

1. Honorable Discharge

- “[A]ppropriate when the quality of the Soldier’s service generally has met the standards of acceptable conduct and performance of duty for Army personnel . . .” AR 635-200, para. 3-7a.; AR 135-178, para. 2-9a.
- Look at the pattern of behavior, not isolated incidents.
- Soldier receives DD Form 256A, Honorable Discharge Certificate.
- Usually required if the Government introduces limited use information from the Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) during discharge proceedings.

2. General Discharge (Under Honorable Conditions)

- AC: “[I]ssued to a Soldier whose military record is satisfactory but not sufficiently meritorious to warrant an honorable discharge.” AR 635-200, para. 3-7b(1).
- USAR: “If a Soldier’s service has been honest and faithful, it is appropriate to characterize that service as under honorable conditions. Characterization of service as general (under honorable conditions) is warranted when significant negative aspects of the Soldier’s conduct or performance of duty outweigh positive aspects of the Soldier’s military record.” AR 135-178, para 2-9b.
- Only permitted if the reasons for separation (chapter) specifically authorize, and not permitted for expiration of term of service (ETS).
- Soldier receives DD Form 257A, General Discharge Certificate.
- Impact on benefits.
 - No civil service retirement credit for time spent on active duty.
 - No education benefits. Money paid in to Montgomery GI Bill is forfeited (subject to vesting of the benefit due to previous honorable discharge).
 - Many states will not pay unemployment compensation.
 - “I understand that I may expect to encounter substantial prejudice in civilian life.” This statement is generally included in separation counseling to inform the Soldier that there may be negative impacts resulting from a general discharge.
- No automatic upgrading of discharges. Upgrading requires application to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records (ABCMR) or the Army Discharge Review Board (ADRB).

3. Under Other Than Honorable (OTH) Conditions Discharge

- Authorized under certain chapters for a pattern of behavior, or one or more acts or omissions, “that constitutes a significant departure from the conduct expected of [S]oldiers.” AR 635-200, para. 3-7c(1); AR 135-178, para. 2-9c..
- Board hearing is generally required, unless waived by the Soldier or the separation is voluntary (i.e., Ch. 10).

- No discharge certificate issued (but Soldier still receives DD Form 214 with characterization of service annotated).
- The Soldier must indicate that “I . . . understand . . . I may be ineligible for many or all benefits as a veteran under both Federal and State laws and . . . I may expect to encounter substantial prejudice in civilian life.”
- When approved by a separation authority, automatically reduces an enlisted Soldier to Private, E-1, by operation of law.
- No automatic upgrading of discharges; upgrading requires application to the AB-CMR or the ADRB.

4. Entry Level Status (ELS) (Uncharacterized) Separation

- For “unsatisfactory performance and/or conduct while in entry-level status” (first 180 days of creditable service, or first 180 days of creditable service after a break in service of over 92 days for active duty (AD) Soldiers). See AR 635-200, Glossary, Section II.
- Service will be described as uncharacterized if separation processing is initiated while a Soldier is in an entry level status.
- “Entry level status” for a USAR Soldier generally terminates 180 days after beginning training if the Soldier is ordered to ADT for one continuous period of 180 days or more, **or**
- 90 days after the beginning of the second period of ADT if the Soldier is ordered to ADT under a program that splits the training into two or more separate periods of active duty.
- Counseling and rehabilitation essential before separation.
- Not a per se bar to veteran’s benefits, but has the effect of disqualifying the Soldier for most federal benefits, since most require service of over 180 days to qualify.

5. Order of Release from Custody and Control of the Army

- Usually no characterization of service, because the person never acquired military status. There is an exception for constructive enlistment.
- Very rare, used only for void enlistments.
- Since no “service,” no veteran’s benefits.

6. Punitive Discharges

Dishonorable and Bad Conduct discharges may only result from an approved court-martial sentence, not an administrative separation. A common mistake by leaders conducting counseling for misconduct or unsatisfactory performance is the threat of a punitive discharge if the behavior continues. Such counseling is ineffective and fails to meet counseling requirements under AR 635-200 and AR 135-178; your Judge Advocate or paralegal NCO can provide a template for counseling that includes the lawful characterizations of service a Soldier could receive for various misconduct or unsatisfactory performance.