

1. Applicant's Name: [REDACTED]**a. Application Date:** 29 August 2024**b. Date Received:** 29 August 2024**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, they were discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine. Three months after they were separated with a general discharge, the Department of Defense suspended all administrative actions involving the vaccine and two months later all vaccine requirements were rescinded. In light of the uncertain nature of those turbulent times, as well as their continued honorable service throughout their first contract and ceaselessly through their second contract; even when facing administrative separation. They believe an Honorable characterization of service is warranted.

b. Board Type and Decision: In a records review conducted on 7 February 2025, and by a 5-0 vote, the board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the applicant's PTSD mitigating the misconduct (COVID-19 vaccine refusal). The board also took into consideration the current COVID Policy changes, the applicant's in-service factors (length, quality, and combat service), and the lack of any other misconduct in the applicant's file. 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 will not change due to the applicant's BH diagnosis.

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: 26 September 2022**c. Separation Facts:** Provided by the applicant.**(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: Recommended separation from the Army with a General, under honorable conditions discharge.

(6) Separation Decision Date / Characterization: NIF

4. SERVICE DETAILS:

a. Date / Period of Enlistment: 27 January 2020 / 6 years

b. Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score: 26 / HS Graduate / 129

c. Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service: E-5 / 11B2P 2B Infantryman / 7 years, 3 months, 26 days.

d. Prior Service / Characterizations: 20150601 – 20200126 / Continuous Honorable

e. Overseas Service / Combat Service: None / Afghanistan; 20191105 – 20200315

f. Awards and Decorations: ARCOM, AAM, AAM-CD, AGCM-2, NDSM, GWTSM, ACM-CS, NCOPDR-2, ASR, NATOMDL

g. Performance Ratings: 20200501 – 20210430; Highly Qualified
20190501 – 20200430; Highly Qualified

h. Disciplinary Action(s) / Evidentiary Record:

(1) An Enlistment/ Reenlistment Document indicates that the applicant reenlisted in the Army for 6 years at the pay grade of E-5 on 27 January 2020. It was the applicant's first reenlistment.

(2) A Developmental Counseling Form dated 23 September 2021 indicates that the applicant was counseled by their commander for declining the COVID-19 vaccine.

(3) On 7 October 2021, the applicant received a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand for failing to comply with a lawful order by failing to become fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The applicant acknowledged receipt of the reprimand and submitted written matters on their behalf.

(4) On 26 May 2022 the applicant's Administrative Separation Board Conditional Waiver was disapproved.

(5) On an unknown date the Administrative Separation Board convened, the board determined that under the provisions of AR 635-200, CH 14-12c, Commission of a Serious Offense, the applicant failed to obey a lawful order to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. The Board found that separation was warranted, and they recommended a general, under honorable conditions characterization of service.

i. Lost Time / Mode of Return: None

j. Behavioral Health Condition(s): None

(1) Applicant provided:

(2) AMHRR Listed:

5. APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE: An Online DD Form 293 (Record Review) application, DD Form 214, a Guidance for Implementing Rescission of August 24, 2021 and November 30, 2021 Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements for Members of the Armed Forces memorandum, a Department of the Airforce Guidance of Removal of Adverse Actions and handling of Religious Accommodation Requests memorandum, NCOER, a statement the applicant submitted to the separation board, a Conditional Waiver Chain of Command Recommendations document, A Referral to Administrative Separation Board memorandum, and a Findings and Recommendations Worksheet.

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 U.S. 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: JFF
- 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 waiverable and nonwaiverable 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 waiverable. Eligibility: Ineligible unless a waiver is granted.
- RE-4 Applies to: Person separated from last period of service with a nonwaiverable disqualification. This includes anyone with a DA imposed bar to reenlistment in effect at time of separation or separated for any reason (except length of service retirement) with 18 or more years active Federal service. Eligibility: Ineligible for enlistment.

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

a. The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable, and a narrative reason change. The applicant's DD Form 214 indicates they 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 21, they advanced to the rank of sergeant and reenlisted in the Army on 27 January 2020. The applicant

declined the COVID-19 vaccine on 23 September 2021 and received a GOMOR for failing to comply with the lawful order to become fully vaccinated.

- 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 does not provide a medical or religious exemption to the COVID-19 vaccination mandate.

c. A review of the AMHRR provides administrative irregularity occurred in the proper retention of required records; specifically, the AMHRR is void of the applicant's entire separation packet. Notwithstanding the lack of evidence, the applicant submitted evidence that indicated the Administrative Separation Board recommended separation under AR 635-200, CH14-12c, for failure to obey a lawful order to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. The board recommended a General, under honorable conditions discharge. Additionally, the applicant's AMHRR does contain a properly constituted DD Form 214, which was authenticated by the applicant's signature. The DD Form 214 indicates that the applicant was discharged under the provisions of AR 635-200, by reason of misconduct (Serious Offense) with a general, under honorable conditions characterization of service on 26 September 2022.

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? **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 (30%SC).

(2) Did the condition exist, or experience occur during military service? **Yes.** The Board's Medical Advisor found VA service connection establishes nexus with active military 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 the applicant has a mitigating BH condition. As there is an association between PTSD and avoidant behaviors, there is a nexus between his diagnosis of PTSD and his refusal of the COVID vaccine in order to avoid remaining in the Army.

(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 condition or experience outweighed the basis of separation- COVID Refusal.

b. Response to Contention(s): The applicant requests an upgrade to honorable and a narrative reason change. The board considered this contention during proceedings and voted to grant an upgrade based on the applicant's PTSD, current COVID Policy changes, the applicant's in-service mitigating factors of (length, quality, combat service) and the lack of any other misconduct.

c. The board determined the discharge was inequitable based on the on the applicant's PTSD mitigating the misconduct (COVID refusal). The board also took into consideration the current COVID Policy changes, the applicant's in-service factors (length, quality, and combat service), and the lack of any other misconduct. 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 and no change to the reentry code due to the applicant's BH diagnosis.

d. Rationale for Decision:

(1) The board voted to change the applicant's characterization of service to honorable based on the applicant's medical diagnosis of PTSD mitigating the misconduct (COVID-19 vaccine refusal). Additionally, the board considered the current COVID Policy changes, the applicant's in-service mitigating factors of (length, quality, combat service) and the lack of any other misconduct in the applicant's file. The board found that, but for refusal to take the COVID-19 Vaccine, the applicant would have completed the term of enlistment. Thus, the prior characterization is no longer appropriate.

(2) The board voted to change the reason for discharge to Secretarial Authority under the same rationale, thus the reason for discharge is no longer appropriate. The SPD code associated with the new reason for discharge is JFF.

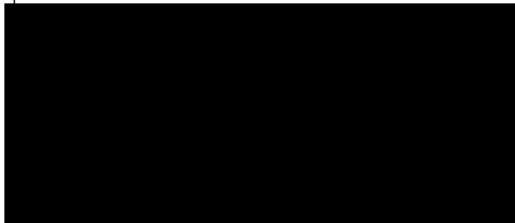
(3) The RE code will not change due to the applicant's medical diagnosis which requires a waiver for reenlistment. The current code is consistent with the procedural and substantive requirements of the regulation.

10. BOARD ACTION DIRECTED:

- a. Issue a New DD-214 / Separation Order: 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, Chapter 15

Authenticating Official:

2/24/2025



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