



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. 1900-23

Ref: Signature Date

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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 limitations 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 13 October 2023. 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 service 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)/mental health condition (MHC) (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). The Board also considered an advisory opinion (AO) from a qualified mental health professional. Although you were offered the opportunity to reply to the AO, you chose not to do so.

You enlisted in the United States Navy and commenced a period of service on 30 April 1976. On 18 July 1977, you began a period of unauthorized absence (UA) from your unit and remained absent until 10 October 1977. On 4 November 1977, you were found guilty at Summary Court Martial (SCM) of violating UCMJ Article 86, for the 84-day period of UA. You were awarded 20 days confinement and reduction in rank to E-2. On 18 November 1977, you were separated for the good of the service due to "Unsuitability" with a General (Under Honorable Conditions) (GEN) discharge and assigned an RE-4 reentry code.

You previously submitted an application to the Board for Correction of Naval Records and were denied relief on 2 April 2008.

The Board carefully considered all potentially mitigating and/or extenuating 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: (a) your desire to upgrade your characterization of service, (b) your assertion that you were struggling with undiagnosed mental health conditions during your service due to life stressors, and (c) the impact that your mental health had on your conduct. For purposes of clemency and equity consideration, the Board noted you provided your Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rating but no documentation related to your post-service accomplishments or character letters.

In your request for relief, you contend that you were suffering from personal stressors with the untimely death of your fiancé and the strain of being a single parent with a baby. In support of your request, you provided a VA determination of service connection for persistent depressive disorder with anxious distress, effective September 2014. 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 30 August 2023. The Ph.D. noted in pertinent part:

There is no evidence that he was diagnosed with a mental health condition in military service. Post-service, the VA has granted service connection for a mental health condition that is temporally remote to service. There is no evidence of a diagnosis of PTSD. It is possible that the strain of grief and parenthood could have contributed to UA and a desire to request separation from service. Additional records (e.g., post-service mental health records describing the Petitioner's diagnosis, symptoms, and their specific link to his military service) may aid in strengthening the opinion.

The Ph.D. concluded, "it is my clinical opinion there is post-service evidence from the VA of a mental health condition that may have been experienced during military service. There is no evidence of a diagnosis of PTSD. There is some post-service evidence that his misconduct may be attributed to a mental health condition."

After thorough review, the Board concluded the potentially mitigating factors were insufficient to warrant relief. In accordance with the Kurta, Hagel, and Wilkie Memos, the Board gave liberal and special consideration to your record of service, and your contentions about undiagnosed mental health issues and the possible adverse impact on your service. Specifically, the Board felt that your misconduct, as evidenced by your SCM, outweighed these mitigating factors. The Board considered the seriousness of your misconduct and the likely negative impact that your conduct had on the good order and discipline of your command, especially considering the length of your UA. The Board determined that such misconduct is contrary to the Navy core values and policy and places an undue burden on fellow shipmates.

In making this determination, the Board concurred with the advisory opinion that there was no convincing evidence that you suffered from any type of mental health condition while on active duty, or that any such mental health condition was related to or mitigated the misconduct that formed the basis of your discharge. The Board noted that you did not report that you were suffering from any mental or physical conditions that would have triggered referral for treatment. It also does not appear that you tried to work with your command to obtain support or an extended leave of absence to handle your personal affairs. Further, the Board agreed with the AO that your post-service diagnosis is temporally remote to your service and fails to draw a sufficient nexus to your underlying misconduct. As a result, the Board concluded that your misconduct was not due to mental health-related symptoms. The Board found that your active duty 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 otherwise not be held accountable for your actions. As a result, the Board determined that a GEN characterization is appropriate in your case, as significant negative aspects of your conduct during service conduct outweighs the positive aspects.

Therefore, while the Board carefully considered the evidence you submitted in mitigation, even in light of the Kurta, Hagel, and Wilkie Memos and reviewing the record liberally and holistically, the Board did not find evidence of an error or injustice that warrants granting you the relief you requested or granting relief as a matter of clemency or equity. Ultimately, the Board concluded the mitigation evidence you provided was insufficient to outweigh the seriousness of your misconduct. 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,

10/17/2023

