



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

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MEMORANDUM FOR The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT: Review of Policies Concerning Separation Program Numbers
and Reenlistment Codes -- ACTION MEMORANDUM

Reference is made to Mr. R. J. Murray's memorandum to ASD(M&RA)
of 26 May 1973, subject as above (Tab A).

As directed, we reviewed the policies and procedures concerning Separation Program Numbers (SPN's) and Reenlistment (RE) codes. This memorandum is a summary of the detailed review enclosed (Tab B).

SPN's are data processing identifiers of reasons for discharge. RE codes specify whether an individual is eligible for reenlistment and whether any waiver is required. Both codes are placed on the DD Form 214, "Report of Separation From Active Duty," (Tab D). They are not placed on the discharge certificate.

The DD Form 214 also contains 33 other items of personnel information relating to the individual's military service. The form is used by the Services, Veterans Administration (VA) and Selective Service System (SSS) for their internal purposes; by veterans in seeking reenlistment, benefits or employment; and by employers who recognize its value and often demand that a veteran provide the form prior to employment.

In FY 73, over 725,000 persons were discharged from the Military Services. Of these discharges:

- 4.52% were under other than honorable conditions
- 6.78% were under honorable conditions but with adverse SPN's
- 88.70% were under honorable conditions with favorable SPN's

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These percentages are representative of the last several years.

Some critics allege that the SPN/RE codes unjustly stigmatize those veterans who were discharged under honorable conditions but with adverse SPN's (6.78%) because the adverse codes limit their employability. On the other hand, the codes are of significant value to veterans with honorable service and favorable SPN's (88.70%) by giving them the immediately available means to document their honorable service in seeking reenlistment, veterans' benefits or employment.

We analyzed five options for possible change, as described in the detailed review (Tab B). Legislative Affairs suggested a sixth option which was considered separately (Tab J).

The options considered were:

1. Do not provide a copy of the DD Form 214 to the individual, but continue to provide it to VA and SSS.
2. Delete SPN/RE codes from all copies of the DD Form 214.
3. Delete SPN/RE codes from the individual's copy of the DD Form 214.
4. Computerize the DD Form 214 information and delete SPN/RE codes from the individual's copy of the form.
5. Place SPN/RE codes on separation orders.
6. For those discharged under honorable conditions but with adverse SPN's, create a non-adverse or neutral reason for discharge, such as "for the convenience of the government," and do not provide the specific reason to the individual.

In all options we considered deleting SPN/RE codes in honorable and general discharge cases only.

Advantages:

One advantage which is common to the first four options is that some criticism of the present system would be obviated. Options 5 and 6 are discussed separately below.

Disadvantages:

Disadvantages common to the first four options are:

1. They are unfair to the honorably discharged veterans (88%) because:
 - a. they lose their readily available employment reference, and
 - b. their receipt of veterans' benefits will be delayed while VA confirms eligibility.
2. If a veteran requests his SPN or RE code, the law requires that the Military Services or the General Services Administration (GSA) research and provide it. A system of providing SPN or RE codes to veterans some time after discharge would be less accurate, more expensive, and more time-consuming than our present system.
3. The number of verification inquiries to the Services or GSA Record Center will increase significantly.
4. The question of retroactivity must be faced. If we delete the codes from the DD Form 214 in all cases or in honorable and general discharge cases only, should we or must we apply this procedure retroactively? If so, how far back? At what costs? On what basis -- on application from the individual or by a governmental review of records?
5. If RE codes are deleted from all copies or only from the individual's copy of the DD Form 214, recruitment of former servicemen will be delayed while eligibility is confirmed, and potential reenlistments will probably be lost.
6. If RE codes are deleted from all copies of the DD Form 214, DoD must create an alternative, responsive system for recruiters to verify reenlistment eligibility.
7. Any unique treatment of honorable and general discharge cases will emphasize the undesirable, bad conduct and dishonorable discharge cases.

Additional disadvantages peculiar to certain options are:

Option 2: If SPN's are deleted from all copies of the DD Form 214, DoD would still be required to provide this information to VA and SSS. This problem may be solved by development of a compatible computer system among DoD, VA, and SSS.

Options 3 and 4: Deletion of SPN/RE codes from the individual's copy of the DD Form 214 and retaining the codes in official records is an undesirable system of keeping records. In addition, a legal problem arises because copies of the individual's copy cannot be authenticated as true and complete copies, since the codes have been consciously omitted.

Option 4: Computerization involves additional cost (\$1 million), and some delay is necessary to forward information to a central location for coding and insertion into a computer.

Option 5: Placing SPN/RE codes on separation orders is virtually identical to our present system. Since a separation order is equally as public a document as the DD Form 214, employers would soon learn that the orders contained the codes, and would demand to see the separation orders and the DD Form 214. No improvement would be gained over our present method.

Option 6: Creating a neutral SPN for some discharges would result in unfair, "broad brush" treatment of individuals inasmuch as all persons so discharged would not be able to identify or prove the specific reason for their discharge. Thus, "less" adverse reasons would be grouped with "more" adverse reasons. In addition, the law requires that information in personnel files must be released to the individual upon his request. Finally, this dual system will increase administration, costs and errors, and be subject to allegations of deceptive record-keeping.

Army and Navy recommend no change to present procedures. Air Force recommends change (Option 5) but provides no effective procedure for improving the present system.

The recent fire at the GSA National Personnel Records Center emphasizes the value of every veteran's having a complete DD Form 214 in his possession. With this document in hand, many routine applications for benefits will be easier, faster and more accurate, and will eliminate the requirement that records be reconstituted from secondary sources.

In summary, there are no advantages in changing our present system, except to answer some critics. We believe that the disadvantages which would inure to the vast majority of our veterans (88.70%) far outweigh any possible advantages which would accrue to the smaller group of veterans (6.78%). Even if any of these options were to be selected, a veteran in either group would still have to obtain documentation of his reason for discharge if an employer required it, or if the veteran wanted quick access to veterans' benefits. Thus, the decision to release the information would remain with the individual, as it is under our present policy.

We recommend no change to our present system.

We have also considered the suggestion of an independent study of the entire discharge system (Tab K). We do not oppose this suggestion and will explore further with Mr. Friedheim his concept of such a study. We believe, however, that such a study would require either a contractual arrangement with a non-DoD organization, or formation of a study panel of prominent, private citizens designated by the Secretary of Defense with necessary staff support provided by OSD. Apart from the question of the utility of such a study, either approach would require an extended period of time.

The orderly conduct of personnel operations necessitates an early decision relative to the SPN/RE policy. Consequently, we adhere to the recommendation above that the present system be retained.



Robert C. Taber
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Principal Deputy

APPROVED W. P. Clement

OCT 23 1973

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For concurrences see attached.

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