

**1. Applicant's Name:** [REDACTED]

- a. **Application Date:** 5 October 2020
- b. **Date Received:** 5 October 2020
- 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 uncharacterized. The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable.

The applicant seeks relief contending, in effect, the applicant never had any disciplinary problems while serving in the military and should have received an honorable discharge.

b. **Board Type and Decision:** In a records review conducted on 19 January 2024, and by a 5-0 vote, the Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the circumstances surrounding the discharge (MST experience and PTSD and MDD diagnoses). 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, Chapter 15, and the narrative reason for separation to Secretarial Authority, with a corresponding separation code to JFF. The reentry eligibility (RE) code remains 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:** Condition, Not a Disability / AR 635-200, Paragraph 5-13 or 5-17 / JFV / RE-3 / Uncharacterized

b. **Date of Discharge:** 3 April 2019

**c. Separation Facts:**

(1) **Date of Notification of Intent to Separate:** 19 March 2019

(2) **Basis for Separation:** The applicant was informed of the following reasons: On 6 February 2019, the applicant's commander received a recommendation for separation IAW AR 635-200, Chapter 5-17 due to the applicant's injury.

(3) **Recommended Characterization:** Uncharacterized

(4) **Legal Consultation Date:** 19 March 2019

(5) **Administrative Separation Board:** NA

(6) **Separation Decision Date / Characterization:** 27 March 2019 / Uncharacterized

**4. SERVICE DETAILS:**

a. **Date / Period of Enlistment:** 20 November 2018 / 5 years

- b. **Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score:** 19 / HS Graduate / 95
- c. **Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service:** E-3 / None / 4 months, 14 days.
- d. **Prior Service / Characterizations:** None
- e. **Overseas Service / Combat Service:** None
- f. **Awards and Decorations:** None
- g. **Performance Ratings:** NA
- h. **Disciplinary Action(s) / Evidentiary Record:** NIF
- i. **Lost Time / Mode of Return:** None
- j. **Behavioral Health Condition(s):**
  - (1) **Applicant provided:** NIF
  - (2) **AMHRR Listed:** NIF

5. **APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE:** DD Form 293.

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), dated 25 September 2019, 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 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 3-9 states a separation will be described as entry-level with service uncharacterized if processing is initiated while a Soldier is in entry-level status. Unless the DCS,

G-1, on a case-by-case basis, determines that characterization of service as honorable is clearly warranted by the presence of unusual circumstances involving personal conduct and performance of duty. This characterization is authorized when the Soldier is separated by reason of selected changes in service obligation, convenience of the Government, and Secretarial plenary authority. A Soldier is in an entry-level status (ELS) if the Soldier has not completed more than 180 days of creditable continuous active duty prior to the initiation of separation action.

(5) Paragraph 5-17 specifically provides that a Soldier may be separated for other physical or mental conditions not amounting to a disability, which interferes with assignment to or performance of duty and requires that the diagnosis be so severe that the Soldier's ability to function in the military environment is significantly impaired.

(6) Paragraph 5-1, states that a Soldier being separated under this paragraph will be awarded a characterization of service of honorable, general (under honorable conditions), or an uncharacterized description of service if in entry-level status. It further states no Soldier will be awarded a character of service under honorable conditions under this chapter unless the Soldier is notified of the specific factors in his/her record that warrants such a characterization, using the notification system. A general (under honorable conditions) characterization is normally inappropriate for Soldiers separated under the provisions of paragraph 5-4, 5-11, 5-12, 5-15, 5-16, or 5-17.

(7) Chapter 15 provides explicitly for separation under the prerogative of the Secretary of the Army. Secretarial plenary separation authority is exercised sparingly and seldom delegated. Ordinarily, it is used when no other provision of this regulation applies, and early separation is clearly in the Army's best interest. Separations under this paragraph are effective only if approved in writing by the Secretary of the Army or the Secretary's approved designee as announced in updated memoranda. Secretarial separation authority is normally exercised on a case-by-case basis.

**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, in effect, the applicant never had any disciplinary problems while serving in the military and should have received an honorable discharge. An uncharacterized discharge is neither positive nor negative and it is not meant to be a negative reflection of a Soldier's military service. It merely means that the Soldier has not been in the Army long enough for the applicant's character of service to be rated as honorable or otherwise. The applicant was in an ELS at the time of the initiation of the separation.

**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: the applicant is

service connected for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), but diagnosed with PTSD due to MST.

(2) Did the condition exist or experience occur during military service? **Yes.** The applicant had a MST in Basic Training.

(3) Does the condition or experience actually excuse or mitigate the discharge? **Yes.** The Board's Medical Advisor applied liberal consideration and opined that while the applicant's discharge may have been medically appropriate, the applicant's desire for discharge, rather than further rehab attempts, could have easily been driven by the MST and nexus between trauma and avoidance. Accordingly, an upgrade to HD/SA is recommended.

(4) Does the condition or experience outweigh the discharge? **Yes.** Based on liberally considering all the evidence before the Board, the ADRB determined that the Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), and PTSD due to MST experience outweighed the basis of separation.

b. Prior Decisions Cited: None

c. Response to Contentions: The applicant contends the applicant never had any disciplinary problems while serving in the military and should have received an honorable discharge. The Board considered this contention during proceedings, but ultimately did not address the contention due to an upgrade being granted based on the applicant's MDD and PTSD due to MST fully outweighing the applicant's basis for separation; Chapter 5-17 due to the applicant's injury.

a. The Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the circumstances surrounding the discharge (MST experience and PTSD and MDD diagnoses). 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, Chapter 15, and the narrative reason for separation to Secretarial Authority, with a corresponding separation code to JFF. The reentry eligibility (RE) code remains 3.

b. Rationale for Decision:

(1) The Board considered the applicant's statement, record of service, the frequency and nature of misconduct, and the reason for separation. The Board concurred with the conclusion of the medical advising official that the applicant's PTSD due to MST experience does mitigate the applicant's separation due to an injury. Based on a preponderance of evidence, the Board determined that the reason for the applicant's separation and the character of service the applicant received upon separation were inequitable.

(2) The Board voted to upgrade the discharge with a Character of Honorable and a narrative Reason of Secretarial Authority with a corresponding separation code to JFF.

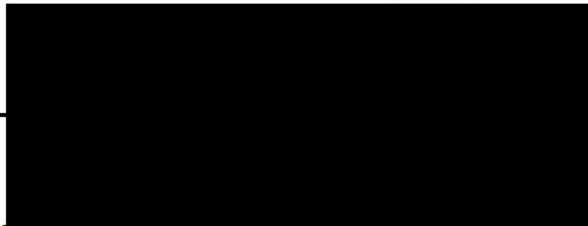
(3) The RE code will not change, as the current code is consistent with the procedural and substantive requirements of the regulation.

10. BOARD ACTION DIRECTED:

- a. Issue a New DD-214: Yes
- b. Change Characterization to: Honorable
- c. Change Reason / SPD Code to: Secretarial Authority / JFF
- d. Change RE Code to: No change
- e. Change Authority to: AR 635-200

Authenticating Official:

1/24/2024



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