AMERICAN PATRIOT DATA & EVALUATION SERVICES L.L.C. | APDES
SUPPORT. HONOR. EMPOWER. — EVERY VETERAN.
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APDES Veteran Resource GUIDE
DISCHARGE UPGRADE STRATEGY

This guide explains how the discharge upgrade process works and what evidence review boards rely on. It is written in plain language so veterans can understand the process without needing legal or clinical training. The goal is to help veterans build a strong, organized, and credible submission.

What Is a Discharge Upgrade?

A discharge upgrade is a formal request asking a military review board to change the characterization of a veteran's discharge.

Examples include:
• Other Than Honorable → Honorable
• General → Honorable

A discharge characterization affects access to VA healthcare, disability benefits, education programs, home loan guarantees, and other earned services. An unfair discharge impacts a veteran’s life long after separation.

Two Boards Handle Upgrades

Discharge Review Board (DRB)

• Handles discharges within 15 years

• Can upgrade characterization

• Limited authority on narrative reason

Board for Correction of Military Records (BCMR/BCNR/AFBCMR/CGBCMR)

• Handles any discharge, regardless of age

• Can change narrative reason, RE code, and other record elements

Liberal Consideration Standard

Boards must give the benefit of the doubt when evidence shows PTSD, MST, TBI, or other mental-health conditions contributed to the conduct that led to discharge.

What Is a Nexus Letter?

A nexus letter is a clinical opinion written by a qualified mental-health professional. It explains the connection between:

1. A veteran's diagnosed mental-health condition
2. In-service events or trauma
3. How those factors contributed to the behavior that led to discharge

A nexus letter does **not** diagnose — it **connects**. Boards rely on nexus letters because board members are administrators and officers, not clinicians.

Why a Forensic Evaluation Report Is Needed

A forensic evaluation report provides:

- A full history of the veteran's experiences and circumstances
- Behavioral pattern analysis
- Risk-related observations relevant to administrative review
- A baseline of functioning for comparison across time
- Context for what was happening during the period of service

Nexus Letter — connects diagnosis to in-service events

Forensic Evaluation — provides structured behavioral and situational analysis

Together, they create a strong evidentiary foundation.

How Review Boards Weigh Evidence

Boards use the **preponderance of the evidence** standard — "more likely than not."

Boards consider:

- Personal statement
- Nexus letter
- Forensic evaluation
- Buddy statements
- Service records
- Medical records
- Character references

Boards find evidence persuasive when:

- Multiple sources tell a consistent story
- Clinical opinions are clear and confident
- A timeline connects events → mental-health impact → behavior
- Veterans show rehabilitation or growth since service

Command Decisions vs. Situational Reality

Military command decisions are based on **discipline, regulations, and maintaining order**. They judge behavior through the lens of standards, not circumstances. When a service member struggles, command often sees the conduct but not the underlying situation that caused it.

Many **veterans** were separated because their behavior was **misunderstood, taken out of context, or judged** without considering what was actually happening in their lives at the time. Review boards are allowed to look deeper — at the full picture, the circumstances, the stressors, and the reality that command never evaluated.

A **discharge upgrade** gives veterans the chance to show the board what was **really going on, why things happened the way they did, and how the situation influenced the behavior** that led to separation.

Command Saw the Behavior — Not the Situation

Command reacts to what you did. The board can look at *why*. That difference matters.

Putting the Strategy Together

A strong discharge upgrade submission includes:

1. Personal Statement
2. Service Records
3. Nexus Letter
4. Forensic Evaluation Report
5. Supporting Evidence
6. Submission to the Correct Board
7. Board Review Under Liberal Consideration

Closing Note

A **discharge upgrade** is not about rewriting history — it is about ensuring the **record reflects the full truth of a veteran's service, circumstances, and mental-health reality**. With proper evidence, veterans can present a complete, credible, and professionally supported case for relief.

Credential Summary — Michelle, APDES: MA, Forensic Psychology | BA, Forensic Psychology | AS, Criminal Justice | Certified: SASSI | Certified: MoCA | PARS & Pearson Qualified | Statewide & Virtual Evaluations Available

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