Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Challenge)

Student Handout

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Objectives

* Differentiate between the development requirements for PTSD based on combat, fear, and non-combat related stressors
* Identify development actions required to obtain medical evidence, service records and stressor information for stressor corroboration
* Recognize when a claimed stressor must be corroborated
* Understand the unique requirements for developing claims for PTSD based on personal trauma

References

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

* [38 CFR 3.1(y) Definitions](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58#se38.1.3_11)
* [38 CFR 3.114(a) Change of law or Department of Veterans Affairs issue](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58#se38.1.3_1114)
* [38 CFR 3.304(f), Direct service connection; wartime and peacetime](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58#se38.1.3_1304)
* [38 CFR 4.125 Diagnosis of mental disorders](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.4&rgn=div5#se38.1.4_1125)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.A General Information of Service Records](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014154/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iii-Chapter-2-Section-A-General-Information-on-Service-Records)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.B Migration of Service Records and the Procedures for Obtaining Them](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014155/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-iii,-Chapter-2,-Section-B---Migration-of-Service-Records-and-the-Procedures-for-Obtaining-Them)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.D Requesting Information and Records Through the Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES)](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014158/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-iii,-Chapter-2,-Section-D---Requesting-Information-and-Records-Through-the-Personnel-Information-Exchange-System-(PIES))
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iv, 4.H, Mental Disorders](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000014201%2FM21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iv-Chapter-4-Section-H-Mental-Disorders)
* [M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D, Claims for Service Connection (SC) for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000014906%2FM21-1-Part-IV-Subpart-ii-Chapter-1-Section-D-Claims-for-Service-Connection-SC-for-Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder-PTSD) (PTSD)
* [VAOPGCPREC 08-01, Feb 26, 2001, Meaning of “Injury” for Purposes of Active Service](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000043823/VAOPGCPREC-08-01,-Feb-26,-2001,-Meaning-of-)
* [Stressor Verification](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/rating/stressor/general.htm)
* [PTSD Rating Job Aid website](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/rating/rat06.htm).
* [VBMS User Guide](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/Resources_Technical_Information.asp)
* [M21-4 Appendix D End Product Codes and Work-Rate Standards for Quantitative Measurements](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000011474/Appendix-B.-End-Product-Codes-and-Work-Rate-Standards-for-Quantitative-Measurements)

Note: This handout is up to date as of December 5, 2017. It is your responsibility to verify if any M21-1 Adjudication Manual updates have occurred since the last update.

Topic 1: PTSD Introduction

**Definition**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a type of anxiety disorder that is triggered by a traumatic event. An individual can develop PTSD when they experience or witness an event that causes intense fear, helplessness, or horror or involves the threat of injury or death. PTSD may occur soon after the major trauma or it can be delayed for a few months or even years. Many people have a difficult time adjusting and coping with the trauma but will usually get better with time. In other cases, the person may get worse and struggle with PTSD symptoms for years.

**Service Connection for PTSD due to In-Service Stressors**

Under [38 CFR 3.304(f)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58#se38.1.3_1304), service connection (SC) for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) associated with an in-service stressor requires:

* credible supporting evidence that the claimed in-service stressor actually occurred
* medical evidence diagnosing the condition in accordance with [38 CFR 4.125](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.4&rgn=div5#se38.1.4_1125), and
* a link, established by medical evidence, between current symptomatology and the claimed in-service stressor

**Veteran’s Lay Testimony**

A Veteran’s lay testimony alone may, under specified circumstances, establish an in-service stressor for purposes of establishing SC for PTSD if

* PTSD is diagnosed in service, and the stressor is related to that service, or
* the stressor is related to the Veteran’s
  + engagement in combat with the enemy
  + experience as a former prisoner of war (FPOW) as defined by [38 CFR 3.1(y)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58%20-%20se38.1.3_11#se38.1.3_11), or
  + the stressor is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity or duties as a drone aircraft crew member, if a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) psychiatrist or psychologist, or contract equivalent, confirms
    - the claimed stressor is adequate to support a diagnosis of PTSD, and
    - the Veteran’s symptoms are related to the claimed stressor

***Notes***:

* For the Veteran’s lay testimony alone to establish the occurrence of a claimed stressor
  + the stressor must be consistent with the
    - circumstances, conditions, or hardships of service for claims based on an in-service PTSD diagnosis or FPOW or combat service, or
    - places, types, and circumstances of service for claims based on a fear of hostile military or terrorist activity or duties as a drone aircraft crew member, and
  + there must be no clear and convincing evidence to the contrary
* For claims decided prior to July 13, 2010, a Veteran’s testimony alone could not establish the occurrence of a stressor that was related to the Veteran’s fear of hostile military or terrorist activity
* The July 13, 2010, amendment of [38 CFR 3.304(f)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58%20-%20se38.1.3_1114) is not considered a liberalizing rule under [38 CFR 3.114(a)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=pt38.1.3&rgn=div58%20-%20se38.1.3_1114)

Topic 2: Combat and Fear of Hostile Military or Terrorist Activity

**Combat**

Engaging in combat with the enemy means personal participation in events constituting an actual fight or encounter with a military foe or hostile unit or instrumentality. It includes presence during such events either as a

•combatant, or

•service member performing duty in support of combatants, such as providing medical care to the wounded.

**Fear of hostile military or terrorist activity**

* the Veteran experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or circumstance that involved
  + actual or threatened death or serious injury, or
  + a threat to the physical integrity of the Veteran or others, and
* the Veteran’s response to the event or circumstances involved a psychological or psycho-physiological state of fear, helplessness, or horror

Examples of exposure to hostile military or terrorist activity include presence at events involving

* actual or potential improvised explosive devices (IEDs)
* vehicle-embedded explosive devices
* incoming artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
* small arms fire, including suspected sniper fire, or
* attacks upon friendly aircraft

**Decorations as Evidence of Combat Participation**

When a Veteran has received any of the combat decorations listed below, VA will presume that the Veteran engaged in combat with the enemy, unless there is clear and convincing evidence to the contrary

* Air Force Achievement Medal with “V” Device
* Air Force Combat Action Medal
* Air Force Commendation Medal with “V” Device
* Air Force Cross
* Air Medal with “V” Device
* Army Commendation Medal with “V” Device
* Bronze Star Medal with “V” Device
* “C” device, denoting combat conditions, when affixed to other awards for meritorious service or achievement
* Combat Action Badge (CAB)
* Combat Action Ribbon (CAR) (***Note***:  Prior to February 1969, the Navy Achievement Medal with “V” Device was awarded.)
* Combat Aircrew Insignia
* Combat Infantry/Infantryman Badge (CIB)
* Combat Medical Badge
* Distinguished Flying Cross
* Distinguished Service Cross
* Fleet Marine Force (FMF) Combat Operations Insignia
* Joint Service Commendation Medal with “V” Device
* Medal of Honor
* Navy Commendation Medal with “V” Device
* Navy Cross
* Parachutist Badge with Combat Jump Device
* Purple Heart, and/or
* Silver Star

***Important***: Receipt of one of the decorations cited above is not the only acceptable evidence of engagement in combat.

**Veteran Does Not State the Nature of the Stressor**

If a Veteran received one of the combat decorations cited in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**, but does not expressly state the nature of the stressor

* assume the stressor is combat-related
* request service personnel records as discussed in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**
* order an examination, if necessary to decide the claim, and
* in the examination request
* state that VA has verified the Veteran’s combat service, and
* specify any details regarding the combat stressor contained in the record

**Establishing a Stressor Related to Fear**

Schedule an examination if there is evidence of a PTSD diagnosis or symptoms, *and* the Veteran’s *DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge From Active Duty*, or other service records, shows service in an area of potential hostile military or terrorist activity.

***Notes***:

* Service personnel records must be requested prior to or concurrently with any necessary examination being ordered so as to avoid unnecessary delays in claims processing
* The receipt of military awards such as, but not limited to, the Vietnam Service or Campaign Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, and Afghanistan Campaign Medal is generally considered evidence of service in an area of potential hostile military or terrorist activity
* The receipt of military awards such as the National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Service Medal, and Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) Service Medal generally does not indicate service in locations that involve exposure to hostile military or terrorist activity because these are general medals that do not denote service in a particular area or campaign. If the Veteran served in an area of potential hostile military or terrorist activity, he/she would have received a more specific medal for such service
* The fear-based stressor criteria are not met based on
  + *anticipation* of future deployment to a location of hostile military or terrorist activity, or
  + *learning* of the death of another person, when such death occurred remote from the Veteran in a location of hostile military or terrorist activity

Evaluation of evidence for service in a location associated with hostile military or terrorist activity must be done on a case-by-case basis. The fear-based regulation is intended to encompass military service not involving direct combat but where there was always a potential for hostile military or terrorist activity. The list below includes examples of service in areas of hostile military or terrorist activity. The list is not all-inclusive.

* Service along the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ), which separates North from South Korea, has been a location of hostile military activity since the Korean War armistice of 1953, whereas service on U.S. bases in the rest of South Korea generally has not been
* Service aboard a ship in the offshore “blue waters” of Vietnam or service in Thailand for which the Veteran received the Vietnam Service Medal or Vietnam Campaign Medal is sufficient to establish service in a potentially hostile military environment

**Drone Aircraft Crewmember Dutes**

The GWOT has seen expansive use of armed drone aircraft, including, but not limited to, the Predator and Reaper. Schedule an examination if there is evidence of a PTSD diagnosis or symptoms, and the Veteran’s DD Form 214 or other service records shows service as an armed drone aircraft crew member.

***Note***: Service personnel records must be requested prior to or concurrently with any necessary examination being ordered so as to avoid unnecessary delays in claims processing.

Topic 3: Stressor Corroboration

**Stressor Corroboration**

Develop to corroborate the details of a claimed in-service stressor only when

* a verified stressor is not otherwise of record, and
* the claimed stressor does not meet one of the criteria in [**M21-1, Part III, Subpart iv, 4.H.**](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014201/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-iv,-Chapter-4,-Section-H---Mental-Disorders)
* Examples of claimed stressors that must be corroborated are
* a plane crash caused by severe weather
* a severe motor vehicle accident
* witnessing the death, injury, or threat to the physical being of another person caused by something other than hostile military or terrorist activity, and
* actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical being, caused by something other than hostile military or terrorist activity

**Important**: The primary role of the Veterans Service Representative (VSR) in development for stressors is to verify the occurrence of the event the Veteran claims to have resulted in PTSD. The role of the VSR or Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR) is not to determine whether the event is sufficient to meet the stressor criteria for diagnosis of PTSD. This determination is made by a medical professional when determining whether the criteria have been met for a diagnosis of PTSD.

**Primary Evidence to Corroborate**

Primary evidence is generally considered the most reliable source for corroborating in-service stressors and should be carefully reviewed when corroboration is required. It is typically obtained from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) or Department of Defense (DoD) entities, such as service departments, the JSRRC, and the Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections (MCASC).

Primary evidence includes

* service personnel records and pay records
* military occupation evidence
* hazard pay records
* military performance reports
* verification that the Veteran received Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay
* unit and organizational histories
* daily staff journals
* operational reports-lessons learned (ORLLs)
* after action reports (AARs)
* radio logs, deck logs, and ship histories
* muster rolls
* command chronologies and war diaries, and
* monthly summaries and morning reports

***Notes****:*

* Many of the unit documents listed above are available on the Compensation Service Intranet site, [**Stressor Verification**](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/rating/stressor/general.htm)
* A Veteran’s military occupation may be specified on his/her *DD Form 214* or in service personnel records
* This information may be requested from the Department of Defense Finance and Accounting Service
* Military performance reports may be requested via the Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES)
* Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay may be requested through the Veterans Information Solution (VIS)
* While confirmation of receipt of Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay through VIS alone does not constitute verification of a combat-related stressor, it may, in combination with other evidence, “tip the scales” in favor of the Veteran's assertion of his/her involvement in combat

**Secondary Sources of Evidence**

Review the following secondary sources of evidence critically and carefully for information confirming participation in combat or to otherwise corroborate a claimed in-service stressor when corroboration is required

* buddy statements
* contemporaneous letters and diaries
* newspaper archives, and
* information from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)-sanctioned web sites, which may be accessed through the [**PTSD Rating Job Aid website**](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/rating/rat06.htm)

***Important***: It may not be necessary to corroborate the claimed stressor if it is

* related to the Veteran’s fear of hostile military or terrorist activity or drone aircraft crew member duties, and
* consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the Veteran’s service

***Note***: When sufficient evidence is received to corroborate a claimed stressor, annotate the claims folder by editing the subject line of the relevant document(s) used to concede the PTSD stressor using the following format:  [Location of stressor], *pg.* [number].

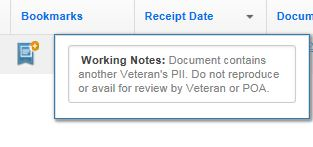
Accept a buddy statement from a fellow Veteran as corroboration of a claimed in-service stressor if the statement is consistent with the time, place, and circumstances of the service of both the Veteran and the fellow Veteran making the buddy statement.

If the evidence available calls into question the qualifications of the fellow Veteran to make the statement, ask the person to submit his/her *DD Form 214* or other evidence of service with the claimant.

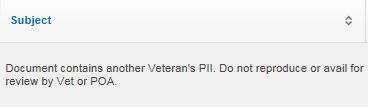
***Notes***:

* Upon receipt of a *DD Form 214* (or other document containing personally identifiable information (PII)) from a fellow Veteran in support of a paper-based claim
  + place the document in a separate envelope in the claims folder, and
  + annotate on the envelope that the contents must not be
    - reproduced, or
    - reviewed by the Veteran to whom the claims folder pertains or his/her representative
* In paperless claims processing, individual documents bearing the PII of a Veteran other than the claimant should be designated with a VBMS bookmark or SUBJECT value that clearly identifies the restricted nature of the content

***Example 1***:



***Example 2***:



**In-Service Mental Health Treatment Records**

In-service mental health treatment records are *not* stored with the STRs.

They are maintained with the records of

* a military treating facility, or
* a civilian treating facility
* ***Note***: The records are typically destroyed five years after the end of the year in which the case is closed. Follow the procedures at [**M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.A**](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014154/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-iii,-Chapter-2,-Section-A---General-Information-on-Service-Records) to determine when and how to request STRs, including in-service mental health records

**Developing for Service Department Records of In-Service Mental Health Treatment**

In order to develop for service department records of in-service mental health treatment administered at a military treatment facility (MTF), refer to guidance on clinical record requests as described in

* [**M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.D.**](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014158/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-iii,-Chapter-2,-Section-D---Requesting-Information-and-Records-Through-the-Personnel-Information-Exchange-System-(PIES))**, and**
* [**M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 2.B.**](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014155/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-iii,-Chapter-2,-Section-B---Migration-of-Service-Records-and-the-Procedures-for-Obtaining-Them)

If a service member obtains treatment “off-base” at a civilian facility, any mental health records created during the course of treatment are not automatically associated with the service member's STRs. It is the responsibility of the patient and civilian provider to transfer records of care to the service department.

Records retained by a civilian provider are not records in the custody of a Federal department or agency. They are not forwarded for long-term storage to NPRC and cannot be obtained through PIES/Defense Personnel Records Image Retrieval System (DPRIS).

To obtain identified civilian treatment records, follow procedures for requesting non-Federal or private records.

Obtain any adequately identified records from an MTF that are relevant to a claim for SC for PTSD. If a service member obtains treatment at a military facility, it will be necessary to request all records associated with that treatment by completion of [***VA Form 21-8359, Information Regarding a Veteran in Uniformed Services Hospital or Dispensary***](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8359-ARE.pdf).

When completing the [***VA Form 21-8359***](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8359-ARE.pdf)

* Complete the first page (*Request by VA-1*) of *VA* [***Form 21-8359***](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8359-ARE.pdf), by
* filling in all of the blocks in *Part I*
* placing a check mark in the boxes to the left side of the following items in *Part II:*
  + *Hospital Report*
  + *21-Day Certificate*, and
  + *Notice of Discharge*, and
* dating and signing the form (on behalf of the Veterans Service Center Manager)
* Send the first, second (*21-Day Certificate-2*), and third (*Notice of Discharge-3*) pages of *VA Form* [***21-8359***](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8359-ARE.pdf) to the appropriate uniformed services hospital on a date that ensures the hospital will receive it on or after the twenty-first day of the Veteran’s hospitalization
* Retain the fourth page (*VA Control Copy-4*) of [***VA Form 21-8359***](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8359-ARE.pdf) in the claims folder
* Take no further action

***Note***: MTFs do not furnish hospital reports until *after* the Veteran’s discharge from the hospital when a Veteran has been admitted for treatment.

Request hospital reports and clinical records if the Veteran indicates pertinent treatment in a VA facility, Vet Center, or elsewhere.

**When to Develop for a Stressor**

Request the Veteran provide credible supporting evidence to establish that an in-service stressor occurred ***unless*** the evidence of record shows that

* PTSD was initially diagnosed in service
* a confirmed stressor is already of record, or
* the claimed stressor is related to the Veteran’s
  + verified combat or FPOW service and consistent with the circumstances, conditions, or hardships of such service, or
  + fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, or the Veteran served as a drone aircraft crew member, and exposure to such activity is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the Veteran’s service

**Stressor Development**

Stressor development is necessary when the evidence submitted with the claim or received through other development (such as service records) does not allow for corroboration of a stressor.

When stressor development is necessary

* use the PTSD development paragraphs in VBMS to request information from the Veteran
* enclose [***VA Form 21-0781***](http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-21-0781-are.pdf) to solicit specific details of the in-service stressor, such as the
  + date of the incident
  + place of the incident
  + unit of assignment at the time of the incident
  + detailed description of the event
  + medals or citations received as a result of the incident, and
  + name and other identifying information concerning any other individuals involved in the event, if appropriate, and
* allow the claimant 30 days to submit the requested evidence
* If the Veterans claimed stressor is related to combat, fear, or hostile military or terrorist activity that cannot be corroborated based on evidence currently of record use the VBMS development paragraph ***PTSD – Need stressor details/med evid combat-related incdnt***
* If the Veterans claimed stressor is related to a non-combat incident such as a car accident, hurricane etc. then use the VBMS development paragraph ***PTSD – Need Stressor detail/med evid of stressful incdnt***
* If the Veteran does not mention a source for his/her stressor and does not provide details use the VBMS development paragraph ***PTSD – Need Stressor detail/med evid of stressful incdnt***
* If the Veteran claims a stressor related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) or similar personal trauma incident such as harassment use the VBMS development paragraph ***PTSD – Need stressor detail/med evid personal trauma incdnt***

***Important***:

* Do ***not*** unnecessarily delay an examination or claim by asking the Veteran for specific details or send the Veteran [***VA Form 21-0781***](http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-21-0781-are.pdf) in any case in which there is credible supporting evidence that demonstrates that the claimed in-service stressor occurred, such as evidence of
  + internment as an FPOW
  + fear of hostile military or terrorist activity
  + receipt of one of the decorations listed in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**, or
  + lay testimony sufficient to independently establish an in-service stressor as discussed in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**
* Do ***not*** routinely transmit or request return of a [***VA Form 21-0781a, Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Secondary to Personal Assault***](http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-21-0781a-are.pdf), absent an indication that the claim involves personal trauma.
* Do ***not*** send a second development letter requesting stressor information if the Veteran
  + fails to respond to the request for stressor information within 30 days, or
  + submits insufficient information in response to the 30 day request.
  + the stressor information is insufficient to meet the criteria described in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**

Can the stressor information be corroborated based on the evidence of record and/or preliminary research associated with the claimed stressor?

* If *yes*, annotate the claims folder as directed at **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.** and proceed to Step 3.
* If *no*, refer the claims folder to the JSRRC coordinator, as directed at **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**

Has a compensation examination been completed?

* If *yes*, refer the claims folder to the rating activity.

If *no*, request an examination.

Topic 4: Corroboration Review

**Corroboration Review**

Follow the steps in the table below to determine proper routing of the claim based on the status of stressor corroboration.

Review the stressor information submitted by the Veteran, if any, as well as all other service records, medical evidence, and lay or other evidence to determine if at least the minimum information required to concede or request verification of a stressor has been received, per **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**

Is sufficient stressor information of record?

* If *yes*, proceed to Step 2
* If *no*, refer the claims folder to the rating activity when
  + the Veteran has not responded to stressor development and there is no stressor information of record, or
  + the stressor information is insufficient to meet the criteria described in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**

Can the stressor information be corroborated based on the evidence of record and/or preliminary research associated with the claimed stressor?

* If *yes*, annotate the claims folder as directed at **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.** and proceed to Step 3
* If *no*, refer the claims folder to the JSRRC coordinator, as directed at **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**

Has a compensation examination been completed?

* If *yes*, refer the claims folder to the rating activity
* If *no*, request an examination

**Joint Service Records Research Center (JSRRC) Coordinator**

The JSRRC Coordinator is the primary point of contact within each RO for all procedures related to requests for corroboration of stressors unrelated to MST or personal trauma. Although this title refers to JSRRC, the JSRRC Coordinator also has jurisdiction over requests to MCASC and NARA.

The JSRRC Coordinator or individual acting in the capacity of a JSRRC Coordinator

* determines whether or not submission of a request to JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA for stressor verification is appropriate
* serves as the MCASC and NARA point of contact for issues related to records requests
* personally submits all of the RO’s requests for stressor corroboration
* notifies JSRRC, MCASC, or NARA when further action on a pending research request is no longer necessary, such as when evidence is received that verifies the claimed stressor or the claim is withdrawn altogether, and
* forwards inquiries from the regional office (RO) regarding JSRRC-related issues to the VA Central Office (VACO) JSRRC mailbox at [**VAVBAWAS/CO/JSRRC**](mailto:JSRRC.VBACO@va.gov)

**Referring a Claim to the JSRRC Coordinator**

As directed in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**, only route those claims to the JSRRC Coordinator in which

* sufficient stressor information has been submitted by the Veteran or is otherwise present in the claims folder to meet the criteria outlined in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**, and
* the stressor cannot be conceded and requires additional research.

***Important***: ***Do not***

* route a claim to the JSRRC Coordinator for review until development is complete in every respect except for
  + corroboration of the in-service stressor, and
  + a confirmed diagnosis of PTSD, or
* schedule a VA examination before receiving corroboration of the claimed in-service stressor

A diagnosis of PTSD is not a prerequisite for initiating the stressor verification process.

* Military performance reports may be requested via the Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES)
* Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay may be requested through the Veterans Information Solution (VIS)
* While confirmation of receipt of Combat/Imminent Danger/Hostile Fire Pay through VIS alone does not constitute verification of a combat-related stressor, it may, in combination with other evidence, "tip the scales" in favor of the Veteran's assertion of his/her involvement in combat

**Routing a Claim to the JSRRC Coordinator**

To route a claim to the JSRRC Coordinator, the claims processor conducting routine development of the claim for SC for PTSD unrelated to personal trauma or MST will

* ensure all development is complete as directed in **M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1.D.**
* establish a VBMS tracked item using the *JSRRC COORDINATOR REVIEW* option from the COMPMGT drop down menu, and
* add the *JSRRC Request* special issue for routing the request to the JSRRC Coordinator

***References***: For more information on

* establishing tracked items and special issues in VBMS, see the
  + [***VBMS User Guide***](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/Resources_Technical_Information.asp), and
  + [**M21-4, Appendix D, Section I.b**](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000011474/Appendix-B.-End-Product-Codes-and-Work-Rate-Standards-for-Quantitative-Measurements), and
* National Work Queue (NWQ) procedures for using a special issue for routing the request to the JSRRC Coordinator, see the [***National Work Queue Phase 1 Playbook***](https://vaww.vba.esp.va.gov/sites/OFOPlaybooks/Shared%20Documents/NWQ%20Phase%201%20Playbook.pdf)

Topic 5: PTSD Based on Personal Trauma

**PTSD Based on Personal Trauma**

***Personal trauma*** for the purpose of VA disability compensation claims based on PTSD refers broadly to stressor events involving harm perpetrated by a person who is not considered part of an enemy force.

***Examples***: Assault, battery, robbery, mugging, stalking, harassment.

**PTSD Based on Military Sexual TraumaMST**

MST is a subset of personal trauma and refers to sexual harassment, sexual assault, or rape that occurs in a military setting

The RO’s MST Outreach Coordinator will be responsible for handling these types of claims

**Required Evidence for PTSD Based on Personal Trauma**

To establish SC for PTSD based on in-service personal trauma, there *must* be credible evidence to support the Veteran’s assertion that the stressful event occurred.

This does *not* mean that the evidence actually proves that the incident occurred, but that there is at least an approximate balance of positive and negative evidence that the event did occur.

***Note***: Veterans whose stressor occurred during inactive duty for training (INACDUTRA) are eligible for SC in the same manner as those whose stressor occurred during active duty or active duty for training.  VA Office of General Counsel concluded in [**VAOPGCPREC 8-2001**](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000043823/VAOPGCPREC-08-01,-Feb-26,-2001,-Meaning-of-) that “PTSD resulting from sexual assault may be considered a disability resulting from an injury.”

Identifying possible sources of evidence to support the claim may require asking the Veteran for information concerning the traumatic incident. Make this request as compassionately as possible in order to avoid causing further trauma.

**Development for Evidence of Personal Trauma**

When writing a letter to obtain information from the Veteran regarding a PTSD claim based on personal trauma, use Modern Awards Processing-Development (MAP-D) or VBMS and select the appropriate personal trauma special issue on the CONTENTIONS screen

* *PTSD – Personal Trauma* (claims for PTSD resulting from a non-sexual personal trauma), or
* *Non-PTSD Personal Trauma* (claims for any condition, mental or physical (other than PTSD), resulting from a non-sexual personal trauma)

# PTSD Review Exercise

**Instructions:** Answer each of the following PTSD review questions.

1. What is the M21-1 reference that is dedicated solely to PTSD claims?

M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, Chapter 1, Section D - Claims for Service Connection for Post-Tra

umatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

1. As mentioned in M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, 1, D, 1, a, SC for PTSD Due to In-Service Stressors what are the three requirements of Service Connection for PTSD due to in-service stressors?


5. Using the M21-1 Reference from the last question a CFR references was provided for establishing service connection for PTSD. What is the corresponding CFR reference?
6. What is the M21-1 reference for Individual Decorations as Evidence of Combat Participation?
7. What form is used in order to provide stressor details to the VA regarding combat related PTSD claims?
8. What form is used to provide a statement in support of claim for PTSD secondary to personal assault?
9. What M21-1 reference issues guidance on an in-service diagnosis of PTSD related to a pre-service stressor?
10. In order to request personal records (sometimes called the 201 file) what two programs are used?