

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF MILITARY RECORDS**

Application for the Correction of
the Coast Guard Record of:

BCMR Docket No. 2024-191


ET3

FINAL DECISION

This proceeding was conducted according to the provisions of 10 U.S.C. § 1552 and 14 U.S.C. § 2507. The Chair docketed the case after receiving the applicant's completed application on August 21, 2024, and this decision of the Board was prepared pursuant to 33 C.F.R. § 52.61(c).

This final decision, dated October 30, 2025, is approved and signed by the three duly appointed members who were designated to serve as the Board in this case.

APPLICANT'S REQUEST AND ALLEGATIONS

The applicant, an Electrician's Mate third class (ET3) currently on active duty, asked the Board to correct his record by paying him the Critical Skills Training Bonus (CSTB)¹ that he was promised for signing a 21-month extension contract and CSTB agreement. He stated that while he was in ET "A" School² he signed an extension contract and other paperwork to receive a \$65,000 CSTB which was ratified by the Petaluma admin office, but stated that the Coast Guard Pay and Personnel Center (PPC) refused to pay the bonus. Instead, he stated that PPC told him that he was eligible only to receive a \$25,000 bonus. The applicant stated that several of his classmates from ET "A" School received the full \$65,000 bonus.

In support of his request, the applicant submitted a copy of numerous documents, all of which are summarized below.

SUMMARY OF THE RECORD

The applicant enlisted in the Coast Guard on December 14, 2021, finished recruit training, and at the time of his graduation from recruit training the CSTB amount for the ET rate was \$25,000. He started ET "A" School on May 8, 2023 without having completed a CSTB agreement. On August 3, 2023, the Coast Guard increased the bonus amount to \$65,000 upon issuing ALCOAST 281/23.

On August 30, 2023 while still a student at ET "A" School, the applicant signed a CSTB

¹ A CSTB is an incentive to attract qualified personnel to critical skills or ratings. These bonuses are linked to a member's affiliation with a critical rating by graduating from Class "A" school or achieving a rating designator for the applicable rating. Article 3.G.1. of COMDTINST 7220.2A.

² Coast Guard "A" School is where members receive specialized instruction in their chosen rating. ETs receive a 20-week rating course in Petaluma, California, with instruction in electronic systems, navigation systems, and network integrated control systems. <https://www.gocoastguard.com/careers/enlisted/et> (last visited on October 27, 2025).

agreement (CG 7220D) in which he agreed to remain on active duty for four years upon completion of the school to receive a lump sum bonus payment of \$65,000. He also completed a Career Intentions Worksheet on which he indicated that he intended to extend his enlistment by 21 months to receive a CSTB. He also signed a Page 7 dated August 30, 2023 documenting that he read and fully understood the contents of Article 1.B.13 of the Military Bonus Programs manual.

On September 6, 2023 while still at “A” School, the applicant completed his extension paperwork in which he agreed to extend his enlistment for 21 months to receive a \$65,000 CSTB.

The applicant also submitted an undated copy of a CSTB eligibility checklist which shows that he needed to obligate service to have four years of service remaining upon graduation from ET “A” School to receive the \$65,000 bonus.

The applicant graduated from ET “A” School on September 7, 2023 and received his rating designator but did not receive the \$65,000 CSTB because it was denied by PPC.

On March 9, 2024 the applicant’s post “A” School Commanding Officer (CO) submitted a waiver request to the Commandant on the applicant’s behalf. In the request, the CO argued that that a waiver should be given because the applicant needed to extend his enlistment to meet the 4-year obligated service that was completed in September 2023 when the \$65,000 CSTB was in effect. The CO argued that retroactively giving the \$25,000 CSTB when the applicant entered ET “A” School “discounts the time stamp for when he met all requirements and the CSTB should be considered solely on the time stamp for when the paperwork was completed.”

On April 9, 2024 PPC denied the applicant’s request for the \$65,000 bonus but approved a \$25,000 CSTB, arguing that that \$25,000 was the “amount in force when the paperwork should have been completed, according to policy, prior to his departure for “A” School.

VIEWS OF THE COAST GUARD

On September 11, 2025 a judge advocate (JA) of the Coast Guard submitted an advisory opinion and adopted the findings and analysis in a memorandum submitted by the Commander, Personnel Service Center (PSC). The JA recommended that the applicant’s request to receive a \$65,000 CSTB be granted.

The JA argued that the applicant’s request for relief should be granted in the interest of justice because he [the applicant] reasonably interpreted an unclear policy to determine that he was eligible for the \$65,000 CSTB announced in ALCOAST 281/23, and timely applied. The JA added that the denial of his Bonus Agreement by PPC and CG-1M was not in accordance with CG policy, warranting correction of the applicant’s record to reflect his proper acceptance of the bonus as requested in exchange for the obligation of 4 years obligated service beginning on the date of his graduation from “A” School.

The JA noted that the Military Pay and Incentive Programs manual was unclear on whether an increase in amount to an existing CSTB constitutes the “offering of a bonus.” Chapter 2.G.2 of the manual requires members to complete the CSTB Agreement form CG-7220D “prior to departing for A-school.” However, the JA noted, Chapter 2.G.2 of the manual also states that members currently in “A” School “during an offering for an applicable CSTB are permitted to apply”, and that to qualify for the CSTB Program, “members must complete and sign a CSTB agreement prior to graduation or rating designation...”

The JA further noted that CG-1M has historically interpreted this facially conflicting policy to preclude current “A” School attendees from being eligible to apply for increases in amount of existing CSTBs, however this interpretation is neither stated nor supported by the circumstances.

The JA stated that increases in CSTB amounts are literally offered via ALCOAST, and the two ALCOASTs at issue here are nearly identical in form and substance. Thus, the JA argued, the same text is used to offer the later amount as is used to offer the increased amount, weakening any distinction between original offerings and subsequent increases.

The JA argued that even if such a distinction did exist, members in “A” school “during an offering” would remain eligible for the offering, whatever the amount, while in “A” school pursuant to the explicit text of Chapter 2.G.2-3 of the pay manual. With the sole exception of the first sentence of Chapter 2.G.2 of the pay manual, the clear preponderance of CG policy indicates that a member is entitled to the bonus amount in force at the time their Bonus Agreement and contract extension are signed. In this case, that would be the higher amount authorized.

The JA stated that although CG-1M has now explicitly denied eligibility for members at “A” School to apply for an increased amount announced during their “A” School, this was not made explicit when the applicant applied for the increased amount. The JA argued that it was reasonable to interpret CG policy in force at the time to have authorized the applicant to be granted a CSTB at the higher amount, in the absence of clarification from CG-1M, the Coast Guard’s denial of the Applicant’s CSTB Agreement was an injustice worthy of correction by the Board.

Furthermore, the JA argued, Coast Guard policy was unclear about the effective date of the bonus and whether bonus agreements executed on or after the effective date of the amount increase would use the amount authorized by the new ALCOAST pursuant to Chapter 1.C.2. of COMDTINST 7220.2A. Chapter 1.C.2. of The Military Bonus and Incentive Programs manual states that Bonus Agreements signed before the effective date of any increase will receive the bonus amount previously authorized by the expiring ALCOAST, but any agreement signed after the effective date would use the new amount. However, CG-1M’s then-unstated-but-now-explicit interpretation was that CSTB applicants would be granted the amount in effect upon the date their “A” School convened.

The JA argued that the documents provided by the applicant in support of his application support the proposition that the applicant’s interpretation is reasonable. These documents show several senior officers, warrant officers, and senior enlisted personnel with subject matter expertise in military pay procedures support and/or processed the applicant’s original request for the higher CSTB amount, reflecting the general understanding that he was indeed eligible for the higher amount despite the fact that he was at “A” School when the increase was promulgated.

Finally, the JA argued that the applicant reasonably thought he was eligible to apply for the increased \$65,000 ET CSTB because he was in “A” School when the offer was made on August 3, 2023 and he executed his Bonus Agreement on September 6, 2023 – after the effective date of the increase and before graduating on September 22, 2023 - in accordance with the plain text of COMDTINST 7220.2A. The JA stated that his contract extension meets the statutory requirements for a bonus of that amount pursuant to 37 U.S.C. §331(c)((1)(B).

In conclusion, the JA argued that having met all the requirements of the Military Bonus and Incentives Program, the applicant should be entitled to the increased bonus amount in force at the time his agreement was signed provided he agree to serve as required by statute.

APPLICANT’S RESPONSE TO THE VIEWS OF THE COAST GUARD

On September 30, 2025 the Chair sent the applicant a copy of the Coast Guard's views and invited him to respond within 30 days. He replied on October 1, 2025, and agreed with the Coast Guard's recommendation.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

Section 4 of ALCOAST 403/22, issued on October 21, 2022, states that a \$25,000 CSTB is authorized for current active duty enlisted personnel who agree to remain on active duty for at least four years from the date of ET "A" School graduation.

ALCOAST 281/23 was issued on August 3, 2023 and announced that the CSTB for the ET rating was increased to \$65,000 in exchange for four years obligated service from the date of "A" School graduation.

Article 3.G.2 of COMDINST 7220.2A, the August 2022 version of the Military Bonus and Incentive Programs manual, states that upon having orders issued to "A" School, but prior to departing their permanent unit, members must complete and sign a CSTB Agreement, Form CG-7220D. Members who are currently in Class "A" school or an apprenticeship program during an offering for an applicable CSTB are eligible to apply for the CSTB bonus. The form must be placed in the member's personnel file and a copy given to the member. This document is proof of enrollment in the CSTB Program and will be used by the Training Center Servicing Personnel Office (SPO) to initiate bonus payment procedures upon graduation.

Article 3.G.3 of the manual states that to qualify for the CSTB Program, members must complete and sign a CSTB agreement form prior to graduation or rating designation; achieve a rating designator; and agree to obligate service by extension of enlistment to meet the four (4) year minimum active-duty service commitment (ADSC) upon receiving a rating designator.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Board makes the following findings and conclusions based on the applicant's military record and submissions, the Coast Guard's submission and applicable law:

1. The Board has jurisdiction concerning this matter pursuant to 10 U.S.C. § 1552. The application was timely.

2. The applicant argued that he was eligible for and was promised a \$65,000 CSTB for signing a 21-month extension contract on September 6, 2023. When considering allegations of error and injustice, the Board begins its analysis by presuming that the disputed information in the applicant's military record is correct as it appears in his record, and the applicant bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that the disputed information is erroneous or unjust.⁵ Absent evidence to the contrary, the Board presumes that Coast Guard officials and other Government employees have carried out their duties "correctly, lawfully, and in good faith."⁶

3. The applicant's record contains a CSTB agreement that he signed on August 30, 2023 and a 21-month extension contract dated that September 6, 2023 that he signed after being told that he could receive a \$65,000 CSTB if he extended his enlistment so he would have at least four years of obligated service upon graduation from ET "A" School. This advice was correct pursuant to ALCOAST 281/23 which was issued on August 3, 2023 and raised the CSTB from \$25,000 to \$65,000 in exchange for four years obligated service from the date of "A" School graduation.

4. The Coast Guard recommended that the Board grant relief, arguing that the applicant reasonably thought he was eligible to apply for the increased \$65,000 CSTB and because he met all the requirements of the Military Bonus and Incentives Program. The JA argued that the applicant should be entitled to the increased bonus amount in force at the time his agreement was signed provided he agree to serve as required by statute. The Coast Guard noted that he was in "A" School when the increased bonus offer was made, and he executed his Bonus Agreement after the effective date of the increase and before graduating on September 22, 2023 - in accordance with the plain text of COMDTINST 7220.2A. Finally, the JA stated that the denial of the Bonus Agreement by PPC and CG-1M was not in accordance with CG policy, warranting correction of the member's record to reflect the \$65,000 CSTB.

5. The Board finds that the applicant is eligible to receive the \$65,000 CSTB for signing a 21-month extension contract and CSTB agreement, pursuant to ALCOAST 281/23. The Coast Guard increased the bonus from \$25,000 to \$65,000 on August 3, 2023 and he signed his CSTB agreement on August 30, 2023 and the 21-month extension contract on September 6, 2023, while still at "A" School. Article 3.G.2 of the Military Bonus and Incentive Programs manual, COMDINST 7220.2A, states that members currently in "A" school during an offering for an applicable CSTB are eligible to apply for the CSTB bonus. In addition, Article 3.G.3 of the manual states that to qualify for the CSTB Program, members must complete and sign a CSTB agreement form prior to graduation or rating designation; achieve a rating designator; and agree to obligate service by extension of enlistment to meet the four (4) year minimum active-duty service commitment (ADSC) upon receiving a rating designator. The applicant did just that and is eligible for the \$65,000 CSTB.

6. The Board finds that the applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that he is eligible to receive a \$65,000 CSTB for signing a CSTB agreement and 21-month extension contract. Accordingly, the Board should order the Coast Guard to correct his record to show that he is eligible for the \$65,000 CSTB for signing the CSTB agreement on August 20, 2023 and 21-month extension contract on September 6, 2023, in accordance with ALCOAST 281/23.

(ORDER AND SIGNATURES ON NEXT PAGE)

ORDER

The application of ET3 [REDACTED], USCG, for correction of his military record is granted. The Coast Guard shall correct his record to show that he is eligible for a \$65,000 CSTB for signing the CSTB agreement on August 20, 2023 and 21-month extension contract on September 6, 2023, pursuant to ALCOAST 281/23.

October 30, 2025

