# Dont' Ask Don't Tell victims finally given 'honorable discharges'



The United States Department of Defense has revised the discharge status of 820 former military personnel to “honorable discharges” in a monumental move aimed at addressing past injustices linked to the now-defunct “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. This announcement, made on 15th October by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, culminates a year-long review of service records of veterans affected by the policy.

Secretary Austin articulated that the initiative was designed to rectify the adverse effects of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and similar policies on these individuals. Over the past year, 851 cases were carefully examined, with more than 96% deemed eligible for “relief.” He affirmed the Department's commitment to recognizing the contributions of all service members, including those who faced discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, operative from 28th February 1994 until its repeal on 20th September 2011, enforced a mandate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual military personnel to hide their sexual identities. While designed to prevent inquiries into individuals' sexual orientations, the policy frequently failed to protect service members from being inadvertently exposed and subsequently discharged. The Department of Defense's records reveal that approximately 13,500 military personnel were discharged during the policy's period of enforcement due to their sexual orientation. Although most received honorable discharges, close to 2,000 were given less than fully honorable discharges.

Following the policy's repeal by Congress, affected service members were allowed to appeal for an upgrade via the Military Department Review Boards. However, many were either unaware of this possibility or did not pursue it. In response, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks initiated a review last year to proactively upgrade the discharges of those who had not yet applied.

As a direct result of this initiative, veterans discharged under the policy will have their military records—specifically their DD-214 forms—amended to reflect an “honorable” discharge status. This adjustment allows them to access benefits that were previously inaccessible, such as healthcare services, educational assistance, VA loan programs, and employment opportunities. To obtain their updated documentation, former service members must individually request copies from the Department of Defense due to the sensitive nature of the information contained in the DD-214 forms.

While the review applies only to those discharged under or after the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” framework, it does not extend to veterans expelled for homosexuality before the policy's implementation, still leaving a significant number of individuals with unresolved less-than-honorable discharges. In a separate initiative, President Joe Biden announced in June a programme granting pardons to those convicted under former regulations criminalising consensual same-sex relations, enabling them to erase their convictions and seek discharge upgrades.

Moving forward, the Pentagon has stated that the review policy has completed its course with the concluded 820 cases. Additional veterans desiring to amend their discharge status must themselves file applications to seek adjustments. Pentagon officials have encouraged all veterans who feel they have been subject to errors or injustices to leverage this path for correcting their military records.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Story/Article/3231715/pentagon-upgrades-discharges-for-veterans-affected-by-dont-ask-dont-tell/> - This link corroborates the announcement by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin regarding the revision of discharge status for former military personnel affected by the 'Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell' policy.
* <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Story/Article/3231715/pentagon-upgrades-discharges-for-veterans-affected-by-dont-ask-dont-tell/> - This link supports the information about the year-long review of service records and the number of cases examined.
* <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-bill/1540> - This link provides context on the repeal of the 'Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell' policy by Congress on 20th September 2011.
* <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/10/15/pentagon-upgrades-discharges-veterans-affected-dont-ask-dont-tell.html> - This link confirms the details about the policy's enforcement period and the number of military personnel discharged due to their sexual orientation.
* <https://www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade/> - This link explains the process for affected service members to appeal for discharge upgrades via the Military Department Review Boards.
* <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Story/Article/3231715/pentagon-upgrades-discharges-for-veterans-affected-by-dont-ask-dont-tell/> - This link details the initiative by Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks to proactively upgrade the discharges of those who had not yet applied.
* <https://www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade/> - This link explains how veterans can request copies of their updated DD-214 forms to reflect the new 'honorable' discharge status.
* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/15/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-new-initiatives-to-support-lgbtq-individuals/> - This link supports the information about President Joe Biden's programme granting pardons to those convicted under former regulations criminalising consensual same-sex relations.
* <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Story/Article/3231715/pentagon-upgrades-discharges-for-veterans-affected-by-dont-ask-dont-tell/> - This link confirms that the review policy has completed its course with the concluded 820 cases and provides guidance for additional veterans to file applications.
* <https://www.va.gov/benefits/> - This link details the benefits that veterans with 'honorable' discharge status can access, such as healthcare services, educational assistance, and VA loan programs.