

1. Applicant's Name: [REDACTED]**a. Application Date:** 2 February 2021**b. Date Received:** 1 March 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 and a narrative reason change.

b. Applicant Contention(s)/Issue(s): The applicant seeks relief contending, they deployed to Afghanistan in 2012-2013 with F Company, 2-16 Infantry Rangers, where they endured continuous combat conditions including mortar, RPG (), and IED () attacks while serving on a wrecker crew at FOBs (Forwarding Operating Base) Andar and Arian. Upon redeployment, the applicant exhibited signs of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Depression but were discouraged from seeking treatment due to stigma within the unit. Despite invisible wounds, the applicant was assigned as the unit armorer, earned Soldier of the Month and Quarter, and remained entrusted with over \$2.5 million in sensitive items. Struggling privately with mental health, the applicant self-medicated once using an illegal substance, resulting in a discharge based on a single isolated incident in 36 months of otherwise honorable service. The applicant contended their discharge was inequitable, as they were denied adequate support and mental healthcare, and believed one mistake should not define their service or undermine their sacrifices.

c. Board Type and Decision: In a records review conducted on 25 July 2025, and by a 5-0 vote, the Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's length and quality of service, to include combat service, and the circumstance surrounding the discharge (PTSD diagnosis). 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. The Board determined the reentry code is proper and equitable and voted not to change it.

Please see **Board Discussion and Determination** section for more detail regarding the Board's decision. Board member names available upon request.

3. DISCHARGE DETAILS:

a. Reason / Authority / Codes / Characterization: Misconduct (Drug Abuse) / AR 635-200, Chapter 14-12c (2) / JKK / RE-4 / General (Under Honorable Conditions)

b. Date of Discharge: 22 September 2014

c. Separation Facts:

(1) Date of Notification of Intent to Separate: NIF

(2) Basis for Separation: NIF

(3) Recommended Characterization: NIF

(4) **Legal Consultation Date:** NIF

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

(6) **Separation Decision Date / Characterization:** NIF

4. SERVICE DETAILS:

a. **Date / Period of Enlistment:** 16 August 2011 / 3 years, 30 weeks

b. **Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score:** 20 / Associate's Degree / 97

c. **Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service:** E-4 / 91B10 Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic / 3 years, 1 month, 7 days

d. **Prior Service / Characterizations:** None

e. **Overseas Service / Combat Service:** SWA / Afghanistan, 30 May 2012 – 13 February 2013 (8 months, 14 days)

f. **Awards and Decorations:** ACM-CS, ARCOM, MUC, NDSM, GWOTSM, ASR, OSR, NATO Medal

g. **Performance Ratings:** NA

h. **Disciplinary Action(s) / Evidentiary Record:** The Enlisted Record Brief provides the applicant was flagged (Suspend Favorable Personnel Actions (FLAG)) on 8 January 2014, for field-initiated involuntary separation (BA). Notwithstanding the missing separation package, a DD Form 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty), authenticated by an electronic signature, reflects the applicant was discharged accordingly on 22 September 2014, with 3 years, 2 months, and 10 days of total service. They had not completed the first full term of service.

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

j. **Behavioral Health Condition(s):** The following documents have been provided to the ARBA Medical Advisor, if applicable. See **"Board Discussion and Determination"** for Medical Advisor Details.

(1) **Applicant provided:** Veterans Affairs Medical Records (13 pages), dated 3 May 2018, provides a diagnosis of Chronic Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Depression.

(2) **AMHRR Listed:** None

5. APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE: ACTS Online Application; VA Medical Records; Two Character Letters are as follows:

a. The applicant's parent described them as a compassionate, responsible, and physically strong individual who excelled in leadership from an early age. After deploying to Afghanistan, the applicant returned visibly changed-exhibiting signs of PTSD, chronic pain, social withdrawal, and physical decline. Their parent observed emotional distress triggered by loud noises, paranoia, and loss of mobility, noting the applicant no longer resembled the joyful, active person

they once were. The parent emphasized the military experience severely impacted the applicant's mental and physical health, leaving lasting disabilities.

b. The applicant's sibling described them as outgoing, protective, and determined from a young age. After military service, the applicant returned with severe night terrors, mood swings, and hypervigilant reactions to loud noises. Their sibling recalled a specific moment when the applicant mistook a noise for an explosion and had to be calmed down. Physical issues also emerged-chronic back and knee pain caused their legs to give out while holding a child. Once strong and energetic, the applicant now struggled with the lasting mental and physical effects of war.

6. POST SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS: None provided with this application.

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

a. Office, Secretary of Defense memorandum (Supplemental Guidance to Military Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Discharge Upgrade Requests by Veterans Claiming Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), 3 September 2014, directed the Service Discharge Review Boards (DRBs) and Service Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records (BCM/NRs) to carefully consider the revised PTSD criteria, detailed medical considerations and mitigating factors when taking action on applications from former service members administratively discharged UOTHC and who have been diagnosed with PTSD by a competent mental health professional representing a civilian healthcare provider in order to determine if it would be appropriate to upgrade the characterization of the applicant's service.

b. Office, Under Secretary of Defense memorandum (Clarifying Guidance to Military Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Requests by Veterans for Modification of their Discharge Due to Mental Health Conditions, Sexual Assault, or Sexual Harassment), 25 August 2017 issued clarifying guidance for the Secretary of Defense Directive to DRBs and BCM/NRs when considering requests by Veterans for modification of their discharges due in whole or in part to mental health conditions, including PTSD; Traumatic Brain Injury; sexual assault; or sexual harassment. Boards are to give liberal consideration to Veterans petitioning for discharge relief when the application for relief is based in whole or in part to those conditions or experiences. The guidance further describes evidence sources and criteria and requires Boards to consider the conditions or experiences presented in evidence as potential mitigation for misconduct that led to the discharge.

c. Office, 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), 25 July 2018 issued guidance to Military DRBs and BCM/NRs regarding equity, injustice, or clemency determinations. Clemency generally refers to relief specifically granted from a criminal sentence. However, the guidance applies to more than clemency from a sentencing in a court-martial; it also applies to other corrections, including changes in a discharge, which may be warranted based on equity or relief from injustice.

(1) This guidance does not mandate relief but rather provides standards and principles to guide Boards in application of their equitable relief authority. In determining whether to grant relief on the basis of equity, injustice, or clemency grounds, DRBs shall consider the prospect for rehabilitation, external evidence, sworn testimony, policy changes, relative severity of misconduct, mental and behavioral health conditions, official governmental acknowledgement that a relevant error or injustice was committed, and uniformity of punishment.

(2) Changes to the narrative reason for discharge and/or an upgraded character of service granted solely on equity, injustice, or clemency grounds normally should not result in separation pay, retroactive promotions, and payment of past medical expenses or similar benefits that might have been received if the original discharge had been for the revised reason or had the upgraded service characterization.

d. 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.

e. Army Regulation 600-85 (Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP)) provided a comprehensive alcohol and drug abuse prevention and control policies, procedures, and responsibilities for Soldiers for ASAP services. The ASAP is a command program that emphasizes readiness and personal responsibility. The ultimate decision regarding separation or retention of abusers is the responsibility of the Soldier's chain of command. Abuse of alcohol or the use of illicit drugs by military personnel is inconsistent with Army values and the standards of performance, discipline, and readiness necessary to accomplish the Army's mission. All Soldiers who are identified as drug abusers, without exception, will be referred to the ASAP counseling center for screening; be considered for disciplinary action under the UCMJ, as appropriate; and be processed for administrative separation in accordance with Army Regulation 635-200.

(1) Unit commanders must intervene early and refer all Soldiers suspected or identified as alcohol and/or drug abusers to the ASAP. The unit commander should recommend enrollment based on the Soldier's potential for continued military service in terms of professional skills, behavior, and potential for advancement. ASAP participation is mandatory for all Soldiers who are command referred. Failure to attend a mandatory counseling session may constitute a violation of Article 86 (Absence Without Leave) of the UCMJ.

(2) Alcohol and/or other drug abusers, and in some cases dependent alcohol users, may be enrolled in the ASAP when such enrollment is clinically recommended. Soldiers who fail to participate adequately in, or to respond successfully to, rehabilitation will be processed for administrative separation and not be provided another opportunity for rehabilitation except under the most extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the Clinical Director in consultation with the unit commander.

(3) Alcohol and/or other drug abusers, and in some cases dependent alcohol users, may be enrolled in the ASAP when such enrollment is clinically recommended. Soldiers who fail to participate adequately in, or to respond successfully to, rehabilitation will be processed for administrative separation and not be provided another opportunity for rehabilitation except under the most extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the Clinical Director in consultation with the unit commander.

(4) All Soldiers who are identified as drug abusers, without exception, will be referred to the ASAP counseling center for screening; be considered for disciplinary action under the UCMJ, as appropriate; and be processed for administrative separation in accordance with Army Regulation 635-200.

f. 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.

(a) 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.

(b) 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.

(c) An 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.

(d) A Dishonorable discharge is the most severe type of discharge and will be given to a Soldier pursuant only to an approved sentence of general or special court-martial. The appellate review must be completed and affirmed sentence ordered duly executed. Behaviors such as fraud, desertion, treason, espionage, sexual Assault, and murder and other actions may be punished with a dishonorable discharge.

(e) An Uncharacterized separation will be described as entry-level with service uncharacterized if processing is initiated while a Soldier is in entry-level status. This characterization is 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.

(2) 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. 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. 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. Paragraph 14-12c (2) terms abuse of illegal drugs as serious misconduct. It continues; however, by recognizing relevant facts may mitigate the nature of the offense. Therefore, a single drug abuse offense may be combined with one or more minor disciplinary infractions or incidents of other misconduct and processed for separation under paragraph 14-12a or 14-12b as appropriate.

(3) 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. If Secretarial Authority is granted, it will normally correct the record to show the following:

- Separation Authority: Army Regulation 635-200, Chapter 15
- Separation Code: JFF
- Reenlistment Code: RE1
- Narrative Reason for Separation: Secretarial Plenary Authority
- Character of Service: Honorable

g. 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 "JKK" as the appropriate code to assign enlisted Soldiers who are discharged under the provisions of Army Regulation 635-200, Chapter 14-12c (2) for misconduct (drug abuse).

h. Manual for Courts-Martial (2012 Edition), United States, states military law consists of the statutes governing the military establishment and regulations issued thereunder, the constitutional powers of the President and regulations issued thereunder, and the inherent authority of military commanders. Military law includes jurisdiction exercised by courts-martial and the jurisdiction exercised by commanders with respect to nonjudicial punishment. The purpose of military law is to promote justice, to assist in maintaining good orders and discipline in the Armed Forces. Article 112a (wrongful use of a schedule I controlled substance) states in the subparagraph, the maximum punishment consists of dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement for one month.

i. Title 38, U.S. Code, Sections 1110 and 1131, permits the VA to award compensation for a medical condition which was incurred in or aggravated by active military service. The VA, however, is not required by law to determine medical unfitness for further military service. The VA, in accordance with its own policies and regulations, awards compensation solely on the basis that a medical condition exists and that said medical condition reduces or impairs the social or industrial adaptability of the individual concerned. Consequently, due to the two concepts involved, an individual's medical condition, although not considered, medically unfitting for military service at the time of processing for separation, discharge, or retirement, may be sufficient to qualify the individual for VA benefits based on an evaluation by the agency.

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

a. The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable and a narrative reason change. The applicant's AMHRR, the issues, and documents submitted with the application were carefully reviewed.

(1) The AMHRR is void of the specific facts and circumstances surrounding the misconduct leading to the applicant's separation. Notwithstanding the missing records, an electronically authenticated DD Form 214 reflects their separation under the provisions of AR 635-200, Chapter 14-12c (2) for misconduct (drug abuse) with a general (under honorable conditions) characterization of service.

(a) The applicant contends being deployed to Afghanistan where they served honorably under constant combat threats. Despite earning multiple awards and being entrusted as unit armorer, they silently battled untreated PTSD due to the stigma of seeking treatment. One isolated incident in an attempt to self-medicate led to their discharge. The applicant asserted this single mistake amid 36 months of decorated service does not reflect their true character or sacrifice, and their discharge was a failure of leadership, not conduct.

(b) Further, their family observed a drastic decline in the applicant's mental/physical health following deployment. Once strong, joyful, and dependable, the applicant returned home suffering from PTSD symptoms-night terrors, hypervigilance, social withdrawal-and chronic pain impacting mobility and daily function. Their parent and sibling emphasized the applicant's visible deterioration was a direct result of combat exposure, and they no longer resemble the vibrant person who left to serve.

(2) VA medical records provides the applicant was diagnosed with Chronic PTSD and Depression. They served 3 years and 5 weeks of a 3 year-20 week contractual obligation.

b. Chapter 14 establishes policy and prescribes procedures for separation members for misconduct. Specific categories include minor disciplinary infractions, a pattern of misconduct, commission of a serious offense and convictions by civil authorities. Action will be taken to separate a member for misconduct when it is clearly established that rehabilitation is impracticable or is unlikely to succeed. 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.

c. Published Department of Defense guidance indicates that the guidance is not intended to interfere or impede on the Board's statutory independence. The Board will determine the relative weight of the action that led to the discharge and whether it supports relief or not. In reaching its determination, the Board shall consider the applicant's petition, available records and/or submitted documents in support of the petition.

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: Trauma symptoms documented in-service, post-service PTSD

(2) Did the condition exist or experience occur during military service? **Yes.** Trauma symptoms documented in-service

(3) Does the condition or experience actually excuse or mitigate the discharge? **Yes.** The Board's Medical Advisor applied liberal consideration and opined that given the trauma occurred prior to the misconduct and nexus between trauma and substance use, the basis is mitigated.

(4) Does the condition or experience outweigh the discharge? **Yes.** After applying liberal consideration to the evidence, including the Board Medical Advisor's opine, the Board determined that the applicant's condition or experience outweighed the listed basis for separation for the aforementioned reasons.

b. Prior Decisions Cited: NA – Applies to Personal Appearances only.

c. Response to Contention(s): The applicant seeks relief contending, they deployed to Afghanistan in 2012-2013 with F Company, 2-16 Infantry Rangers, where they endured continuous combat conditions including mortar, RPG (), and IED () attacks while serving on a wrecker crew at FOBs (Forwarding Operating Base) Andar and Arian. Upon redeployment, the applicant exhibited signs of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Depression but were discouraged from seeking treatment due to stigma within the unit. Despite invisible wounds, the applicant was assigned as the unit armorer, earned Soldier of the Month and Quarter, and remained entrusted with over \$2.5 million in sensitive items. Struggling privately with mental health, the applicant self-medicated once using an illegal substance, resulting in a discharge based on a single isolated incident in 36 months of otherwise honorable service. The applicant contended their discharge was inequitable, as they were denied adequate support and mental healthcare, and believed one mistake should not define their service or undermine their sacrifices.

The Board acknowledged this contention but didn't consider it due to PTSD mitigating the applicant's Drug Abuse charges.

d. The Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's length and quality of service, to include combat service, and the circumstance surrounding the discharge (PTSD diagnosis). 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. The Board determined the reentry code is proper and equitable and voted not to change it.

e. Rationale for Decision:

(1) The Board carefully considered the applicant's request, supporting documents, evidence in the records, a medical review, and published Department of Defense guidance for liberal consideration of discharge upgrade requests. The Board considered the applicant's statement, record of service, the frequency and nature of misconduct, and the reason for separation. The Board found sufficient evidence of in-service mitigating factors (Length, Combat, Quality) and concurred with the conclusion of the medical advising official that given the trauma occurred prior to the misconduct and nexus between trauma and substance use, the basis is mitigated. Based on a preponderance of evidence, the Board determined that the character of service the applicant received upon separation was inequitable and warranted an upgrade.

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(2) 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

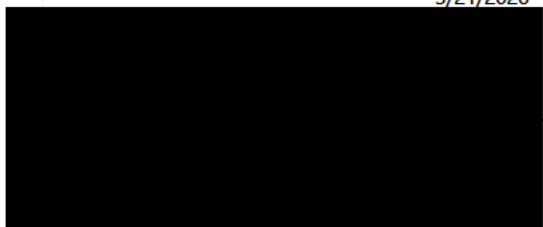
(3) The RE code will not change, as the current code is consistent with the procedural and substantive requirements of the regulation.

10. BOARD ACTION DIRECTED:

- a. Issue a New DD-214: Yes
- b. Change Characterization to: Honorable
- c. Change Reason / SPD Code to: Misconduct (Minor Infractions)/JKN
- d. Change RE Code to: No change
- e. Change Authority to: AR 635-200

Authenticating Official:

3/21/2026

**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
UOTHHC – Under Other Than
Honorable Conditions
VA – Department of Veterans
Affairs