

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 general (under honorable conditions). The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable.

The applicant seeks relief contending, in effect, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their combat service in Iraq. The applicant was severely depressed at the time, which led to the applicant's discharge. The applicant was recently diagnosed with PTSD and depression on 13 May 2014 at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) and had been referred to the VA Outpatient clinic for mental health treatment for PTSD.

b. Board Type and Decision: In a records review conducted on 26 September 2024, and by a 3-2 vote, the Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighing the applicant's illegal substance abuse offense. Therefore, the Board voted to grant relief in the form of an upgrade of the characterization of service to Honorable and changed to the separation authority to AR 635-200, paragraph 14-12a. Accordingly, the narrative reason for separation changed to Misconduct (Minor Infractions) with a corresponding separation code of JKN. The Board determined the reentry code is proper and equitable and voted not to change it.

Please see Section 9 of this document for more details regarding the Board's decision. Board member names available upon request.

3. DISCHARGE DETAILS:

a. Reason / Authority / Codes / Characterization: Misconduct (Serious Offense) / AR 635-200, Paragraph 14-12c / JKQ / RE-3 / General (Under Honorable Conditions)

b. Date of Discharge: 14 June 2011**c. Separation Facts:**

(1) Date of Notification of Intent to Separate: 17 May 2011

(2) Basis for Separation: The applicant was informed of the following reasons: On or about 8 March 2011, the applicant violated a lawful general order, to wit: possessing synthetic cannabinoids, for which the applicant received a Field Grade Article 15.

(3) Recommended Characterization: General (Under Honorable Conditions)

(4) Legal Consultation Date: NIF / Election of Rights, undated

(5) Administrative Separation Board: NA

(6) Separation Decision Date / Characterization: 31 May 2011 / General (Under Honorable Conditions)

4. SERVICE DETAILS:

- a. Date / Period of Enlistment:** 7 October 2008 / 3 years, 23 weeks
- b. Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score:** 21 / HS Graduate / 100
- c. Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service:** E-3 / 19D10, Calvary Scout / 2 years, 8 months, 8 months
- d. Prior Service / Characterizations:** None
- e. Overseas Service / Combat Service:** SWA / Iraq (15 October 2009 – 14 October 2010)
- f. Awards and Decorations:** MUC, NDSM, GWOTSM, ICM-CS, ASR, OSR
- g. Performance Ratings:** NA
- h. Disciplinary Action(s) / Evidentiary Record:** Field Grade Article 15, 5 May 2011, for violating Official Code of Georgia Annotated 16-13-25 by wrongfully possessing synthetic cannabinoids (8 March 2011); and use synthetic cannabinoids, conduct that was to the prejudice of good order and discipline or conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces (8 March 2011). The punishment consisted of a reduction to E-1; forfeiture of \$733 pay per month for two months (suspended); and extra duty and restriction for 45 days.

Uniform Traffic Ticket, 24 April 2009, reflecting the applicant received a citation for speeding 85 miles per hour (mph) in a 60-mph speed zone in Columbia, South Carolina.

Eight Developmental Counseling Forms, making false official statements; having an inappropriate relationship; using an illegal substance; driving on a suspended license; leaving the state without a mileage pass; disobeying a direct order from a noncommissioned officer (NCO); receiving a citation for speeding; and pending separation under AR 635-200, Chapter 14-12c.

- i. Lost Time / Mode of Return:** None

j. Behavioral Health Condition(s):

(1) Applicant provided: Department of Veterans Affairs Progress Notes, 1 July 2014, reflecting the applicant screened positive for PTSD and depression, and had a history PTSD, TBI, and ADHD as a child. The applicant was assessed with cubital tunnel syndrome left; TBI with residual; PTSD; depression; and unilateral hearing loss.

(2) AMHRR Listed: Report of Mental Status Evaluation, 6 April 2011, reflects the applicant was cleared for any administrative actions deemed appropriate by the command. The applicant could understand and participate in administrative proceedings; was mentally responsible; and met medical retention requirements. The applicant had been screened for PTSD and mTBI. The applicant did not meet the criteria for either diagnosis at the time. The applicant was diagnosed with adjustment disorder with depressed mood, and alcohol abuse.

The ARBA's medical advisor reviewed DoD and VA medical records and not solely those documents listed in 4j(1) and (2) above.

5. APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE: Application for Correction of Military Record Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty; Application for the Review of Discharge; Burke County Veterans Services letter; VA Request for and Authorization to Release Medical Records or Health Information; VAMC Progress Notes; Army Review Boards Agency, Case Management Division letter; and ADRB Case Number AR20140006170.

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) Chapter 14 establishes policy and prescribes procedures for separating members for misconduct. Specific categories include minor disciplinary infractions, a pattern of misconduct, and commission of a serious offense, to include abuse of illegal drugs, convictions by civil authorities and desertion or being absent without leave. Action will be taken to separate a member for misconduct when it is clearly established that rehabilitation is impractical or unlikely to succeed.

(5) Paragraph 14-3 prescribes a discharge under other than honorable conditions is normally appropriate for a Soldier discharged under this chapter. However, the separation authority may direct a general discharge if such is merited by the Soldier's overall record.

(6) Paragraph 14-12c prescribes a Soldier is subject to action per this section for commission of a serious military or civilian offense, if the specific circumstances of the offense warrant separation and a punitive discharge is, or would be, authorized for the same or a closely related offense under the Manual for Courts-Martial.

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 "JKQ" as

the appropriate code to assign enlisted Soldiers who are discharged under the provisions of Army Regulation 635-200, Chapter 14, paragraph 12c, misconduct (serious offense).

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-3 Applies to: Person who is not considered fully qualified for reentry or continuous service at time of separation, but disqualification is waiverable. Eligibility: Ineligible unless a waiver is granted.

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 applicant contends being diagnosed with PTSD and depression from combat-related service, and the conditions affected behavior, which led to the discharge. The applicant provided medical documents reflecting the applicant screened positive for PTSD and depression and had a history of PTSD, TBI, and ADHD as a child. The applicant was assessed with cubital tunnel syndrome left; TBI with residual PTSD; depression; and unilateral hearing loss. The applicant's AMHRR shows the applicant underwent a mental status evaluation on 6 April 2011, which indicates the applicant was mentally responsible. The applicant was diagnosed with adjustment disorder with depressed mood, and alcohol abuse. The MSE was considered by the separation authority.

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's Medical Advisor, a voting member, 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. Additionally, the applicant asserts Depression, which may be sufficient evidence to establish the existence of a condition that could mitigate or excuse the discharge.

(2) Did the condition exist, or experience occur during military service? **Yes.** The Board's Medical Advisor found that the applicant was diagnosed in service with an Adjustment Disorder and is service connected by the VA for PTSD. Service connection establishes that the PTSD also existed during military service. The applicant self-asserts Depression during military service.

(3) Does the condition or experience excuse or mitigate the discharge? **Yes.** The Board determined, based on the BMA's opine, that the applicant's behavioral health conditions mitigate the discharge. Given the nexus between PTSD and self-medicating with substances, the possession of synthetic cannabinoids that led to the separation is mitigated. The applicant's

self-asserted Depression is inconsequential given the full mitigation for PTSD.

(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 illegal substance abuse offense.

b. Response to Contention(s): The applicant contends being diagnosed with PTSD and depression from combat-related service, and the conditions affected behavior, which led to the discharge. The Board liberally considered this contention and determined that it was valid due to the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighing the applicant's illegal substance abuse separating offense. Therefore, a discharge upgrade is warranted.

c. The Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder outweighing the applicant's illegal substance abuse offense. Therefore, the Board voted to grant relief in the form of an upgrade of the characterization of service to Honorable and changed to the separation authority to AR 635-200, paragraph 14-12a. Accordingly, the narrative reason for separation changed to Misconduct (Minor Infractions) with a corresponding separation code of JKN. The Board determined the reentry code is proper and equitable and voted not to change it.

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 illegal substance abuse offense. Thus, the prior characterization is no longer appropriate.

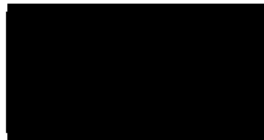
(2) The Board voted to change the reason for discharge to Misconduct (Minor Infractions) under the same pretexts. Thus, the reason for discharge is no longer appropriate. The SPD code associated with the new reason for discharge is JKN.

(3) The RE code will not change based on the service-connected behavioral health condition. The current code is consistent with the procedural and substantive requirements of the regulation.

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: No Change
- e. Change Authority to: AR 635-200

Authenticating Official:



Legend:

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