



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF NAVAL RECORDS
701 S. COURTHOUSE ROAD, SUITE 1001
ARLINGTON, VA 22204-2490

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Docket No: 4492-22

Ref: Signature Date



Dear Petitioner:

This is in reference to your application for correction of your naval record pursuant to Section 1552 of Title 10, United States Code. After careful and conscientious consideration of relevant portions of your naval record and your application, the Board for Correction of Naval Records (Board) found the evidence submitted insufficient to establish the existence of probable material error or injustice. Consequently, your application has been denied.

Although you did not file your application in a timely manner, the statute of limitation was waived in accordance with the 25 August 2017 guidance from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (Kurta Memo). A three-member panel of the Board, sitting in executive session, considered your application on 9 September 2022. The names and votes of the panel members will be furnished upon request. Your allegations of error and injustice were reviewed in accordance with administrative regulations and procedures applicable to the proceedings of this Board. Documentary material considered by the Board consisted of your application together with all material submitted in support thereof, relevant portions of your naval record, and applicable statutes, regulations, and policies, to include the Kurta Memo, the 3 September 2014 guidance from the Secretary of Defense regarding discharge upgrade requests by Veterans claiming post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Hagel Memo), and the 25 July 2018 guidance from the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness regarding equity, injustice, or clemency determinations (Wilkie Memo). Additionally, the Board also considered an advisory opinion (AO) furnished by qualified mental health provider and your response to the AO.

You enlisted in the Navy and entered active duty on 11 July 2000. Your pre-enlistment physical examination, on 16 June 2000, and self-reported medical history both noted no psychiatric or neurologic conditions or symptoms.

On 25 January 2001, you commenced a period of unauthorized absence (UA) lasting six days. On 26 February 2001, you commenced a period of UA that lasted two days.

On 5 January 2004, a Navy Drug Screening Laboratory message indicated you tested positive for amphetamine/methamphetamine well above the testing cutoff level. On 20 January 2004, you

were convicted at a Summary Court-Martial (SCM) for UA and the wrongful use of methamphetamine. You were sentenced to forfeitures of pay, a reduction in rank to the lowest enlisted paygrade (E-1), and confinement for thirty days. At the SCM, you testified that you bought the drugs from a person off the street in █ █ and, at the time, you were having problems with your wife.

On 21 January 2004, your command notified you that you were being processed for an administrative discharge by reason of misconduct due to drug abuse. You waived your rights to consult with counsel, submit statements on your own behalf, and to request an administrative separation board. Ultimately, on 5 March 2004, you were discharged from the Navy for misconduct with an under Other Than Honorable (OTH) conditions characterization of service and assigned an RE-4 reentry code.

On 4 February 2010, the Naval Discharge Review Board (NDRB) denied your application for relief. The NDRB determined that your discharge was proper as issued and that no change was warranted. On 30 July 2020, the VA granted you a service-connection for PTSD with a 50% disability rating effective 23 January 2020. On 9 February 2021, the NDRB again denied your request for relief after determining your discharge was proper as issued.

The Board carefully considered all potentially mitigating factors to determine whether the interests of justice warrant relief in your case in accordance with the Kurta, Hagel, and Wilkie Memos. These included, but were not limited to, your desire for a discharge upgrade and contentions that: (a) two years ago you were diagnosed with PTSD, (b) your PTSD explained a lot about your actions underlying your discharge, (c) while in Newport News you started to drink heavily to cope with stress and anxiety, and (d) you self-medicated for years. For purposes of clemency consideration, the Board noted you did not provide supporting documentation describing post-service accomplishments or advocacy letters.

As part of the Board review process, the BCNR Physician Advisor who is a licensed clinical psychologist (Ph.D.), reviewed your contentions and the available records and issued an AO dated 29 July 2022. The Ph.D. stated in pertinent part:

There is no evidence Petitioner was diagnosed with a mental health condition during his service. In contrast Petitioner submitted evidence of service-connection for PTSD. Unfortunately, Petitioner did not provide clarifying information about his PTSD (i.e., when the trauma occurred, what the trauma was, symptoms experienced). The lack of clarifying information made available did not provide enough markers to establish an onset and development of mental health symptoms or identify a nexus with his misconduct. Furthermore, no evidence was presented Petitioner was not responsible for his conduct or that he should not be held accountable for his actions. Additionally, Petitioner's in-service statement provided alternative reasoning for his misconduct (i.e., issues with his wife). Additional records (e.g., VA C&P examination, in-service and/or post-service mental health records describing the Petitioner's diagnosis,

symptoms, and their specific link to his misconduct) would aid in rendering an alternate opinion.

The Ph.D. concluded, “[b]ased on the available evidence, it is my clinical opinion that there is post-service evidence of a diagnosis of PTSD that may be attributed to military service. There is insufficient evidence his misconduct may be attributed to PTSD.”

In response to the AO, you provided a rebuttal statement that further explained the circumstances of your case.

Based upon this review, the Board concluded these potentially mitigating factors were insufficient to warrant relief. Specifically, the Board determined that your misconduct, as evidenced by your SCM, outweighed these mitigating factors. In accordance with the Hagel, Kurta, and Wilkie Memos, the Board gave liberal and special consideration to your record of service, and your contentions about any traumatic or stressful events you experienced and their possible adverse impact on your service. However, the Board concluded that there was no convincing evidence of any nexus between any mental health conditions and/or related symptoms and your misconduct, and determined that there was insufficient evidence to support the argument that any such mental health conditions mitigated the misconduct that formed the basis of your discharge. As a result, the Board concluded that your misconduct was not due to mental health-related conditions or symptoms. Moreover, even if the Board assumed that your misconduct was somehow attributable to any mental health conditions, the Board unequivocally concluded that the severity of your misconduct far outweighed any and all mitigation offered by such mental health conditions. The Board determined the record reflected that your misconduct was intentional and willful and demonstrated you were unfit for further service. The Board also determined that the evidence of record did not demonstrate that you were not mentally responsible for your conduct or that you should not be held accountable for your actions.

The Board noted that there is no provision of federal law or in Navy/Marine Corps regulations that allows for a discharge to be automatically upgraded after a specified number of months or years. The Board did not believe that your record was otherwise so meritorious as to deserve a discharge upgrade. The Board concluded that significant negative aspects of your conduct and/or performance greatly outweighed any positive aspects of your military record. The Board determined that characterization under OTH conditions is appropriate when the basis for separation is the commission of an act or acts constituting a significant departure from the conduct expected of a Sailor. Moreover, absent a material error or injustice, the Board declined to summarily upgrade a discharge solely for the purpose of facilitating veterans’ benefits, or enhancing educational, employment, or military enlistment opportunities. Lastly, the Board determined that drug abuse by a Sailor is contrary to Navy core values and policy, renders such Sailors unfit for duty, and poses an unnecessary risk to the safety of their fellow Sailors. As a result, the Board determined that there was no impropriety or inequity in your discharge, and even under the liberal consideration standard, the Board concluded that your serious misconduct clearly merited your receipt of an OTH. Even in light of the Wilkie Memo and reviewing the record holistically, the Board still concluded that insufficient evidence of an error or injustice exists to warrant upgrading your characterization of service or granting clemency in the form of

an upgraded characterization of service. Accordingly, given the totality of the circumstances, the Board determined that your request does not merit relief.

You are entitled to have the Board reconsider its decision upon submission of new matters, which will require you to complete and submit a new DD Form 149. New matters are those not previously presented to or considered by the Board. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that a presumption of regularity attaches to all official records. Consequently, when applying for a correction of an official naval record, the burden is on the applicant to demonstrate the existence of probable material error or injustice.

Sincerely,

9/14/2022

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Executive Director
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