

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

- a. **Application Date:** 30 November 2022
- b. **Date Received:** 7 December 2022
- 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 honorable conditions (general). The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable and a narrative reason change.

The applicant states in effect, their discharge was inequitable because it was based on an isolated offense after 29 months in service. They were discharged for refusing to receive the COVID-19 vaccine after their application for a religious accommodation exemption was denied. The negative consequences they received after the denial of their religious exemption request are the only negative remarks in their record as a soldier. It is not an accurate representation of their characterization of service in the army.

b. **Board Type and Decision:** In a records review conducted on 21 February 2024, and by a 5-0 vote, the Board determined the discharge was inequitable based on the 24 February 2023 SECARMY Policy Memo "Army Policy Implementing the Secretary of Defense Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Vaccination Mandate Rescission". Therefore, the Board voted to grant relief in the form of an upgrade of the characterization of service to Honorable and based on the applicant's religious exemption request changed the separation authority to AR 635-200, the narrative reason for separation to Secretarial Authority with a corresponding separation code of JFF and the reentry code to RE-1.

*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:** Misconduct (Serious Offense) / AR 635-200 / JKQ / RE-3 / Under Honorable Conditions (General).

b. **Date of Discharge:** 14 October 2022

**c. Separation Facts:**

- (1) **Date of Notification of Intent to Separate:** 7 September 2022
- (2) **Basis for Separation:** The applicant failed to obey a lawful order; an order to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.
- (3) **Recommended Characterization:** General, under honorable conditions.
- (4) **Legal Consultation Date:** 8 September 2022
- (5) **Administrative Separation Board:** N/A

**(6) Separation Decision Date / Characterization:** 28 September 2022 / General, under honorable conditions.

**4. SERVICE DETAILS:**

**a. Date / Period of Enlistment:** 4 May 2020 / 6 years

**b. Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score:** 27 / Bachelor's Degree / 134

**c. Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service:** E-4 (Specialist) / 11B10 Infantryman / 2 years, 5 months, 11 days.

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

**e. Overseas Service / Combat Service:** None.

**f. Awards and Decorations:** NDSM, GWTSM, ASR

**g. Performance Ratings:** N/A

**h. Disciplinary Action(s) / Evidentiary Record:**

**(1)** An Enlistment/ Reenlistment Document provides the applicant enlisted in the Army Reserve at the rank of specialist (E-4) with an active-duty obligation of 6 years on 16 March 2020.

**(2)** A Developmental Counseling Form dated 16 September 2021 provides the applicant was counseled for declining the COVID-19 vaccine on 3 September 2021.

**(3)** On 23 September 2021 the chaplain conducted a religious accommodation request interview with the applicant, which provides the chaplain believed the applicant was sincere in their beliefs.

**(4)** On 23 September 2021 the applicant's immediate commander recommended disapproval of the accommodation request; Due to the applicant being an infantryman with their job requiring them to be in confined spaces for extended periods of time where social distancing and regular hygiene practices could not always be accommodated. The conditions increased unvaccinated personnel risk of acquiring and transmitting the disease. The quarantine requirement and potential loss of life would degrade the ability to conduct combat operations and effect the ability to execute the mission.

**(5)** A Report of Medical Examination document dated 27 April 2022, provides the applicant received a separation medical examination.

**(6)** On 11 July 2022 the applicants request for religious accommodation exemption from the Army's COVID-19 vaccine mandate was denied by the Surgeon General and Commanding General, USAMEDCOM.

**(7)** A Report of Mental Status Evaluation document dated 26 July 2022, provides the applicant received a separation evaluation that cleared them for chapter 14 separation.

(8) On 1 September 2022, the applicant received a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand for refusing to receive the COVID-19 vaccination; disobeying the lawful order placed fellow soldiers at risk and reduced readiness of the force.

(9) On 8 September 2022 the applicant's immediate commander notified them of their intent to separate them for commission of a serious offense; they failed to obey a lawful order; an order to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The commander recommended a General (under honorable conditions) characterization of service. The applicant acknowledged the commander's notification and basis for separation, their available rights, they consulted with counsel and completed their election of rights indicating they understood the prejudices that may occur in receiving a characterization of service of less than honorable; they submitted statements on their behalf; Two peer statements detail the applicant's positive attitude, character, and work ethic. They describe the applicant as reliable, mature and a Bradley Fighting Vehicle Gunner subject matter expert.

(10) A Commander's Report dated 22 September 2022, provides the applicants immediate commander recommended an Honorable characterization of service. They provided the applicant refused to follow a law order, aside from that their service has been exemplary.

(11) On 23 September 2022 the command endorsed and concurred with the commander's honorable discharge recommendation and on 28 September 2022 the appropriate authority approved the separation after careful consideration of all matters and directed a general, under honorable conditions characterization of service.

(12) A Certificate Of Release Or Discharge From Active Duty document provides the applicant was discharged on 14 October 2022, they completed 2 years, 5 months, and 11 days of active service.

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

j. **Behavioral Health Condition(s):**

(1) **Applicant provided:** None.

(2) **AMHRR Listed:** Depressive Disorder.

**5. APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE:** A DD Form 293 (Discharge Review) application, a copy of their DD Form 214, a copy of their ERB and three additional enclosures in support of their application.

- A self-authored statement submitted during their separation proceedings dated 12 September 2022 provides the applicant held spiritual and religious beliefs that superseded their desire to serve, because of those beliefs they were unable to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. It was not a decision they made lightly, it took hours of prayer and contemplation, and they must live in accordance with the principals that they hold in the highest regard.
- A memorandum of recommendation dated 13 September 2022 from a retired Captain describes the applicant as someone that was always the first to volunteer and assisting others.

- A memorandum of recommendation dated 14 September 2022 provides a First Lieutenant recommend they should receive an honorable discharge due to their work ethic, character, and selfless dedication.

**6. POST SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** None submitted in support of their 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. 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.

c. 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.

d. 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.

e. Office, Secretary of Defense memorandum (Rescission of August 24, 2021 and November 30, 2021 Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements for Member of the Armed Forces) 10 January 2023, implemented 23 December 2022, James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2023 which rescinded the mandate for members of the Armed Forces to be vaccinated against Corona Virus 2019 (COVID-19), as issued on 24 August 2021 in the now-rescinded Secretary of Defense Guidance for Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination for Department of Defense Service Members issued on 30 November 2021.

f. Office, Secretary of the Army memorandum (Army Policy Implementing the Secretary of Defense Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Vaccination Mandate Recission), 24 February 2023 implemented policy mandating the COVID-19 vaccination, applicable to Soldiers servicing in the Regular Army (RA), Army National Guard (ARNG)/Army National Guard of the United States (ARNGUS), and the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR), cadets of the US. Military Academy (USMA), cadet candidates at the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School (USAMPS), and cadets in the Senior Reserve Officer Training Corps (SROTC). It provides that Soldiers currently serving shall not be separated solely on their refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine if they sought an exemption on religious, administrative, or medical grounds. Furthermore, the guidance provides details for updating records of current Soldiers, however, former Soldiers may petition the Army Discharge Review Board or the Army Board for Correction of Military Records to request corrections to their personnel records regarding the characterization of their discharge.

g. Office, Assistant Secretary of the Army, Manpower and Reserve Affairs (SAMR) memorandum (Correction of Military Records for Former Members of the Army Following Recission of August 24, 2021 and November 30, 2021, Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements for Former Soldiers), 6 September 2023, provided supplemental guidance to the Army Discharge Review Board (ADRB) and the Army Board for Correction of Military Records (ABCMR) when considering requests for discharge upgrade requests involving former service members who did not meet the COVID-19 vaccination mandate. If the Board determines relief is warranted, this does not imply the vaccination mandate or involuntary separation itself constituted an "injustice" or "inequity" as the vaccination mandate was a valid lawful policy at the time. Consistent with previous published Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness Guidance and Board processes regarding changes to policy and/or standards, the COVID-19 vaccination requirement rescission is a relevant factor in evaluating an application for upgrade of the characterization of service. Reinstatement is not under the purview of the Military Review Board. Former Soldier would need to submit their requests for reinstatement to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records. Additionally, the Board should:

**(1)** Generally grant a request to upgrade the characterization of service from a former Soldier when they were involuntarily separated, and the Reentry Code would prevent them from rejoining the military without a waiver should they desire to do so; and meet three conditions: (1) The original action was based solely on refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, (2) The former Soldier formally sought an accommodation on religious or medical grounds prior to contemporaneous with official initiation of the action; and (3) there are no aggravating factors in the member's record, such as misconduct.

**(2)** If the above conditions are met, normally grant enlisted requests to show the following correction:

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

**(3)** Officer records should be changed to have similar effect.

**(4)** It further states to apply existing policy that requires the former soldier to establish evidence of an error, impropriety, inequity, or injustice in support of their petition in cases with multiple reasons for separation.

**h.** Army Regulation 635-200 provides the basic authority for the separation of enlisted personnel provides the authorized types of characterization of service or description of separation.

**(1)** 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.

**(2)** 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.

**(3)** 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.

**(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. 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. Paragraph 14-12c, states 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.

(5) 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.

i. 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).

j. 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 waivable and nonwaivable separations. Table 3-1, defines reentry eligibility (RE) codes:

- RE-1 Applies to: Person completing his or her term of active service who is considered qualified to reenter the U.S. Army. Eligibility: Qualified for enlistment if all other criteria are met.
- RE-3 Applies to: Person who is not considered fully qualified for reentry or continuous service at time of separation, but disqualification is waivable. Eligibility: Ineligible unless a waiver is granted.
- RE-4 Applies to: Person separated from last period of service with a nonwaivable 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

a. The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable. The applicant's DD Form 214 provides the applicant received a general (under honorable conditions) characterization of service for refusing to comply with the covid-19 vaccination mandate.

b. Based on the available evidence the applicant enlisted in the army at the age of 27, they declined the COVID-19 vaccine 3 September 2021 and submitted a request for religious accommodation on 16 September 2021. Their religious accommodation request was denied 11 July 2022. The applicant received a GOMOR for disobeying a lawful order; refusing the COVID-19 vaccination. They were processed for administrative separation under the provisions of AR 635-200, CH 14-12c misconduct (serious offense).

- The applicant's AMHRR is void of any indiscipline or misconduct prior to and after they declined the COVID-19 vaccination.
- The applicant's AMHRR provides the applicant did request a religious exemption to the COVID-19 vaccination mandate; their request was denied.

c. The applicant was notified of the intent to separate them, they acknowledged understanding the basis for separation under the provisions AR 635-200 Ch14-12c. The applicant consulted military counsel; they submitted a personal statement and letters of support from their peers. They received the required medical and mental health separation examinations and on 14 October 2022 the applicant was discharged under the provisions of AR 635-200, CH 14; they received a general, under honorable conditions characterization of service after completing 2 years, 5 months, and 11 days of their contractual obligation.

d. The rescission of the COVID-19 vaccination mandate does not negate the propriety of the discharges or separations that occurred prior to this policy change or imply the vaccination mandate or involuntary separation constituted an inequity; it was a valid lawful policy at the time. However, the COVID-19 vaccination requirement rescission is a relevant factor in evaluating an application for discharge upgrade relief based on religious or medical grounds prior to or simultaneously with the official initiation of the separation action; and there are no aggravating factors of indiscipline and/or misconduct

e. Chapter 14 establishes policy and prescribes procedures for members being separated 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.

f. 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? **No**. The Board's Medical Advisor reviewed DoD and VA medical records and found no mitigating BH diagnoses on the applicant. The applicant provided no documents or testimony of a condition or experience, that, when applying liberal consideration, could have excused, or mitigated a discharge.

(2) Did the condition exist, or experience occur during military service? **N/A**

(3) Does the condition or experience actually excuse or mitigate the discharge? **N/A**

(4) Does the condition or experience outweigh the discharge? **N/A**



b. Response to Contention(s): The applicant contends their discharge was inequitable. The Board considered this contention and found it valid and voted to grant relief.

c. The Board determined the discharge was inequitable based on the 24 February 2023 SECARMY Policy Memo "Army Policy Implementing the Secretary of Defense Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Vaccination Mandate Rescission". Therefore, the Board voted to grant relief in the form of an upgrade of the characterization of service to Honorable and based on the applicant's religious exemption request changed the separation authority to AR 635-200, the narrative reason for separation to Secretarial Authority with a corresponding separation code of JFF and the reentry code to RE-1.

d. Rationale for Decision:

(1) The Board voted to change the applicant's characterization of service to Honorable. The Board members discussed the applicant's file, the length and quality of service, no prior misconduct, and the applicant's denied religious exemption request. The Board noted that COVID-19 vaccination refusal was the sole reason for separation and the change in policy since the applicant's involuntary separation. Based on a preponderance of evidence, the Board determined the current discharge inequitable and warranted an upgrade. The Board found that, but for refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine, the applicant would have completed their term of enlistment.

(2) The Board voted to change the reason for discharge to Secretarial Authority under the same pretexts and ASA(M&RA) guidance, thus the reason for discharge is no longer appropriate. The SPD code associated with the new reason for discharge is JFF.

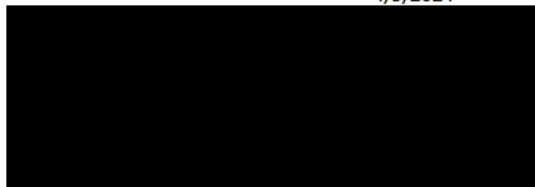
(3) The Board voted to change the RE code to RE-1.

**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: RE-1
- e. Change Authority to: AR 635-200

**Authenticating Official:**

4/5/2024



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

**ARMY DISCHARGE REVIEW BOARD CASE REPORT AND DIRECTIVE**

**AR20230002705**

UOTHC – Under Other Than  
Honorable Conditions

VA – Department of Veterans  
Affairs