

1. Applicant's Name: [REDACTED]

- a. **Application Date:** 26 April 2021
- b. **Date Received:** 26 April 2021
- c. **Counsel:** None

2. REQUEST, ISSUES, BOARD TYPE, AND DECISION:

a. **Applicant's Requests and Issues:** The current characterization of service for the period under review is under other than honorable conditions. The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable.

The applicant seeks relief, contending, in effect, their discharge should be upgraded to general (under honorable conditions) due to service-connected Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and tinnitus resulting from their deployment during Operation Desert Storm. The applicant contends they are currently rated as permanently disabled due to these conditions by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The applicant further contends an upgrade would significantly improve their ability to obtain employment and contribute as a productive member of society.

b. **Board Type and Decision:** In a records review conducted on 1 July 2025, and by a 5-0 vote, the Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighing the applicant's AWOL offense. Therefore, the Board voted to grant relief in the form of an upgrade of the characterization of service to Honorable and changed the separation authority to AR 635-200, paragraph 14-12a, the narrative reason for separation to Misconduct (Minor Infractions), with a corresponding separation code of JKN, and the reentry code to RE-3.

Please see Section 9 of this document for more detail regarding the Board's decision.

(Board member names available upon request)

3. DISCHARGE DETAILS:

a. **Reason / Authority / Codes / Characterization:** In Lieu of Trial by Court-Martial / AR 635-200, Chapter 10 / KFS / RE-4 / Under Other Than Honorable Conditions

b. **Date of Discharge:** 11 January 2002

c. Separation Facts:

(1) **Date and Charges Preferred (DD Form 458, Charge Sheet):** On 10 April 2001, the applicant was charged with: Charge I: Violating Article 86, UCMJ: The applicant did on or about 21 December 2000 without authority, absent themselves from their organization and remain absent until on or about 10 April 2001.

(2) **Legal Consultation Date:** 13 April 2001

(3) **Basis for Separation:** Pursuant to the applicant's request for discharge under the provisions of AR 635-200, Chapter 10, in lieu of trial by court-martial.

(4) **Recommended Characterization:** NIF

(5) Separation Decision Date / Characterization: 12 December 2001 / Under Other Than Honorable Conditions / The applicant was reduced to E-1.

4. SERVICE DETAILS:

a. Date / Period of Enlistment: 22 July 1999 / 5 years

b. Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score: 28 / Bachelor's Degree / NIF

c. Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service: E-5 / 77W20 F7, Water Treatment Specialist / 11 years, 1 month, 18 days

d. Prior Service / Characterizations: RA, 20 July 1989 – 22 February 1993 / HD
RA, 23 February 1993 – 26 June 1996 / HD
RA, 27 June 1996 – 26 June 1998 / HD
Break in Service

e. Overseas Service / Combat Service: SWA / Kuwait (25 January 1991 – 5 May 1991)

f. Awards and Decorations: ALB, AAM-2, AGCM-2, NDSM, SASM-2BSS, NCOPDR, ASR, OSR-2, KLR, KLM-K

g. Performance Ratings: March 1996 – July 1996 / Among the Best
August 1996 – February 1997 / Fully Capable
March 1997 – July 1997 / Fully Capable
August 1997 – October 1997 / Fully Capable
November 1997 – April 1998 / Fully Capable

h. Disciplinary Action(s) / Evidentiary Record: Two Personnel Action forms reflect the applicant's duty status changed as follows:

From Active Duty (AD) to Absent Without Leave (AWOL), effective 21 December 2000;
From AWOL to Dropped From Rolls (DFR), effective 22 January 2001.

Report of Return of Absentee, 11 April 2001, reflects the applicant surrendered to military control 10 April 2001.

Request for Discharge in Lieu of Trial by Court-Martial, 13 April 2001, reflects the applicant under their own free will and under the direction of counsel voluntarily requested a discharge in lieu of trial by court-martial. The applicant understood if their request for discharge was accepted, they may be discharged under conditions other than honorable and was advised on the possible effects of an under other than honorable discharge. The applicant elected not to submit statements on their behalf and did not desire a physical evaluation.

Transmittal of Charges, 4 December 2001, reflects the commander recommended trial by Special BCD Court-Martial.

i. Lost Time / Mode of Return: 109 Days (AWOL, 21 December 2000 – 9 April 2001)

j. Behavioral Health Condition(s):

(1) **Applicant provided:** VA Rating Decision, 26 July 2011, reflects the applicant was awarded service connected disability of 30 percent for post-traumatic stress disorder.

(2) **AMHRR Listed:** None

The ARBA's medical advisor reviewed DoD and VA medical records, including documents listed in 4j(1) and (2) above.

5. APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE: Application for the Review of Discharge; Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty; VA Rating Decision.

6. POST SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS: None submitted with the application.

7. STATUTORY, REGULATORY AND POLICY REFERENCE(S):

a. Section 1553, Title 10, United States Code (Review of Discharge or Dismissal) provides for the creation, composition, and scope of review conducted by a Discharge Review Board(s) within established governing standards. As amended by Sections 521 and 525 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, 10 USC 1553 provides specific guidance to the Military Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records and Discharge Review Boards when considering discharge upgrade requests by Veterans claiming Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), sexual trauma, intimate partner violence (IPV), or spousal abuse, as a basis for discharge review. The amended guidance provides that Boards will include, as a voting board member, a physician trained in mental health disorders, a clinical psychologist, or a psychiatrist when the discharge upgrade claim asserts a mental health condition, including PTSD, TBI, sexual trauma, IPV, or spousal abuse, as a basis for the discharge. Further, the guidance provides that Military Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records and Discharge Review Boards will develop and provide specialized training specific to sexual trauma, IPV, spousal abuse, as well as the various responses of individuals to trauma.

b. Multiple Department of Defense Policy Guidance Memoranda published between 2014 and 2018. The documents are commonly referred to by the signatory authorities' last names (2014 Secretary of Defense Guidance [Hagel memo], 2016 Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness [Carson memo], 2017 Official Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness [Kurta memo], and 2018 Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness [Wilkie memo]).

(1) Individually and collectively, these documents provide further clarification to the Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records when considering requests by Veterans for modification of their discharge due to mental health conditions, including PTSD; TBI; sexual assault; or sexual harassment. Liberal consideration will be given to Veterans petitioning for discharge relief when the application for relief is based in whole or in part on matters relating to mental health conditions, including PTSD; TBI; sexual assault; or sexual harassment. Special consideration will be given to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) determinations that document a mental health condition, including PTSD; TBI; or sexual assault/harassment potentially contributed to the circumstances resulting in a less than honorable discharge characterization. Special consideration will also be given in cases where a civilian provider confers diagnoses of a mental health condition, including PTSD; TBI; or sexual assault/harassment if the case records contain narratives supporting symptomatology at the time of service or when any other evidence which may reasonably indicate that a mental health condition, including PTSD; TBI; or sexual assault/harassment existed at the time of discharge might have mitigated the misconduct that caused a discharge of lesser characterization.

(2) Conditions documented in the service record that can reasonably be determined to have existed at the time of discharge will be considered to have existed at the time of discharge. In cases in which a mental health condition, including PTSD; TBI; or sexual assault/harassment may be reasonably determined to have existed at the time of discharge, those conditions will be considered potential mitigating factors in the misconduct that caused the characterization of service in question. All Boards will exercise caution in weighing evidence of mitigation in cases in which serious misconduct precipitated a discharge with a less than Honorable characterization of service. Potentially mitigating evidence of the existence of undiagnosed combat related PTSD, PTSD-related conditions due to TBI or sexual assault/harassment as causative factors in the misconduct resulting in discharge will be carefully weighed against the severity of the misconduct. PTSD is not a likely cause of premeditated misconduct. Caution shall be exercised in weighing evidence of mitigation in all cases of misconduct by carefully considering the likely causal relationship of symptoms to the misconduct.

c. Army Regulation 15-180 (Army Discharge Review Board), sets forth the policies and procedures under which the Army Discharge Review Board is authorized to review the character, reason, and authority of any Servicemember discharged from active military service within 15 years of the Servicemember's date of discharge. Additionally, it prescribes actions and composition of the Army Discharge Review Board under Public Law 95-126; Section 1553, Title 10 United States Code; and Department of Defense Directive 1332.41 and Instruction 1332.28.

d. Army Regulation 635-200 (Active Duty Enlisted Administrative Separations), provides the basic authority for the separation of enlisted personnel.

(1) Chapter 3, Section II provides the authorized types of characterization of service or description of separation.

(2) Paragraph 3-7a states an Honorable discharge is a separation with honor and is appropriate when the quality of the Soldier's service generally has met the standards of acceptable conduct and performance of duty for Army personnel or is otherwise so meritorious that any other characterization would be clearly inappropriate.

(3) Paragraph 3-7b states a General discharge is a separation from the Army under honorable conditions and is issued to a Soldier whose military record is satisfactory but not sufficiently meritorious to warrant an honorable discharge.

(4) Paragraph 3-7c states Under Other Than Honorable Conditions discharge is an administrative separation from the Service under conditions other than honorable and it may be issued for misconduct, fraudulent entry, security reasons, or in lieu of trial by court martial based on certain circumstances or patterns of behavior or acts or omissions that constitute a significant departure from the conduct expected of Soldiers in the Army.

(5) Chapter 10 provides, in pertinent part, that a member who has committed an offense or offenses for which the authorized punishment includes a punitive discharge may submit a request for a discharge for the good of the Service in lieu of trial by court-martial. The request may be submitted at any time after charges have been preferred and must include the individual's admission of guilt.

(6) Paragraph 10-8a stipulates a discharge under other than honorable conditions normally is appropriate for a Soldier who is discharged in lieu of trial by court-martial. However, the separation authority may direct a general discharge if such is merited by the Soldier's overall record during the current enlistment. (See chap 3, sec II.)

(7) Paragraph 10-8b stipulates Soldiers who have completed entry-level status, characterization of service as honorable is not authorized unless the Soldier's record is otherwise so meritorious that any other characterization clearly would be improper.

(8) Paragraph 10-8c, stipulates when characterization of service under other than honorable conditions is not warranted for a Soldier in entry-level status, service will be uncharacterized.

e. Army Regulation 635-5-1 (Separation Program Designator (SPD) Codes), provides the specific authorities (regulatory or directive), reasons for separating Soldiers from active duty, and the SPD codes to be entered on the DD Form 214. It identifies the SPD code of "KFS" as the appropriate code to assign enlisted Soldiers who are discharged under the provisions of Army Regulation 635-200, Chapter 10, In Lieu of Trial by Court-Martial.

f. Army Regulation 601-210, (Regular Army and Reserve Components Enlistment Program), governs eligibility criteria, policies, and procedures for enlistment and processing of persons into the Regular Army, the U.S. Army Reserve, and Army National Guard for enlistment per DODI 1304.26. It also prescribes the appointment, reassignment, management, and mobilization of Reserve Officers' Training Corps cadets under the Simultaneous Membership Program. Chapter 4 provides the criteria and procedures for waiverable and nonwaiverable separations. Table 3-1, defines reentry eligibility (RE) codes: RE-4 Applies to: Person separated from last period of service with a nonwaiverable disqualification. This includes anyone with a DA imposed bar to reenlistment in effect at time of separation or separated for any reason (except length of service retirement) with 18 or more years active Federal service. Eligibility: Ineligible for enlistment.

8. SUMMARY OF FACT(S): The Army Discharge Review Board considers applications for upgrade as instructed by Department of Defense Instruction 1332.28.

The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable. The applicant's Army Military Human Resources Record (AMHRR), the issues, and documents submitted with the application were carefully reviewed.

The evidence in the applicant's Army Military Human Resource Record (AMHRR) confirms the applicant was charged with the commission of an offense punishable under the UCMJ with a punitive discharge. In consultation with legal counsel, the applicant voluntarily requested, in writing, a discharge under the provisions of AR 635-200, Chapter 10, in lieu of trial by court-martial. In this request, the applicant admitted guilt to the offense, or a lesser included offense, and indicated an understanding an under other than honorable conditions discharge could be received, and the discharge would have a significant effect on eligibility for veterans' benefits. The under other than honorable conditions discharge received by the applicant was normal and appropriate under the regulatory guidance.

The applicant contends their discharge should be upgraded to general (under honorable conditions) due to service-connected Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and tinnitus resulting from their deployment during Operation Desert Storm. The applicant contends they are currently rated as permanently disabled due to these conditions by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The applicant provided a VA Rating Decision letter which supported the applicant's contention. The applicant's AMHRR includes no documentation of a PTSD diagnosis. On 13 April 2001, the applicant elected not to receive a physical evaluation prior to separation.

The applicant contends an upgrade would significantly improve their ability to obtain employment and contribute as a productive member of society. The Board does not grant relief

to gain employment or enhance employment opportunities. The AMHRR does not include any indication or evidence of arbitrary or capricious actions by the command.

9. BOARD DISCUSSION AND DETERMINATION:

a. As directed by the 2017 memo signed by A.M. Kurta, the board considered the following factors:

(1) Did the applicant have a condition or experience that may excuse or mitigate the discharge? **Yes.** The Board reviewed the applicant's DOD and VA health records, applicant's statement, and/or civilian provider documentation and found that the applicant has the following potentially-mitigating diagnoses/experiences: PTSD.

(2) Did the condition exist or experience occur during military service? **Yes.** The Board found the applicant is 30 percent SC for PTSD.

(3) Does the condition or experience actually excuse or mitigate the discharge? **Yes.** The Board determined, based on the Board Medical Advisor's opine, that the applicant's behavioral health conditions mitigate the discharge. Given the nexus between PTSD and avoidant behavior, the applicant's AWOL offense is mitigated.

(4) Does the condition or experience outweigh the discharge? **Yes.** After applying liberal consideration to the evidence, including the Board Medical Advisor opine, the Board determined that the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighed the applicant's AWOL offense.

b. Response to Contention(s):

(1) The applicant contends their discharge should be upgraded to general (under honorable conditions) due to service-connected Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and tinnitus resulting from their deployment during Operation Desert Storm. The applicant contends they are currently rated as permanently disabled due to these conditions by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Board liberally considered this contention and determined that the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighed the applicant's AWOL offense.

(2) The applicant contends an upgrade would significantly improve their ability to obtain employment and contribute as a productive member of society. The Board considered this contention but does not grant relief to gain employment or enhance employment opportunities.

c. The Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighing the applicant's AWOL offense. Therefore, the Board voted to grant relief in the form of an upgrade of the characterization of service to Honorable and changed the separation authority to AR 635-200, paragraph 14-12a, the narrative reason for separation to Misconduct (Minor Infractions), with a corresponding separation code of JKN, and the reentry code to RE-3.

d. Rationale for Decision:

(1) The Board voted to change the applicant's characterization of service to Honorable because the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighed the applicant's AWOL offense. Thus, the prior characterization is no longer appropriate.

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(2) The Board voted to change the reason for discharge to Misconduct (Minor Infractions) under the same pretexts, thus the reason for discharge is no longer appropriate. The SPD code associated with the new reason for discharge is JKN.

(3) The RE code will change to RE-3.

10. BOARD ACTION DIRECTED:

- a. Issue a New DD-214: Yes
- b. Change Characterization to: Honorable
- c. Change Reason / SPD Code to: Misconduct (Minor Infractions)/JKN
- d. Change RE Code to: RE-3
- e. Change Authority to: AR 635-200

Authenticating Official:



AWOL – Absent Without Leave
AMHRR – Army Military Human
Resource Record
BCD – Bad Conduct Discharge
BH – Behavioral Health
CG – Company Grade Article 15
CID – Criminal Investigation
Division
ELS – Entry Level Status
FG – Field Grade Article 15

GD – General Discharge
HS – High School
HD – Honorable Discharge
IADT – Initial Active Duty Training
MP – Military Police
MST – Military Sexual Trauma
N/A – Not applicable
NCO – Noncommissioned Officer
NIF – Not in File
NOS – Not Otherwise Specified

OAD – Ordered to Active Duty
OBH (I) – Other Behavioral
Health (Issues)
OMPF – Official Military
Personnel File
PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress
Disorder
RE – Re-entry
SCM – Summary Court Martial
SPCM – Special Court Martial

SPD – Separation Program
Designator
TBI – Traumatic Brain Injury
UNC – Uncharacterized
Discharge
UOTHC – Under Other Than
Honorable Conditions
VA – Department of Veterans
Affairs