

1. Applicant's Name: [REDACTED]**a. Application Date:** 16 July 2025**b. Date Received:** 21 July 2025**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.

b. Applicant's Contention(s)/Issue(s): The applicant seeks relief contending, they refused the COVID-19 vaccine after both parents experienced severe medical reactions, leaving them fearful of unknown long-term effects. The applicant contends prior honorable service, including deployment to Afghanistan, should outweigh this decision and not define their future.

c. Board Type and Decision: In a records review conducted on 20 February 2026, and by a 3-0 vote, the Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the May 2025 Undersecretary of Defense Memo, "Supplemental Guidance to the Military Department Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military / Navy Records Considering Requests from Service Members Adversely Impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements" and the 22 May 2025, Assistant Secretary of the Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs Memo, "Supplemental Guidance to the Army Discharge Review Board and Army Board for Correction of Military Records when Considering Requests for Service Member Adversely Impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements. The Board found the current discharge inequitable and warranted an upgrade. 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, and the narrative reason for separation to Secretarial Authority, with a corresponding separation code of JFF, and the reentry code to RE-1. Please see **Board Discussion and Determination** section for more detail regarding the Board's decision. Board member names are available upon request.

3. DISCHARGE DETAILS:

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

b. Date of Discharge: 15 June 2022

c. Separation Facts: The Army Military Human Resource Record (AMHRR) provides the following details:

(1) Date of Notification of Intent to Separate: 8 March 2022

(2) Basis for Separation: The applicant refused a lawful order to get the COVID-19 Vaccine.

(3) CDR Recommended Characterization: Honorable

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(4) Legal Consultation Date: 16 March 2022 / The applicant elected counsel and declined to provide a statement on their behalf.

(5) Administrative Separation Board: NA

(6) Separation Decision Date / Characterization: 14 May 2022 / General (Under Honorable Conditions)

4. SERVICE DETAILS:

a. Date / Period of Enlistment Under Review: 13 January 2020 / 6 years

b. Age at Enlistment / Education / GT Score: 21 / High School Diploma / 112

c. Highest Grade Achieved / MOS / Total Service: E-4 / 11B1P Infantryman / 2 years, 6 months, 3 days

d. Prior Service / Characterizations: None

e. Overseas Service / Combat Service: SWA / Afghanistan (13 August – 13 September 2021)

f. Awards and Decorations: AAM, NDSM, GWOTSM, HSM, ASR

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 February 2022, for adverse action (AA) and field-initiated involuntary separation (BA), pending COVID-19 vaccination action.

(1) A General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand (GOMOR), 5 October 2021, reflects the applicant was reprimanded for failing to comply with a lawful order. They were ordered to become fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine. The commanding general states, in response to the Secretary of Defense's direction, on 24 August 2021, the Secretary of the Army directed Army Soldiers receive a COVID-19 vaccination. In response to this direction, the applicant was counseled on their requirement to receive the vaccine, given an opportunity to view an educational video and speak to a medical professional and they still refused. Subsequently, their unit commander lawfully ordered them to receive a COVID-19 vaccination and the applicant unjustifiably disobeyed the order. The applicant did not request a medical or religious exemption. The applicant declined to provide a personal statement and the approval authority directed the reprimand to be permanently filed.

(2) A commander's report, dated 24 March 2022, cited mitigating circumstances supporting an upgrade to honorable, noting the applicant refused the vaccine after both parents suffered serious medical reactions, including one parent experienced a brain aneurysm which resulted in permanent impairment. Following the incident, the applicant received a Red Cross message and was placed on emergency leave due to their parent's critical condition.

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: None

(2) AMHRR provided: None

5. APPLICANT-PROVIDED EVIDENCE: Application for the Review of Discharge; Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty

6. POST SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS: None provided with 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. Office, Secretary of Defense memorandum (Rescission of 24 August 2021 and 30 November 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. For Service members administratively discharged on the sole bases of failure to obey a lawful order to receive vaccine for COVID-19, the Department precluded by law from awarding any characterization less than a general (under honorable conditions) discharge. Former service members may petition the Military Departments DRBs and BCM/NRs to individually request correction to their personnel records, including records regarding the characterization of their discharge.

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 to rescind the COVID-19 vaccination mandate, 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 Rescission of 24 August 2021 and 30 November 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) 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 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:

(1) 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

i. 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. It states:

(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.

(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. 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.

(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

j. 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 14-12C, Misconduct (Serious Offense).

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

a. The applicant request an upgrade to honorable in accordance with the rescinded COVID-19 vaccination mandate.

(1) An authenticated DD Form 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty) under the provisions of AR 635-200, Chapter 14-12C for misconduct (serious offense) with a general (under honorable conditions) characterization of service. The applicant was counseled, flagged, and received a GOMOR for refusing to comply with the COVID-19 mandate. For separation, the applicant waived counsel and declined to provide a personal statement. Their AMHRR is void of any other disciplinary actions during the period under review.

(a) The applicant's AMHRR is void of any indiscipline or misconduct prior to and/or after declining to fully vaccinate with the COVID-19 vaccination. They completed 2 years, 5 months, and 15 days of a 6-year enlistment contractual obligation.

(b) The applicant's AMHRR is void of evidence which reflects the applicant requested a religious or medical exemption request to the COVID-19 vaccination mandate.

(2) The applicant contends they refused the COVID-19 vaccine after both parents experienced severe medical reactions, leaving them fearful of unknown long-term effects. The applicant contends prior honorable service, including deployment to Afghanistan, should outweigh this decision and not define their future.

b. 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.

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. Prior Decisions Cited: None

c. Response to Contention(s): The applicant contends they refused the COVID-19 vaccine after both parents experienced severe medical reactions, leaving them fearful of unknown long-term effects. The applicant contends prior honorable service, including deployment to Afghanistan, should outweigh this decision and not define their future. The Board determined that the applicant's concerns and record of honorable service warranted consideration under the updated DoD and Army policy and concluded that these factors made the prior discharge inequitable, resulting in the approval of an upgrade.

d. The Board determined the discharge is inequitable based on the 7 May 2025 Undersecretary of Defense Memo, "Supplemental Guidance to the Military Department Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records Considering Requests from Service Members Adversely Impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements" and the 22 May 2025, Assistant Secretary of the Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs Memo, "Supplemental Guidance to the Army Discharge Review Board and Army Board for Correction of Military Records when Considering Requests for Service Member Adversely Impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements." The Board discussed the applicant's file, the length and quality of service, no prior misconduct, and COVID-19 vaccination refusal as the sole reason for separation. Based on a preponderance of evidence, the Board found the current discharge inequitable and warranted an upgrade. 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, and the narrative reason for separation to Secretarial Authority, with a corresponding separation code of JFF, and the reentry code to RE-1.

e. Rationale for Decision:

(1) Published Department of Defense guidance indicates the guidance is not intended to interfere or impede on the Board's statutory independence. The Board determines the relative weight of the action that was the basis for the discharge and whether it supports relief or not. In reaching its determination, the Board considers the applicant's application, available records and any supporting documents included with the application.

(2) The Board voted to upgrade the characterization of service to Honorable because the sole basis for separation, refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, is no longer consistent with current Department of Defense policy. The Board determined the original discharge, though procedurally proper at the time, is now inequitable under updated guidance.

(3) The Board voted to change the applicant's narrative reason for discharge to Secretarial Authority, with a corresponding separation code to JFF, as the reason the applicant was discharged was both improper and inequitable

(4) The RE code will change to RE-1.

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

Authenticating Official:

3/3/2026

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
UOTHC – Under Other Than
Honorable Conditions
VA – Department of Veterans
Affairs