



The Korean War Army Reserve veteran who wasn't

BY JEFFREY PHILLIPS AND JOHN ROTHROCK, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS — 04/29/18 08:30 AM EDT
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The Reserve Officers Association was contacted last month by the family of an Army Reservist from Georgia who served in World War II and the Korean War, and had recently died. As an infantry officer, he had received the Purple Heart and Silver Star — the nation's third-highest decoration for valor.

The government was refusing to engrave on his headstone one key word: "Korea."

Like many members of the Reserve and Guard, then and now, this hero had not been provided a certain form certifying his combat service in Korea. The lack of that form was preventing the Department of Veterans Affairs from citing his Korean War service on his headstone.

Nearly half of today's U.S. military — including our Coast Guard — serve in the reserve components. They are "reservists" in the federal reserve (the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force reserve) and the National Guard. Together, these reserve components and the "regular," or active component, represent the "Total Force" structure of our national defense; they are interdependent and cannot effectively operate in war without each other. As an example, Navy sources state that, of every 10 military intelligence officers and enlisted troops deployed, eight are members of the reserve components.

As of September 2017, from the most recent Department of Defense Reserve Personnel Master Files Report, some 815,000 reservists were in uniform. Since 9/11, more than 900,000 members of the Reserve and

National Guard have been mobilized to help fight the war on terror; more than 1,200 have died in the war.

For reservists, service means a total commitment to leave family, jobs and civilian life when the nation calls. Unlike regular forces, they risk the disruption of their civilian careers so they can serve the country. As our regular forces are reduced, we will see greater reliance on the reserves, which have become an operational force used now more than ever before.

However, many reservists do not share in the benefits they earned. Members of the reserve components called to active duty for up to, but not more than, 90 days, will not receive the Department of Defense Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty. The DD Form 214 is issued upon a service member's retirement, separation or discharge from active duty in the armed forces of the United States. The DD-214 is also issued to members of the reserve components in time of war, national emergency, or when called up by the president.

A DD-214 is probably a veteran's most important document: it verifies military service for benefits, retirement, employment and membership in veterans' organizations; it is the key that unlocks the door for a veteran. Information may include the date and place of entry into active duty; home address; date and place of release from active duty; home address after separation; last duty assignment and rank; military job specialty; military education; decorations, medals, badges, citations and campaign awards; total creditable service; foreign service; and separation information (such as type of discharge).

Yet many — uncountable hundreds of thousands — of reservists who have honorably served their nation in peace and war cannot satisfy the requirement for issuance of the form. Largely an artifact of the Cold War, when reservists were in the "strategic reserve" and rarely, if ever, mobilized, the "90-day requirement" now prevents equity in a force whose deployments have reached unprecedented levels.

Paradoxically, while operational tempo and deployments have surged, much less frequent is the active-duty period that exceeds 90 days. Thus, a reservist can (and many do) serve an entire 20-year career without "earning" a DD-214. Is that how America wants its citizen-warriors treated?

According to VA Pamphlet 26-7, "There is no one form used by the Reserves or National Guard that is similar to a DD Form-214," that meets "Proof of Service Requirements." This is a big problem for reservists trying to gain access to veterans' benefits who don't have the form that the Department of Veterans Affairs and state veteran agencies require to substantiate eligibility.

While reservists don't receive a DD-214 upon separation that captures their complete record, they may request a letter from their service (such as the Army) reflecting this information — but no standard Department of Defense-approved separation form exists; thus, the reservist must ask for a non-standard record. Many don't even know this option exists.

The National Guard Bureau Form 22 is the Guard's workaround solution for separating members. A Pentagon-approved DD-214 type of statement would be a unitary, standardized record for all reservists.

Emphasizing the importance of the DD-214 and the penalty paid by those who don't have one, a 2015 law created the VA ID card to function as proof of service and save veterans the trouble of carrying around DD-214 forms. (In an oversight, the law excluded members of the U.S. Public Health Service and commissioned members of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, both considered veterans by law and

entitled to veteran benefits. VA officials assured the Reserve Officers Association that they expect a solution by May.)

The ID card is a great idea, but if you don't have a DD-214 to begin with ...

It's time for Congress to recognize the service of America's citizen-warriors and end the inequity by directing that all service members separating from the Reserve or National Guard, including those making retroactive requests themselves or through surviving family members, receive a DD Form 214 type of statement.

Such a statement will ensure that our citizen-warriors in the Reserve and Guard, and their families, will receive credit for their honorable service to our nation.

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