

Reading & Understanding the WWII Discharge Document

For US Army enlisted personnel (not officers) this was WD AGO Form 53 - 55

"War Department Adjutant General's Office Form 53, Enlisted Record and Report of Separation."

Box 1 Name,

Make note of the spelling of the name, how it is spelled here is also how it was spelled in the enlistment record and all other service records you will be looking for. You must use this name spelling when ordering service records from NPRC.

Box 2 Army Serial Number,

Very important! You must use this number when ordering service records from NPRC.

Some Army records were filed by name, others were filed by Army serial number.

Later medical records from the VA are filed using the veteran's Social Security Number, give both ASN & SS numbers when inquiring for records from the VA.

The ASN is needed to identify your veteran from others with the same name. The ASN will also identify what state the veteran was from & which Service Command area he was inducted in.

Box 3 Grade,

The soldier's rank at time of discharge. May be different than rank shown in unit records.

Box 4 Arm or Service

Common abbreviations here are: ASF = Army Service Force; FA = Field Artillery; CE = Corps of Engineers; CMP = Corps of Military Police

Box 5 Component,

Common abbreviations here is: AUS = Army of the United States; NG = National Guard

Box 6 Organization

Unit served with. Use caution! This may be the last organization he was assigned to and discharged from, it does not mean he was in the named unit the whole time of service. At the end of the war, thousands of 'high point' infantrymen whose divisions were to be redeployed to the Pacific or staying in Europe for occupation duty were transferred to other units to be shipped home.

You may find clues to this situation in boxes 31, 33 & 36. For example, box 6 might show the unit as "204th Combat Engineer Bn.", but box 31 might show "CIB"

(Combat Infantryman Badge) Box 33 may show medal & citations such as

"Good Conduct S O #81 313 inf 24 May 44" ; "Bronze Star: # 173 79 inf 1 Aug 45";

The Good Conduct medal was awarded by Special Order of the 313th Infantry Regiment, the Bronze Star (for Valor) was awarded by General Order #173 by the 79th Infantry Division.

This shows that the soldier was an infantryman in the 79th Division during his war service and later transferred to the 204th Engineers to be shipped home. The travel dates shown in box 36 can be compared to travel dates found in unit histories.

Box 7 Date of Separation, = Discharge Date

Box 8 Place of Separation, = Separation Point Separation Center

Box 9 Permanent Address = mailing address at time of discharge

Box 10 Date of Birth.

Box 11 Place of Birth

Box 12 Address

Box 13 Color Eyes

Box 14 Color Hair

Box 15 Height

Box 16 Weight

Box 17 Number of Dependents

Box 18 Race

Box 19 Marital Status

Box 20 US Citizen

Box 21 Civilian Occupation & Number.

Boxes 9 - 21 shows genealogical data at time of induction.

Box 22 Date of Induction

Date of Order to report for induction

Box 23 Date of Enlistment, (usually blank or "None", if drafted)

Box 24 Date of Entry into Service,

Date soldier reported to Induction Center.

Box 25 Place of Entry into Service,

Place of Induction Center.

Box 26 Selective Service Data, Registered Yes / No

Box 27 Local SS (Draft) Board & Number

Box 28 County & State

Box 29 Home Address at time of entry into Service

Box 30 Military Occupation & Number,

What he did in the last unit assigned to shown in box 6

Box 31 Military Qualifications & Date,

Marksmanship Badges etc. MM= marksman, SS = sharpshooter, usually shows weapon used for qualification, '03 =1903 Springfield; Rifle = prob. the M1 Garand, but any rifle could have been used.

Box 32 Battles and Campaigns

Usually lists campaigns participated in, but not specific battles

An arrowhead denotes participation in an assault landing.

For example, a campaign credit for " Normandy w/ arrowhead" means the soldier participated in the D-Day Invasion on June 6 or 7 1944. "Normandy" without an arrowhead means he landed June 8th or later and was not in the assault force.

Box 33 Decorations & Citations,

EAME= European African Middle Eastern, may show "w / # stars", the # of stars denote Bronze Star Campaign medals for the Campaigns listed in box 32)

There were 2 different Bronze Star Medals, one was for campaigns, and 1 for valor or distinguished service in action .

Medals may show date & the unit that awarded medal if the awarding unit is different than unit listed in box 6.

Box 34 Wounds Received in Action

Box 35 Latest Immunization Dates, Smallpox, Typhoid, Tetanus, Other.

Box 36 Service Outside Continental U.S. and Return

Depart: = Date ship left loading port

Destination: = ETO = European Theater of Operations, APT = Asiatic Pacific Theater; MTO = Mediteranian Theater of Operations.

Arrive: Date ship arrived at port of destination

These dates can be used to find ships or convoys.

Box 37 Total Length of Service,

Years-Months-Days boxes below, first 3 for Continental Service, next 3 for Foreign Service.

Box 38 Highest Grade Held = highest rank

Box 39 Prior Service

Box 40 Reason and Authority For Separation

AR 615 - 365 RR 1-1 Demobilization, is the Army Regulation concerning Army forces reduction after the war.

Box 41 Service Schools Attended

Box 42 Education (Years), 3 boxes, Grammar, High School, College

Box 43 Longevity For Pay Purposes

Total of Continental & Foreign service

Box 44 Mustering out Pay

Box 45 Soldiers Deposits

Box 46 Travel Pay (amount received to get home)

Box 47 Total Amount, Name of Disbursing Officer

Boxes 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, Insurance data.

Box 54 Right Thumb Print

Box 55 Remarks, ASR Score is the number of 'points' earned which determined when a soldier was shipped home. Lapel Pin was a small round pin issued at discharge, commonly called the "Ruptured Duck"

box may contain additional information continued from previous boxes.

Box 56 Signature of Person Being Separated

Box 57 Personnel Officer, Name, Grade, Organization & Signature.