

## Section D. Claims for Service Connection for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

### Overview

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13. *General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD*

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**Introduction** This topic contains general information on developing claims for service connection for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It includes information on

- the requirements for establishing service connection for PTSD
  - the significance of prisoner-of-war (POW) and combat service
  - the definition of *engaging in combat*
  - individual decorations as evidence of participation in combat
  - action to take if a veteran received a combat decoration but does not expressly state the nature of the stressor
  - what constitutes credible supporting evidence
  - the degree of stressor corroboration required
  - considering non-combat-related stressors
  - using primary evidence to corroborate a claimed in-service stressor, and
  - secondary sources of evidence that may corroborate a claimed in-service stressor.
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**a. Requirements for Establishing Service Connection for PTSD** Service connection for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) requires

- credible evidence that the claimed in-service stressor occurred
- medical evidence diagnosing the condition in accordance with [38 CFR 4.125](#), and
- a link, established by medical evidence, between current symptoms and an in-service stressor.

**Important:** The lay testimony of a combat veteran alone may establish an in-service stressor for the purposes of establishing service connection for PTSD.

**Reference:** For more information on establishing service connection for PTSD, see

- M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart iv, 4.H
  - [38 CFR 3.304\(f\)](#), and
  - [38 U.S.C. 1154\(b\)](#).
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## 13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

### b. Significance of POW and Combat Service

The veteran's testimony alone establishes the occurrence of the claimed in-service stressor if

- the evidence of record confirms the veteran
  - engaged in combat, or
  - was a prisoner-of-war (POW) as defined by [38 CFR 3.1\(y\)](#)
- the claimed stressor is related to that episode of combat or POW experience,
- there is no clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, and
- the claimed stressor is consistent with the circumstances, conditions, or hardships of the veteran's service.

**Note:** There are no limitations as to the type of evidence that may be accepted to confirm engagement in combat. Any evidence that is probative of (serves to establish the fact at issue) combat participation may be used to support a determination that a veteran engaged in combat.

**References:** For more information on

- claims for service connection for PTSD, see
  - [38 CFR 3.304\(f\)](#), and
  - [38 U.S.C. 1154\(b\)](#), and
- evidence that may be used to support a determination that a veteran engaged in combat with the enemy, see *VAOPGCPREC Opinion 12-99*.

### c. Definition: Engaging in Combat

**Engaging in combat** with the enemy means personal participation in events constituting an actual fight or encounter with a military foe or hostile unit or instrumentality. It includes presence during such events either as a

- combatant, or
- service member performing duty in support of combatants, such as providing medical care to the wounded.

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## 13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

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### d. Individual Decorations as Evidence of Engagement in Combat

Consider the receipt of any of the following individual decorations as evidence of exposure to combat-related stressors:

- Air Force Cross
- Air Medal with “V” Device
- Army Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Bronze Star Medal with “V” Device
- Combat Action Badge
- Combat Action Ribbon (*Note:* Prior to February 1969, the Navy Achievement Medal with “V” Device was awarded.)
- Combat Aircrew Insignia
- Combat Infantry/Infantryman Badge
- Combat Medical Badge
- Distinguished Flying Cross
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Joint Service Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Medal of Honor
- Navy Commendation Medal with “V” Device
- Navy Cross
- Purple Heart, and/or
- Silver Star.

***Important:*** Receipt of one of the decorations cited above is not the only acceptable evidence of engagement in combat.

***Note:*** Because the medals listed below may be awarded for either combat or non-combat service, their receipt does not confirm a veteran’s participation in combat. Request documentation (using Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES) request code O19) showing justification for awarding the medal.

- Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
- Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
- Afghanistan Campaign Medal, and
- Iraq Campaign Medal.

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## 13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

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### e. Action to Take if Veteran Received Combat Decoration but Does Not State Nature of Stressor

If a veteran received one of the combat decorations cited in M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.13.d but does not expressly state the nature of the stressor

- assume the stressor is combat-related
  - order an examination, if necessary to decide the claim, and
  - in the examination request
    - state that VA has verified the veteran’s combat service, and
    - specify any details regarding the combat stressor contained in the record.
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### f. What Constitutes Credible Supporting Evidence

Credible supporting evidence that an in-service stressor actually occurred includes not only evidence that specifically documents the veteran’s personal participation in the event, but evidence that

- indicates the veteran served in the immediate area and at the particular time in which the stressful event is alleged to have occurred, and
- supports the description of the event.

**Notes:**

- Evaluate the evidence as a whole to determine whether a stressor is sufficiently corroborated. (See *Moran v. Principi*, 17 Vet.App. 149 (2003).)
  - Corroborating evidence of a stressor is *not* restricted to service records, but may be obtained from other sources. (See *Doran v. Brown*, 6 Vet.App. 283 (1994).)
  - The credible supporting evidence requirement does not necessarily demand the submission of official documentary evidence.
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### g. The Degree of Stressor Corroboration Required

Corroboration of every detail, including the claimant’s personal participation in the claimed stressful event, is not required. The evidence may be sufficient if it implies a veteran’s personal exposure to the event.

**Examples:**

- When considered as a whole, evidence consisting of a morning report, radio log, and nomination for a Bronze Star may be sufficient to corroborate a veteran’s account of an event, even if it does not specifically include mention of the veteran’s name. (See *Suozzi v. Brown*, 10 Vet.App. 307 (1997).)
  - Unit records documenting the veteran’s presence with a specific unit at the time mortar attacks occurred may be sufficient to corroborate a veteran’s statement that she/he experienced such attacks personally. (See *Pentecost v. Principi*, 16 Vet.App. 124 (2002).)
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## 13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

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### h. Considering Non-Combat-Related Stressors

PTSD may result from a non-combat stressor, such as

- a plane crash
  - a ship sinking
  - an explosion
  - a rape or assault
  - duty in a burn ward or graves registration unit
  - witnessing the death, injury, or threat to the physical being of another person not caused by the enemy, and
  - actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's own physical being not caused by the enemy.
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### i. Using Primary Evidence to Corroborate a Claimed In-Service Stressor

Primary evidence is generally considered the most reliable source for verifying in-service stressors. It is typically obtained from the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) (formerly the U.S. Armed Services Center for Unit Records Research (CURR)), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), or the Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections (MCASC) and should be carefully reviewed for information corroborating participation in combat or to otherwise corroborate a claimed in-service stressor.

Primary evidence may include

- unit and organizational histories
- daily staff journals
- operational reports-lessons learned
- after action reports
- radio logs, deck logs, and ship histories
- muster rolls
- command chronology and war diaries
- monthly summary, and
- monthly reports.

**Note:** Generally, documents written or recorded by the lowest possible unit in the chain of the command are the most probative source of information to verify a claimed stressor, because, by nature, they tend to include details of events with greater precision. **Examples:**

- A company commander's narrative is likely of greater relevance and specificity than a battalion commander's.
  - A Navy ship's deck log would likely yield more probative information than a fleet log.
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## 13. General Information on Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD, Continued

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**j. Secondary Sources of Evidence Which May Corroborate a Claimed In-Service Stressor**

Alternative sources of evidence must be critically and carefully reviewed for information confirming participation in combat or to otherwise corroborate a claimed in-service stressor.

Alternative sources of evidence may include

- military occupational specialty (MOS) evidence (*Note:* A veteran's MOS may be specified on his/her *DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*, or in the personnel folder.)
- hazard pay records, which may be obtained from the Department of Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS).
- personnel folder, which may be requested via PIES.
- service medical records
- performance reports, which may be requested via PIES
- verification that the veteran received Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay (*Note:* This information may be requested through the Veterans Information Solution (VIS).)
- buddy statements
- contemporaneous letters and diaries
- newspaper archives, and
- information from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)-sanctioned websites, which may be accessed through the PTSD Rating Job Aid website.

***Important:***

- All sources of evidence obtained for purposes of stressor corroboration must be fully documented in the file. *Example:* Print and file pages from a sanctioned website used in the determination of combat participation.
  - While confirmation of receipt of Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay through the VIS alone does not constitute verification of a combat-related stressor, it may, in combination with other evidence, "tip the scales" in favor of the veteran's assertion of his/her involvement in combat.
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**14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred**

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**Introduction** This topic contains information on requesting evidence that a stressor occurred. It includes information on

- when to request hospital reports and clinical records
  - when to request evidence from the veteran
  - the information to request from the veteran
  - the PIES codes to use when submitting a records request, and
  - relevant personnel records in PTSD cases.
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**a. When to Request Hospital Reports and Clinical Records** Request hospital reports and clinical records if the veteran indicates pertinent treatment in a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility, Vet Center, or elsewhere.

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**b. When to Request Evidence From the Veteran** Request the veteran to provide credible supporting evidence to establish that a stressor occurred if the evidence of record

- shows that the veteran was engaged in combat, but the claimed stressor is not related to that combat, or
  - does *not* show that the veteran was engaged in combat.
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## 14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred, Continued

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### c. Information to Request From the Veteran

Use the PTSD development letter in the Modern Awards Processing-Development (MAP-D) application to request information from the veteran.

Enclose *VA Form 21-0781, Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* to solicit specific details of each of the in-service stressful incidents, such as the

- date of the incident
- place of the incident
- unit of assignment at the time of the incident
- detailed description of the event
- medals or citations received as a result of the incident, and
- name and other identifying information concerning any other individuals involved in the event, if appropriate.

**Important:** Do not ask the veteran for specific details in any case in which there is credible supporting evidence that the claimed in-service stressor occurred, such as evidence of internment as a POW or receipt of one of the decorations listed in M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.13.d.

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### d. Minimum Information Required From the Veteran

At a minimum, the veteran *must* provide the following:

- a stressor that can be documented
- the location where the incident took place
- the approximate date (within a two-month period) of the incident, and
- the unit of assignment at the time the stressful event occurred.

Inform the veteran that

- the information is necessary to obtain supportive evidence of each of the stressful events, and
- failure to respond or an incomplete response may result in denial of the claim.

**Notes:**

- Specific details of claimed stressful events may also be gathered from such sources as VA or private medical treatment reports and examination reports.
  - Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) may obtain the date and location of well-documented events, such as the Tet Offensive, from VBA-sanctioned web sites (available through the PTSD Rating Job Aid website) and supply this information on the veteran's behalf.
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## 14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred, Continued

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### d. Minimum Information Required From the Veteran (continued)

*Reference:* For information on the types of stressors that may be impossible to corroborate, see the *JSRRC Stressor Verification Guide, Section V*.

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### e. PIES Codes Used to Submit a Records Request

Use the following PIES request codes to request records required to process a claim for service connection for PTSD:

- Use PIES request code O18 if
  - the stressor is associated with an episode of personal trauma, such as rape, assault, and so forth, or
  - the veteran is claiming service connection for PTSD as a result of both personal trauma and other types of stressors.
- Use PIES request code O19 for verification of all other types of stressors.

*Notes:*

- Only select documents from the veteran's personnel folder, including those listed under M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.14.f, are provided in response to submission of a PIES request under request code O19.
  - A copy of *all* documents within the personnel folder are provided in response to a PIES request submitted under request code O18.
  - Because of the time and cost involved in photocopying all documents within a personnel folder, do not submit a request to NPRC (address code 13) under request code O18 unless the claim involves personal trauma.
  - If documents not routinely provided by NPRC in response to a request submitted under request code O19 are needed, identify the documents in a customized request, using request code O99.
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## 14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred, Continued

### f. Relevant Personnel Records in PTSD Cases

The table below identifies the forms that contain information about the veteran's unit(s) of assignment, military occupation, and service locations.

*Note:* These forms are among the documents that will be provided in response to PIES requests submitted under request code O19.

Branch of Service	Name(s) of Forms
Army	<p><i>DA Form 2-1, Personnel Qualification Record.</i></p> <p><i>Notes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>DA Form 2-1</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– is used for both officers and enlisted personnel, and</li> <li>– first came into use in January 1973.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prior to January 1973, <i>DA Form 20, Enlisted Qualification Record</i> and <i>DA Form 66, Officer Qualification Record</i> were used.</li> </ul>
Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enlisted record of <i>Transfer and Receipts</i>, pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 12</li> <li>– 32, and</li> <li>– 33</li> </ul> </li> <li>• enlisted record <i>Administrative Remarks</i>, pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 4 through 9</li> <li>– 13, and</li> <li>– 34, and</li> </ul> </li> <li>• officer record, <i>NAVPERS 1301/51, Officer Data Card</i>, page 35.</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: DD Form 214</i> and enlistment contracts are usually included.</p>
Air Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enlisted record, <i>AF Form 7, Airman Military Record</i>, pages 36 through 39</li> <li>• officer record, <i>AF Form 11, Officer Military Record</i>, pages 39 and 40, and</li> <li>• performance reports for both enlisted personnel and officers.</li> </ul>

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## 14. Requesting Evidence That a Stressor Occurred, Continued

### f. Relevant Personnel Records in PTSD Cases (continued)

Branch of Service	Name(s) of Forms
Marine Corps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enlistment contracts</li> <li>• discharge papers</li> <li>• <i>MABMC-11 (discharge order)</i>, and</li> <li>• service records, pages               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 3</li> <li>– 5 through 6</li> <li>– 8 through 9</li> <li>– 12 through 13, and</li> <li>– 17.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Coast Guard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enlisted record</li> <li>• <i>Endorsement on Order Sheet, (DoT Form CG 3312B)</i></li> <li>• officer record</li> <li>• <i>Service Records Card</i></li> <li>• <i>DoT Form CG CG 3301</i></li> <li>• <i>DoT Form CG CG 3303</i></li> <li>• <i>DoT Form CG CG 3305</i>, pages 3, 5, 6-7</li> <li>• <i>DD Form 214</i>, and</li> <li>• the enlistment contract.</li> </ul>

**15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor**

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**Introduction**

This topic contains information on requesting verification of an in-service stressor. It includes information on

- when to request corroboration of an in-service stressor
  - where to send a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor
  - what to include in requests to the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) (formerly the U.S. Armed Services Center for Unit Records Research (CURR))
  - sending requests for research of Marine Corps unit records to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)
  - accessing Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era unit records through Virtual VA
  - requesting stressor corroboration from Marine Corps unit records dated after the Vietnam Era
  - the responsibilities of the Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections (MCASC)
  - information to include in requests to MCASC
  - sample letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor
  - the duties of the JSRRC coordinator
  - invalid or incomplete requests
  - denying service connection because of an unconfirmed stressor
  - handling requests for more information, and
  - the failure of a veteran to provide sufficient information.
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## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

Continued

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**a. When to Request Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor**

Submit a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor if

- the evidence does not corroborate the veteran's claim that he/she engaged in combat or experienced other in-service stressor(s)
- the in-service stressor claimed is capable of being documented
- the veteran's records contain
  - evidence of a diagnosis of PTSD, such as outpatient treatment records showing treatment for PTSD, *or*
  - competent lay evidence of persistent or recurrent symptoms of PTSD, such as the veteran's description of symptoms indicative of PTSD, and
- development is complete in every respect except for
  - corroboration of the in-service stressor, and
  - a confirmed diagnosis of PTSD.

***Important:***

- Do *not* schedule a VA examination before receiving corroboration of the claimed in-service stressor. A diagnosis of PTSD is not a prerequisite for initiating the stressor verification process.
- Some stressors are clearly impossible to document and should not be referred to the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) (formerly the U.S. Armed Services Center for Unit Records Research (CURR)), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), or the Marine Corps. If, after requesting/obtaining pertinent facts from the veteran, it is obvious that corroboration simply is not feasible, the claim should be decided based on the evidence of record.

***References:*** For information on

- where to send a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.b, and
- the types of stressors that may be impossible to corroborate, see the *JSRRC Stressor Verification Guide, Section V*.

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## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

Continued

**b. Where to  
Send a Request  
for  
Corroboration of  
an In-Service  
Stressor**

Use the table below to determine where to send a request for corroboration of an in-service stressor.

If the stressor occurred during service in the ...	Send the request to ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Army</li> <li>• Navy</li> <li>• Air Force, or</li> <li>• Coast Guard</li> </ul>	JSRRC (address code 55) via the PIES/ Defense Personnel Records Imaging System (DPRIS) interface under request code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• O40 - first (or only) stressor</li> <li>• O41 - second stressor (if more than one is claimed), or</li> <li>• O42 - third stressor (if more than two are claimed).</li> </ul>
Marine Corps ( <i>except</i> during assignment aboard a Navy ship)	<p><b>Address:</b>            Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections            Alfred M. Gray Research Center            2040 Broadway Street, MCCDC            Quantico, VA 22134-5107</p> <p><b>Fax number:</b>            (703) 784-4665.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Submit a request for stressor corroboration to this address or fax number <i>only</i> if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the claimed stressor of a Korean Conflict or Vietnam Era veteran cannot be corroborated through review of Marine Corps unit records in Virtual VA, or</li> <li>• the claimed stressor occurred during service after the Vietnam Era.</li> </ul>
Marine Corps, during assignment aboard a Navy ship	<p><b>Address:</b>            U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center            7701 Telegraph Road            Kingman Building, Room 2C08            Alexandria, VA 22315-3852</p> <p><b>Important:</b> Do <i>not</i> submit these requests for stressor verification to JSRRC via the PIES/DPRIS interface.</p>

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# 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

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**c. Information to Include in Requests to JSRRC**

The following information must be included when submitting a request for stressor corroboration to JSRRC’s mailing address or through the PIES/Defense Personnel Records Imaging System (DPRIS) interface:

- adequate identifying information, to include the claimant’s full name and Social Security number (SSN)
- a description of the claimed stressor(s)
- month and year during which the stressful event occurred (JSRRC will research records dated 30 days before the date provided and 30 days after)
- the veteran’s unit of assignment at the time of the stressful event, and
- the geographic location where the stressful event took place.

*Note:* The telephone number for VA’s liaison officer at JSRRC is (703) 428-6915.

*Reference:* For a listing of the personnel documents containing information about the veteran’s unit(s) of assignment and service locations, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.14.f.

Additional information identified by JSRRC as helpful in conducting research includes

- the medals or citations received by the veteran, and
- the names of other soldiers or sailors involved in the stressful incident.

**d. Sending Requests for Research of Marine Corps Unit Records to NARA**

Send a request for research of Marine Corps unit records to NARA when

- corroboration of a stressor is required, and
- the unit records are dated prior to the Vietnam Era.

*Exception:* Unit records covering the Korean Conflict may be accessed through Virtual VA. For more information, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.e.

Use to table below to request stressor corroboration from NARA.

Step	Action
1	Access the inquiry form at <a href="#">NARA’s website address</a> .
2	Select “Records created by the United States military” from the drop-down list of question topics.

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## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

Continued

### d. Sending Requests for Research of Marine Corps Unit Records to NARA (continued)

Step	Action
3	<p>In the box provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify yourself as a VBA employee, and</li> <li>• indicate the specific information you are seeking, as well as the veteran's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– name</li> <li>– rank</li> <li>– unit of assignment at the time of the stressful event, and</li> <li>– inclusive dates of service.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4	Furnish your contact information in the spaces provided.

### e. Accessing Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era Unit Records Through Virtual VA

Marine Corps unit records covering the Korean Conflict and Vietnam Era are available to VA personnel through Virtual VA.

Perform a thorough search of Virtual VA to obtain information needed to corroborate the claimed stressor(s) of a Korean Conflict or Vietnam Era veteran.

*Note:* The Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections (MCASC) maintains custodianship of the records in Virtual VA and is the ultimate authority on their content and organization.

### f. Requesting Stressor Corroboration From Marine Corps Records Dated After the Vietnam Era

Send requests for stressor corroboration from Marine Corps unit records dated after the Vietnam Era directly to MCASC.

*References:* For information on

- MCASC's mailing address and fax number, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.b
- what to include in the request to MCASC, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.h, and
- a sample of a letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.i.

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## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

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### g. Responsibilities of MCASC

When a regional office (RO) cannot document the claimed stressor of a Marine Corps Korean Conflict or Vietnam Era veteran following a thorough search of the records in Virtual VA, or the claim requires research of unit records dated after the Vietnam Era, staff at MCASC is responsible for

- identifying the record(s) required to document the stressors, or
- providing confirmation that the claimed stressor(s) cannot be corroborated using records in its custody.

**Important:** An RO cannot deny a claim for PTSD based solely on the absence of a verified stressor until MCASC or NARA has confirmed the RO's negative findings.

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### h. Information to Include in Record Requests to MCASC

The following information must be included in each request to MCASC for records needed to document a claimed stressor:

- the veteran's name and VA file number
- the name of the veteran's squadron/battalion (or higher echelon)
- the date (month and year) the stressful event occurred (not to exceed a 60-day period)
- a concise description of the stressful event
- identification of the unit records reviewed through Virtual VA
- the mailing address of the requesting RO, and
- a point of contact at the RO.

**Notes:**

- The request may be faxed or mailed to MCASC, but it must be on VA letterhead and no more than one page in length.
- Do *not* attach to the request any medical information or statement(s) from the veteran.
- Submit a request to MCASC *only* after exhausting all efforts to document the claimed stressor(s) through other means, including Virtual VA and/or *official* military web sites.

**References:** For

- MCASC's mailing address and fax number, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.b, and
  - sample of a letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.i.
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**15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,**

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**i. Sample Letter to MCASC for a Determination as to the Availability of Records Required to Corroborate a Stressor**

A sample letter to MCASC for a determination as to the availability of records required to corroborate a stressor is below.

Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections	00/21
Alfred M. Gray Research Center	C 123-45-6789
2040 Broadway Street, MCCDC	JONES, John A.
Quantico, VA 22134-5107	

Dear Sir/Madam:

This is a request for research of records in your possession for the purpose of verifying an in-service stressor claimed by a veteran seeking service connection for post-traumatic stress disorder. The alleged stressor occurred in *<name of country>*. I have already reviewed the following unit records that MCASC provided to VA on compact disc:  
*<List the unit records reviewed through Virtual VA, if applicable.>*

The following information is provided to assist you in your research:

Name of Claimant:	John A. Jones
VA File Number:	123-45-6789
Mailing Address:	<i>&lt;Mailing address of regional office&gt;</i>
Name of Unit:	<i>&lt;Name of the unit in which the veteran was serving when the stressful incident occurred&gt;</i>
Description of Stressful Event:	The veteran alleges that he witnessed the collision of two helicopters that killed 25 – 30 people at Camp Radcliff between January and March of 1969. All the bodies were reportedly charred and fused together.
Point of Contact:	If additional information is required, please contact <i>&lt;regional office employee's name&gt;</i> at #####-####-####

Your assistance in this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Veterans Service Center Manager

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## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

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**j. Duties of the JSRRC Coordinator**

The JSRRC coordinator is the primary point of contact for all JSRRC-related related issues within each regional office and

- determines whether or not submission of a request for stressor verification is appropriate
- serves as the MCASC and NARA point of contact for issues related to records requests
- personally submits all of the RO's requests for stressor corroboration
- notifies JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA when further action on a pending research request is no longer necessary, (i.e., evidence is received that verifies the claimed stressor or the claim is withdrawn altogether)
- determines the status of research requests pending at JSRRC by checking the stressor corroboration database, and
- forwards inquiries from the regional office regarding JSRRC-related issues to the VACO JSRRC e-mailbox at VAVBAWAS/CO/CURR.

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**k. Invalid or Incomplete Requests**

JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA will return to the appropriate regional office any research request identified as invalid or incomplete, with an explanation of the deficiency(ies) identified. JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA then closes out the request; it must be resubmitted as a new request to receive further consideration.

JSRRC, MCASC, and NARA process research requests on a first-come, first-served basis. Incomplete requests that are later resubmitted lose their original "place in line." For this reason, it is very important to provide correct and complete information to JSRRC, MCASC, and NARA at the time of the initial submission.

**Note:** ROs have the authority to deny a claim for service connection for PTSD without requesting corroboration of an in-service stressor from an official records custodian, such as JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA, if the claimant fails to provide the minimum information required to conduct research. For more information, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.16.

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*Continued on next page*

## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

Continued

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### **l. Denying Service Connection Because of an Unconfirmed Stressor**

Denying service connection solely because of an unconfirmed stressor is improper unless the appropriate records custodian, such as JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA, has confirmed that the claimed stressor cannot be corroborated or

- the veteran has failed to provide the basic information required to conduct research, *and*
- the JSRRC coordinator has taken the actions described in M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii.1.D.16.

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### **m. Handling Requests for More Information**

Occasionally, JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA requires additional information in order to conduct its research. When this occurs the RO must take immediate action to comply with the request.

*Notes:*

- The JSRRC coordinator may contact the veteran by telephone to obtain the additional information needed to document the in-service stressor. The substance of the telephone call must be documented on a *Report of Contact, VA Form 119*.
- Failure by the veteran to respond substantively to the request for information is grounds for denial of the claim based on the absence of a verifiable stressor.

*Reference:* For more information on stressor corroboration and the additional evidence that may be required to conduct research, see the *JSRRC Stressor Verification Guide*.

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*Continued on next page*

## 15. Requesting Corroboration of an In-Service Stressor,

Continued

### n. Failure of a Veteran to Provide Sufficient Information

Use the table below to determine what action to take when a veteran fails to provide sufficient information about a claimed stressful event.

If a veteran ...	Then ...
fails to respond within 60 days to the initial request for information about the claimed stressful event	send a 30-day follow-up letter requesting information as described in M21-1MR Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.15.c.
submits insufficient information in response to the initial request for information	send a 30-day follow-up letter explaining <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what information is missing, and</li> <li>• why the information is needed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fails to respond within 30 days to the follow-up letter, or</li> <li>• submits information that is still insufficient</li> </ul>	refer the case to the JSRRC coordinator to make a formal finding that sufficient information required to corroborate the claimed stressor(s) does not exist. <p><b>Reference:</b> For more information on action taken by the JSRRC coordinator, see</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.16.a, and</li> <li>• M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.16.b.</li> </ul>

16. Completion of a Formal Finding of a Lack of Information Required to Document the Claimed Stressor(s)

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**Introduction** This topic contains information on completing a formal finding of a lack of information required to document the claimed stressor(s), including

- action by the JSRRC coordinator
  - requirements for a formal finding, and
  - a sample of a formal finding.
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**Change Date** September 29, 2006

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**a. Action by the JSRRC Coordinator** The JSRRC coordinator will make a formal finding regarding the lack of sufficient information in the claims folder to document the occurrence of the stressful event(s) and the veteran's involvement in it.

To ensure that the information of record is insufficient, the JSRRC coordinator should review the claims folder to confirm

- the claimant was properly notified of the information required to document the stressor(s), and
  - all relevant evidence, to include service records, has been considered in an attempt to confirm the occurrence of the stressful event.
- 

**b. Requirements for a Formal Finding** The formal finding

- must be approved by the Veterans Service Center Manager (VSCM) or his/her designee
- should be on a separate page to be filed in the claims folder, and
- should note
  - the actions taken to obtain the required information
  - that all procedures have been properly followed
  - that evidence of all efforts to obtain the records is in the claims folder
  - that all efforts to obtain the needed information have been exhausted
  - that further efforts would be futile, and
  - that the information required to document the stressful event(s) is unavailable.

**Note:** It is *not* necessary to contact the veteran by telephone to

- advise him/her of the formal finding, or
  - allow additional time to submit the needed information.
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## 16. Completion of a Formal Finding of a Lack of Information Required to Document the Claimed Stressor(s), Continued

**c. Sample of a Formal Finding**

A sample of a formal finding of a lack of information required to document the claimed stressor(s) is shown below:

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Memorandum**

Date:

From:

RE: Private, John Q.  
CSS 999 99 9999

Subj: Formal finding of a lack of information required to corroborate stressor(s) associated with a claim for service connection for PTSD.

To: File

1. We have determined that the information required to corroborate the stressful events described by the veteran is insufficient to send to the U.S. Army and Joint Services Records Research Center (JSRRC) and/or insufficient to allow for meaningful research of Marine Corps or National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) records.
2. All procedures to obtain this information from the veteran have been properly followed. Evidence of written and telephonic efforts to obtain this information is in the file. All efforts to obtain the needed information have been exhausted, and any further attempts would be futile.
3. The following efforts were made in order to obtain the information necessary to corroborate stressful events for the PTSD claim:

1  
2  
3  
4  
5

Signature/Position: \_\_\_\_\_

17. *Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma*

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**Introduction** This topic contains information on developing claims for service connection for PTSD based on personal trauma. It includes information on

- general information about personal trauma
- the evidence required to establish service connection
- the process for obtaining information from the veteran
- the letters to use to obtain information from the veteran
- the process for obtaining service records
- the problems associated with development
- alternative sources for information, and
- the process for obtaining police reports.

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**Change Date** December 13, 2005

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**a. General Information About Personal Trauma** Personal trauma is an event of human design that threatens or inflicts harm. Veterans claiming service connection for disability due to in-service personal trauma face unique problems documenting their claims.

These incidents are often violent and may lead to the development of PTSD.

*Examples:* Rape, physical assault, domestic battering, robbery, mugging, stalking, and harassment.

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**b. Evidence Required to Establish Service Connection** To establish service connection for PTSD, there *must* be credible evidence to support the veteran's assertion that the stressful event occurred.

This does *not* mean that the evidence actually proves that the incident occurred, but that there is at least an approximate balance of positive and negative evidence that the event did occur.

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## 17. Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma, Continued

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### c. Obtaining Information From the Veteran

Identifying possible sources of evidence to support the claim may require asking the veteran for information concerning the traumatic incident. Make this request as compassionately as possible in order to avoid causing further trauma.

Although personal trauma is most often thought of as involving female veterans, male veterans may also be involved. Be sure requests for evidence/ information reflect the appropriate gender of the veteran.

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### d. Letters to Use to Obtain Information From the Veteran

When writing a letter to obtain information from the veteran regarding a claim based on personal trauma, use MAP-D and select the personal assault option from the PTSD special issues screen. Enclose *VA Form 21-0781a, Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Secondary to Personal Trauma*, to solicit details of the claim.

**Important:** Letters used by ROs to solicit details concerning a combat stressful incident are inappropriate for PTSD claims based on personal trauma.

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### e. Obtaining Service Records

Review the claim and all attached documents. Request service medical records (SMRs) and the entire personnel folder from the appropriate records custodian, if necessary.

**Note:** Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) must work closely with Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs) when developing personal trauma cases.

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### f. Problems Associated With Development

Because personal trauma is an extremely personal and sensitive issue

- many incidents of personal trauma are not officially reported, and
- the victims of this type of in-service trauma may find it difficult to produce evidence to support the occurrence of the stressor.

It is often necessary to seek alternative evidence.

**Reference:** For information on alternative sources for information, see M21-1MR, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.17.g.

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*Continued on next page*

## 17. Developing Claims for Service Connection for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma, Continued

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### g. Alternative Sources for Information

Service records not normally requested may be needed to develop claims for service connection for PTSD based on personal trauma, including in-service sexual assault. Responses to a request for information may identify alternative sources for information, such as

- rape crisis center or center for domestic abuse
  - counseling facility
  - health clinic
  - family members or roommates
  - faculty members
  - civilian police reports
  - medical reports from civilian physicians or caregivers who may have treated the veteran either
    - immediately following the incident, or
    - sometime later
  - chaplain or clergy
  - fellow service persons, or
  - personal diaries or journals.
- 

### h. Obtaining Police Reports

Obtain reports, as appropriate, from

- military police
- shore patrol
- a provost marshal's office, or
- other military law enforcement offices.

*Note:* Requests may be submitted via phone, fax, e-mail, or written correspondence, as long as the request is properly documented in the claims folder.

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