

SUMMARY: The Applicant was discharged on September 15, 2022 in accordance with Air Force Instruction 36-3208, *Administrative Separation of Airmen*, with an Under Honorable Conditions (General) Service Characterization for Misconduct – (Drug Abuse). The Applicant requested an upgrade of their Service Characterization and a change to the Narrative Reason for separation.

The Applicant requested the Board be completed based on a Record Review. The Board was conducted on August 28, 2025. 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 stated their behavior and drug abuse was caused by schizoaffective disorder and traumatic brain injury (TBI) which were contributing factors not considered in their discharge.

The DRB determined the discharge was proper and equitable. A thorough review of the Applicant's discharge revealed they were discharged for drug use. In addition, there were no head injuries or an inability to make decisions documented in the Applicant's records to corroborate their claim of traumatic brain injury. Regarding the Applicant's concurrence with their Veteran's Affairs (VA) rating, the Department of Veteran's Affairs, operating under a different set of laws than the military, is empowered to offer compensation for any medical 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. Due to these reasons, the Board denied the Applicant's request to upgrade their service characterization and narrative reason.

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, through the REVIEW OF DISCHARGE FROM THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES (DD FORM 293), did contend a condition or experience excused or mitigated their misconduct in that "The condition of my behavior and drug abuse were caused by my schizoaffective disorder and TBI [traumatic brain injury], which were a contributing factor not considered in my discharge."

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

A review of the available records revealed that the Applicant denied a history of pre-service mental health conditions or drug abuse. The Applicant's responses recorded in the March 2018 accession REPORT OF MEDICAL HISTORY (DD FORM 2807-1) documented NO, for HAVE YOU EVER HAD OR DO YOU NOW HAVE, for all items listed under item 17 (17. a. Nervous trouble . . . i. Used illegal drugs or abused prescription drugs). The conditions (adjustment, anxiety, and depressive disorders) did exist/occur during military service (Entered: April 2019, Separated: September 2022) as the April 2020 Operational Medicine (physician assistant) encounter documented "A/P [Assessment/Plan] . . . 1. Anxiety Disorder . . . Pt reports continued anxiety symptoms which are mostly related to work. While at work, they become very nervous when working on F-35. . . . They reported some depressive symptoms when they first arrived on station as well as after their mother passed away." The November 2021 Mental Health (psychiatrist) encounter documented "DIAGNOSIS: Adjustment Disorder . . . CLINICAL IMPRESSION/SUMMARY: SM [Service Member] presents with frustrations surrounding their workplace and their perception of their inability to choose to make positive changes in their life. SM does not appear to have a clinical depressive episode at present. . . . SM does not desire any medications." The condition (cannabis abuse) did exist/occur during military service as the May 2022 ADAPT [Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment] (nurse practitioner) encounter documented "Pt [Patient] presented to ADAPT. . . as a self-referral to disclose illicit use of marijuana. . . . Pt reported primarily utilizing illicit substances as a means of managing their anxiety and depressive sx[s] [symptoms] after discovering their father was terminally ill." The July 2022 Mental Health (social worker) encounter documented "Patient and Command were informed that the patient was FAILED from ADAPT due to inability to adhere to treatment plan and program requirements with ongoing use of marijuana and not intent to address this as a substance use disorder. Review of the available records showed no history of schizoaffective disorder or TBI during their military service."

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

A review of the Applicant's records revealed they were discharged with an Under Honorable Conditions (General) character of service, due to misconduct (drug abuse [cannabis use]), with 3 years and 3 months of

service. The Applicant contended that “The condition of my behavior and drug abuse were caused by my schizoaffective disorder and TBI which were a contributing factor not considered in my discharge.” Review of the available records showed no history of schizoaffective disorder or TBI during his military service. The diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder was first documented in February 2023 by a licensed independent social worker. There were no head/brain studies to assess for brain injury within the 21 diagnostic imaging studies contained in the electronic medical record. Serial encounters related to adjustment, anxiety, and depressive disorders document the psychosocial challenges and occupational stressors of adjusting and performing in the work environment, manifesting as anxiety and depression. The May 2022 ADAPT encounter documented “Pt reported primarily utilizing illicit substances as a means of managing his anxiety and depressive symptoms after discovering his father was terminally ill.” The anxiety and depressive symptoms were appropriate and expected reactions to “discovering their father was terminally ill.” As such, the anxiety and depressive symptoms, for which they were utilizing illicit substances as a means of managing, probably do not represent an underlying mental health condition. The cannabis abuse likely represents self-medication of grief symptoms (anxiety and depression) versus the contended consequence of the subsequently diagnosed schizoaffective disorder.

There is no evidence from their in-service medical records that they used cannabis to cope with having schizoaffective disorder, or that this condition caused them to use cannabis. While Applicant’s adjustment disorder and cannabis abuse may explain some of their behaviors and misconduct, cannabis abuse in itself represents misconduct, and the conditions do not excuse or mitigate the discharge.

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

Since the Applicant’s adjustment disorder and cannabis abuse do not excuse or mitigate their discharge, their adjustment disorder and cannabis abuse also do not outweigh their discharge.

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 unanimously to **deny** the Applicant’s request. Therefore, the awarded Service Characterization shall remain “Under Honorable Conditions (General),” the Narrative Reason for separation shall remain Misconduct – (Drug Abuse), and the Reentry Code shall remain 2B. The DRB results were approved by the Presiding Officer on September 8, 2025.

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://afrbportal.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

Attachment:
Examiner's Brief (Applicant Only)