records.”
  - For **medical records:** Check the Medical Records box and write a request for “full and complete medical records.”
- **Application Guide:** The application guide gives you ideas on how to best support your application with evidence. Evidence should include a personal statement, relevant records, evidence of a mental health condition (if applicable), letters from family and friends, and character letters. Read the guide for assistance with the process.
- **Personal Statement Template:** The personal statement is your opportunity to tell your story. The document provided is a template, write out your story on a separate page. Always include a statement with your application. The statement should include your reasons for enlistment, what happened during service, and your post-service life. You must explain the misconduct. If you suffered a trauma or had an incident that led to the misconduct, describe the incident and how it affected your behavior and choices. If you are having difficulty writing the statement, reach out to a close family member, friend, counselor, caseworker, or veteran service officer.

Best of luck with your application!

The Veterans Consortium Discharge Upgrade Program





**PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT**

**AUTHORITY:** 10 U.S.C. 1553, Review of Discharge or Dismissal; DoD Instruction 1332.28, Discharge Review Board (DRB) Procedures and Standards; and E.O. 9397 (SSN), as amended.

**PRINCIPAL PURPOSE(S):** To apply for a change in the characterization or reason for military discharge issued to an individual. The appropriate Military Service Discharge Review Board reviews submitted packages and makes determinations. Completed forms are covered by the correction of discharge review board and official military records Systems of Records (SORNs) maintained by each Military Service.

**ROUTINE USE(S):** The DoD Routine Uses can be found in the applicable system of records notices below:

Army (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/569931/a0015-185-sfmr.aspx>)

Navy and Marine Corps (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/570411/nm01000-1/>)

Air Force (<https://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/569833/f036-safcb-a/>)

Defense Finance and Accounting Service (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/570192/t7340b/>)

Coast Guard (<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-10-02/html/2013-23991.htm>)

Official Military Personnel Files:

Army (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/570054/a0600-8-104-ahrc.aspx>)

Navy (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/570310/n01070-3/>)

Marine Corps (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-wide-SORN-Article-View/Article/570626/m01070-6/>)

Air Force (<http://dpcl.d.defense.gov/Privacy/SORNsIndex/DOD-Component-Article-View/Article/569821/f036-af-pc-c/>)

Coast Guard (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-10-28/html/2011-27881.htm>)

**DISCLOSURE:** Voluntary. However, failure to provide the information not annotated as "optional" may result in a denial of your application. The Service Member's SSN is used to retrieve these records and links to the member's official military personnel file and pay record.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETION OF DD FORM 293****REQUESTING COPIES OF YOUR OFFICIAL MILITARY PERSONNEL FILE**

Information on obtaining military or health records is available at the National Personnel Records Center website at [www.nara.gov/regional/mpr.html](http://www.nara.gov/regional/mpr.html) or your local Veterans Administration office.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit any request for their military records prior to applying for a discharge review rather than after submitting a DD Form 293 to avoid substantial delays in processing of the application and scheduling of review. Applicants and their counsel may also examine their military personnel records at the site of their scheduled review prior to the review. The Board shall notify applicants of the date of availability of the records for examination in their standard scheduling information.

**DD FORM 293 - PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT INFORMATION FOR ALL APPLICABLE ITEMS.** Items on the form are self-explanatory unless otherwise noted below. If the item is not applicable, enter "NA." If the space provided is insufficient, attach an extra page.

**SECTION 1, ITEM 6. MAILING ADDRESS** - Indicate the address to be used for all future correspondence regarding the application. If you change this address while the application is processing, you must notify the Discharge Review Board immediately. **Note:** Failure to attend a hearing because of an unreported change in address may result in waiving of your right to a hearing.

**SECTION 2, ITEM 8. DATE OF DISCHARGE** - If you received more than one discharge, refer to the discharge that you want changed. Discharge Review Boards cannot consider any discharge resulting from a sentence given by a general court-martial. If the discharge you want reviewed was issued more than 15 years ago, you must submit an application to the appropriate Board for Correction of Military Record using the DD Form 149, Application for Correction of Military Record under the Provisions of Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 1552.

**SECTION 3, ITEM 20. ACTION REQUESTED** - If you request a change of narrative reason for separation, you must list the specific reason for discharge that you believe to be appropriate; otherwise the Board will presume that you do not want a change in reason for discharge. If you do not request a change of discharge characterization in this item, the Board will presume you want to change discharge to Honorable.

If you were separated on or after 1 October 1982 while in an entry level status with an under other than honorable conditions discharge and less than 180 days of active service, you can request a change of discharge characterization to "Uncharacterized" and reason to "Entry Level Separation."

**ITEM 21. TYPE OF REVIEW REQUESTED** - Discharge Review is conducted in one of three ways: 1) records review, 2) Board hearing, or 3) traveling Board. Location is the defining factor between a Board hearing in the Washington, DC Metro Area, and a traveling board, located throughout the Continental United States (CONUS).

**Records Review:** You may have the Board conduct a discharge review based solely on military records and any additional documentation that you provide. This review is conducted without personal appearance by you and/or your representative/counsel appearing. A personal appearance hearing can be requested, however, you forfeit your right to a record review.

**Board Hearing:** You may appear alone or assisted by a representative/counsel before the Board in the Washington, D.C. Metro Area or before a Traveling Board in selected CONUS locations. Neither the Service nor the DoD is responsible for, nor will it pay for, any costs incurred by the applicant or representative/counsel for appearance in person, providing testimony, or obtain documentation. Detailed notification and/or scheduling information for all personal appearances will be provided after the application has been processed. In addition, without appearing yourself, you may have your case presented by a representative/counsel of your choice. **NOTE:** The Naval and Coast Guard Discharge Review Boards do not have traveling panels. Applicants participating in a personal appearance hearing may make sworn or unsworn statements, introduce witnesses, documents, or other information on their behalf.

Applicants may make oral or written arguments personally and/or through representative/ counsel. Applicants and witnesses who present sworn or unsworn statements may be questioned by the Board.

INSTRUCTIONS (*Continued*)

**FAILURE TO APPEAR AT A HEARING OR RESPOND TO A SCHEDULING NOTICE.** If you do not appear at a scheduled personal appearance hearing or respond as required to a scheduling notice, and you did not make a prior, timely request for a continuance, postponement, or withdrawal of the application, you will forfeit the right to a personal appearance and the Board shall complete its review of the discharge based upon the evidence of record.

**ITEM 23, ISSUES/CONDITIONS RELATED TO YOUR REQUEST** - For clarification, the response acronyms represent are Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT).

**ITEM 24, WHY IS A CHANGE REQUESTED?** - List each issue that you want the Board to address. There is no limit to the number of issues that you may submit. If you need additional space, continue on a plain sheet of paper and attach it to the application. You are not required to submit any issues with your application; however, if you want the Board to respond to specific issues of concern, you must list your specific matters per the instructions and regulations governing the Board. Issues must be stated clearly and specifically, and should address the reasons you believe that the discharge received was improper or inequitable. It is important to focus on matters that occurred while you served in the Armed Forces.

The following examples demonstrate one way in which issues may be stated (the example issues do not indicate, in any way, the only type of issues that should be submitted to the Board):

**Example 1.** My discharge was inequitable because it was based on one isolated incident in 28 months of service with no other adverse action.

**Example 2.** The discharge is improper because the applicant's pre-service civilian conviction, properly listed on his enlistment documents, was used in the discharge proceedings.

**NOTE:** If an issue is not listed in Item 24, it may result in the Board not addressing the issue even if is discussed in a legal brief or other written submission, or at the hearing. Changes or additions to the list may be made on the DD Form 293 any time before the Discharge Review Board closes the review process for deliberation. Please be sure that your issues are consistent with the Board Action Requested (Item 20). If there is a conflict between what you say in your issues and what you requested in Item 20, the Board will respond to your issue in the context of the action requested in Item 20. For example, if you request a General Discharge in Item 20 but your issue in Item 24 indicated you want an Honorable Discharge, the Board will respond to the issue in terms of your request for a General Discharge. Therefore, if you are submitting issues for the purpose of obtaining an Honorable Discharge, be sure to mark the box for an Honorable Discharge in Item 20.

**Incorporation by Reference.** Issues that are listed on a legal brief or other written submissions may be incorporated by reference in Item 24. The reference must be specific for the Board to understand clearly the matter being submitted as an issue. At a minimum, it shall identify the page, paragraph, and sentence incorporated.

**Example:** Issue 1. Brief, page 2, paragraph 1, sentences one and two.

Applicants should be as specific as possible with all references so the Board can clearly distinguish the scope of the issue. Because it is to your benefit to bring such issues to the Board's attention as early as possible in the review, if you submit a brief, you are strongly urged to set forth all such issues as a separate item at the beginning of the brief.

**SECTION 4, ITEM 25. DOCUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF CLAIM** - Evidence not in your official records should be submitted to the Board with the application but at least before the review date. This also applies to legal briefs or counsel submissions. However, you have the right to submit evidence until the time the Discharge Review Board closes the review process for deliberation. Documents that are of the most benefit are those which substantiate or relate directly to your issues in Item 24. Other documents that may be helpful are character references; criminal, credit and employment reports; educational achievements; exemplary post-service conduct; and medical reports. You should add your name and SSN to each document submitted. The Board will consider all documents submitted in your behalf, but will respond in writing only to those issues set forth in Item 24.

**SECTION 5, REPRESENTATIVE OR COUNSEL (ITEMS 27-29)** - Skip this section if you do not have a representative/counsel. At a later date, if you obtain the services of either a representative/counsel, inform the Board immediately. The military services neither provide a representative/counsel or evidence for you, nor do they pay the cost of such representation regardless of the circumstance. The following organizations regularly furnish representation at no charge: American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and state or regional Veterans Offices. In addition, there are other organizations willing to assist you in completing this application and to provide representation at no cost. It is to your advantage to coordinate with your representative/counsel prior to submitting an application. This will insure that your representative/counsel is able to appear at the location you listed in Item 21. **NOTE:** Representatives may or may not be lawyers. Some of the organizations listed only represent applicants who appear before the Board in the Washington, D.C. Metro Area. Contact your local Veterans Affairs Office, Veterans Administration Office or veterans service organization for further information.

**SECTION 6, APPLICANT:** If the former Service Member is deceased or incompetent, the application may be submitted by the next of kin, a surviving spouse or a legal representative. Legal proof of death or incompetency and satisfactory evidence of the relationship to the former Service Member must accompany the application.

# INSTRUCTION AND INFORMATION SHEET FOR SF 180, REQUEST PERTAINING TO MILITARY RECORDS

**1. General Information.** The Standard Form 180, Request Pertaining to Military Records (SF180) is used to request information from military records. Certain identifying information is necessary to determine the location of an individual's record of military service. Please try to answer each item on the SF 180. If you do not have and cannot obtain the information for an item, show "NA," meaning the information is "not available". Include as much of the requested information as you can. Incomplete information may delay response time. To determine where to mail this request see Page 2 of the SF180 for record locations and facility addresses.

Online requests may be submitted to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) by a veteran or deceased veteran's next-of-kin using eVetRecs at <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>.

**2. Personnel Records/Military Human Resource Records/Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) and Medical Records/Service Treatment Records (STR).** Personnel records of military members who were discharged, retired, or died in service **LESS THAN 62 YEARS AGO** and medical records are in the legal custody of the military service department and are administered in accordance with rules issued by the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS, Coast Guard). STRs of persons on active duty are generally kept at the local servicing clinic. After the last day of active duty, STRs should be requested from the appropriate address on page 2 of the SF 180. (See item 3, Archival Records, if the military member was discharged, retired or died in service more than 62 years ago.)

a. Release of information: Release of information is subject to restrictions imposed by the military services consistent with Department of Defense regulations, the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Privacy Act of 1974. The service member (either past or present) or the member's legal guardian has access to almost any information contained in that member's own record. The authorization signature of the service member or the member's legal guardian is needed in Section III of the SF180. Others requesting information from military personnel records and/or STRs must have the release authorization in Section III of the SF 180 signed by the member or legal guardian. If the appropriate signature cannot be obtained, only limited types of information can be provided. If the former member is deceased, the surviving next-of-kin may, under certain circumstances, be entitled to greater access to a deceased veteran's records than a member of the general public. The next-of-kin may be any of the following: unmarried surviving spouse, father, mother, son, daughter, sister, or brother. Requesters **MUST provide proof of death, such as a copy of a death certificate, newspaper article (obituary) or death notice, coroner's report of death, funeral director's signed statement of death, or verdict of coroner's jury.**

b. Fees for records: There is no charge for most services provided to service members or next-of-kin of deceased veterans. A nominal fee is charged for certain types of service. In most instances, service fees cannot be determined in advance. If your request involves a service fee, you will receive an invoice with your records.

**3. Archival Records.** Personnel records of military members who were discharged, retired, or died in service **62 OR MORE YEARS AGO** have been transferred to the legal custody of NARA and are referred to as "archival records".

a. Release of Information: Archival records are open to the public. The Privacy Act of 1974 does not apply to archival records, therefore, written authorization from the veteran or next-of-kin is not required. In order to protect the privacy of the veteran, his/her family, and third parties named in the records, the personal privacy exemption of the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552 (b) (6)) may still apply and may preclude the release of some information.

b. Fees for Archival Records: Access to archival records are granted by offering copies of the records for a fee (44 U.S.C. 2116 (c)). If a fee applies to the photocopies of documents in the requested record, you will receive an invoice. Photocopies will be sent after payment is made. For more information see <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/archival-programs/military-personnel-archival/ompf-archival-requests.html>.

**4. Where reply may be sent.** The reply may be sent to the service member or any other address designated by the service member or other authorized requester. If the designated address is NOT registered to the addressee by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), provide BOTH the addressee's name AND "in care of" (c/o) the name of the person to whom the address is registered on the NAME line in Section III, item 3, on page 1 of the SF 180. The COMPLETE address must be provided, INCLUDING any apartment/suite/unit/lot/space/etc. number.

**5. Definitions and abbreviations.** DISCHARGED -- the individual has no current military status; SERVICE TREATMENT RECORD (STR) -- The chronology of medical, mental health, and dental care received by service members during the course of their military career (does not include records of treatment while hospitalized); TDRL -- Temporary Disability Retired List.

**6. Service completed before World War I.** National Archives Trust Fund (NATF) forms must be used to request these records. Obtain the forms by e-mail from [inquire@nara.gov](mailto:inquire@nara.gov) or write to the Code 6 address on page 2 of the SF 180.

## PRIVACY ACT OF 1974 COMPLIANCE INFORMATION

The following information is provided in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(3) and applies to this form. Authority for collection of the information is 44 U.S.C. 2907, 3101, and 3103, and Public Law 104-134 (April 26, 1996), as amended in title 31, section 7701. Disclosure of the information is voluntary. If the requested information is not provided, it may delay servicing your inquiry because the facility servicing the service member's record may not have all of the information needed to locate it. The purpose of the information on this form is to assist the facility servicing the records (see the address list) in locating the correct military service record(s) or information to answer your inquiry. This form is then retained as a record of disclosure. The form may also be disclosed to Department of Defense components, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS, U.S. Coast Guard), or the National Archives and Records Administration when the original custodian of the military health and personnel records transfers all or part of those records to that agency. If the service member was a member of the National Guard, the form may also be disclosed to the Adjutant General of the appropriate state, District of Columbia, or Puerto Rico, where he or she served.

## PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENT

Public burden reporting for this collection of information is estimated to be five minutes per request, including time for reviewing instructions and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of the collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to National Archives and Records Administration (ISSD), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001. **DO NOT SEND COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. SEND COMPLETED FORMS TO THE APPROPRIATE ADDRESS LISTED ON PAGE 2 OF THE SF 180.**

## REQUEST PERTAINING TO MILITARY RECORDS

Requests from veterans or deceased veteran's next-of-kin may be submitted online by using eVetRecs at <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>  
To ensure the best possible service, please thoroughly review the accompanying instructions before filling out this form. PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY OR TYPE BELOW.

### SECTION I - INFORMATION NEEDED TO LOCATE RECORDS (Furnish as much information as possible.)

1. NAME USED DURING SERVICE (last, first, full middle)	2. SOCIAL SECURITY #	3. DATE OF BIRTH	4. PLACE OF BIRTH			
5. SERVICE, PAST AND PRESENT (For an effective records search, it is important that ALL service be shown below.)						
	BRANCH OF SERVICE	DATE ENTERED	DATE RELEASED	OFFICER	ENLISTED	SERVICE NUMBER (If unknown, write "unknown")
a. ACTIVE						
b. RESERVE						
c. STATE NATIONAL GUARD						

6. IS THIS PERSON DECEASED? ☐ NO ☐ YES - **MUST** provide Date of Death if veteran is deceased: \_\_\_\_\_

7. DID THIS PERSON RETIRE FROM MILITARY SERVICE? ☐ NO ☐ YES

### SECTION II - INFORMATION AND/OR DOCUMENTS REQUESTED

#### 1. CHECK THE ITEM(S) YOU ARE REQUESTING:

☐ **DD Form 214 or equivalent.** Year(s) in which form(s) issued to veteran: \_\_\_\_\_  
This form contains information normally needed to verify military service. A copy may be sent to the veteran, the deceased veteran's next-of-kin, or other persons or organizations, if authorized in Section III, below. **An UNDELETED DD214 is ordinarily required to determine eligibility for benefits.** If you request a DELETED copy, the following items will be blacked out: authority for separation, reason for separation, reenlistment eligibility code, separation (SPD/SPN) code, and, for separations after June 30, 1979, character of separation and dates of time lost.  
**An UNDELETED copy will be sent UNLESS YOU SPECIFY A DELETED COPY by checking this box:** ☐ I want a **DELETED** copy.

☐ **Medical Records** Includes Service Treatment Records, Health (outpatient) and Dental Records. **IF HOSPITALIZED (inpatient) the FACILITY NAME and DATE (month and year) for EACH admission MUST be provided:** \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **Other** (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

2. **PURPOSE:** (Providing information about the purpose of the request is **strictly voluntary**; however, it may help to provide the best possible response and may result in a faster reply. Information provided will in no way be used to make a decision to deny the request.)

☐ Benefits (explain) ☐ Employment ☐ VA Loan Programs ☐ Medical ☐ Genealogy ☐ Correction ☐ Personal ☐ Other (explain)

Explain here: \_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION III - RETURN ADDRESS AND SIGNATURE

1. **REQUESTER NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. ☐ I am the MILITARY SERVICE MEMBER OR VETERAN identified in Section I, above. ☐ I am the VETERAN'S LEGAL GUARDIAN (**MUST submit copy of Court Appointment**) or AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE (**MUST submit copy of Authorization Letter or Power of Attorney**)

☐ I am the DECEASED VETERAN'S NEXT-OF-KIN (**MUST submit Proof of Death. See item 2a on instruction sheet.**) ☐ OTHER

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Relationship to deceased veteran) (Specify type of Other)

3. **SEND INFORMATION/DOCUMENTS TO:**  
(Please print or type. See item 4 on accompanying instructions.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

4. **AUTHORIZATION SIGNATURE:** I declare (or certify, verify, or state) under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the information in this Section III is true and correct and that I authorize the release of the requested information. (See items 2a or 3a on accompanying instruction sheet. Without the Authorization Signature of the veteran, next-of-kin of deceased veteran, veteran's legal guardian, authorized government agent, or other authorized representative, only limited information can be released unless the request is archival. No signature is required if the request is for archival records.)

Signature Required - Do not print	Date
Daytime phone	Fax Number
Email address	



The various categories of military service records are described in the chart below. For each category there is a code number which indicates the address at the bottom of the page to which this request should be sent. Please refer to the Instruction and Information Sheet accompanying this form as needed.

BRANCH	CURRENT STATUS OF SERVICE MEMBER		
		Personnel Record	Medical or Service Treatment Record
AIR FORCE	Discharged, deceased, or retired before 5/1/1994	14	14
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 5/1/1994 – 9/30/2004	14	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 10/1/2004 – 12/31/2013	1	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired on or after 1/1/2014	1	13
	Active (including National Guard on active duty in the Air Force), TDRL, or general officers retired with pay	1	
	Reserve, IRR, Retired Reserve in non-pay status, current National Guard officers not on active duty in the Air Force, or National Guard released from active duty in the Air Force	2	
	Current National Guard enlisted not on active duty in the Air Force	2	13
COAST GUARD	Discharge, deceased, or retired before 1/1/1898	6	
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 1/1/1898 – 3/31/1998	14	14
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 4/1/1998 – 9/30/2006	14	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 10/1/2006 – 9/30/2013	3	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired on or after 10/1/2013	3	14
	Active, Reserve, Individual Ready Reserve or TDRL	3	
MARINE CORPS	Discharged, deceased, or retired before 1/1/1895	6	
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 1/1/1905 – 4/30/1994	14	14
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 5/1/1994 – 12/31/1998	14	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 1/1/1999 – 12/31/2013	4	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired on or after 1/1/2014	4	8
	Individual Ready Reserve	5	
	Active, Selected Marine Corps Reserve, TDRL	4	
ARMY	Discharged, deceased, or retired before 11/1/1912 (enlisted) or before 7/1/1917 (officer)	6	
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 11/1/1912 – 10/15/1992 (enlisted) or 7/1/1917 – 10/15/1992 (officer)	14	
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 10/16/1992 – 9/30/2002	14	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired (including TDRL) 10/1/2002 – 12/31/2013	7	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired (including TDRL) on or after 1/1/2014	7	9
	Current Soldier (Active, Reserve (including Individual Ready Reserve) or National Guard)	7	
NAVY	Discharged, deceased, or retired before 1/1/1886 (enlisted) or before 1/1/1903 (officer)	6	
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 1/1/1886 – 1/30/1994 (enlisted) or 1/1/1903 – 1/30/1994 (officer)	14	14
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 1/31/1994 – 12/31/1994	14	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired 1/1/1995 – 12/31/2013	10	11
	Discharged, deceased, or retired on or after 1/1/2014	10	8
PHS	Active, Reserve, or TDRL	10	
	Public Health Service - Commissioned Corps officers only	12	

**ADDRESS LIST OF CUSTODIANS and SELF-SERVICE WEBSITES (BY CODE NUMBERS SHOWN ABOVE) – Where to write/send this form**

1	Air Force Personnel Center HQ AFPC/DPSIRP 550 C Street West, Suite 19 Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4721	6	National Archives & Records Administration Research Services (RDT1R) 700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20408-0001	11	Department of Veterans Affairs Records Management Center ATTN: Release of Information P.O. Box 5020 St. Louis, MO 63115-5020
2	Air Reserve Personnel Center Records Management Branch (DPTSC) 18420 E. Silver Creek Avenue Building 390 MS 68 Buckley AFB, CO 80011	7	US Army Human Resources Command's web page: <a href="https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/Accessing%20or%20Requesting%20Your%20Official%20Military%20Personnel%20File%20Documents">https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/Accessing%20or%20Requesting%20Your%20Official%20Military%20Personnel%20File%20Documents</a> or 1-888-ARMYHRC (1-888-276-9472)	12	Division of Commissioned Corps Officer Support ATTN: Records Officer 1101 Wootton Parkway, Plaza Level, Suite 100 Rockville, MD 20852
3	Commander, Personnel Service Center (BOPS-C-MR) MS7200 US Coast Guard 2703 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE Washington, DC 20593-7200 <a href="mailto:MR_CustomerService@uscg.mil">MR_CustomerService@uscg.mil</a>	8	Navy Medicine Records Activity (NMRA) BUMED Detachment St. Louis 4300 Goodfellow Boulevard, Building 103 St. Louis, MO 63120	13	AF STR Processing Center ATTN: Release of Information 3370 Nacogdoches Road, Suite 116 San Antonio, TX 78217
4	Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps Manpower Management Records & Performance (MMRP-10) 2008 Elliot Road Quantico, VA 22134-5030	9	AMEDD Record Processing Center 3370 Nacogdoches Road, Suite 116 San Antonio, TX 78217	14	National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records) 1 Archives Drive St. Louis, MO 63138-1002  eVetRecs: <a href="http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/">http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/</a>
5	Marine Forces Reserve 2000 Opelousas Avenue New Orleans, LA 70146-5400	10	Navy Personnel Command (PERS-313) 5720 Integrity Drive Millington, TN 38055-3120		



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# Discharge Upgrades and Narrative Reasons

A less than honorable discharge can affect your veteran benefit eligibility and may cause difficulties in obtaining employment. Your DD-214 might also show a narrative reason that is stigmatizing. If you are looking to change your discharge characterization or narrative reason on your DD-214, you can apply to the proper board to request changes.

The boards assume the discharge was proper and equitable. The burden is on YOU to provide an argument and evidence for the change. Without writing out an argument, the board will not change your DD-214.

You can request an “upgrade” or a change in the characterization of your discharge. The boards have two options: they can upgrade your discharge or they can vote for no change. The boards cannot downgrade a veteran’s existing characterization of service. Fear of further harm should not stop you from applying for an upgrade. This guide will provide more details for each step of the process.

This booklet will guide you through the process of applying for a change to your DD-214 and how to properly make an argument to increase your chance of success. Here is a list of steps you must take:

1. Request your records and gather evidence.
2. Get the correct application form.
3. Make an argument for why the board should change your characterization of discharge or narrative reason.
4. Write a cohesive personal statement.
5. Attach evidence to support your personal statement and argument.
6. Submit the complete application packet to the right board with the correct form.

## 1. Request Your Records and Gather Evidence

Since the boards assume that the discharge was correct you must know the evidence they will review prior to applying. The boards will have a copy of your military personnel and may have your service medical treatment records. You must know what these records say before applying.

### A. Request Your Military Personnel and Service Treatment Records

You may request these online or request them via mail by submitting a SF-180 form. When using the SF-180 form, check all the boxes and write “full and complete personnel file” and “full and complete medical file” on their designated lines. If you were hospitalized during service, put the location information and dates of hospitalization on the medical portion of the form. If your hospitalization took place in a civilian facility, contact that facility and request all copies of your records. Note that hospitals only keep records for a certain period of time, they may not have old records.

**IMPORTANT:** Be very careful when you are filling out the SF-180, there are many different places to send the form and your personnel and medical files may be kept in separate locations. If held at different locations, you must fill out two separate SF-180 forms. Look at the last page of the form to make sure you are submitting the form to the proper location. Sending it to the wrong place may delay your request. Once you submit the request, it may take 4-6 months to receive the documents.

### B. Obtain Mental Health Records

Especially if you are alleging that a mental health condition was a contributing factor, you **must** provide medical evidence of the diagnosis. Ask your treating doctor to write a letter with your current diagnoses and symptoms. If possible, ask your doctor to write a letter with your current diagnosis, that these conditions existed during service, and that the condition was a mitigating factor in the misconduct and how.

If the VA is providing your treatment, use the VA Form 10-5345 to request your records. If you are service-connected for the mental health condition, provide the VA Rating Decision documents. If possible, obtain the compensation and pension examination or disability benefits questionnaire

## 2. Get the Correct Form

### DD-149 vs DD-293

The different boards use separate application forms. If you submit the application on the wrong form, your application will be automatically denied. If it has been less than 15 years since your discharge and you have never applied for a discharge upgrade, apply to the Discharge Review Board (DRB) using the DD-293. If it has been less than 15 years since your discharge, and you previously applied, you can reapply if:

- You previously had a records review and now want a personal appearance hearing. **Note:** The hearings usually take place in the Washington, DC area and the board will not reimburse you for travel costs; or
- If you have a service-related mental health condition and you applied before 2014; or
- If you have new, substantial, relevant evidence that you didn't provide earlier.

If it has been more than 15 years since your discharge or you applied before to the DRB and the above situations do not apply to you, then apply to the Board for Correction of Military Records (BCMR), Board for the Correction of Naval Records (BCNR) or Air Force Board for the Correction of Military Records (AFBCMR) using the DD-149. If you were discharged by a General Court-Martial, then you must apply using the DD-149.

More information about the boards can be found at the back of the manual.

### 3. Make an Argument for Why the Board Should Change Your Discharge or Narrative Reason

By Department of Defense instructions, the boards assume the military acted correctly. This means the boards assume the discharge was right. The burden is on **YOU** to provide an argument and evidence for the change. Without writing out an argument, the board will not change your DD-214. Attach additional documents since all of your evidence will likely not fit on the application form.

#### Was there an error in the discharge process or was it improper?

You may argue that the discharge was an error or that it was improper. This means the military made a prejudicial mistake in the discharge process by failing to comply with its own regulations.

Sample arguments are below. These arguments are examples, you should include additional facts that apply to your specific discharge. Include enough evidence to support your argument.

1. The discharge was improper because the Marine Corps failed to follow proper procedures for screening for PTSD prior to separation.
2. The discharge was in error because I requested an administrative board and did not receive a board prior to the discharge.

#### Was the discharge inequitable or an injustice?

You may also argue that the discharge was inequitable or an injustice. This means that based on your service history and your personal situation at the time of the misconduct, the characterization does not accurately reflect your service. Examples are below:

1. The discharge was inequitable because it was based on one isolated incident in over three years of service, with no other infractions.
2. The discharge was inequitable because my mental health conditions rendered me incapable of service.
3. The discharge was inequitable because I was dealing with severe family issues at the time. I was unable to manage or cope with the personal problems which is why I behaved like I did.

#### Was there a mental health condition or trauma involved?

Remember that if you are arguing that a mental health disorder or trauma, such as military sexual trauma (MST), was a factor in the misconduct, the board must answer four questions:

1. Did the veteran have a condition or experience that may excuse or mitigate the discharge?
2. Did that condition or experience exist/occur during military service?
3. Does the condition or experience actually excuse or mitigate the misconduct?
4. Does that condition or experience outweigh the discharge?

Use numbered bullet points and write out the answers to each question and why you think they should agree with your answer. Make sure that you include a doctor's note that states your diagnoses, that the conditions existed during service, and gives an opinion that the misconduct was related to the condition. You may also explain the misconduct and connection to your mental status or MST in your personal statement.

A final point—the boards view a file that includes what you submit and what the board's analysts prepares. The analysts construct the presentation around your application, your argument, and the official records. If you make it difficult for the analyst to understand what you are arguing, you are making it harder for the board to consider their decision. Write clear, simple, and factually correct statements. If you need assistance in doing this, talk to a veterans service officer (VSO).

See the information in the back of this manual for more detailed explanations of the boards and the standards for an upgrade.

## 4. Write a Personal Statement

The personal statement is a key component of your application. The board has your records, so the personal statement is a chance to tell your story and put the misconduct into context.

When writing your statement, include the key details. These include the unit(s) to which you were assigned before and during the misconduct, the locations of service—both in and out of a combat theater— promotions, awards or any other favorable actions. The board will look at the official record however that provides only one perspective. They will also look at your statement. DO NOT make any false claims about promotions, combat service, or awards in your personal statement as the board will recognize those immediately. BE HONEST ABOUT ACCOMPLISHMENTS. If you received a decoration, award or promotion, tell the board and describe the circumstances surrounding it.

If you are alleging that mental health conditions affected your behavior which led to the misconduct, describe the onset of the condition and symptoms you suffered. If you are diagnosed with PTSD, talk about the trauma and how it affected you.

You should include the following in your personal statement.

1. **Background.** Discuss your background and reasons for enlistment.
2. **Service History.** Here is where you can talk about awards, promotions, and other positive aspects of your service.
3. **Traumas Experienced.** If you experienced a trauma, such as military sexual trauma or a traumatic brain injury, write about the trauma. Be as specific as possible and include all the details. This will boost your credibility and allow the board to view the context. Also include changes in behavior, explain why you began to act the way you did.
4. **Misconduct.** Explain the misconduct. It is important for the board to understand the context of your situation and actions. For example, if you went AWOL, give the reasons for the AWOL.
5. **Discharge.** Talk about the discharge process, especially if you are alleging an error.
6. **Post-service Life.** Write about what you have been doing since service. Especially highlight community service or other accomplishments.

## 5. Attach Evidence to Support Your Statement and Argument

### A. Military Personnel/Medical Records

Although the board will request your personnel and perhaps your medical records, you will want to attach any records that you are referring to in your personal statement or application. For example, you can attach your awards or medical records that show mental health symptoms.

### B. Buddy and Family Statements

It may be useful to gather “buddy statements,” or statements from servicemembers or veterans that you served with. Those who are aware of your good conduct, mitigating circumstances, bias, or change in behavior can write these statements. If members of your chain of command can provide statements, these also strengthen your application.

Family and friends may also provide statements that can show changes in behavior after a situation. They should write about you before and after service, especially if you are arguing that a mental health condition affected your actions.

### C. If Relevant, Mental Health or Rehab Records

If you are alleging that you have a mental health condition that affected your behavior, you must provide evidence of the diagnosis. This may include a doctor’s letter, a print out of your medical records, or anything that documents your conditions. If you are rated or service-connected by the VA, include the rating decision. If you developed an addiction during service, include rehabilitation treatment records.

### D. More Evidence

Provide letters and documentation of post-service achievements, commitment to the community, employment achievements, or family responsibilities. Other evidence can include police records showing no criminal history; rehabilitation records; employment verification; performance evaluations; awards and certificates; documentation of community service; and letters from community leaders.

## 6. Submit the Packet to the Right Board with the Correct Form

Now that you have gathered your evidence and written out your argument, attach all the forms together and submit it as a complete packet. The packet should include the following:

- ✓ DD-293 (DRB) or DD-149 (BCMR)
- ✓ Your DD-214
- ✓ Your written arguments
- ✓ Personal Statement
- ✓ Medical Evidence
- ✓ Supporting Letters and Other Evidence

After submitting the application, decisions take one to three years.

More detailed information about the boards are provided in the manual.

## Additional Information: The Boards

You must apply to the proper board. There are two types of boards: (1) the Discharge Review Boards and (2) the Boards for Correction of Records. If you apply to the wrong board, this may substantially delay your application.

If your discharge is less than 15 years old, apply first to the branch's Discharge Review Board. If you already applied to the Discharge Review Board or your discharge was more than 15 years ago, apply to the branch's Board for Correction of Records. For example, you were discharged in 2010, you would apply to the Discharge Review Board. If you were discharged you in 1972, you would apply to the Board for Correction of Records.

Once you have figured out the proper board, review the standards for the arguments you are making.

## Punitive Discharges

A Bad Conduct or Dishonorable Discharge from a court-martial may only be upgraded on the basis of clemency. This means that the board determines that the discharge was too harsh for the crime or you have significant post-service accomplishments. Submit evidence of these accomplishments, and include rehabilitation records, character letters, and clean police records. Note: The Board cannot overturn a court-martial conviction.



## Discharge Review Boards

The Discharge Review Board (DRB) must receive your application within **15 years** of your discharge date. The DRBs have limited authority, they cannot upgrade a discharge from a General Court-Martial or grant medical retirement. The board consists of five officers, you must receive a majority vote (at least 3) to receive a change.

Submit applications to the DRB using the **DD-293**. It is very important that you use the right form, the board may return your application if submitted on the wrong form. You must allege the discharge was either **improper and/or inequitable**.

The DRBs offer two different types of review: (1) a records review or (2) a personal appearance hearing. With the records review, the DRB will review your service records and the documents submitted with the application and make a decision. If your application is denied, you may then apply for a personal appearance hearing.

Personal appearance hearings generally take place in the Washington, DC area. The Board WILL NOT reimburse you for travel costs to attend the hearing. If requested, do not miss your hearing date.

**IMPORTANT:** With DRB applications, you may first apply for a records review. If denied, you may then reapply and request a personal appearance hearing. But, if you first go to a personal appearance hearing, you cannot reapply for a records review. It is advantageous to first apply for a records review, then a personal appearance hearing. Should you decide to make a personal appearance you can bring advocates and witnesses to speak.



## Arguments

The board must assume the discharge and narrative reason are correct. This means the burden is on YOU to provide an argument to rebut this assumption with substantial, credible evidence. To be successful at the DRB, you must prove that the discharge was either improper or inequitable. **You must supply documented evidence and proof.**

### Improper

To argue that the discharge was improper, you must prove that there was a prejudicial error that occurred during the discharge process. To be prejudicial, there must be substantial doubt that if the error did not happen, the discharge would have been different.

### Inequitable

To argue that the discharge was inequitable, you must prove either (1) under today's discharge standards, you likely would have received a different type of discharge; or (2) although the discharge was proper, the board should look at other factors such as the quality of your service, family and personal problems, or mental health conditions that you experienced at the time.

### Reconsideration

If your application is denied, you may reapply for reconsideration for any of the following reasons:

1. You first had a records review and now you want a personal appearance hearing;
2. When new policies are announced in discharge review process;
3. When the service materially changes discharge policies that would have given you substantially more rights;
4. When you applied without an attorney and now have one; or
5. By providing new, substantial, and relevant evidence that you did not have before.

If the Discharge Review Board denied your request, consider applying to the Board for Correction of Records.



## Board for Correction of Records

If your discharge was more than 15 years ago or you previously applied to the DRB, you may apply to the Board for Corrections of Military/Naval/Air Force Records (we will refer to these collectively as the BCMR). The BCMR has the authority to upgrade any discharge, change the discharge to a medical retirement, and make any changes need to the DD-214. The Board consists of three high-ranking civilians from your service component and you must receive a majority vote to receive an upgrade (at least two).

Submit applications to the BCMR using the **DD-149**. It is very important that you use the right form, the Board may return your application if submitted on the wrong form. To prevail, you must show that the discharge was an **error and/or injustice**.

**IMPORTANT:** You must submit the BCMR application within three years of discovering the error. This date may be the most recent DRB denial, the date you received denial of benefits from the VA, or the date you actually discovered the error. However, this three-year deadline is commonly waived in the interest of justice. You must make an argument for why the board should accept the application. If you are arguing that a mental health condition was a contributing factor in the misconduct, under new directives, the BCMR must liberally waive the deadline.

### Arguments

The Board will assume the discharge and narrative reason are correct, and the burden is on YOU to provide an argument to rebut this assumption with substantial, credible evidence. To be successful at the BCMR, you must prove that the discharge was either in error or an injustice. There are no clear definitions as each case is different, but review the arguments for the DRBs standards of improper (like an error) or an inequitable (like an injustice) for additional guidance.

### Reconsideration

You may reapply to the board if your new application has evidence and arguments that you did not put in your prior applications. The board may also grant reconsideration if you are now arguing that a mental health condition was a factor in the discharge.

## Applicants with a Mental Health Condition

The boards are now directed to look at whether a mental health condition, such as PTSD or traumatic brain injury, or experience, such as military sexual trauma, was a mitigating factor in the misconduct. The boards must answer four questions when looking at applications.

### 1. Did the veteran have a condition or experience that may excuse or mitigate the discharge?

The guidance states that absent clear evidence to the contrary, a diagnosis given by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist is evidence that you have a condition. If you do not have a diagnosis, the board will liberally consider evidence of the condition. However, we recommend that you provide evidence of an official diagnosis.

### 2. Did that condition exist/experience occur during military service?

An opinion by a civilian provider that the condition existed during service will receive liberal consideration. If diagnosed by the VA, this is persuasive evidence that the condition existed during service. If you are arguing that you had a mental health condition before service, you must prove with the evidence that the condition was made worse by service.

### 3. Does that condition or experience actually excuse or mitigate the discharge?

Conditions that the board determines existed during service are liberally considered as a factor in the misconduct. This is your chance to show with evidence that the mental health condition resulted in the actions leading to the discharge. You can do this with your personal statement, opinion letters from your doctor, and statements from individuals you served with, friends, and family.

### 4. Does that condition or experience outweigh the discharge?

The board will do a weighing test to determine whether the mental health condition was more severe than the misconduct. Even if you had a mental health condition at the time, the board may deny an application for serious misconduct or actions not associated with your condition or experience.

The Veterans Consortium Discharge Upgrade Program provides pro bono representation to veterans with Other Than Honorable discharges due to conduct related to PTSD, traumatic brain injury, or similar mental health conditions. If you are diagnosed with a service-related mental health condition, contact us today for potential representation.

**Good luck with your application!**

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# The Veterans Consortium

DISCHARGE UPGRADE PROGRAM<sup>SM</sup>

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**DISCLAIMER:** This guide is intended as an introductory tool to the discharge upgrade process. This guide does not purport to provide legal advice or to give an opinion as to the appropriate course of action in a particular case. Applicants should always conduct their own research on the best course of action for their particular case and should always check any information in this guide against the relevant statutes, regulations, and guidance to ensure its accuracy.

This manual was prepared on behalf of The Veterans Consortium, a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) serving the U.S. veteran community and celebrating 28 years of pro bono legal service to U.S. veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors. For more information on The Veterans Consortium Discharge Upgrade Program, please visit our website at [www.vetsprobono.org](http://www.vetsprobono.org) or contact us via e-mail at [upgrades@vetsprobono.org](mailto:upgrades@vetsprobono.org) or via phone at (202) 733-3324.

This guide is current as of December 2019.

## TEMPLATE FOR VETERAN'S AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF PETITION

I, Firstname M. Lastname, do hereby depose under oath:

1. My name is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. [Briefly describe childhood, with greater detail if relevant.]
3. [Why enlist in the armed forces?]

### **Military Service**

4. [Information about training, specialty, unit, accomplishments, strengths, etc.]
5. [Information about deployment(s). Detailed paragraphs about important events, duties, experiences, hardships, combat, accomplishments, etc.]
6. [Information about return from deployment(s). Detailed paragraphs about readjustment, duties, family, treatment, etc.]
7. [If mental health is relevant, describe symptoms (e.g., feelings of isolation, numbness, anxiety, fear, anger, etc.). Include one or two anecdotes to illustrate the symptoms.]
8. [Describe events that led to separation. Include all mitigating details and context.]

### **Return to Civilian Life**

9. [Describe transition back to civilian life.]
10. [Information about employment; family (e.g., marriage, children); any volunteering and community service; lack of criminal record; future plans and goals.]
11. [Information about any mental health treatment, counseling, or rehabilitation. If substance abuse/drug use involved, information about sobriety and treatment.]
12. [Reflect on events that occurred in service, including any expression of apology, remorse, or regret and any acceptance of responsibility.]
13. [State why seeking a discharge upgrade, perhaps explaining impact of less-than-honorable discharge and meaning of an honorable discharge.]

I have read the foregoing and affirm that it is true to the best of my knowledge and belief under pains and penalties of perjury.

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Firstname M. Lastname

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Date