



SCUTTLEBUTT STACK – 30 AUG 2017

PENTAGON: MORE VETS CAN APPLY FOR REVIEW OF 'BAD PAPER' DISCHARGES

The U.S. Defense Department has taken steps to allow more veterans with so-called "bad paper" discharges to apply to have their status reviewed and potentially changed.

In guidance issued Monday, the Pentagon extended beyond 15 years the time in which veterans can seek a change to their separation status if the discharge was related to sexual assault, sexual harassment or a mental health condition. A previous change had removed the time cap for discharges related to traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The policy is meant to ease the burden on veterans and give them a reasonable opportunity to establish the extenuating circumstances of their discharge, Air Force Lt. Col. Reggie Yager, the acting director of legal policy in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, said in a press release.

"Liberal consideration, in our view, is the right balance to ensure we are making fact-based decisions while also giving appropriate leeway to the challenges posed by these invisible wounds," he said in the release.

It wasn't immediately clear how many veterans could be affected by the policy update.

During a five-year period through fiscal 2015, 13,282 service members received an "other-than-honorable" discharge and thus couldn't receive treatment at the Veterans Affairs Department -- even though they had been diagnosed with PTSD, TBI or another condition that could be associated with misconduct, according to a May report from the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress.

Thousands more veterans have been discharged for personality disorders.

In the past, veterans given other-than-honorable discharges, often for minor misconduct and other behaviors that could be linked to trauma-related conditions, had 15 years to request a review of their discharge status. Guidance issued in 2014 removed that cap for those claiming PTSD or TBI. The new policy removes the cap for more veterans and directs the services' disciplinary review boards to give the same consideration to requests related to circumstances involving sexual assault and sexual harassment as requests stemming from PTSD and TBI.

"Veterans who desire a correction to their service record or who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous, or warrants an upgrade, are encouraged to apply for review," the release states. "This guidance fills in the gaps and resolves any confusion that veterans or the review boards may have had, and it ensures a fair and equitable review of separations for all veterans," it says.

The change comes in part as a response to years of public pressure to offer recourse to veterans kicked out after sexual assault or trauma.

For example, a 2016 Human Rights Watch report found that 31,000 veterans had been discharged between 2001 and 2010 for personality disorders and 30 percent of those were women. Personality disorders, the report said, can often be linked to a sexual assault or harassment event.

The study also criticized the board process for a lack of oversight and "judicial oversight of BCMR cases is so negligible and deferential as to be nearly non-existent, providing little incentive for Boards to create credible decisions that can withstand scrutiny."

While the new rule does not fundamentally change how the boards operate, it does open the door for more discharges to be reconsidered indefinitely.

Officials with the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) called the change "a step in the right direction" but not enough. They said that the lack of direction on what "liberal consideration" means has created a problem that still needs to be addressed.

"Words matter, and for a long time, veterans and the military review board agencies have been unsure of what 'liberal consideration' actually means," said John Rowan, VVA's president. "This clarification is a step in the right direction, establishing rules that should be used now and in the future -- but it's nowhere near enough."

VVA has asked President Donald Trump to issue pardons to all veterans discharged after the 9//11 terrorist attacks without a court-martial.

Those desiring to appeal a discharge that was less than 15 years ago should complete DD Form 293, the release states, and send it to their service disciplinary review board (see contact information below).

For those over 15 years ago, veterans can complete DD Form 149 and send it to their service Military Department Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records (BCM/NR). Addresses for those boards are on the forms.

To have their discharge upgraded, officials said, veterans will need to present evidence of a mental health condition or diagnosis, show evidence of an event, such as a sexual assault, that impacted their behavior "in a significant way" and explain how that event or condition caused their discharge, according to the release.

Although not required, the release said it's "helpful" for veterans to also submit copies of their applicable service records.

"The more information provided, the better the boards can understand the circumstances of the discharge," the release said.

Here is the contact information for each service's boards:

Air Force BCMR

Website: <http://www.afpc.af.mil/board-for-correction-of-military-records>

Phone: 240-612-5379

Email: usaf.pentagon.saf-mr.mbx.saf-mrbc@mail.mil

Air Force DRB:

Website: <http://www.afpc.af.mil/Air-Force-Discharge-Review-Board/>

Phone: 240-612-0995

Email: usaf.pentagon.saf-mr.mbx.saf-mrb@mail.mil

Army BCMR:

Website: <http://arba.army.pentagon.mil/>

E-mail: army.arbainquiry@mail.mil

Army DRB:

Website: <http://arba.army.pentagon.mil>

E-mail: army.arbainquiry@mail.mil

Navy BCNR:

Website: <http://www.secnav.navy.mil/mra/bcnr/Pages/home.aspx>

Phone: 703-607-6111

E-mail: BCNR_Application@navy.mil

Navy DRB:

Website: <http://www.secnav.navy.mil/mra/CORB/Pages/NDRB/default.aspx>

Phone: 202-685-6600

E-mail: NDRB@navy.mil

Source: military.com

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VA HAS A NEW 'WAIT-LIST' PROBLEM – THE BACKLOG TO SEE AN OUTSIDE DOCTOR

More than 2,900 veterans are caught up in bureaucracy hell at the Shreveport VA hospital, waiting to see non-VA doctors promised under the Veterans Choice Program that was created to alleviate appointment wait-times, a whistle-blower says.

It's been three years since clinical social worker Shea Wilkes revealed a secret wait-list with 2,700 veterans, including 37 who died, languishing for appointments at Overton Brooks VA Medical Center in Shreveport, La. Now, he says he's discovered a new kind of wait-list – the backlog of 2,900 waiting to see an outside doctor – and has written to President Trump pleading for help because “some will die.”

The fallout from his Sept. 17 letter has created a “s--- storm up and down the VA,” Wilkes told Fox News. “The leaders at the hospital have been working non-stop trying to get the numbers down.”

TRUMP SIGNS VA REFORM BILL

As the medical center works to address the problem, a VA spokeswoman told Fox News that veterans requiring "urgent care" will still get "priority appointments."

The Veterans Choice Program was created by Congress in 2014 to give veterans speedy access to appointments if they live 40 miles from a VA facility or can't get in to see a doctor within the mandated 30-day consultation window. However, the program has had problems and veterans continue to wait.

In a bid to improve the situation, Trump on Aug. 12 signed the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017, which propped up the beleaguered choice program with an infusion of \$2.1 billion and gave the VA greater flexibility in hiring and training employees.

'Scheduling manipulations and secret wait lists for care in the VA have not been corrected.'

- Shea Wilkes, in letter to President Trump

But the program has had little impact on Overton Brooks, where wait-times for non-VA appointments date back to the end of 2016. The VA requires a referral to see an outside doctor and the process is cumbersome – a request goes back and forth several times between the VA and Tri-West, the program administrator. Part of the chain requires someone to send Tri-West the veteran's medical history and no one is assigned to that job, Wilkes said.

So patients wait.

“No one knows what in the hell they are doing,” he said. “‘Choice’ is not really a choice. The VA generates your choice.”

In his letter to Trump, Wilkes wrote: “Scheduling manipulations and secret wait lists for care in the VA have not been corrected, they have simply become actual wait lists for non-VA care...Those responsible for these mistakes are not held accountable and their careers continue to progress with little or no accountability. The problems are hidden from the VA's Washington leadership.”

Wilkes also told Trump he didn't want to ask the VA inspector general for help because he claims he faced retaliation by that agency when he reported the first secret wait-list in 2014. The IG began a criminal investigation into Wilkes for violating HIPAA laws, but the Office of Special Counsel gave Wilkes whistleblower protection and slammed the IG in a presidential memo for investigating a “straw man” instead of the complaints he raised.

The Trump letter nevertheless was forwarded to the IG after Wilkes gave a copy to the newly created VA Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. From there, it spread throughout the VA.

This time, his complaint took a surprising turn. Two of Overton Brooks' top managers called Wilkes into a meeting -- but it wasn't to chastise him.

"For the first time ever, they didn't hem and haw or try to deny it," Wilkes said. "They went through my letter talking about how they were going to fix it. It was pretty shocking. They told me what they had done so far and what they were doing in the future."

Wilkes was told that dozens of employees, including managers, worked overtime on the weekend trying to help the veterans on the list.

The VA declined several requests by Fox News to comment on why Overton Brooks had this latest wait-list and why the VA requires numerous layers of approval to create each appointment. Instead, spokeswoman Jessica Jacobsen stated, "Improving patient access to care is a priority for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). And while there are pending Care in the Community appointments for some Shreveport-area Veterans, Veterans requiring urgent care receive priority appointments."

Source: FoxNews

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4 MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS HEAD TO THE PORT CITY

A big event and only the second of its kind ever held is headed to the Mobile and Battleship Park. The Heroes4Freedom and Liberty Event is set for September 7th at the aircraft pavilion at Battleship Park. It will feature four recipients of the Medal of Honor.

They include Hershel 'Woody' Williams, a survivor of the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II.

Alabama Native Bennie Adkins, a Vietnam era MOH recipient will be there.

Navy Veteran and MOH recipient Donald 'Doc' Ballard and MOH recipient Robert Patterson of Pensacola will also be there.

"The event is designed to make sure that those that have served, particularly those that have served in harm's way are properly remembered and recognized," says local spokesman Pete Riehm.

It is also a fundraiser in support of the Military Warriors Support Foundation, which will also be recognized for providing 800 homes to wounded veterans over the past ten years.

Other notable people who are expected to attend: United State Attorney General Jeff Session, and Energy Secretary Rick Perry. Musicians Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter, Eric Horner, and Steve 'Papa T' Turner are scheduled to attend.

The event begins at 5 p.m. and runs until 10 p.m. Tickets are \$250 apiece. Here is a link to the Heroes4Freedom website where tickets can be reserved.

Source: wkrg.com

Marine Col Joe Adams (Ret)

A former Marine, Joe Adams was a private investigator for 26 years and has three decades of work as a contract operative with various government agencies including the FBI, DEA, and the CIA as well as with foreign militaries friendly to the United States. And, he is a world-class marksman.

In the early 80's, Adams worked with the CIA and the Contras fighting the Communist government in Nicaragua. He became head of security and personal bodyguard for Dr. Adolfo Callero. Dr. Callero was President Ronald Reagan's choice for the first Democratic President of Nicaragua.

In the late 80's, Adams again working with the CIA, became a Colonel with the Burma Liberation Expeditionary Forces fighting the military dictatorship in Burma who had imprisoned the Nobel Peace Prize Recipient Aung Sun Suu Kyi. Adams organized and trained commandos for an all student revolutionary group named the Democratic Alliance Burma Army.

Adams's last deployment was as a Colonel in the 2nd Brigade Croatian Special Forces Group, Croatian Rangers. Again, he organized, trained and led his Black Ops team behind enemy lines during the war in the Balkans.

In 2008, Adams founded Project Bluelight which is an anti-terrorist intelligence operation in support of United States Border Patrol agents in the field.

The Project Bluelight Scouts, under his command, are directly responsible for coordinating the apprehension of almost 10,000 persons entering this country illegally from 126 foreign countries including fifteen terrorist states, tons of narcotics, and countless weapons and explosive devices.

For more information and to support the mission go to supportbluelight.com.

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MATTIS ASSEMBLING PANEL TO DISCUSS TRANSGENDER TROOPS

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is assembling a panel of experts to discuss the matter of openly transgender individuals already serving in the U.S. military.

President Donald Trump on Friday directed the Pentagon to extend indefinitely a ban on transgender individuals joining the military, but he gave Mattis the authority to decide those already serving.

Mattis says in a statement released Tuesday that the Pentagon, in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, will develop a plan that "will promote military readiness, lethality and unit cohesion."

He says, "Panel members will bring mature experience, most notably in combat and deployed operations, and seasoned judgment to this task. "

The White House had said Friday that transgender people would be allowed to continue serving until Mattis had completed such an analysis.

Source: AP