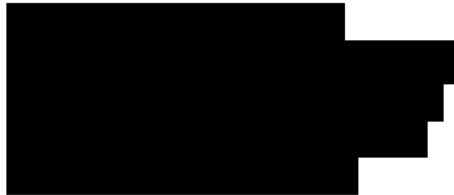




**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF NAVAL RECORDS  
701 S. COURTHOUSE ROAD, SUITE 1001  
ARLINGTON, VA 22204-2490

█  
Docket No. 5580-23  
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 February 2024. 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 the advisory opinion (AO) furnished by a qualified mental health provider and your response to the AO.

You enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and began a period of active duty service on 9 January 1976. Your enlistment physical examination, on 9 January 1976, and self-reported medical history both noted no psychiatric or neurologic conditions or symptoms.

On 22 November 1976, you commenced a period of unauthorized absence (UA). Your UA terminated after five (5) days on 27 November 1976. Instead of taking disciplinary action, your command chose to document your UA as "time lost," an extended your contractual end of obligated service date day-for-day.

On 10 December 1976, you received non-judicial punishment (NJP) for dereliction of duty when you were sleeping on guard duty. You did not appeal your NJP. On 8 September 1977, you received NJP again for sleeping on duty. You did not appeal your NJP.

On 7 December 1977, you commenced a period of UA from your unit at █, █. On 7 January 1978, your command declared you to be a deserter and dropped you from the rolls. Your UA terminated after 117 days with your surrender to military authorities at █, █ on 3 April 1978. However, on 1 May 1978, you commenced another UA. Your UA terminated after 208 days on 25 November 1978.

Following your return to military control, on 8 December 1978, you submitted a voluntary written request for an administrative discharge for the good of the service under other than honorable conditions (OTH) to avoid trial by court-martial for your two long-term UAs. As a result of this course of action, you were spared the stigma of a court-martial conviction for your multiple UAs, as well as the potential sentence of confinement and the negative ramifications of receiving a punitive discharge from a military judge. Prior to submitting this voluntary discharge request, you conferred with a qualified military lawyer, at which time you were advised of your rights and warned of the probable adverse consequences of accepting such a discharge. You acknowledged that if your request was approved, your characterization of service will be OTH without referral or consideration by an administrative separation board. You acknowledged and understood that with an OTH discharge you would be deprived of virtually all veterans' benefits based on your current period of service, and that you may encounter substantial prejudice in civilian life in situations wherein the type of service rendered in any branch of the Armed Forces or the character of the discharge therein may have a bearing.

On 21 December 1978, your separation physical examination and self-reported medical history both noted no neurologic or psychiatric conditions or symptoms. Ultimately, on 22 December 1978, you were separated from the Marine Corps in lieu of a trial by court-martial with an OTH discharge characterization and assigned an RE-4 reentry code.

The Board carefully considered all potentially mitigating factors to determine whether the interests of justice warrant relief in your case in accordance with the Hagel, Kurta, and Wilkie Memos. These included, but were not limited to, your desire for a discharge upgrade and change to your narrative reason for separation. You contend that: (a) although you take personal responsibility for your actions leading to your separation, the fact remains that you have been unjustly harmed and stigmatized as a result of your OTH characterization of service, (b) you had a series of missteps as a young Marine, but your misconduct is mitigated by the ongoing trauma you were internally suffering from following a training accident, (c) post-service you have successfully reintegrated into civilian society, and (d) you have been inequitably punished because of your separation when your traumatic event that was the catalyst for your misconduct

is taken into consideration, as well as the decades of prejudice you have endured because of your unfavorable discharge. For purposes of clemency and equity consideration, the Board considered the entirety of the evidence you provided in support of your application.

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 22 December 2023. The Ph.D. stated in pertinent part:

The Petitioner submitted a personal statement and one character reference in support of his claim. He indicated that during service he was in a helicopter that “almost crashed,” and that he recalls his Gunnery Sergeant standing up and proclaiming, “We’re all going to die!” There is no evidence that the Petitioner was diagnosed with a mental health condition or suffered from PTSD while in military service, or that he exhibited any psychological symptoms or behavioral changes indicative of a diagnosable mental health condition. He did not submit any medical evidence in support of his claim. There are no records contained within his active duty service file that mention the helicopter incident. Additional records (e.g., 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, “it is my considered clinical opinion there is insufficient evidence of a mental health condition that may be attributed to military service. There is insufficient evidence that his misconduct could be attributed to a mental health condition.”

Following a review of your AO rebuttal submission, the Ph.D. did not change or otherwise modify their original AO.

After thorough review, the Board concluded these potentially mitigating factors were insufficient to warrant relief. 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 purported 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 forming the basis of your discharge. As a result, the Board concluded that your serious 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 concluded 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 observed that character of military service is based, in part, on conduct and overall trait averages which are computed from marks assigned during periodic evaluations. Your overall active duty trait average calculated from your available performance evaluations during your enlistment was approximately 3.01 in conduct. Marine Corps regulations in place at the time of your discharge recommended a minimum trait average of 4.0 in conduct (proper military behavior), for a fully honorable characterization of service. The Board concluded that your cumulative misconduct was not minor in nature and that your conduct marks during your active duty career were a direct result of your serious misconduct and further justified your OTH characterization.

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 Marine. The simple fact remains is that you left the Marine Corps while you were still contractually obligated to serve and you went into a UA status without any legal justification or excuse on no less than two separate occasions totaling approximately 325 days. 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 misconduct and disregard for good order in discipline clearly merited your discharge. 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,

2/14/2024

