

SUMMARY: The Applicant was discharged on January 24, 2024 in accordance with Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-3211, Military Separations, with an Under Honorable Conditions (General) Service Characterization for Misconduct – (Drug Abuse). The Applicant requested an upgrade of their Service Characterization.

The Applicant requested the Board be completed based on a Record Review. The Board was conducted on March 19, 2026. The Applicant was not represented by counsel.

The attached examiner's brief (provided to Applicant only), extracted from available service records, contains pertinent data regarding the circumstances and character of the Applicant's military service.

DISCUSSION: The Discharge Review Board (DRB), 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 Board 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 DRB provided a notice to inform the service member of resources available to help answer their questions about the application process and/or to help them supplement their application, to include information on the types of evidence that can be submitted to support a claim; information regarding potential eligibility for mental health treatment and evaluation services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); general information regarding Veterans Service Organizations that may assist with DRB applications, and their right to retain counsel; a link to a database of legal services organizations that serve members of the military, veterans, and their families; the weblink to the VA's Directory of Veteran's Service Organizations; and information regarding reasonable accommodation requests from the DRB in the application and adjudication process.

The Applicant's record of service included the following documented misconduct leading up to their discharge:
-Article 15 for Wrongful use of marijuana

The documentary evidence the Board 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 (ARMS); and the DRB Brief detailing the Applicant's service information and a summary of the case.

The Applicant states during service they earned two Problem Solver awards and the Air and Space Achievement Medal, demonstrating dedication and contributions. Prior to separation, they never received any kind of written or formal punishment. In the final six months, they struggled with undiagnosed PTSD and depression, along with a recurring chest wall pain, which led to poor decisions, including marijuana use to cope. These challenges were untreated at the time due to a lack of adequate support. Since separation they have worked to address mental health issues and deeply regret their actions. They respectfully ask for an upgrade to Honorable discharge to reflect their service to be allowed to fully reintegrate and contribute to society.

After reviewing the service record, the DRB found no evidence to indicate the Applicant was unaware of the Air Force policy of zero tolerance for illegal drug use. The DRB took note of the Applicant's duty performance as documented by their performance reports, awards and decorations, and other accomplishments. However,

the Board found the negative aspects of the Applicant's willful misconduct outweighed the positive aspects of their military service.

LIBERAL CONSIDERATION: Due to the Applicant's contentions or evidence of a mental health diagnosis and/or experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment and/or records documenting that one or more symptoms of mental health conditions and/or experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment existed/occurred during military service found in the Applicant's record, the Board considered the case based on the liberal consideration (LC) standards required by guidance from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and 10 USC §1553. The Board included a member who is a physician, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker with training on mental health issues connected with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI) or other trauma. Specifically, the Board reviewed the four questions the Under Secretary of Defense provided that Boards should consider 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 Board considered the following:

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

The Applicant checked the boxes for "PTSD" and "other mental health" on his application. The Applicant contended that in his last six months of service he struggled with undiagnosed PTSD and chest wall pain which led to him making poor decisions, including marijuana use to cope. The Applicant contended that these issues were not addressed during his time in service.

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

A review of the available records revealed the Applicant was seen on one occasion by mental health reporting symptoms of difficulty sleeping due to the pain he was experiencing. The Applicant's records revealed the Applicant was command referred to substance use treatment services and declined. There was no evidence that the Applicant exhibited or endorsed any clinically significant features of PTSD during his time in service. There was no evidence that the Applicant received the diagnosis of PTSD during his time in service or post-service.

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

A review of the Applicant's DD214 revealed the Applicant was discharged with an Under Honorable conditions character of service due to misconduct (drug abuse) with three years, six months, four days time in service. The intent of liberal consideration does not apply to medical conditions, thus the Applicant's contention of PTSD will only be considered under the guidance of liberal consideration.

A review of the available records revealed the Applicant made his medical and mental health conditions known to his leadership during his time in service and at the time of his disciplinary and discharge processes. The Applicant indicated in his response to discharge notification that he was using marijuana to deal with physical pain. There was evidence that the Applicant reported sleep difficulties related to his physical pains and chose to use marijuana for physical pains. The Applicant's records also revealed the Applicant had a pre-service history of marijuana use. The Applicant's records revealed the Applicant was seen for one session in the mental health clinic related to sleep hygiene strategies and was command referred to substance use treatment services, although the Applicant's records revealed the Applicant declined substance use services. A review of the Applicant's written response to his Article 15 revealed the Applicant made no claims of PTSD. The Applicant stated in his written response "With that being said, I would like to explain the reasoning behind my drug use. I have been going through a lot of medical issues, to include chronic chest pain, migraines, inability to sleep through a full night and depression. I have been under the care of medical staff on base for over two years and have not been able to alleviate any of these symptoms I have been having. I have been prescribed numerous medications, physical therapy both on and off base and seen just about every clinic the base hospital has to offer. I have seen Mental Health for the lack of sleep and depression; however, they linked my depression to the lack of sleep and in the end the only advice I was given was "listen to white noise" and "try to get to sleep later, rather than earlier". I ultimately made the decision to experiment with marijuana in an attempt to get some relief

from the daily pain and other symptoms, as they take a huge toll on not only my physical health, but my mental health as well. These symptoms along with the stress from work and other outside factors is what caused me to make the decisions I made.”

There was no evidence that a mental health condition caused or mitigated the Applicant’s choice to use drugs during his time in service. The Applicant reported he chose to use drugs due to his ongoing medical issue, which may explain the Applicant’s misconduct but does not mitigate or excuse the Applicant’s misconduct.

The Applicant submitted his VA ratings determination letter as evidence in support of his contentions. A VA rating for service connection is not synonymous with a diagnosed condition. Regarding the Applicant’s concurrence with his VA rating, the VA, operating under a different set of laws than the military, is empowered to offer compensation for any medical or mental health condition with an established nexus to military service, without regard to its impact on a member’s fitness to serve, the narrative reason for release from service, or the length of time that has transpired since the date of discharge. The VA may also conduct periodic reevaluations for the purpose of adjusting the disability rating as the level of impairment from a given condition may improve or worsen over the life of the veteran. At the time of the Applicant’s service, there is no evidence that a mental health condition that caused or mitigated the misconduct that led to the Applicant’s discharge.

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

Based on a review of the available records, there was no evidence the Applicant’s choice to use drugs during his time in service was mitigated or excused by a mental health condition. Because the Applicant’s discharge was not mitigated, the Applicant’s discharge was also not outweighed.

Additionally, 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 no evidence of inequity or impropriety.

FINDING AND CONCLUSION: After a thorough review of the available evidence, to include the Applicant’s issues, summary of service, service/medical record entries, and discharge process, the Board found the discharge was proper and equitable. The DRB voted two to one to *partially approve* the Applicant’s request. Therefore, the awarded Service Characterization shall remain “Under Honorable Conditions (General),” the Narrative Reason for separation shall change to Secretarial Authority, and the Reentry Code shall remain 2B. The DRB results were approved by the Presiding Officer on March 25, 2026.

Should the Applicant wish to appeal this decision, they must request a personal appearance before this Board before applying for relief to the Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records (AFBCMR). In accordance with DAFI 36-2603, *Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records*, all Applicants before the AFBCMR must first exhaust available administrative avenues of relief before applying to the AFBCMR otherwise their AFBCMR case will be administratively closed until such time that the Applicant avails themselves of the available avenue of relief. Therefore, should the Applicant wish to appeal this decision, they must first exercise their right to make a personal appearance before the AFDRB.

Instructions on how to appeal an AFDRB decision can be found at <https://afrbaportal.azurewebsites.us>

If desired, the Applicant can request a list of the Board members and their votes by writing to:

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

Attachments:

1. SAF/MRB Memorandum, dated 24 March 26
2. Examiner's Brief (Applicant Only)



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON, DC

Office of the Assistant Secretary

24 March 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR SAF/MRBP

SUBJECT: Paul Thames, AFDRB Docket #: FD-2025-00145

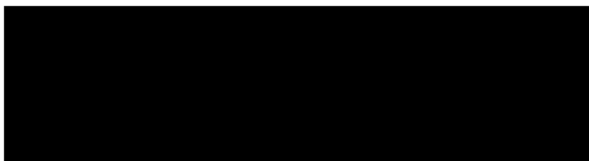
Having considered the decision of the Air Force Discharge Review Board (AFDRB) without participation of the Applicant or Applicant's counsel for consideration as the Secretarial Reviewing Authority (SRA), I have reviewed both the Board majority and minority decision in subject case, and under authority delegated by the Secretary, I join with the minority in concluding there was sufficient evidence to determine if the discharge met the pertinent standards of equity and propriety.

In particular, the minority notes the applicant met factors listed in paragraphs (6)(a)-(6)(l) and (7)(a) - (7)(r) of the "Wilkie Memo" and there was evidence of inequity or impropriety to grant relief on the basis of equity, an injustice, or clemency grounds.

Therefore, I conclude the evidence does support granting relief, and so direct the application be approved as follows:

The Character of Service: I agree with the minority approving Applicant's original request to upgrade their Discharge Characterization. Therefore, the Character of Service shall change to Honorable.

This decision shall be appended as an addendum to the decisional document.



Director, Air Force Review Boards Agency