

DD 214 describes a veteran's military career

Officially called a "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty," but the basic document that proves a veteran has served in the active military is known more commonly by its form number: the DD 214.

The Department of Defense issues the DD 214 upon a military service member's retirement, separation or discharge from active-duty military. It also identifies the veteran's condition of discharge: honorable, general, other than honorable, dishonorable or bad conduct.

Before Jan. 1, 1950, several similar forms were used by the military services, including the WD AGO 53, WD AGO 55, WD AGO 53-55, NAVPERS 553, NAVMC 78PD, and the NAVCG 553.

The DD-214 or the Report of Separation contains information normally needed to verify military service for benefits, retirement, employment, and membership in veterans' organizations. Information shown on the Report of Separation may include the service member's:

- Date and place of entry into active duty
- Home address at time of entry
- Date and place of release from active duty
- Home address after separation
- Last duty assignment and rank
- Military job specialty
- Military education
- Decorations, medals, badges, citations, and campaign awards
- Total creditable service
- Foreign service credited
- Separation information (type of separation, character of service, authority and reason for separation, separation and reenlistment eligibility codes)

This document is the key to any and all veterans' benefits, including burial. Without this document most veterans' benefits cannot be granted. So it is important to safely store your DD 214. If you don't have your DD 214, you should get it now.

To get a copy of it you must fill out Standard Form 180 – available at www.solanocounty.com/veterans. Fax the completed form to the National Personnel Records Center at (314) 801-9049. To get the discharge document of a deceased veteran, the death certificate must accompany the SF-180.

While some limited information about the veteran is available to the general public, the DD 214 is not a public document. The Privacy Act of 1974 limits access to a veteran's DD 214 to only the service member (either past or present) or the member's legal guardian. Only these persons will have access to almost any information contained in that member's own record.

If the former service member is deceased, the surviving next of kin may, under certain circumstances, be entitled to greater access to a deceased veteran's records than an unrelated member of the general

public. The next of kin may be any of the following: un-remarried surviving spouse, father, mother, son, daughter, sister, or brother.

Limited information from Official Military Personnel Files is releasable to the general public without the consent of the veteran or the next-of-kin. You are considered a member of the general public if you are asking about a veteran who is of no relation to you, or a veteran who is a relative but you are not the next-of-kin.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.