

**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to an Air Force-wide class action lawsuit, *Johnson et al. v. Kendall*, Case No. 3:21-cv-01214, settled on 11 June 2024, the Air Force Discharge Review Board (AFDRB) reconsidered the Class Member's case file under the authority provided in the Under Secretary of Defense memorandum, Guidance to Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Regarding Equity, Injustice, or Clemency Determinations, dated 25 June 2018, known as the "Wilkie Memo," to upgrade discharges to ensure fundamental fairness. As part of the Air Force-wide class action lawsuit, the Class Member (Applicant) for the referenced case number was identified as part of the Automatic Reconsideration Group. The AFDRB reviewed the record per the parameters of the settlement agreement as noted above.

If no relief was merited under the "Wilkie Memo," the AFDRB then also reviewed the Applicant's case to ensure appropriate application of liberal consideration where there was a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), or other mental health conditions, or experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment, or records documenting that one or more symptoms of PTSD, TBI, other mental health conditions, or experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment existed or occurred during military service, under the authority provided in the Under Secretary of Defense memorandum, Clarifying Guidance to Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Requests by Veterans for Modification of their Discharge Due to Mental Health Conditions, Sexual Assault, or Sexual Harassment, dated 25 August 2017, known as the "Kurta Memo" standard of liberal consideration.

The Applicant was discharged on 8 October 2019 in accordance with Air Force Instruction 36-3208, Administrative Separation of Airmen, with a Character of Service of Under Other Than Honorable Conditions, a Narrative Reason of In Lieu of Trial By Court Martial, and a Reentry Code of 2B, as reflected on the DD 214, *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*.

As an Automatic Reconsideration Group member, the AFDRB sent notice to both the service member's last known mailing address and e-mail address on file, which stated that 1) the AFDRB would reconsider the Applicant's case without a need for further response from the member; 2) if the member wished to supplement their application, they should submit supplemental evidence within 60 days of the notice; 3) submitting medical evidence in support of the application would benefit the member; 4) provided examples of the types of evidence that may be relevant; and 5) included information regarding available resources to assist members in supplementing their applications.

**COUNSEL:** The Applicant was not represented by Counsel.

**DISCUSSION:** The AFDRB, under its responsibility to examine the propriety and equity of an Applicant's discharge, is authorized to change the characterization of service and the narrative reason for discharge if such changes are warranted. If applicable, the Board can also change the Applicant's reentry code. In reviewing discharges, the Board presumes regularity in the conduct of governmental affairs unless there is substantial credible evidence to rebut the presumption, including evidence submitted by the Applicant. The AFDRB thoroughly reviewed the circumstances that led to the discharge and the discharge process to determine if the discharge met the pertinent standards of equity and propriety.

The documentary evidence the AFDRB considered as part of the review includes but is not limited to the DD Form 293, *Application for the Review of Discharge from the Armed Forces of the United States*, and any additional documentation submitted by Applicant and/or counsel; the Applicant's personnel file from the Automated Records Management System; and the AFDRB Brief detailing the Applicant's service information and a summary of the case to include the AFDRB's medical opinion which included a narrative explanation as to the following: a) whether the available record reasonably supports that a mental health condition existed at

the time of the Applicant's military service; b) whether these conditions were present at the time of the misconduct; c) whether these conditions were mitigating for the misconduct; d) whether the Applicant received mental health and/or medical evaluations before their administrative separation. In accordance with DoDI 1332.28, *Discharge Review Board (DRB) Procedures and Standards*, the AFDRB previously provided a copy of the examiner's brief, extracted from available service records, containing pertinent data regarding the circumstances and character of the military service to the member after the Board adjudicated the original AFDRB case.

In accordance with the terms of the Settlement Agreement, the Board reconsidered the Applicant's case based on liberal consideration standards. Specifically, the Board was required to include a member who was a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist, or a physician with training on mental health issues connected with PTSD or TBI or other trauma as specified in the current edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association, if the former service member, while serving on active duty, was deployed in support of a contingency operation and who, at any time after such deployment, was diagnosed by a physician, clinical psychologist or psychiatrist as experiencing PTSD or TBI as a consequence of that deployment. If this former member claims that the PTSD or TBI is based in whole or in part on sexual trauma, intimate partner violence or spousal abuse, the Board was required to seek advice and counsel in the review from a psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker with training on mental health issues associated with PTSD or TBI or other trauma as specified in the current edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association. The Board was required to review the four questions under the Under Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Clarifying Guidance to Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards of Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Requests by Veterans for Modification of their Discharge Due to Mental Health Conditions, Sexual Assault, or Sexual Harassment*, dated 25 August 2017, and commonly referred to as the "Kurta Memo" when weighing evidence in requests for modification of discharges due in whole or in part to mental health conditions, including PTSD, TBI, sexual assault, and sexual harassment.

The AFDRB reviewed the military records and new evidence as part of the Settlement Agreement. The Applicant did not submit new evidence.

**FINDING:** The Board was conducted on 30 June 2025.

The Board deliberated and determined the Applicant's package did not merit relief. The Board considered the factors laid out in the attachment to the Under Secretary of Defense memorandum, *Guidance to Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Regarding Equity, Injustice, or Clemency Determinations*, dated 25 June 2018, known as the "Wilkie Memo." The Board considered the factors listed in paragraphs (6)(a)-(6)(l) and (7)(a)-(7)(r) of this memorandum and found that the evidence did not support an inequity or impropriety.

Therefore, the Board was required to review the four questions under the Under Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Clarifying Guidance to Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards of Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Requests by Veterans for Modification of their Discharge Due to Mental Health Conditions, Sexual Assault, or Sexual Harassment*, dated 25 August 2017, and commonly referred to as the "Kurta Memo" when weighing evidence in requests for modification of discharges due in whole or in part to mental health conditions, including PTSD, TBI, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. Also, on reconsideration, the Board considered the presence of a mental health condition in itself does not warrant an upgrade.

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

Yes. The Applicant marked “PTSD” for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and “Other Mental Health” on his application, DD Form 293, and contended that he was wrongfully discharged from service. He explained through his legal counsel that he was falsely accused of being disrespectful to a superior commissioned officer, creating a hostile work environment, making a threat, and physical assault. The Applicant had denied engaging in any of these acts of misconduct. He claims these charges were referred to a court-martial based on incomplete and biased investigations. The Applicant states that while impacted by and battling a brain tumor with inadequate counsel and for fear of a federal conviction, the applicant submitted a discharge in lieu of a court-martial. He had untreated medical conditions and had since benefited from counseling for his physical and mental health issues.

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

Yes. A review of the Applicant’s available service treatment records finds there is no evidence or records that the Applicant received any mental health treatment or a mental disorder diagnosis during service. However, in accordance with the “Kurta Memo” Applicants statements as to his condition can be used as evidence of a mental health condition. Also, the Board considered the Applicant received several evaluations from a mental health provider or his primary care manager for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE) training, periodic health assessments, and a separation health and physical examination (SHPE) and on all these evaluations, he denied any mental health issues including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and alcohol issues. There is evidence that the Applicant first made complaints of tinnitus or ringing in the ears in May 2019 after he completed a SHPE in April 2019. He would receive MRIs of his brain, and there was evidence of a non-aggressive lesion; however, there is no evidence that he developed any mental health conditions, cognitive impairments, or neuropsychological issues from having a brain tumor or lesion.

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

No. The record is not clear the Applicant was suffering from a condition at the time he committed the misconduct for which he was ultimately discharged. The applicant was discharged from service in lieu of a court-martial for referred charges of being disrespectful to his superior commissioned officer, dereliction of duty by creating a hostile work environment, assault upon another service member, and communicating a threat to the same service member. Since he denied engaging in these acts of misconduct, it is unlikely that his mental health condition caused him to engage in these serious offenses. The Board is not convinced applicant’s mental health condition had caused him to engage in any of these misconduct infractions or that his mental health condition was a contributing factor to his decision to engage in these misconducts and/or submit a discharge in lieu of a court-martial. Therefore, his mental health condition does not excuse or mitigate his discharge.

4. Does that condition or experience outweigh the discharge?

No. Even if the Board concluded the Applicant’s condition mitigated the discharge, it does not outweigh the Applicant’s discharge. The severity of the Applicant’s misconduct resulting in his discharge in lieu of a court-martial outweighs his mental health condition.

**CONCLUSION:** After thoroughly reviewing and reconsidering the Applicant's case including all available evidence, the member's contentions, summary of service, service/medical record entries, and discharge process, the Board concluded:

**The Character of Service:** The AFDRB voted unanimously to deny the Applicant's original request to upgrade their Discharge Characterization. Therefore, the Character of Service shall remain.

**Narrative Reason/SPD Code:** The AFDRB also voted unanimously to deny upgrading the Narrative Reason/SPD Code. Therefore, the Narrative Reason shall remain.

**Reentry Code:** The AFDRB also voted unanimously to deny upgrading the Reentry Code. Therefore, the Reentry Code shall remain.

The Board President approved the results of the AFDRB on 29 October 2025.

Should the Applicant wish to appeal this decision, they may request a personal appearance before this Board. An Applicant must be within 15 years of discharge. If their discharge was more than 15 years ago, they may apply for relief to the Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records (AFBCMR). Instructions on how to appeal an AFDRB decision can be found at <https://afrba-portal.cce.af.mil/>.

The Applicant may request a list of the Board members and their votes. In addition, when the Applicant requests, the AFDRB will disclose the type of mental health professional providing the opinion, their licenses and certifications, and the identity of the mental health professional if their military pay grade is at or above the O-6 level, or its civilian equivalent by writing to:

Air Force Review Boards Agency  
Attn: Discharge Review Board – Reconsideration Case  
3351 Celmers Lane  
Joint Base Andrews, MD 20762-6435