DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY BOARD FOR CORRECTION OF MILITARY RECORDS

Application for the Correction of the Coast Guard Record of:

BCMR Docket No. 2005-082

FINAL DECISION

AUTHOR: Andrews, J.

This proceeding was conducted under the provisions of section 1552 of title 10 and section 425 of title 14 of the United States Code. The Chair docketed the application for correction on March 25, 2005, upon receipt of the applicant's completed application and military records.

This final decision, dated January 5, 2006, is 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, a former seaman apprentice (SA; pay grade E-2) in the Coast Guard, asked the Board to correct his military record by upgrading the reenlistment code on his discharge form (DD 214) from RE-4 so that he would be eligible to reenlist. He was discharged on January 26, 2000, with an RE-4 reenlistment code (ineligible for reenlistment), a JFX separation code (unsuitable for service due to a personality disorder), and "Personality Disorder" as the narrative reason for separation shown on his DD 214. The applicant asked that his narrative reason for separation and separation and reenlistment codes be upgraded to "Miscellaneous/General," JND, and RE-1 (eligible to reenlist) or, if not, to "Condition, Not A Disability," JFV, and RE-3G (eligible to reenlist with waiver).

The applicant alleged that the diagnosis of "personality disorder" was based on two short consultations with a psychologist, Dr. G, after his command gave her biased information. He stated that "she was very un-professional and curt in her questioning, which led me to become very frustrated." The applicant alleged that at the time, he was under a lot of stress because his grandfather had died of cancer and he had been in a boating accident and incurred "a life changing knee injury that the USCG doctor did not take seriously." The applicant stated that he was actually suffering from a temporary "adjustment disorder," rather than a permanent "personality disorder," and that the stresses that caused the adjustment disorder are no longer present in his life. He argued that upgrading his DD 214 as requested would be consistent with several of this Board's past decisions.

The applicant alleged that while in the Coast Guard, he never received non-judicial punishment (NJP) and "carried out my duties to the best of my abilities even when my command made me feel isolated and moved the only person who tried to help me with my career to another duty rotation." The applicant alleged that since his discharge, he has "had stable employment, never been in trouble with the law, ... [and earned an] AA degree in Paralegal Studies" in a program approved by the American Bar Association. The applicant submitted many medical records and other documents in support of his allegations, including

¹ A "personality disorder" is "an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment." American Psychiatric Association, DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS, FOURTH EDITION, TEXT REVISION (2000) (DSM-IV-TR), p. 685. Types of personality disorders include paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, antisocial, borderline, histrionic, narcissistic, avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive. *Id.* "The diagnosis of Personality Disorders requires an evaluation of the individual's long-term patterns of functioning The personality traits that define these disorders must also be distinguished from characteristics that emerge in response to specific situational stressors or more transient mental states The clinician should assess the stability of personality traits over time and across different situations." *Id.* at 686. The Coast Guard relies on the DSM when diagnosing members with psychological conditions. *See* Coast Guard Medical Manual (COMDTINST M6000.1B), Chap. 5.B.1.

² Adjustment disorders are defined as psychological responses to identifiable stressors that result in the development of clinically significant emotional or behavioral symptoms. Adjustment disorders are not personality disorders and normally disappear when the stressors disappear. American Psychiatric Association, DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS, FOURTH EDITION, TEXT REVISION (2000) (DSM-IV-TR), p. 679.

and follow directions, is very committed to self improvement, has "excellent people skills";

- a letter of recommendation from the head of the Legal Assisting Program at the applicant's college, stating that the applicant has a "strong work ethic" and is "extremely good natured," never disruptive, and "always courteous and polite";
- a letter of recommendation from a veterans' employment representative at the xxxxxxxxx Employment Commission, stating that the applicant is a "quick learner, a team player," who works quite competently with little supervision; and
- a letter of recommendation from the Director of Human Resources at a security company, stating that the applicant was a responsible, efficient, and trustworthy security guard.

SUMMARY OF APPLICANT'S MILITARY AND MEDICAL RECORDS

The applicant first enlisted in the Coast Guard on July 29, 1997, at the age of 18. On his Report of Medical History prior to his enlistment, the applicant denied ever having suffered from depression or having been treated for a mental condition. Following boot camp, he was assigned to a cutter on the xxxx Coast.

On January 8, 1998, the applicant's command referred him for a psychiatric evaluation. Several "page 7" record entries indicate that the applicant was disruptive, argumentative, and threatening to crewmates and superiors at his command. The applicant told the doctor that no one on his boat understood him and that "they need to adjust their attitudes." He admitted that his mother had taken him to a psychiatrist while in high school. Dr. N found him to be angry and volatile and diagnosed him with an "Adjustment Disorder with Mixed Disturbance of Emotion and Conduct." The applicant was sent to anger and stress management classes.

On February 13, 1998, Dr. N noted that the applicant had been referred for evaluation due to continuing disruptive, disrespectful behavior and to making threatening remarks to crewmates and superiors. Dr. N noted that it was unlikely that the applicant would ever adapt to military life and recommended that he be administratively discharged.

On May 15, 1998, the applicant was honorably discharged from the Coast Guard with "Personality Disorder" as the narrative reason for separation on his

DD 214, a JFX separation code (denoting an involuntary discharge due to a personality disorder), and an RE-3G reenlistment code.

In September 1998, the applicant consulted Dr. S pursuant to an attempt to receive a waiver and enlist in the Navy. Dr. S wrote that the applicant said he had been discharged from the Coast Guard in May 1998 due to a diagnosed adjustment disorder after having two confrontations—one with a crewmate and one with a lieutenant. The applicant reported that he had been under stress due to a serious accident and injury and his father's illness. Dr. S wrote that there is "[n]o current evidence for major psych. illness—[patient] states he feels more mature to handle conflict/stress—father is in good health—Obviously, I cannot predict precisely how [he] may handle conflict in future, but I see no current evidence for psychiatric illness."

On October 3, 1998, Dr. R of a Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) hospital wrote that "[n]either the applicant's background not his current mental status are consistent with any thought disorder or mood disorder" and that testing would be necessary to determine whether there was a personality disorder, which was not detectable during their interview.

On December 1, 1998, a clinical psychologist's report reported that he agreed with Dr. R that the applicant had "no psychiatric disorder." The psychologist noted that mental disorders testing by the DVA on November 12, 1998, had revealed "no clinical disorder" and that "[t]he only disorder that he could possibly qualify for is number 309.9, adjustment disorder not otherwise specified. This primarily is a stress-related disorder, associated with the current distress that [he] is experiencing with regard to the problems that he is having with his job and the diagnosis. ... It is unfortunate that [the applicant] has been labeled with the diagnosis of personality disorder, which carries many negative impressions and expectations It is unclear as to whether or not he has ever really met the criteria, which include the requirement that such a disorder be ongoing for a number of years."

Subsequently, the applicant asked his congressman to help him reenlist in the Coast Guard. He wrote that he loved the sea and wanted to complete a 20-year career in a sea-going service. Initially, the Coast Guard refused to grant a waiver, stating that too little time had passed since his discharge. However, on July 8, 1999, the applicant was allowed to reenlist in the Coast Guard after receiving a waiver.

On October 22, 1999, the applicant's command counseled him about "disruptive and non-conforming behavior." The record entry notes that he had twice asked to be discharged and was slow to achieve qualifications and that the

"[t]ime that you spend figuring out how you can get discharged from the Coast Guard or get out of your responsibilities of Boat Crewman is time that could be spent working on your quals." The applicant refused to sign the entry.

On October 27, 1999, the applicant hurt his right knee playing football. He told a doctor that he had been having anxiety attacks, nightmares, sleeplessness, and headaches since a boating incident on October 10, 1999. The applicant told the doctor that he would not go back on the cutter and "wanted out of the Coast Guard." The applicant also told the doctor that he had "thoughts of harming fellow co-workers." The doctor referred him to a clinical psychologist and noted that the applicant should be evaluated to "rule out" post-traumatic stress disorder, specific phobia, and personality disorder.

On November 2, 1999, a clinical psychologist, Dr. G interviewed the applicant and noted that he said he was "feeling like he was going to explode." Dr. G wrote that the applicant reported having "difficulty [with] the lack of freedom in the USCG" and a "significant fear of being on a boat." She wrote that he wanted to be discharged so that he could enlist in the National Guard.

On November 9, 1999, Dr. G again interviewed the applicant. According to her report, he insisted that his only problem with being in the Coast Guard was his fear of boats since his boat "capsized" on October 10, 1999. Dr. G noted that this statement contradicted one he had made to her on November 2, 1999, when he told her that the boat had simply tilted and taken on water. The applicant became "very angry and frustrated when it was suggested that there might be additional factors in his difficulty in the USCG." The applicant told Dr. G that he had difficulty in the Coast Guard because of the "culture shock" and that he felt like a "slave." He told her that he "is very aware of his surroundings in the event someone may attempt to harm him" and had recently thought that some workmen were installing a "listening device above his room because they seemed to be taking a rather long time to complete a job on the sprinkler system." He admitted that he had been previously discharged following "numerous instances of ... hostile, aggressive behavior towards other service members." She noted that he had recently hurt his leg while playing football. Dr. G diagnosed the applicant with "Adjustment Disorder with Mixed Anxiety and Depressed Mood" and "Antisocial and Paranoid Traits." The psychologist concluded that the applicant had "difficulty with authority and structure" and was maladjusted to a military lifestyle. She noted that he "utilizes rationalization and externalization of blame and lacks insight into the role his own behavior plays in his difficulties, thereby making a change in his behavior very unlikely." Dr. G "strongly recommended administrative separation based on the diagnosis of an adjustment disorder" and "strongly recommended that [he] not be able to reenlist in the military."

On November 10, 1999, the officer in charge (OIC) of the applicant's unit informed him that he was initiating the applicant's administrative discharge due to the diagnosed adjustment disorder. The OIC noted that the applicant had been slow in achieving qualifications and had expressed a desire to be released from the Coast Guard on numerous occasions.

On November 17, 1999, the applicant waived his right to submit a statement on his own behalf and noted that he did not object to being discharged. He stated that he regretted enlisting on active duty and would rather be in the Reserve or National Guard.

On November 19, 1999, the OIC recommended to the Coast Guard Personnel Command (CGPC) that the applicant be discharged for unsuitability due to his diagnosed adjustment disorder. The OIC noted that the applicant "has difficulty accepting orders and in general, he is having an extremely difficult time adjusting to the military lifestyle." The OIC wrote that the applicant's "mental condition and behavior are unpredictable and unacceptable and he should not be allowed to enter any branch of the military."

On December 28, 1999, CGPC directed that the applicant be discharged for unsuitability with the JFX (personality disorder) separation code and an RE-4 reenlistment code.

On January 8, 2000, a Navy orthopedic surgeon reported that the applicant had had a "complete anterior cruciate ligament tear" with a "possible meniscal tear" in his right knee and was "unable to fully extend his knee." Therefore, the applicant had undergone reconstructive surgery on December 13, 1999. During surgery, the surgeon had discovered "a severe complex bucket handle tear, which was not repairable, so the majority of his lateral meniscus was removed." The surgeon stated that the applicant would require six months of intensive rehabilitation and that "his premature discharge from the Coast Guard would harm his chances for an excellent result from his surgery. ... At the end of six months, I can better determine any type of potential disability for his future and whether or not he will require a medical board at that time." The surgeon noted that the applicant was currently serving in a limited duty status and was not deployable.

On January 11, 2000, the applicant underwent a discharge physical examination. On a Report of Medical History, he noted his recent knee surgery and ongoing knee pain and cramps. Dr. N found that his knee condition was not disqualifying, pursuant to Article 2.C.2.e. of the Physical Disability Evaluation System (PDES) Manual, and found him qualified for separation in accordance

with Chapter 3-F-16.c. of the Medical Manual. Dr. N noted that the applicant should continue rehabilitation therapy for his knee. Dr. N also noted that the applicant suffered from an "Adjustment Disorder with Mixed Disturbance of Emotion and Conduct" but had "no permanent disqualifying physical or mental defects."

On January 13, 2000, the applicant signed a form objecting to the results of the examination and stating that he did not agree that he was able to perform his duties or had a "high expectation of recovery in the near term from illness, injury, or surgical procedure such that I would again be able to perform my usual duties."

On January 18, 2000, the applicant sent CGPC a written statement of objection to being found fit for discharge. He stated that he wanted to remain on active duty until he had completed rehabilitation treatment for his knee. He also asked for another psychological evaluation. He stated that Dr. G's evaluation was "biased and tainted with frustration that I created."

On January 20, 2000, the applicant's command notified CGPC that the applicant had refused to disclose whether he had submitted a written objection regarding the finding of fitness for separation to CGPC. On January 24, 2000, CGPC informed the command that the applicant's case had been carefully reviewed and that he had been found fit for separation by both the examining physician and the medical staff at CGPC. CGPC noted that the applicant could continue his physical therapy after his separation. CPGC ordered the command to effect the applicant's separation.

On January 26, 2000, the applicant was honorably discharged with a JFX separation code, an RE-4 reenlistment code, and "Personality Disorder" as the narrative reason for separation on his DD 214, in accordance with Article 12.B.16. of the Personnel Manual.

On July 23, 2001, a clinical psychologist, Dr. M, reported that the applicant "presented with vague complaints of mood disorder that have eluded firm diagnosis" and complained that he had not been selected for several jobs for which was well qualified. Dr. M stated that the applicant explained that he had not "fit in" in the Coast Guard because it "isn't very integrated and I don't go to clubs, I don't drink, I don't like country music, I don't like NASCAR." He noted that the applicant could not explain why he had reenlisted except that he "had hoped things would go smoother and be more tolerable during his second tour but they were not." Dr. M reported that test results showed the following:

Results did NOT suggest problems with depression, anxiety, paranoia, PTSD, psychosis, substance abuse, or prominent antisocial personality features. As such, results were inconsistent with [the applicant's] prior personality disorder diagnosis. [He] did demonstrate a significant elevation on one scale sensitive to manic-like symptoms. However, examination of relevant subscales indicates that elevation was due to stable character features reflecting exaggerated self-importance, self-centeredness, cynicism, stubbornness and a tendency to be overly opinionated. He does not demonstrate such characteristics to a clinically debilitating level. ... [The applicant] does not appear to meet diagnostic criteria for any mental health disorder at this time. A prior diagnosis of personality disorder (paranoid/antisocial traits) does not appear consistent with his overall history nor with current test results.

On July 13, 2004, the Commandant of the Coast Guard approved the recommendation of the Discharge Review Board (DRB) and denied the applicant's request for an upgraded reenlistment code, separation code, and narrative reason for separation. The DRB noted that "two separate military doctors diagnosed applicant with a personality disorder."

On July 26, 2005, the DVA informed the applicant that his 10% disability rating for post-traumatic arthritis in his right knee would be continued but that service connection for his adjustment disorder, "also claimed as personality disorder," was denied. The DVA stated that the denial was based on a lack of any evidence of a "permanent residual or chronic disability." The DVA also stated that at an examination on June 17, 2005, the examiner found "no diagnosis of current psychiatric disorder" and noted that his "previous diagnosis has resolved [since] you were removed from the situation which was causing your stress."

VIEWS OF THE COAST GUARD

On August 9, 2005, the Judge Advocate General (JAG) of the Coast Guard submitted an advisory opinion recommending that the Board grant partial relief by correcting the applicant's narrative reason for discharge to "Condition, Not A Disability" and his separation code to JFV. However, he recommended that the Board not upgrade the applicant's reenlistment code.

The JAG adopted as part of his advisory opinion a memorandum on the case prepared by CGPC. CGPC stated that the applicant was discharged due to a diagnosed adjustment disorder, rather than a personality disorder, and so should have been discharged for a "Condition, Not A Disability" with the corresponding JFV separation code. CGPC also stated, however, that the record indicates that the applicant should not be considered for future reenlistment in the military. CGPC stated that upgrading the RE-4 to an RE-3G would circumvent the recommendation of the clinical psychologist, Dr. G. CGPC stated

the separation authority for discharging someone due to a condition that is not a disability is Article 12.B.6. of the Personnel Manual.

The JAG argued that "[a]bsent strong evidence to the contrary," the Board must presume that the doctors involved in the applicant's discharge "carried out their duties correctly, lawfully, and in good faith." *Arens v. United States*, 969 F.2d 1034, 1037 (Fed. Cir. 1992); *Sanders v. United States*, 594 F.2d 804, 813 (Ct. Cl. 1979). He argued that the medical records show that Dr. G took into consideration the applicant's boating incident, medical history, and family history before strongly recommending that the applicant be separated and not be allowed to reenlist in the military. He stated that the record also shows that it was the applicant who was curt and uncooperative during the evaluation. Moreover, the JAG pointed out, the applicant did not object to his discharge. He argued that the applicant has not proved by a preponderance of the evidence that his RE-4 reenlistment code is erroneous or unjust.

APPLICANT'S RESPONSE TO THE VIEWS OF THE COAST GUARD

On August 16, 2005, the applicant responded to the views of the Coast Guard. The applicant asked the Board to grant full relief as the rules allow a member being discharged due to a condition, not a disability, to receive an RE-3G. The applicant complained that Dr. G was not professional as she did not offer him relief, medication, or other remedies. He stated that she took the side of his command and was biased against him. The applicant argued that since the Coast Guard has admitted that he was discharged due to an adjustment disorder, which is temporary, he should receive the RE-3G. He also argued that the RE-4 is unjust because it stops him from reenlisting in any military service, but he has not been in all of the military branches.

APPLICABLE LAW

Article 12.B.16. of the Coast Guard Personnel Manual authorizes enlisted personnel with diagnosed personality disorders that are listed in Chapter 5 of the Medical Manual to be discharged by reason of unsuitability at the direction of the Commandant.

Chapter 5.B.2 of the Medical Manual lists personality disorders that qualify a member for administrative discharge pursuant to Article 12.B. of the Personnel Manual. Adjustment disorders are not included among the personality disorders listed in Chapter 5.B.2. of the Medical Manual. Chapter 5.B.3 of the Medical Manual states that adjustment disorders "are generally treatable and not usually grounds for separation," but that members with adjustment disorders may be administratively discharged "when these conditions persist or treatment

is likely to be prolonged or non-curative (e.g. inability to adjust to military life ...)." Chapter 3.F.16.d of the Medical Manual states that adjustment disorders "do not render an individual unfit because of physical impairment. However, if these conditions are recurrent and interfere with military duty, are not amenable to treatment, or require prolonged treatment, administrative separation should be recommended (see Section 5-B)."

Article 12.B.16.d. of the Personnel Manual provides that every member discharged under the article shall be notified of the reason he is being considered for discharge and shall be allowed to submit a statement on his own behalf. Article 12.B.16.h. provides that every member "under consideration for discharge for unsuitability must have a physical examination performed by a Public Health Service or Armed Forces medical officer. If one is not available locally, a contract physician may perform the exam."

Article 1.E. of the Coast Guard Instruction for completing discharge forms states that a member's DD 214 should show a separation code and reenlistment code "as shown in the SPD Handbook or as stated by [CGPC] in the message granting discharge authority." The narrative reason for separation on the DD 214 must be whatever is specified by CGPC.

The SPD Handbook includes the following combinations of codes and narrative reasons for separation which might apply to the applicant's case:

SPD Code	Narrative Reason for Separation	RE Code	Separation Authority	Explanation
JFX	Personality Disorder	RE-4 or RE-3G	12.B.16	Involuntarily discharge [by direction] when a personality disorder exists, not amounting to a disability, which potentially interferes with assignment to or performance of duty.
JFV	Condition, Not a Disability	RE-4 or RE-3G	12.B.12	Involuntarily discharge [by direction] when a condition, not a physical disability, interferes with the performance of duty (Enuresis, motion sickness, allergy, obesity, fear of flying, et al.)
JND	Miscellaneous/ General Reasons	RE-1 or RE-4	12.B.12.	Involuntary discharge [by direction] when a Service component does not have a Service reporting requirement for specific reasons and desires to identify reasons collectively "All other reasons" which qualify a member for separation.

Under Article 12.B.4. of the Personnel Manual, a member's commanding officer has authority to decide which of the permissible RE codes listed in the SPD Handbook the member is assigned.

Article 12.B.12.a.12. of the Personnel Manual authorizes enlisted personnel with a diagnosed "condition that, though not a physical disability, interferes

with performance of duty" to be discharged for the convenience of the Government.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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

- 1. The Board has jurisdiction concerning this matter pursuant to section 1552 of title 10 of the United States Code.
- 2. Although the applicant filed his application more than three years after his discharge, he filed it within three years of having timely filed an application with the DRB, which has a fifteen-year statute of limitations. Therefore, the Board finds that the application is timely in accordance with the decision in *Ortiz v. Sec'y of Defense*, 41 F.3d 738, 743 (D.C.C. 1994).
- 3. The record indicates that the applicant was discharged due to a diagnosed adjustment disorder, not a personality disorder. An adjustment disorder is not a personality disorder.³ There are a limited number of separation codes available to the Coast Guard; they cannot be tailor-made to reflect exactly the circumstances of each member's discharge. Therefore, a member sometimes receives a separation code and narrative reason for separation that do not perfectly reflect the cause of his discharge. Nonetheless, because civilian employers often demand to see former servicemembers' DD 214s prior to hiring them, it is extremely important for DD 214s to be fair and not to unduly tarnish servicemembers' records without just cause and substantial evidence. The record contains several doctors' evaluations that state that the applicant does not have a personality disorder. Therefore, the Board agrees with the JAG and CGPC that the applicant's separation code and narrative reason for separation should be corrected to JFV and "Condition, Not A Disability" because an adjustment disorder is a normally temporary medical condition that does not constitute a physical disability.
- 4. The article of the Personnel Manual that authorizes the discharge of a member for a condition that is not a disability is Article 12.B.12., rather than Article 12.B.16. or Article 12.B.6. (as indicated by CGPC). Therefore, the discharge authority noted on the applicant's DD 214 should also be corrected to be consistent with his narrative reason for discharge.

³ Coast Guard Medical Manual, Chap. 5.B.2.; American Psychiatric Association, DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS, FOURTH EDITION, TEXT REVISION (2000) (DSM-IV-TR), p. 679.

- 5. The applicant asked that his discharge be upgraded to RE-1 or at least RE-3G. He submitted doctors' reports indicating that his adjustment disorder has abated since he left active duty. He also submitted several employment references showing that he has been successful in civilian life. However, the applicant's record contains several doctors' statements indicating that he was unable to adapt to a military lifestyle. During his two enlistments, the applicant was repeatedly described by doctors and superior officers as hostile, disruptive, frustrated, volatile, argumentative, and disrespectful toward superiors. A doctor reported on October 27, 1999, that the applicant admitted to having had thoughts of harming his fellow servicemembers. Moreover, according to Dr. G's notes, the applicant stated on November 2, 1999, that he had difficulty with "the lack of freedom" in the Coast Guard. He told her on November 9, 1999, that taking orders made him feel like a "slave." Following orders is an inherent part of all military service. In light of his medical and military records, the Board finds that the applicant has not proved by a preponderance of the evidence that the RE-4 reenlistment code on his DD 214 is erroneous or unjust.
- 6. Accordingly, the applicant's request to have his RE code upgraded should be denied, but the partial relief described in findings 3 and 4 should be granted.

[ORDER AND SIGNATURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE]

ORDER

Block 25 on his DD 214 shall be corrected to show that he was discharged under the authority of Article 12.B.12. of the Personnel Manual (COMDTINST M1000.6A).

Block 26 shall be corrected to show that he received the separation code JFV.

Block 28 shall be corrected to show "CONDITION, NOT A DISABILITY" as the narrative reason for separation.

The Coast Guard shall issue the applicant a new DD 214 with these corrections made in the original (not by hand and not by issuing a DD 215).

No other relief is granted.

Stephen H. Barber
Harold C. Davis, M.D.
David Morgan Frost