Military Records Specialist (MRS) Course

Trainee Handout

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Objectives

* Identify the requirements for designating a MRS.
* Identify the records reviewed by an MRS
* Identify records requests required prior to completing a final attempt letter
* Identify the components contained in a final attempt letter

References

All M21-1 references are found in the [Live Manual Website](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/).

* M21-1.III.iii.2.B.2.d Processing Service Treatment Records (STRs) That Do Not Include a Certificate of Completeness
* M21-1.III.iii.2.B.3.a. When to Ask the Records Management Center (RMC) for STRs
* M21-1.III.iii.2.B.3.b. Following up on STRs the RMC Should Have Sent to a Vendor for Scanning or to a Regional Office (RO)
* M21-1.III.iii.2.B.3.c. Obtaining STRs for Members of the Reserves or National Guard
* M21-1.III.iii.2.B.3.g. Status Messages Generated by Veterans Business Management System (VBMS) for STR Requests to HAIMS
* M21-1.III.iii.2.B.3.l. Obtaining Supplemental STRs Located in the Joint Legacy Viewer (JLV)
* M21-1.III.iii.2.A.2.d. How to Request Clinical Records from an Medical Treatment Facility (MTF)
* M21-1.III.iii.2.E.1.d. Handling Negative Replies to Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES) Requests Submitted Under Request Code M05 and M05-V
* M21-1. III.iii.1.C.2.e. Exhibit: Final-Attempt Letter
* M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, Chapter 2, Section I - Control and Follow-Up of Requests for Service Records
* M21-1.III.i.2.D.3.a. MRS Actions Upon Receipt of a Referral Package
* M21-1.III.i.2.D.3.d. Service Department Memorandum of Complete and Current STRs

Topic 1: MRS Overview

**Assignment of and Qualifications for an MRS**

Each RO must designate an employee to serve as MRS.

The designated employee must

* possess expertise in military records, and
* be thoroughly familiar with the information within the M21-1 manual.

Important:

* Each RO must designate at least one alternate MRS.
* If an RO does not have sufficient staffing to designate an MRS, the Veterans Service Center Manager (VSCM) should request an exception to this requirement from the Office of Field Operations (OFO).

**Duties of an MRS**

An MRS

* is responsible for local training on requests for service records
* serves as the contact point with service departments and other Federal records custodians when it becomes necessary to return or request service records outside of normal channels, and
* has other responsibilities that are described in the M21-1 manual.

**RMC Responsibility for Maintaining a List of MRSs**

The RO must provide the RMC with a list of the current MRSs

VA’s RMC maintains a list of MRSs and their alternates.

Email notification of any change in personnel assigned as an MRS or alternate to the following electronic mailbox: VAVBASTL/RMC/DIR.

If email is not available, mail notification of changes to

Director (00)

VA Records Management Center

PO Box 5020

St Louis, MO 63115-0020

DO NOT OPEN IN MAILROOM

Important: The RO MRS corporate mailbox address must be included in the Cc field of all emails sent to RMC to ensure prompt and accurate responses.

**Electronic Mailboxes for MRSs**

Each RO must maintain an electronic mailbox to which its MRSs and their alternates have access. The mailbox should be checked daily, as it will be used by

* Compensation Service to disseminate instruction, guidance, and training, and
* Federal records custodians as a means of communicating with individual ROs.

***Note***: ROs must email notification of any changes to the name of the electronic mailbox to the PIES Help Desk ([VAVBAWAS/CO/PIES](mailto:PIES.VBACO@va.gov)).

Topic 2: Records Review

MRS VBMS Work Queue Review

NWQ Playbook page 15

1) Claims processor identifies a claim requiring special assistance by an MRS, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Coordinator, or designated Joint Service Records Research Center (JSRRC) user.

2) Claims processor completes all development actions within their scope, within 5 business days of receiving the claim in their work queue.

3) Claims processor adds the appropriate special issue, either “JSRRC Request” or “Specialized Records Request,” within 5 business days of receiving the claim in their work queue.

4) Claims processor will follow locally established procedures to ensure assignment of the work item to the appropriate specialized claims processor.

5) Specialized claims processor (e.g., MRS, PTSD Coordinator) will review the claim and take the appropriate action within 5 business days of receiving the claim in their work queue, to include updating all systems and opening any necessary tracked items(s).

6) Specialized claims processor (e.g., MRS, PTSD Coordinator) will remove the “JSRRC Request” or “Specialized Records Request” special issue prior to completing the work item.\*

\*Note: Removing the “JSRRC Request” or “Specialized Records Request” special issue will indicate that the claim is ready for NWQ recall. All outstanding development actions must be taken prior to removal.

**Determining Whether All Necessary Actions to Obtain Service Records Were Properly Taken**

When a Veteran Service Representative (VSR) or other RO employee refers a claim to an MRS because attempts to obtain a Veteran’s service records have been unsuccessful, the MRS must first review all prior actions taken to obtain the records to ensure they comply with all directives.

* If the MRS determines all necessary actions to obtain the records were properly taken, he/she
  + prepares the final-attempt letter described in Topic 4, and
  + sends the letter to the claimant.
* If the MRS determines additional development action is necessary, he/she must either direct or personally undertake corrective action.

*Example*: Corrective action is necessary if a VSR sends a request for service records

* to the wrong address, or
* without sufficient information to identify the Veteran.

*Exceptions*:

* A final-attempt letter is not necessary if the Veterans fails to return NA Form 13055, Request for Information Needed to Reconstruct Medical Data to assist with fire-related STR development, as indicated in M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.E.1.c.
* MRSs must take the follow-up action described in M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.4.b before taking the actions described in this block if
  + attempts to obtain service records from NPRC have been unsuccessful, and
  + NPRC has never provided a negative response to the request for these records.

**Annotating All Prior Actions**

Create a document annoting the time line of all actions taken to include the following information:

* Date of Request:
* Facility name:
* Follow-up to facility date (if required):
* Facility response.

This information is required to be included in the Final Attempt Letter to the Veteran.

Topic 3: MRS Processing

Certificate of Completeness issued with STRs

Certificate of Completeness are required to be provided with all STRs for Veterans discharged between January 1, and July 31, 2013.

**DD Form 2963 issued with STRs**

DD Form 29963, Service Treatment Record (STR) Certification is required to be provided with all STRs for Veterans discharged on or after August 1, 2013.

**Processing STRs That Do Not Include a Certificate of Completeness**

The table below describes the procedures for processing STRs that do *not* include a *signed*

* letter of certification (if the STRs belong to a Veteran who separated from service between January 1, and July 31, 2013) or
* *DD Form 2963* (if the STRs belong to a Veteran who separated from service on or after August 1, 2013).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Stage** | **Description** |
| 1 | The RO’s Military Records Specialist (MRS) reviews the claims folder for the purpose of confirming   * the Veteran separated from service on or after January 1, 2013, and * the certification letter/*DD Form 2963* is missing or unsigned. |
| 2 | If the MRS determines the STRs should have included a signed certification letter/*DD Form 2963* but did not, he/she must send an encrypted email to request certification to the [VAVBASTL/RMC/STRCERT](mailto:STRCERT.VBARMC@va.gov) mailbox.  The email must include   * the Veteran’s   + name   + Social Security number (SSN)   + branch of service   + dates of service, and * the MRS’s   + phone number   + fax number, and   + email address. |
| 3 | VA’s Records Management Center (RMC) responds to the email by forwarding the MRS’s request to a point of contact within the Veteran’s service department. |
| 4 | The Veteran’s service department provides a certification letter/ *DD Form 2963* to the RMC. |
| 5 | The RMC forwards the certification letter/*DD Form 2963* to the MRS.  ***Note***: If the RMC does not respond to the MRS’s request within 15 days, the MRS sends a follow-up email to [VAVBASTL/RMC/STRCERT](mailto:STRCERT.VBARMC@va.gov). |
| 6 | The MRS   * attaches the certification letter/*DD Form 2963* to the STRs, or * uploads it into Virtual VA or the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) (if VA is processing the associated claim in a paperless environment). |

***Important***: Do not delay the processing of claims that service members submit *prior* to separation based on the absence of a certification letter/*DD Form 2963*. VA does *not* require service departments to certify the completeness of STRs VA uses to decide this category of claims.

**When to Ask the RMC for STRs**

If the RMC is in possession of a Veteran’s claims folder and/or STRs, it automatically sends the claims folder and/or STRs to a vendor for scanning and uploading into the Veteran’s electronic claims folder (eFolder) when an RO establishes a corresponding claim in VBMS. If the RO establishes the claim in Share, the RMC automatically sends the claims folder and/or STRs directly to the RO. In either case, there is rarely a need to request STRs from the RMC.

Upon establishing the claim, check the FOLDER LOCATION screen in the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator (BIRLS) to ensure that the STRs are In Transit. Use the table below to determine what action to take depending on whether or not STRs have already been sent to an RO by the RMC.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If the STRs are...** | **Then ...** |
| In Transit | no further action is required. |
| Not In Transit | * the station must request the STRs by   + sending an encrypted email to the RMCs mailbox at [VAVBASTL/RMC/RCD](mailto:RCD.VBARMC@va.gov)   + including on the carbon copy (Cc) line the RO’s MRS corporate mailbox (to ensure prompt and accurate responses), and   + associating copies of all emails to RMC with the claims folder. * In the body of the email, indicate whether the corresponding claim is being processed in VBMS or Share and include the   + Veteran’s name, VA file number, and SSN   + type of folder requested (STRs or claims folder)   + date of the first and any subsequent requests, and   + the requestor’s name and RO. |

**Following up on STRs the RMC Should Have Sent to a Vendor for Scanning or to an RO**

The table below contains instructions for following up on STRs the RMC should have sent to a vendor for scanning or to an RO based on the establishment of a corresponding claim.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If the RO is processing the corresponding claim in ...** | **Then send an encrypted email to VAVBASTL/RMC/RCD**  **with a Cc to the RO’s MRS corporate mailbox when** |
| Share | * BIRLS shows an “in-transit” date for the STRs (at 375 or 376) that is **more than two weeks** in the past, and * the STRs have not yet arrived at the RO.   ***Notes***:   * In the body of the email,   + include the Veteran’s name and SSN   + indicate the in-transit date shown in BIRLS, and   + advise the RMC that the RO has not yet received the STRs. * Associate copies of all emails to RMC with the claims folder. |
| VBMS | * two weeks have passed since the claim was established in VBMS * the STRs have not been uploaded into the corresponding eFolder, and * there is no indicator in VBMS that shows the STRs are awaiting scanning.   ***Notes***:   * In the body of the email,   + include the Veteran’s name and SSN   + indicate the date the corresponding claim was established in VBMS, and   + advise the RMC that the scanning vendor has not yet received the STRs. * Associate copies of all emails to RMC with the claims folder. |

***Note***: Send a follow-up email if the RMC does not reply within 15 days.

**Obtaining STRs for Members of the Reserves or National Guard**

VBMS will automatically generate a request for STRs from HAIMS when the Veteran’s claim is established. Use the table below to determine if additional action is needed.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If ...** | **Then ...** |
| the STRs have not been received from HAIMS within 45 days from the date that the request was submitted | * The MSR must send a follow-up encrypted email to [VAVBASTL/RMC/NG&RESERVES](mailto:NG&RESERVES.VBARMC@va.gov) with a Cc line to the RO’s MRS corporate mailbox containing   + the subject *45 day follow-up on HAIMS STRs*,   + the Veteran’s full name, SSN, and branch of service   + the requestor’s name and contact information (phone and email) * create a custom tracked item with a 30-day suspense, and * associate a copy of the email with the claims folder. |

**Status Messages Generated by VBMS for STR Requests to HAIMS**

*VBMS Message***:** WARNING: Electronic STR Requested. Request date [mm/dd/yyyy]. Request Successful. Suspense Date [mm/dd/yyyy] has Expired.

VBMS successfully sent the request to HAIMS but VBMS did not receive any STRs and the suspense date expired. The request will remain pending in VBMS.

Use the table below to determine if additional action is necessary.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If the service member or Veteran** **...** | **Then ...** |
| is still on active duty (including service under Title 10 or 32 U.S.C.) | no action is needed.  The STRs will be uploaded into HAIMS following separation/retirement from military service. |
| is currently serving in the Reserves or National Guard | refer to [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.B.3.c](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#3c) for information about requesting the records through PIES. |
| has been separated or retired from the Reserves or National Guard for at least 45 days | * the MRS must send a follow-up encrypted email to [VAVBASTL/RMC/NG&RESERVES](mailto:NG&RESERVES.VBARMC@va.gov) with a Cc line to the RO’s MRS corporate mailbox containing   + the subject *45 day follow-up on HAIMS STRs*,   + the Veteran’s full name, SSN, and branch of service   + the requestor’s name and contact information (phone and email) * create a custom tracked item with a 30-day suspense, and * associate copy of email with the claims folder. |

**How to Request Clinical Records from an MTF**

If the clinical records are maintained at an MTF, you must submit a request to the treating facility by using a *VA Form 21-8359, Information Re Veteran in Uniformed Services Hospital (Request by Department of Veterans Affairs)*.

The request to an MTF must include the

* Veteran’s name
* Social Security number (SSN) or service number
* month of treatment (if known), and
* year of treatment.

***Note***: If a custodian provides a negative response to a clinical records request, the regional office (RO) Military Records Specialist (MRS) must prepare a “final-attempt letter” in accordance with the procedures contained in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 1.C.2.d and e](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000014156/M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, Chapter 1, Section C - Requesting Evidence From Sources Other Than the Claimant).

**Limitations on Requests to an MTF**

The Department of Defense (DoD) and VA have a data sharing agreement that requires MTFs to provide VA with a complete copy of the claimant’s health care treatment records upon request. This agreement does not include medical treatment that pertains to a sensitive diagnosis.

The MTFs identified the following as sensitive diagnoses:

* mental health
* substance abuse
* Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) Acquired immune deficiency
* syndrome (AIDS)
* reproductive health
* sexually transmitted diseases
* rape, and
* abuse.

The RO must take note of the following when developing for health care records from an MTF.

* Only use VA Form 21‑8359 when submitting a request for the claimant’s health care records that do not pertain to a sensitive diagnosis.
* Use a VA Form 21‑8359 and VA Forms 21‑4142 and 21‑4142a signed by the individual who is the subject of the information, when requesting health care treatment records that pertain to a sensitive diagnosis.
* Request nothing other than the items listed under Part II of the first page of VA Form 21‑8359.
* Do not request interim or special reports from a hospital until after the Veteran has discharged.
* If the MTF responds that the records have been retired, ROs must attempt to obtain the records from NPRC.

**Handling Negative Replies to PIES Requests Submitted Under Request Code M05 and M05-V**

Ask the locally designated MRS to take the actions described in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.4.a](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000014163/M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, Chapter 2, Section I - Control and Follow-Up of Requests for Service Records) if

* a claimant returns a completed [*NA Form 13055*](http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/na-13055-info-2-reconstruct-medical-data.pdf)
* VA uses information from the form to submit a PIES request under request code
  + M05-V (if the corresponding claim is being processed in VBMS), or
  + M05 (if the corresponding claim is ***not*** being processed in VBMS), and
* NPRC provides a negative response to the request.

Unless the claimant responds to the MRS’s actions by providing the missing records or providing information that justifies the undertaking of additional development to obtain them, decide his/her claim based on the evidence of record as soon as all other development actions are complete.

**Assisting PIES Coordinators in Following Up on Requests for Service Records From the NPRC**

With the exception of the circumstances noted in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.2.a](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#2a), Following Up on PIES Requests for Records Held by the NPRC users must ask their locally designated MRS to follow up on PIES requests

* that have remained open at least 45 days, or
* have been completed for at least 15 days, but the records are not available in VBMS.

MRSs assist PIES Coordinators in following up on this type of request by

* sending an email to [VAVBASTL/RMC/PIESVBMS](mailto:PIESVBMS.VBARMC@va.gov), or
* contacting the VALO Transformation 21 (T-21) Customer Service Team by telephone at 314-679-3821.

If it is determined that the requested records do not exist or are irretrievable, the MRS must take the actions described in [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.I.4.a](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#4a).

***Important***:

* Only PIES coordinators, MRSs, FDC Program Coordinators, HVOCs, and members of RO management have permission to complete these follow-up requests.
* The RO MRS corporate mailbox address must be included in the Cc field of all email requests to RMC to ensure prompt and accurate responses.

**When to Contact the PIES Help Desk**

MRSs may contact Compensation Service’s PIES Help Desk via email at VAVBAWAS/CO/PIES for assistance if

* all attempts to obtain a Veteran’s service records have been unsuccessful, and
* there is evidence in the claims folder or an allegation by the claimant of unusual circumstances that could explain the difficulty in locating the Veteran’s records.

Examples:

* Unsuccessful attempts to obtain the records of general or flag officers.
* Unsuccessful attempts to obtain records because doing so would require the disclosure of classified information.
* A records custodian confirms possession of records VA is seeking but denies
  + VA access to the records, or
  + refuses to release the records to VA.

**Information the PIES Help Desk Might Need From an MRS**

When an MRS requests assistance from Compensation Service, the PIES Help Desk might ask him/her to furnish – *preferably by email* – a complete history of the attempts made to obtain a Veteran’s records, to include

* the date of each request for records
* the response(s) to each request, if any
* the names and telephone numbers of persons who have been contacted in an attempt to locate the records, and
* the results of any telephone contacts.

***Note***: The MRS should also be prepared to mail or fax copies of all PIES requests/responses and [*VA Forms 27-0820*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-27-0820-ARE.pdf) that document telephone contacts made in connection with the search for the Veteran’s records.

***Important***: Do not send this documentation unless the PIES Help Desk specifically requests it.

Topic 4: Final Attempt Letter to the Veteran

**Multiple Periods of Service**

If there are multiple periods of service then the final attempt letter will provide,

* the period of service of the records that are not available, and
* the periods of service of the records received.

**Response Time for Veteran**

**IMPORTANT – REPLY NEEDED WITHIN 10 DAYS**

Ensure the heading of the letter indicates the reply is needed within 10 days.

**What Is The Current Status Of Your Claim?**

As previously advised in letter of <insert date>, we requested your Service Treatment Records.

We have determined that your Service Treatment Records <enter period of service> cannot be located and therefore are unavailable for review. All efforts to obtain the needed information have been exhausted, and based on these facts, we have determined that further attempts to obtain the records would be unsuccessful.

Please note that we have received a copy of the Service Treatment Records from <insert period of service here>.

**Actions Taken Paragraph**

Describe all attempts taken to requests the records and the responses received.

We have taken the following actions in an effort to obtain these records:

**What Do We Still Need From You?**

Please submit any relevant documents in your possession including:

* Any available copies of Service Treatment Records as listed above.
* Any other relevant evidence or information that you think will support your claim, to include such things as buddy statements.
* You may be able to furnish documents that can substitute for service treatment records. Submit any original or certified copies of the following documents you have that relate to your disability during service: (If you only have photocopies, send them.)
* Statements from military medical personnel (nurses, medics, corpsmen, doctors)
* "Buddy" certificates or affidavits - (A "buddy" certificate or affidavit is a statement by a person who knew you when you were in service and knows of any disability you had while on active duty. The statement should state the dates and places they saw the condition(s) and should describe what they saw. If the person making the statement was on active duty at the time, they should show their service number and unit of assignment.)
* State or local accident and police reports
* Employment physical examinations
* Medical evidence from hospitals, clinics and private physicians by which or by whom you may have been treated after separation
* Letters written during service
* Photographs taken during service
* Pharmacy prescription records
* Insurance examinations

If you are unable to submit records, you may also advise us of possible locations(s) of these records.

**How Soon Should You Send What We Need?**

We strongly encourage you to send any information or evidence as soon as you can. However, if

We do not hear from you within 10 days, we will make a determination on the evidence of record.

**How Should You Submit What We Need?**

Please note that the quickest, easiest, and most secure way to submit any documents to us is via the eBenefits website. Just visit www.eBenefits.va.gov to register. Please also refer to the ‘What is eBenefits?’ section of this letter for more information.

You can also send what we need to the appropriate address listed on the attached “Where to Send Your Written Correspondence” chart.

**Standard Paragraphs**

* What is eBenefits?
* Do You Have Questions Or Need Assistance?
* Power of Attorney information
  + We sent a copy of this letter to your representative, <insert POA>, whom you can also contact if you have questions or need assistance.
* Where to Send Written Correspondense

Attachment A: Final Attempt Letter Example



**IMPORTANT – REPLY NEEDED WITHIN 10 DAYS**

Dear xxxxxxx:

We are continuing to work on your claim.

**What Is The Current Status Of Your Claim?**

As previously advised in letter of <enter date>, we requested your Service Treatment Records.

We have determined that your Service Treatment Records cannot be located and therefore are unavailable for review. All efforts to obtain the needed information have been exhausted, and based on these facts, we have determined that further attempts to obtain the records would be unsuccessful.

**Please note that we have received a copy of the Service Treatment Records from 1996-2011 for the inactive duty periods.**

We have taken the following actions in an effort to obtain these records:

* We contacted <enter facility> on <enter date > to obtain your Service Treatment Records. <Enter facility> responded on <enter date> <enter response>.

**What Do We Still Need From You?**

Please submit any relevant documents in your possession including:

* Any available copies of Service Treatment Records as listed above.
* Any other relevant evidence or information that you think will support your claim, to include such things as buddy statements.
* You may be able to furnish documents that can substitute for service treatment records. Submit any original or certified copies of the following documents you have that relate to your disability during service: (If you only have photocopies, send them.)
* {\*} Statements from military medical personnel (nurses, medics, corpsmen, doctors)
* {\*} "Buddy" certificates or affidavits - (A "buddy" certificate or affidavit is a statement by a person who knew you when you were in service and knows of any disability you had while on active duty. The statement should state the dates and places they saw the condition(s) and should describe what they saw. If the person making the statement was on active duty at the time, they should show their service number and unit of assignment.)
* {\*} State or local accident and police reports
* {\*} Employment physical examinations
* {\*} Medical evidence from hospitals, clinics and private physicians by which or by whom you may have been treated after separation
* {\*} Letters written during service
* {\*} Photographs taken during service
* {\*} Pharmacy prescription records
* {\*} Insurance examinations

If you are unable to submit records, you may also advise us of possible locations(s) of these records.

**How Soon Should You Send What We Need?**

We strongly encourage you to send any information or evidence as soon as you can. However, if we do not hear from you within **10 days**, we will make a determination on the evidence of record.

**How Should You Submit What We Need?**

**Please note that the quickest, easiest, and most secure way to submit any documents to us is via the eBenefits website.** Just visi[t www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov/) to register. Please also refer to the ‘What is eBenefits?’ section of this letter for more information.

You can also send what we need to the appropriate address listed on the attached “Where to Send Your Written Correspondence” chart.

**What is eBenefits?**

eBenefits provides electronic resources in a self-service environment to Service members, Veterans, and their families. Use of these resources often helps us serve you faster! Through the eBenefits website you can:

* Submit claims for benefits and/or upload documents directly to the VA
* Request to add or change your dependents
* Update your contact and direct deposit information and view payment history
* Request a Veterans Service Officer to represent you
* Track the status of your claim or appeal
* Obtain verification of military service, civil service preference, or VA benefits
* And much more!

Enrolling in eBenefits is easy. Just visit [www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov/) for more information. If you submit a claim in the future, consider filing though eBenefits. Filing electronically, especially if you participate in our fully developed claim program, may result in a faster decision than if you submit your claim through the mail.

**Do You Have Questions Or Need Assistance?**

If you have any questions, you may contact us by telephone, email, or letter.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If you** | **Here is what to do.** |
| Telephone | Call us at 1-800-827-1000. If you use a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), the Federal number is 711. |
| Use the Internet | Send electronic inquiries through the Internet at https://iris.va.gov. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **If you** | **Here is what to do.** |
| Write | VA now uses a centralized mail system. For all written communications, put your full name and VA file number on the letter. Please mail or fax all written correspondence to the appropriate address listed on the attached *Where to Send Your Written Correspondence.* |

We look forward to resolving your claim in a fair and timely manner. In all cases, be sure to refer to your VA file number xxxxxxxxx.

If you are looking for general information about benefits and eligibility, you should visit our

website a[t https://www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov/), or search the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at https://iris.va.gov.

We sent a copy of this letter to your representative, <ensure the designated POA is inserted here>, whom you can also contact if you have questions or need assistance.

Sincerely yours, RO Director

VA Regional Office

Enclosures: VA Form 21-4138

VA Form 21-4142

Where to Send Your Written Correspondence

cc: <POA>

Practical Exercise

**Scenario:**

Veteran information:

* Army: Active duty from June 1, 1995 to May 31, 2015, Honorable Discharge. DD-214 verified service
* Army Reserves, June 1, 2015 to December 15, 2015 with active duty for training service only. VIS verified.
* Veteran is claiming a back injury while on active duty for training which causes chronic back pain and does not have a current diagonosis. The Veteran provided a Line of Duty Determination that indicated he fell from a ladder during a training exercise and was treated for a back strain and the incident was in the line of duty during active duty for training.
* MOS – Infantry

The claims was established in VBMS on February 1, 2016 and it has been more than 45 days since the claim was submitted.

The Army active duty STRs are available in VBMS and include a DD Form 2963.

There are no records from the Army reserve period of service except the Line of Duty Determination supplied by the Veteran.

**Questions:**

1. What records request should have been completed for the Army reserve records?

2. What action, in any, is the MRS required to complete?

3. Bonus Question: Can we request an exam based on the LOD determination and the Veterans lay statement of chronic back pain without receiving the STRs from the Army Reserve period of service? Provide an justification for your answer.