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The Document Every Veteran Needs Before Applying for VA Benefits

KEY POINTS

- A DD-214 is the document that proves your military service and discharge status. Most VA benefit applications require it before they can move forward.
- If you separated from the National Guard without 90 or more continuous days of federal active duty, you need an NGB-22 instead.
- If you have both, a VA claim may need your DD-214 for one period of service and your NGB-22 for another.
- If needed, you can request a free replacement DD-214 online

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may be an NGB-22 instead. Many veterans have both.

Why Every VA Benefit Starts With Your Service Record

Most VA benefit application denials or holdups happen when the VA can't confirm who you are and what your service looked like. That confirmation comes down to one of two documents.

DD-214 vs. NGB-22

	DD-214	NGB-22
Who it's for	Veterans with 90+ continuous days of full-time federal active duty	Guard members who separated without meeting that

	DD-214	NGB-22
		federal active-duty threshold
Issued by	Federal government (National Archives holds copies)	Your state's Adjutant General
Correction form	DD-215	NGB Form 22A
If you have both	Covers your Title 10 (federalized) periods	Covers your overall Title 32 (state) Guard service

Once you have your DD-214 or NGB-22, you can move forward with whatever VA benefit it's supporting documentation for, including:

- Disability compensation
- Education benefits
- VA healthcare enrollment
- A home loan

DD-214 or NGB-22: Which One Applies

to You

What the DD-214 Is Used For

Your **DD-214** is the military's official record of your discharge, issued for continuous periods of 90 days or more of full-time federal active duty.

It's the document that:

- **The VA** uses to process disability claims, education benefits, and healthcare enrollment
- **Lenders** reference for VA home loan eligibility
- **Employers** use for veteran hiring preference

When You Need an NGB-22 Instead

If you served only in the Army or Air National Guard and never met the 90-day federal active-duty threshold, you'll have an **NGB-22** (Report of Separation and Record of Service) instead.

- It's the Guard's direct equivalent to the DD-214, with the same service and discharge information, but it comes from the state Adjutant General rather than the federal government.
- If you were federalized under Title 10 orders at any point, you may have **both**, one for each kind of service.

If You Have Both: Using Them Together

It's common to end up with both documents. Most traditional Guard careers mix state (Title 32) drill weekends and annual training with at least one federalized (Title 10) activation.

The short version of why it matters:

- **Service connection** depends on your duty status when the condition you're claiming started.
- **Title 10 (federal) periods** count as active military service, so your DD-214 generally documents that service the same way it would for any other veteran.
- **Title 32 (state) periods**, like annual training (ACDUTRA) or drill weekends (IDT), aren't considered active military service, but an injury during one of these can still be service-connected with the right documentation.

How to use both when you file a claim, with the recommended assistance of a VSO.

1. **Match each condition to the period it happened in.** On VA Form 21-526EZ, note the specific dates and duty status (Title 10, ACDUTRA, or IDT) for each condition you're claiming.
2. **Submit both documents.** Attach your DD-214 for any Title 10 periods and your NGB-22 for your overall Guard service.

3. **Add duty-status evidence for Title 32 periods.** Include a Line of Duty (LOD) determination, your activation orders, or an NGB Form 23A retirement-point statement.
4. **Make sure every period of your service shows up on one of the two records.** Your state's Transition Assistance Advisor can help you get the paperwork for any missing periods.

Before you file anything, connect with a Veterans Service Officer (VSO). VSOs are accredited to review your records, match your timeline to the right documents, and prepare your claim correctly, at no cost to you.

How to Get a Copy of Your DD-214

If you don't yet have a copy of your DD-214, there's three ways to get it.

1. **Online:** Request it through the National Archives' eVetRecs system at [archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov), the fastest option for most veterans.
2. **By mail or fax:** Submit a Standard Form 180 if you prefer a paper request.
3. **Directly from your branch:** Contact your branch's personnel records office if you separated recently, since your file may not

have transferred to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) yet.

Most eVetRecs requests take a few weeks. For an urgent need, such as a VA loan closing, a burial, or a medical deadline, mark your request as an emergency for expedited handling.

Requesting for a deceased veteran: Next of kin can use any of the routes above. Whichever one you choose, include proof of death, such as a death certificate or published obituary, with the request.

How to Get a Copy of Your NGB-22

Your NGB-22 is held by the state Adjutant General. To request it:

1. **Contact your state directly:** Reach out to the Adjutant General's office in the state where you last served in the Guard.
2. **Served in more than one state?** Request from the state where you were serving at the time of discharge.
3. **Or file through the National Archives:** Submit a Standard Form 180 and note "NGB-22" under "Other" so the request routes correctly.

Processing time varies by state. Check that state's National Guard website for current turnaround estimates before you submit.

If Your Document Is Missing or Delayed

DD-214

- A missing DD-214 may still be with your branch if you separated recently, misfiled at the records center, or caught in a processing backlog.
- Give the National Archives about 10 days to log your request, then check its status online at [archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov) or call the NPRC customer service line at 314-801-0800.
- If your records may have been lost in the 1973 fire, which affected some Army records from before 1960 and some Air Force records from before 1964, they can often reconstruct key details from pay records and morning reports. Note the possible fire damage on your Standard Form 180 to start that process.
- If weeks pass with no progress, a Veterans Service Organization or your county veterans service office can work the request, and your U.S. representative's office can open a congressional inquiry into a stalled federal records request.

NGB-22

- Start with the Adjutant General's office in the state where you were discharged.
- While the search is underway, activation orders, pay records, or an NGB Form 23A

retirement point statement can document your Guard service.

- Corrections go through NGB Form 22A, filed with your state's Adjutant General, not the DD-215 process used for DD-214s.

Common Mistakes Veterans Make With This Document

The same few mistakes account for most of the delays veterans run into with documentation.

- Assuming a DD-214 applies to everyone, when Guard veterans who never hit 90 continuous days of federal active duty need an NGB-22 instead.
- Sending an NGB-22 request to the National Archives instead of the state Adjutant General's office, which routes to the wrong place and adds weeks of delay.
- Waiting too long to request either document, especially close to a claim deadline, when processing can take a few weeks even under normal conditions.
- Assuming a lost or fire-affected record means the service history itself is gone, when reconstruction from alternate sources is usually possible.

How a Solace Advocate Can Help

Most of what this article describes is legwork that a patient advocate can handle for you.

Identifying which record your service produced, getting the request to the right office, and staying on it when weeks pass without an answer. That legwork is what a Solace advocate handles for you.

- **They identify which record your service produced and request it from the right place**, whether that's the National Archives for a DD-214 or your state's Adjutant General for an NGB-22.
- **They help match your timeline to the right paperwork** before you file, so a Title 10 activation and your Guard service each have the record behind them.
- **They follow up until the document is in your hands**, checking status and staying on the records center when a request stalls.

Solace advocates are covered by many commercial insurance and Medicare plans. Checking your eligibility takes about a minute.

Learn more about how an advocate helps manage healthcare, insurance, and benefits.

What happens after you click "See If You Qualify"

1. **Check your coverage.** Answer a few quick questions about your insurance and your health situation.
2. **Meet with a Solace physician.** A short virtual intro visit, about 20 minutes long. They'll listen to what you're managing and what's getting in the way. Then they'll connect you with an advocate who fits your needs.
3. **Your advocate takes it from there.** They'll work to get the document in your hands and be there to support your care journey for as long as you need them.

See If You Qualify →

FAQ

How to apply for VA benefits: what documents do I need?

Most VA benefit applications require a DD-214, the document that proves your service and discharge status. If you separated from the National Guard without 90 or more continuous days of federal active duty, you'll need an NGB-22 instead. Additional documents like marriage or birth certificates may be required depending on the benefit.

How can I obtain a copy of my DD-214?

You can request your DD-214 for free through the National Archives' eVetRecs system, by mail using Standard Form 180, or in person through a Veterans Service Organization. Most digital requests are processed within a few weeks, though older records can take longer.

What is the difference between a DD-214 and an NGB-22?

A DD-214 is issued for continuous periods of 90 days or more of full-time federal active duty. An NGB-22 is the National Guard's equivalent, issued to traditional Guard members who separate without meeting that threshold. It comes from your state's Adjutant General rather than the National Archives.

How do I obtain my NGB Form 22?

Contact the Adjutant General's office in the state where you last served in the Guard, since NGB-22 records are held at the state level, not the National Archives. You can also file a Standard Form 180 and note "NGB-22" under the "Other" documents field to route the request correctly.

How to get military records if they were lost in a fire?

If your DD-214 records were affected by the 1973 National Personnel Records Center

fire, the National Archives can often reconstruct key details from alternate sources like pay and morning reports. A Standard Form 180 request will trigger this reconstruction process automatically. This doesn't apply to NGB-22 records, which are held by the state and weren't affected by the NPRC fire.

REFERENCES



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Solace puts an advocate in your corner—someone who’s spent years in healthcare, knows the system, and takes on the toughest parts of your care. Don’t do this alone.



Eligibility varies by plan. Advocates do not provide medical or legal advice or services. Must be 18 years or older.

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