

# Self-Help Guide

## DD214 Corrections for Veterans Discharged Under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and Prior Policies



In 2010, President Obama signed legislation that led to the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT), the discriminatory law that banned gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members from openly serving in the U.S. Military.

Service members discharged under DADT and similar previous Department of Defense policies generally separated with an *Honorable* or a *General Under Honorable Conditions* discharge characterization, but sometimes received a less than honorable discharge. The narrative reason for separation listed on their DD214 included “Homosexual Conduct”, “Homosexual Admission”, or simply “Homosexual.” Often service members were given reenlistment codes that indicated they were ineligible for re-enlistment (e.g., RE-4).

After the repeal of DADT, the Under Secretary of Defense authored a Memorandum that provided guidance to veterans discharged under DADT and similar policies on how to correct their DD214 and remove information from the document that indicates that the veteran was discharged under these policies.

This guide is intended to set forth a step-by-step process to upgrading a less than fully Honorable discharge characterization, changing the narrative reason for discharge, and upgrading the reenlistment code (RE-Code) for veterans discharged under DADT and prior policies.

## I. Step One: Which application form to use and where to file?

There are two entities within each military branch that have the authority to correct DD214s – the Discharge Review Board and the Board for Correction of Military Records. Your **date of separation** will determine where you will send your application.

### a. Discharge Review Board (separated within 15 years)

If you submit your application **within fifteen years of your discharge date**, you must file your application with the **Discharge Review Board (DRB)** of your branch of service. The Air Force, Army and Coast Guard have their own DRBs; the Navy and Marine Corps have a joint DRB.

For applications to the DRB, you will use DD Form 293:

<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/forms/dd/dd0293.pdf>

You will send **DD Form 293**, your DD214, and all supporting evidence via certified mail to the address below for your branch. (Before mailing in your application, we recommend you make a copy of it for your records.)

## A. DISCHARGE REVIEW BOARD

### ARMY

Army Review Boards Agency  
251 18th Street South, Suite 385  
Arlington, VA 22202-3531

### NAVY AND MARINES

Secretary of the Navy Council of Review Boards  
ATTN: Naval Discharge Review Board  
720 Kennon Ave S.E., Suite 309  
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5023

### AIR FORCE

Air Force Review Boards Agency  
3351 Celmers Lane  
Joint Base Andrews NAF,  
Washington, MD 20762-6435

### COAST GUARD

Commandant (CG-133)  
ATTN: Office of Military Personnel  
US Coast Guard Stop 7907  
2703 Martin Luther King, Jr. Ave., S.E.  
Washington, DC 20593-7907

**b. Board for Correction of Military or Naval Records (separated more than 15 years ago)**

If you were discharged **more than fifteen years ago**, you will need to file your application to your branch's **Board for Correction of Military Records (BCMR)** or, if you served in the Navy or Marine Corps, to the **Board for Correction of Naval Records (BCNR)**. The BCMR/BCNR all use the same form – DD Form 149: <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/forms/dd/dd0149.pdf>

For applications to the BCMR/BCNR, you will send **DD Form 149**, your DD214, and all supporting evidence via certified mail to the address below for your branch. (Before mailing in your application, we recommend you make a copy of it for your records.)



**B. BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF MILITARY OR NAVAL RECORDS**

**ARMY**

Army Review Boards Agency  
251 18th Street South, Suite 385  
Arlington, VA 22202-3531

**AIR FORCE**

Air Force BCMR  
3351 Celmers Lane  
Joint Base Andrews NAF,  
Washington, MD 20762-6435

**NAVY AND MARINES**

Board for Correction of Naval Records  
701 S. Courthouse Road, Suite 1001  
Arlington, VA 22204-2490

**COAST GUARD**

DHS Office of the General Counsel  
Board for Correction of Military Records  
245 Murray Lane, Stop O485  
Washington, DC 20528-0485

## II. Step Two: What to write in my application?

On the **DD Form 293** (Discharge Review Board) or **DD Form 149** (Board for Correction of Military/Naval Records), you will explain what you want corrected on your DD214 and why the Board should grant your request for correction.

The Department of Defense directive states that the Boards should normally grant requests to upgrade a discharge to *Honorable*, change the narrative reason of separation to "Secretarial Authority," the separation program designator code (SPD) to "JFF", and change the RE Code to immediately-eligible-to-reenter ("RE- 1," or "RE-1J" if Air Force) when the following conditions are met:

1. The original discharge was based solely on DADT or a similar prior policy; **and**
2. There were no aggravating factors in the record such as misconduct.

Each application is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, but the directive states that if you were awarded a *Honorable* or *General Under Honorable Conditions* discharge, the Board will assume that there were no "aggravating factors" in your record. Still, if you have high marks and accolades in your record, you'll want to point that out to the Board and provide them the pages in your military record that document those achievements.

If you do have other misconduct in your record (i.e., drug use, AWOL periods, etc.) or if you received an Other than Honorable, Bad Conduct, or Dishonorable discharge, you will want to address that in your application and provide the Board with any additional explanation for that misconduct. For more information, see our Self-Help guide on Upgrading Your Discharge at [www.swords-to-plowshares.org/guides/upgrading-your-discharge](http://www.swords-to-plowshares.org/guides/upgrading-your-discharge).

### a. Discharge Review Board (separated within 15 years)

Complete the entire DD Form 293 form with your name, contact information, and military service information. You may want to review a copy of your DD214 to accurately answer these questions.

For **Question 18** on DD Form 293, if you have an Honorable discharge, check the following boxes: *Separation Code*, *Reentry Code*, *Narrative Reason for Separation*. If you have a General Under Honorable Conditions or less than honorable discharge, also check the first *Character of Service* box.

**Question 19** on DD Form 293 asks whether you would like to request a hearing with the Board. We recommend that you **do not** request a hearing by selecting the first box, especially if there are no “aggravating factors” like other misconduct in your record.

For **Question 21** on DD Form 293, check the box marked “DADT”.

For **Question 22, “Why is a change requested?”** – you will want to write out why you are requesting that your DD214 be changed. (You can submit additional pages if necessary.) Here is some sample response language:

My discharge is **inequitable** because the sole reason for it was my admission that I had engaged in homosexual activity and there were no aggravating factors alleged in my discharge paperwork. Further, my record reflects high marks for my service. I have therefore met the requirement that the sole reason for my discharge was due to my homosexual act or admission.

Please upgrade my discharge characterization to Honorable [**include this ONLY if given a General discharge**], change the narrative reason for separation to “Secretarial Authority,” the separation code to “JFF,” and change my RE Code to “RE-1” [or “RE-1J” if you were in the Air Force].

Please do not include any remarks on my new DD-214 that indicate that it was corrected. Under Secretary of Defense memo dated 01/28/2011 states that “sexual orientation is a personal and private matter...” and remarks indicating that a correction was made may result in inquiries as to why.

## **b. Boards for Correction of Military or Naval Records (separated more than 15 years ago)**

Complete the entire DD Form 149 form with your name, contact information, and military service information. You may want to review a copy of your DD214 to accurately answer these questions.

For **Question 11**, check “Discharge/Separation”.

**Question 12** of DD Form 149 asks you to list out what you would like changed on your DD214. Here is some sample language that may be used:

Please make the following corrections to my record: 1. Upgrade my discharge characterization from General Under Honorable Conditions to Honorable [**Include this ONLY if given a General Discharge**]; 2. Change the narrative reason of separation to “Secretarial Authority;” 3. Change my separation code to “JFF;” 4. Change my RE-Code to “RE-1” [or “RE-1J” if you were in the Air Force]; and 5. Please do not include any remarks on my new DD-214 that indicate it was corrected. Under Secretary of Defense memo dated 01/28/2011 states that “sexual orientation is a personal and private matter...” and remarks indicating that a correction was made may result in inquiries as to why.

For **Question 13**, check the box marked “DADT” (even if you discharged under a homophobic policy in place prior to DADT).

**Question 14** asks you why the corrections should be made. (You can submit additional pages if necessary.) Here is sample response language:

My discharge is **unjust** because the sole reason for it was admission that I had engaged in homosexual activity and there were no aggravating factors alleged in my discharge paperwork. Further, my record reflects high marks for my service. I have therefore met the requirement that the sole reason for my discharge was due to my homosexual act or admission.

For **Question 15**, for the first two dates, you will put your date of discharge. and in the last blank – “date of discover” – you will want to put in the date DADT was repealed: September 20, 2011.

The BCMRs typically have a deadline of 3 years from this “date of discover”, but this deadline can be waived. You must explain to the Board why it is “in the interest of justice” that they waive the deadline.

Here is some sample response language (use a separate page if needed):

Even though I discharged 28 years ago, I only recently learned that I could apply for a records correction. Having “Homosexual Conduct” on my DD214 has hurt my employment opportunities and prevented me from accessing veteran services. Having my discharge upgraded and the narrative reason for discharge changed would lift these barriers in my life. In the **interest of justice**, I request that you consider my application.

**Question 17** asks whether you would like to request a hearing with the Board. Requesting a hearing may delay your case and there is no guarantee you will be granted a hearing. We recommend that you check “No,” especially if there are no “aggravating factors” like misconduct in your record.

### III. Step Three: Gather Additional Supporting Evidence

You should include the following documents with your application to the Board (DD149 or DD293):

- A copy of your DD214 – this **must** be included.
- If you answered questions on the form on separate pages, be sure to clearly indicate what question you are answering on that page or pages.
- Attach any portion of your personnel file that shows that your performance marks were high and that there were no “aggravating factors” like misconduct in your record.
- To request a copy of your DD214 and Official Military Personnel File, use **Standard Form 180**. The form is available at <https://www.archives.gov/files/sf180-request-pertaining-to-military-records-exp-april2018-1.pdf>. It comes with detailed instructions and a chart of mailing addresses.

For applications to the DRB, on DD Form 293 you will list the evidence you include at **Question 23**. For applications to the BCMR/BCNR, on DD Form 149 you will list the evidence you include at **Question 19**.

## Disclaimer

This memorandum provides general information only. It does not constitute legal advice, nor does it substitute for the advice of an expert representative or attorney who knows the particulars of your case. Any use you make of the information in this memorandum is at your own risk. We have made every effort to provide reliable, up-to-date information, but we do not guarantee its accuracy. The information in this memorandum is current as of October 2020.

© Copyright Swords to Plowshares 2020. These materials are the property of Swords to Plowshares and are made available at no charge. For parties interested in using or distributing these materials, please note that no alterations are permitted, and proper attribution must be given to Swords to Plowshares.

