



N. Illinois Service Officer Newsletter and Bugler, November 2025

This Service Officer Newsletter is published monthly as a Service and Reference for all Veterans, Veteran Family Members, and friends of Veterans. Each month multiple Veteran Military Organization sites (and other sources, as applicable) are queried for timely, relevant, and viable Veteran issues... issues that regardless of source, impact all Veterans.

Nothing is provided in this newsletter that cannot be retrieved by the reader. Articles and/or article excerpts below are simply provided for ease of access and/or reference."

This month's newsletter covers a topic that is often asked about – Military Discharges. I have discussed this in the past. However, for the good of the Team and for the Veterans we Serve, I am putting it out once more. Information on Military Discharges – types, review boards, upgrades... etc.

As I always do, I Highly Recommend using a Certified/Professional Veteran Service Officer to assist you with any questions you have regarding these matters.

Point of Contact information on recommended area Certified/Professional Service Officer Assistance:

- Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Phone (IDVA) Phone: (217) 836-6575; Email: Michael.Jay@Illinois.gov
- Veterans Assistance Commission of Winnebago County (VACWC), Phone: (815) 516-2850, Email vac@wincoil.us

Note: Links are included in the below selected text which can provide more information.

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David R. Draeger

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SUBJ: Info Paper on Military Discharges

Action Officer: Colonel David R. Draeger, Regular Army, Retired

The following are modified excerpts of articles/Information found at the below referenced sources. The original information has been modified to take out unnecessary graphics... etc. For access to the original information simply google the source document. In addition, if receiving this electronically the recipient should be able to hover over and either “Ctrl + Click” and/or “Click” on links to pull up additional information.

Source: <https://militarybenefits.info/top-ten-questions-about-military-discharge-upgrades/>

Top Ten Questions About Military Discharge Upgrades by MilitaryBenefits

Source: <https://militarybenefits.info/top-ten-questions-about-military-discharge-upgrades/>

[Home](#) » Top Ten Questions About Military Discharge Upgrades

The top ten questions and answers about military discharge upgrades include some complex issues. Did you know there's a difference between a correction to your military records and an actual military discharge upgrade? That's just one of the important things you need to know about appealing the reasons for your military discharge or how it is characterized in cases where an Honorable discharge was not given.

Important Features Added To Discharge Review Options

Before getting to the top 10 questions people ask about military discharge upgrades, it's important to discuss the changes in military discharge review processes that occurred in early 2021.

The changes did not affect the basic requirements for service members to try to resolve their discharge review issues at the lowest possible level via each branch of service's Discharge Review Boards and similar authorities discussed below.

But what is now available in addition to the resources listed below? A DoD-level review of individual military discharges is established as a final opportunity to appeal or change a discharged characterization. This DoD-wide discharge review board is known as DARB (Discharge Appeals Review Board) and is open to service members with separation dates on or after Dec. 20, 2019.

Like other discharge review opportunities, DARB does not automatically review any records—the service member or next-of-kin must request the review and supply documentation in a similar manner to all other discharge review opportunities.

DARB provides “final review of discharge or dismissal characterization upgrade requests when petitioners have exhausted all available administrative remedies.” You can get more information on options under DARB (again, available to those who have run out of all other options) at the [DARB official site](#).

1. What's The Difference Between The Narrative Reason For Discharge and Character Of Service on the DD214?

“Character of Service” describes your discharge as “Honorable” or “General” but “Under Honorable Conditions. There are also “Other Than Honorable” discharges, “Bad Conduct”, and “Dishonorable”.

The “Narrative Reason For Separation” fills in some of the blanks in cases where punitive or administrative action was taken. For example, under Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, it was possible to have “Homosexual Conduct” listed as a Narrative Reason For Separation. In other cases “Misconduct” or other descriptors may be present.

These are not always negative. Some are simply listed as “Disability” as may be the case in certain medical discharges, and others may list “For Convenience Of The Government” where applicable.

“Character of Service” can found in **Box 24** and the “Narrative Reason For Separation” can be found in **Box 28** of the DD214.

2. What Can I Apply To Have Changed About My Military Discharge?

Depending on circumstances, you may apply to have the characterization of your military discharge upgraded (“Bad Conduct”, “Other Than Honorable”, etc.) and/or the Narrative Reason For Discharge (“Homosexual Conduct”, “Misconduct”, etc.). The Discharge Review Board will need to see arguments and supporting evidence that your discharge or its reasons are unfair, inequitable, erroneous, based on faulty or incomplete information, etc.

3. What Is A Discharge Review Board?

A discharge review board, also known as a DRB, is a service-specific panel authorized to review and possibly upgrade discharges and reasons for discharge. Each branch of the service has its’ own DRB, with its’ own procedures and requirements. There is no centralized military discharge review board for the entire Department of Defense, so veterans will need to petition their branch of service’s board specifically.

4. What Does The Discharge Review Board Have The Power To Change In My Military Records?

The DRB has the power to upgrade military discharges that were not the result of a General Court-Martial. The board may also change the Narrative Reason For Discharge except to or from discharges with “disability” listed as the narrative reason.

5. Is There A Time Limit On When I Can Apply To A Discharge Review Board?

In general, you have 15 years from your date of discharge to apply. Discharge review boards are NOT automatic, you must apply to have your case heard.

6. What Are The Boards for Correction of Military Records and Board for Correction of Naval Records?

These are boards that have the power to address issues that a military discharge review board has no power to change, including the narrative reason for discharge or cases where the military discharge was the result of a General Court-Martial. However, these boards require you to attempt to change the nature of your records by other means such as the DRB before applying.

7. What Are The Deadlines For Applying To Boards for Correction of Military Records and Board for Correction of Naval Records?

Generally, the deadlines are three years from the “discovery” of the issues you want to change about your discharge (the idea here being that there is some form of injustice done to you via the nature of your military discharge and/or the narrative reasons for it) or three years from the date a discharge review board rejects your request.

8. Are There Exceptions To The Time Limits?

There are notable exceptions including cases that involve PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, and other issues. Do not assume you have run out of time to apply for correction and upgrades-there may be circumstances that work in your favor including regulatory changes, new evidence, and alterations to DoD policy. You may discover that old rules governing application procedures and deadlines have been extended, modified, or have had exceptions added. You will need to contact the boards directly to learn what current requirements and deadlines might be.

9. What Documentation Is Required For Discharge Review Boards And/Or Boards For Correction?

No matter which type of board you are applying to, expect to provide extensive documentation including a personal statement and justification of your request. You should be prepared to cite specific dates of relevant incidents, diagnoses, reports, etc. You will be required to provide your military service records, medical records, records of Courts-Martial where applicable, etc. Be prepared to obtain these documents before you submit your application.

You should also be prepared to submit statements from coworkers, friends, family members, and others who can support your request. These statements should be as specific as possible, especially when addressing incidents, allegations, conduct, or other data relevant to the nature of your discharge. You will also need to explain in writing why your original discharge should be changed, and what discharge you should be upgraded to. Be prepared to justify this in writing as part of your submission.

10. What If I Just Want Access To VA Benefits And Don't Want To Go Thru The Processes Mentioned Above?

The prevailing advice based on how VA and DoD regulations affect your access to VA benefits after discharge is that it's best to apply to a discharge review board, but there is a VA-based option that allows you to petition the Department of Veterans Affairs for benefits. This is known as a Character of Discharge

review. It does NOT change your discharge or your military records but may allow access to benefits you would otherwise be denied.

Online Tool to Assist Veterans with Discharge Upgrade Process

The DoD and VA have an online tool to assist veterans with discharge upgrades. By answering a few short questions, veterans will know which board they need to go to, what form to fill out, any special guidance applicable to their case, where to send their application, and some helpful tips for appealing their discharge. Any veterans who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous, or warrants an upgrade are encouraged to use this tool and then apply for review.

[Discharge Upgrade Online Tool](#)

Contact [the Department of Veterans Affairs](#) directly at 1-800-827-1000 and ask for information about a Character of Discharge Review and what you will need, based on your specific circumstances, to apply.



Joe Wallace is a 13-year veteran of the United States Air Force and a former reporter for Air Force Television News

Related Articles

[How to Get a DD-214 Copy](#)

[How To Read A DD-214 Form](#)

[Understanding Character of Discharge](#)

[Reenlistment \(RE\) Codes](#)

[Separation Codes](#)

[Separation Program Numbers](#)

[Types of Military Discharges](#)

[Military Discharge Upgrades Policy](#)

Other Related Information, See Source below for original content

Source:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=Legislation+Upgrade+Military+Discharge>

People also ask

Can you upgrade a military discharge?

Can I Get a Discharge Upgrade? You can apply to the Discharge Review Board (DRB) of your branch of the service for a discharge upgrade or a change in the discharge reason (that is, character of service).

[How to Get a Military Discharge Upgrade | Nolo](#)

<https://www.nolo.com › legal-encyclopedia › how-get-...>

Search for: [Can you upgrade a military discharge?](#)

Who has authority to upgrade a discharge is approved by what authority?

The DRB has the power to upgrade military discharges that were not the result of a General Court-Martial. The board may also change the Narrative Reason For Discharge except to or from discharges with "disability" listed as the narrative reason. 5.

How hard is it to get a discharge upgraded?

It is very difficult to get a discharge upgrade, so you should submit comprehensive evidence and/or find an attorney to help you submit a complete package. Make sure to request and submit your military records and positive post-service history.

[Discharge Upgrade Guide: What if I have a bad discharge ...](#)

<https://bals.org › help › resources › discharge-upgrade-...>

Search for: [How hard is it to get a discharge upgraded?](#)

Can you upgrade a bad conduct discharge?

Although a positive post-service history is not necessary to succeed, it's important if you're trying to upgrade a punitive discharge—a Bad Conduct, Dishonorable, or other discharge imposed after a court-martial. **The only basis for upgrading a punitive discharge is clemency**.

Can your military discharge be downgraded?

The VA can't downgrade any discharge. They can only say that a discharge is Honorable for VA purposes. Upon separation veterans are no longer subject to UCMJ and even when someone applies for an upgrade to their discharge the review board can't change it to something worse even if evidence supports that.

[Can the VA downgrade an honorable discharge years later? | RallyPoint](https://www.rallypoint.com/answers/can-the-va-downgrade-an-honorable-discharge-years-later)
[https://www.rallypoint.com › answers › can-the-va-downg...](https://www.rallypoint.com/answers/can-the-va-downgrade-an-honorable-discharge-years-later)

Search for: [Can your military discharge be downgraded?](#)

How do I check when my discharge is due for an upgrade?

Any veterans who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous, or warrants an upgrade are encouraged to use this tool and then apply for review. This tool can be found on Vets.gov at: <https://www.vets.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions>. Jan 25, 2018

