



Service Member Separation

Updating the DD Form 214

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Preface

Electronic systems are becoming increasingly complicated and interconnected, and those of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) are no exception. Due to the evolution of electronic systems, combined with the need to save time, energy, and money, DoD plans to replace paper delivery of servicemember separation information with electronic delivery. A timely analysis is critical to ensure DoD is best positioned to optimize and effectively orchestrate this opportunity. Clear, authoritative information on characterization of service and reasons for separation is critical for individuals as they reenlist, change duty status, or transfer into civilian employment; for dependents and survivors; for government agencies that adjudicate veteran status and benefits; and for military departments as they move toward fully integrated digital databases.

DoD's DD Form 214 has existed since the 1950s, when it standardized information across the services by replacing service-level forms. The form is largely unchanged since that time and has remained the defining document to verify a servicemember's discharge from active duty. As electronic information supplants paper, information provided by the services must continue to meet the important purposes of DD Form 214. To ensure consistency across the services and avoid omission of critical information, DoD needs an in-depth analysis of the current use of DD Form 214 to identify ways in which it could be improved to meet the diverse needs of the numerous organizations and individuals who use and depend on it.

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness asked the RAND Corporation to conduct this in-depth review. We found that, while DD Form 214 is well-established and remains the definitive document to verify veteran status, transferring it to a fully electronic document will take substantial effort. Specifically, DoD should revise policies and processes governing DD Form 214 to ensure data are accurate, useful, and accessible by veterans and other relevant government agencies.

This research was sponsored by the Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management Office, within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and conducted within the Forces and Resources Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community.

For more information on the RAND Forces and Resources Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/frp or contact the director (contact information is provided on the webpage).

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Summary

When a servicemember separates from active duty with the military, he or she receives DD Form 214, which summarizes the details of his or her period of service and the conditions of separation. Servicemembers, dependents and survivors, government agencies that adjudicate veteran status and benefits, and military departments all use this form for a variety of purposes.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is moving toward a fully electronic DD Form 214—a transition that presents an opportunity for DoD to review the form’s contents and use, ensuring that its information continues to meet the needs of government agencies and the military services, including the Reserves and the National Guard. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness asked the RAND Corporation to conduct an in-depth review to assure not only that the content of DD Form 214 remains relevant but also that the policies and procedures governing its use are comprehensive and that DoD properly plans for the transition from paper forms to an electronic system of record. In addition, DoD requested that researchers provide an in-depth historical analysis of DD Form 214 to document how and why it has changed over time.

In conducting this review, we combined a literature review and stakeholder interviews with 92 individuals from across the DD Form 214 stakeholder community. The individuals represented 16 different organizations and were considered to be subject-matter experts on DD

Form 214.¹ These stakeholders enact policy governing DD Form 214, prepare the form, process it, and represent the largest groups of end users.

Stakeholders were grouped into four primary categories:

- **policy** (e.g., Office of the Secretary of Defense, service headquarters, National Guard and Reserve policy experts)
- **suppliers** (e.g., service centers, transition centers, personnel completing DD Form 214)
- **data managers** (e.g., Defense Manpower Data Center [DMDC])
- **end users** (e.g., Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], servicemembers).

Our findings suggest that DD Form 214 is well-established and remains the definitive document to verify veteran status, but DoD can take steps to ensure the data are accurate and accessible by veterans and other government agencies.

Evolution of DD Form 214

DD Form 214 was put into use in 1950 to replace the various service-specific separation forms that were used at that time. DoD issued DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1336.01: *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States* at the time that DD Form 214 was released, and it remains the DoD policy governing DD Form 214, providing guidance on its content, use, and distribution. Based on this DoDI, the services have crafted their own service regulations, which are used when creating and correcting DD Form 214.

Though the design of DD Form 214 has remained largely unchanged in more than a half century, the information within has slowly evolved, with the addition, alteration, and removal of informa-

¹ For a more comprehensive look at the organizations interviewed and the methodology used to select interviewees, see Appendix A.

tion blocks. In general, these modifications have been gradual and have been in response to changes in the military and benefits adjudication at the VA and Department of Labor. The major changes occurred in the following areas:

- an overall streamlining of DD Form 214 and reduction in the amount of information required
- an increase in the information required for VA and other end-user benefits
- an increase in the number of blocks used to characterize the service period and changes to the types of information requested
- an increase in the amount of information about education and training
- movement toward electronic data entry and distribution.

Today, DD Form 214 is composed of 30 blocks of varied information, which fall into the following groups:

- administrative
- entry and exit
- occupation, awards, and education
- record of service
- commission source
- leave paid
- dental exam
- remarks
- contact information after separation
- special additional information.

Evaluating the Utility of DD Form 214 Today

Key stakeholders use DD Form 214 in different, but often complementary, ways. To address the utility of DD Form 214, interviewees were asked to look at the form and rate the importance level of each block. Respondents were told to say if each block was important or

not important, or if they were unsure. The research team then coded responses based on interviewee comments and translated each block's quantitative importance quotient into a four-point categorical rating. DD Form 214 blocks were then grouped together by their primary use, sorting each block into one of ten primary use categories: identification, separation information, catch-all,² service record, benefits, veteran use, contact after separation, reserve duty, verification, and pay. Table S.1 lists the number of blocks in each primary use category and the overall response regarding the importance of blocks in the category.

End users—the VA (including state VAs), Department of Labor, and veterans service organizations (VSOs)—primarily rely on DD Form 214 for case management and benefit adjudication. Servicemembers also rely on DD Form 214 for state benefits and corporate discounts, as well as for their employment searches and as a supplement to their resumes. The services also use DD Form 214 for various ana-

Table S.1
Overall Importance of Primary Use Categories

Primary Use	Overall Response	Number of Blocks
Identification	Very important	6
Separation information	Very important	7
Catch-all	Very important	1
Service record	Important	9
Benefits	Mixed	10
Veteran use	Mixed	4
Contact after separation	Mixed	2
Reserve duty	Mixed	2
Verification	Mixed	2
Pay	Not important	2

² *Catch-all* refers to block 18, which is titled “remarks” on DD Form 214. This block serves to capture data that are not represented elsewhere on the form.

lytics and tracking of servicemembers, and discharge review boards use DD Form 214 for discharge upgrades.³

Based on information from the literature review and stakeholder interviews, the study team concluded the following:

- Changes to DD Form 214 should be coordinated to account for all stakeholders.
- New policies and data management processes are needed to ensure DD Form 214 content is complete and accurate.
- The current form does not adequately address key Reserve and National Guard issues.
- Not all blocks on DD Form 214 are of equal importance; some are obsolete, others are critical.
- There are multiple options for accessing DD Form 214 data.
- Various options exist for moving toward an electronic record, each with advantages and disadvantages.

We discuss each in the following subsections.

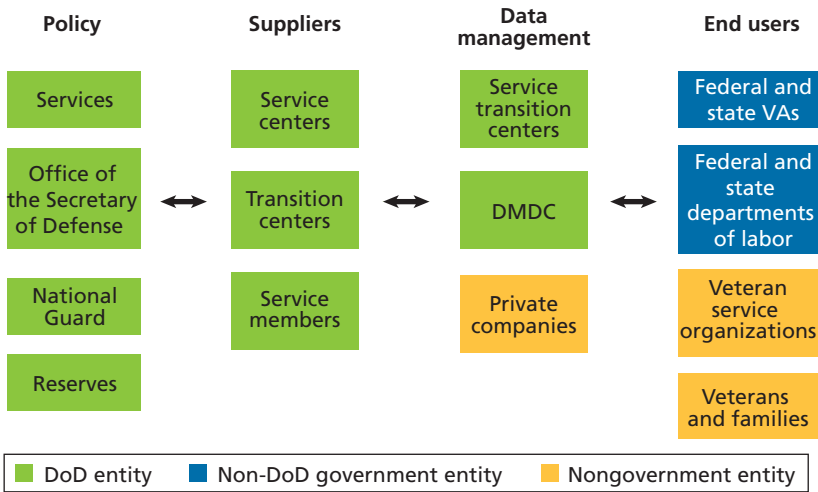
Changes Should Account for All Stakeholders

Changes to DD Form 214 have been gradual, responding to changes in the military and the benefits adjudication process at the VA and Department of Labor. The most-recent changes focus on increasing electronic capabilities and processes that have become inextricably tied to DD Form 214's use by various stakeholders (see Figure S.1). Today, DD Form 214 is easily recognized and well understood by servicemembers, end users, and others. These stakeholders' use of DD Form 214 and the information they need, including that related to electronic transmission, should be a primary consideration as DD Form 214 evolves.

The key stakeholders use DD Form 214 in different, but often complementary, ways. The services also use DD Form 214 for various

³ Discharge review boards exist to independently review servicemember documents to determine if the correct type of separation was given. These boards can change information on a DD Form 214. For example, they can change an "other than honorable" to an "honorable" discharge.

Figure S.1
Interaction Between DD Form 214 Stakeholders



analytics and tracking of members and veterans. The VA, Department of Labor, and VSOs primarily rely on DD Form 214 for case management and benefit adjudication. State VAs also rely on DD Form 214 for outreach to veterans, and, to a lesser extent, strategic analysis. Veterans rely on it for state benefits and corporate discounts, as well as for their employment searches and as a supplement to their resumes.⁴

New Policies and Data Management Processes Are Needed

Data inconsistencies are a major cause of concern. One way to reduce those inaccuracies is to ensure that as much data as possible are pulled in from authoritative personnel databases to prepopulate DD Form 214. Currently, there is no policy that directs the services to use a specific system to prepopulate DD Form 214, so each service has different systems and methods, some of which are more advanced than others. The Air Force and Marine Corps autopopulate most of their DD Form 214 data, the Army only autopopulates about 25 percent, and the Navy does not autopopulate any part of the form. These differences between

⁴ Interviews with representatives of VSOs, state VAs, and the Department of Labor.

services' DD Form 214 systems and methods often leads to incorrect data in systems of record.

One theme consistently emphasized throughout our interviews was the need for processes that will result in more complete, consistent, and accurate DD Form 214 content. In some cases, data inaccuracies occur when servicemembers fill out DD Form 214 by hand, a problem which autopopulating data will help correct. However, some interviewees are worried that autopopulated information will not be further verified. Policies are also needed to determine who can change inaccurate data. Interviewees reported that the DMDC will often change DD Form 214 data without relaying those changes back to the services, which has created problems with veterans seeking certain benefits. A policy that requires all data changes to be made at the service level could improve data accuracy.

The services are required to distribute DD Form 214 to both internal and external organizations. Internally, the services send electronic DD Form 214 data to DMDC, where the data are stored in a merged electronic DD Form 214/DD Form 215 database. The data are then reconciled across five report fields with DMDC's Person Data Repository, which compares the data elements between the two databases. DMDC will update the Person Data Repository data if one of the five fields is blank or null based on separate agreements with each of the services. To send data externally, DMDC takes a subset of the Person Data Repository data and sends it through a VA satellite database to the VA/DoD Identity Repository. However, there are issues with data transmissions internally (from the services to DMDC) and externally (from DMDC to the VA and Department of Labor) which must be resolved if DD Form 214 is to become fully digital. While the technical aspects of data transmission work soundly, DMDC receives data from multiple service databases, which leads to data inaccuracies and problems with data verification. Thus, data accuracy and improving the transmission of data are needed before DD Form 214 becomes fully electronic.

Current Policy Does Not Address Key Reserve and National Guard Issues

Current Reserve and National Guard policy on DD Form 214 is insufficient and has created confusion. For periods of service classified as “contingency,” DD Form 214 is required for every service period of one day or greater, which can lead to an excessively large number of forms for some Reserve component members. In general, this policy creates large administrative backlogs, confuses servicemembers, and leads to inefficiencies. The problem is particularly acute in the Air Force because its Reserve members are frequently activated for short durations, often in direct support of a contingency operation.

Second, for noncontingency active duty service, members of the National Guard and Reserves who provide less than 90 consecutive days of active duty do *not* receive a DD Form 214, even if they have accrued a large amount of active-duty service time. Some servicemembers do multiple rotations of less than 90 days each, then have no way of verifying their service.

Third, DD Form 214 blocks are not designed for Reserve and National Guard servicemembers; they do not record the different statutory authorities under which a guard or reserve member can serve, and they do not record certain awards and promotions. These different types of duty statuses, awards, and promotions are all important because they can affect benefits eligibility. For example, some National Guard awards are state specific and currently cannot be entered into a DD Form 214. Additionally, some benefits are determined by rank, which may not be accurate on the form. In one such scenario, a Reserve servicemember can be called to active duty and receive a DD Form 214. The servicemember can then be promoted within the Reserves but never receive another DD Form 214. This can exclude the servicemember from obtaining the benefits to which he or she is entitled because his or her last DD Form 214 does not display the correct rank.

Fourth, Reserve component separation codes are different than active component codes and are not adequate to capture the range of separation types. For example, a National Guard member may be taken off active duty but stay as a drilling member of the same unit, but no DD Form 214 code reflects this type of separation.

Some DD Form 214 Data Are Obsolete, Others Are Critical

During the interviews, respondents were asked about each data element on DD Form 214 to gain an understanding of which elements are important and how they are used by different stakeholders. Overall, responses from interview participants indicate that the identification, separation information, and catch-all categories are very important; service record categories are important; benefits, veteran use, contact after separation, reserve duty, and verification categories are of mixed importance; and pay data blocks are unimportant.⁵

Multiple Options for Accessing the Data on DD Form 214

To reduce unnecessarily exposing personally identifiable information (PII) on DD Form 214, additional options to verify military service should be considered.⁶ One option is a “proof of service letter” that can be used to validate service. The services have already developed this type of document. Less detailed than DD Form 214, this document is sufficient to supply end users with proof of service. Another option is a VA identification card, which has already been implemented by the VA. Both of these options have the benefit of including less PII.

Another alternative is to develop an “on-demand” DD Form 214 that supplies select information based on who will be using the data. This option would address a number of interviewees’ desires: (1) providing tailored data without a physical DD Form 214, (2) providing cumulative information about a servicemember’s career while that member is still actively serving, (3) alleviating privacy concerns by controlling data, and (4) reducing fraud and forgery. However, all of these options are not without risk, and any new form or identification card opens up the potential for misinterpretation and confusion. Fraud and forgery are also concerns, but additional security features, such as microchips or watermarks, could mitigate these possible problems. While not all of these options need to be implemented, they illustrate

⁵ For a complete list of organizational responses, see Appendix C.

⁶ This type of information includes Social Security number, date of birth, and blocks that describe the reason for a servicemember’s separation. This type of information is important to verify a veteran’s identity but could potentially be used by nefarious actors.

that multiple options exist to allow veterans to verify their military service without needlessly exposing PII.

Various Issues Need to Be Considered for Moving Toward an Electronic Record

Stakeholders hold disparate views about moving toward an electronic record, with some strongly supporting such a move and others holding back, especially veterans who may not be as comfortable with or have access to an electronic version of DD Form 214.

These varied perspectives need to be factored into any decisions about future changes to DD Form 214; test piloting changes could facilitate successful implementation. A phased approach to a fully electronic DD Form 214 needs to include an effective communication strategy with servicemembers and end users.

Recommendations and a Strategic Path Forward

Based on findings from our legal and policy reviews and interviews with DD Form 214 stakeholders, we recommend the following actions to DoD:

- **Develop education and training for servicemembers, suppliers, and end users of DD Form 214 as it transitions to an electronic form.** DoD should implement a strategy to effectively communicate the changes to the form, when these changes will happen, and how the electronic form will be accessed.
- **Develop policies and data management processes to ensure DD Form 214 content is more complete and accurate.** DoD should mandate that the services have up-to-date and accurate information in their data systems. This will allow the use of auto-populated data to the fullest extent possible. Minimizing manual data input will help ensure that DD Form 214 data are more accurate and complete. To ensure that autopopulated data are correct, we recommend that DoD reduce the number and types of systems that store DD Form 214 data, eliminate duplicative

systems, and leverage the Integrated Personnel and Pay System (IPPS) integration effort to consolidate data.⁷

- **Assess the policy governing the issuance of DD Form 214 for Reserve and National Guard members.** In particular, DoD should consider changing the policies that mandate a DD Form 214 to be issued only to servicemembers separating from active duty, so that Reserve and National Guard servicemembers receive a DD Form 214 on separation even if they did not serve any time on active duty. DoD should also reassess the current policy that requires the services to generate a DD Form 214 for servicemembers who spend one day in support of a named contingency. DoD could mandate service systems automatically total the number of days supporting a contingency operation, then produce a DD Form 214 on a yearly basis, instead of creating a form after every day on active duty supporting a contingency. We also recommend that DoD update DD Form 214 to include awards, promotions, and other important items specific to the Reserves and National Guard. These items could be added through a drop-down menu or through autopopulate options in the current service personnel systems.
- **Modify the current version of DD Form 214 in response to stakeholder feedback.** We recommend DoD remove the eight blocks that stakeholders told us were unimportant. (Commissioning Source, Loan Repayment, Dental, Pay, Location of DD Form 214 Copies, Servicemember Initials). DoD should also add in blocks that identify time and location of service in support of operations, as our findings indicate that this information would be helpful to stakeholders.⁸

⁷ IPPS is an online human resource system that provides one system to access servicemember pay, personnel, and talent management capabilities. All the services are in the process of implementing these systems which will increase access, timeliness, and accuracy of personnel and pay information.

⁸ Our analysis to support these changes is presented in Chapter Six. Removing these blocks would provide the opportunity to add in more-important content, and reduce unneeded information. Some stakeholders indicated that they want all existing content to remain on

- **Explore other options to prove veteran status and ways to access DD Form 214 data.** DoD should consider creating an approved proof-of-service document, partnering with the VA Identification Card project, or creating an on-demand DD Form 214 system administered by DMDC to help veterans prove military service while protecting PII. These three options are not mutually exclusive. Ultimately, DoD will need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of these options as it moves toward a fully electronic DD Form 214.
- **Use a phased approach for updating DD Form 214 to a completely electronic record.** This will allow frequent status checks and course corrections, as well as any necessary adaptations. Our strategic roadmap for updating DD Form 214 lays out a proposed phased approach.

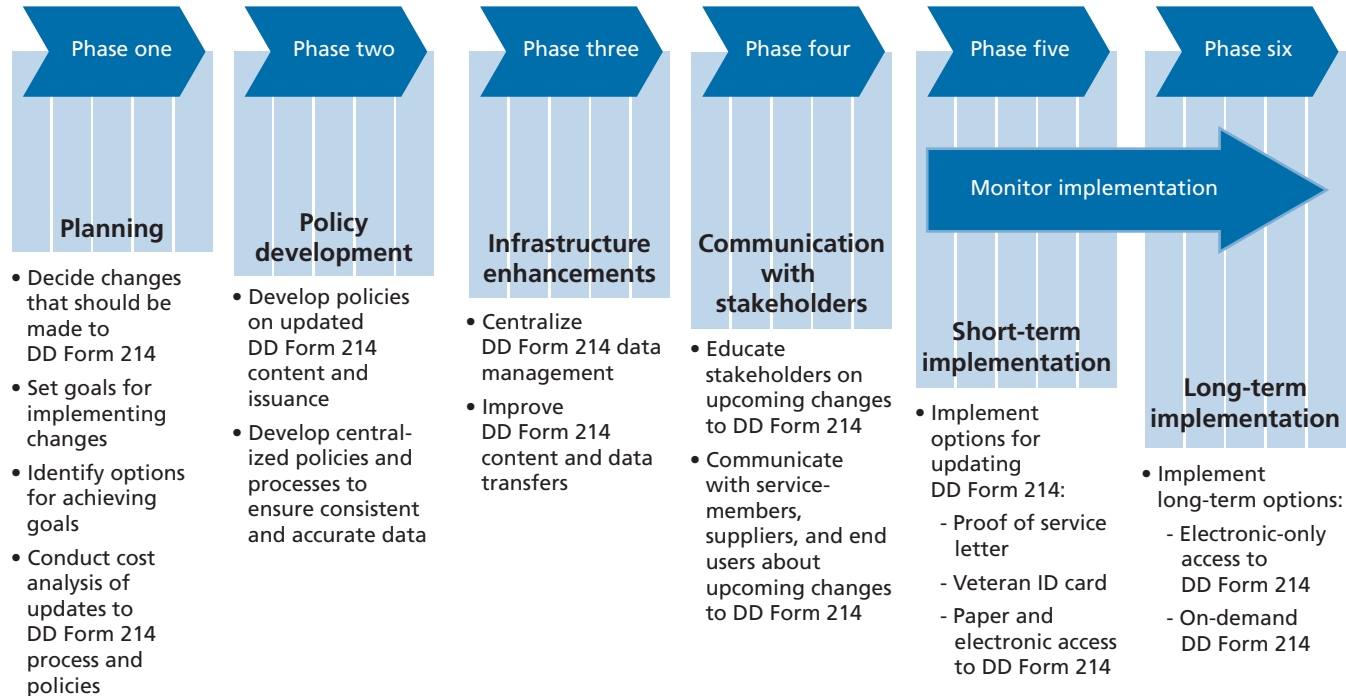
A Strategic Roadmap for Updating DD Form 214

We developed a strategic roadmap to assist DoD in implementing and updating DD Form 214. The roadmap contains a phased approach composed of six phases: (1) planning, (2) policy development, (3) infrastructure enhancements, (4) communication with stakeholders, (5) short-term implementation, and (6) long-term implementation. Figure S.2 shows the highlighted actions that should be accomplished in each phase. A key element of this roadmap is monitoring both short-term and long-term implementation of any changes made to DD Form 214. In addition, during short-term and long-term implementation, conducting pilot programs for options that DoD plans to implement would allow DoD to begin implementing changes with a small segment of the population and identify and resolve problems before rolling out the changes to the broader veteran population.

Successful implementation of an updated DD Form 214 will require that DoD develop and continuously maintain a robust monitoring framework and periodically evaluate the impact of changes made to DD Form 214. We recommend routine monitoring of the

DD Form 214, but it should be noted that the electronic systems that share data can continue to transmit the information contained in these blocks uninterrupted.

Figure S.2
A Strategic Roadmap for Updating DD Form 214



implementation process as well as a periodical comprehensive evaluation of the updated DD Form 214 process. An initial evaluation could be conducted three years after implementation, then every five years afterward. Regardless of the outcome of these evaluations, the need will remain for long-term, sustained routine monitoring to identify and resolve potential problems quickly.

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Abbreviations

AD	active duty
AFI	Air Force Instruction
BCMR	Board for Correction of Military Records
BUPERS	Bureau of Naval Personnel
CGPS	Coast Guard Personnel Service
DFAS	Defense Finance and Accounting Services
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
DPRIRS	Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System
IPPS	Integrated Personnel and Pay System
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OUSD P&R	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
PDR	Person Data Repository
PII	personally identifiable information

PSD	Total Force Personnel Services Delivery
RC	Reserve Component
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
SGLI	Servicemember's Group Life Insurance
SPD	Separation Program Designators
SPN	Separation Program Number
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VADIR	VA/DoD Identity Repository
VEAP	Veteran's Educational Assistance Program
VGLI	Veterans Group Life Insurance
VMET	Verification of Military Experience and Training
VSO	veterans service organization

Introduction

During the five years that the United States recruited, trained, and built combat power for World War II, millions of men and women joined the military. By September 2, 1945, when the war ended, more than 12 million U.S. military personnel were serving in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.¹ From 1939 to 1945, the U.S. armed forces added 11,874,765 personnel.

This record-setting military growth was paralleled by an equally fast demobilization after World War II's end. By 1947, the U.S. armed forces had a combined end strength of only 1,566,000—a decrease of 87 percent from 1945.

As servicemembers left active duty and returned to civilian life, they had to be properly discharged from the military services. The services used a variety of administrative processes and separation documents, which were not standardized and contained different service-member information for each service.

The millions of servicemembers returning home after the war vastly increased the veteran population inside the United States. At the same time, Congress enacted many benefits for these war veterans, the most prominent of which was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (better known as the World War II GI Bill), which was signed into law on June 22, 1944. The new GI Bill placed the Veteran's Administration—renamed the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in March 1989—at the top of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's list of priorities,

¹ National WWII Museum, "Research Starters: US Military by the Numbers," webpage, undated.

making it only second to the War and Navy Departments in terms of resources and personnel.² One of the most influential bills in U.S. history, the GI Bill was intended to help servicemembers secure stability as they returned to civilian life following the war. It established hospitals, paid the expenses of veterans attending college or trade schools, made low-interest home mortgages available, and provided veterans with unemployment compensation. It enabled education and home ownership for millions of veterans, transforming the fabric of American society. Other bills also granted benefits to returning servicemembers, such as the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944, which gave veterans hiring preference for federally funded jobs.³

To serve the large population of veterans, the VA had to increase the size of its workforce considerably, establish new processes and procedures, and accurately determine who was eligible for these new benefits. To help determine benefits eligibility, the VA had to first establish that an applicant was a qualified veteran. Initially, the VA used various service-specific documents to establish veteran status, but as these documents were not standardized or coordinated in any coherent fashion, it was often time-consuming to process the paperwork and make the determination. One standard document was needed to speed up the process and to ensure that all servicemembers received fair and equal consideration for benefits.

DoD also needed one service separation document to help with its own administration processes. While the services were, and still are, responsible for generating, updating, and adjudicating the information on a separation document, DoD recognized that having one standardized form was beneficial for a number of reasons. Servicemembers who left active duty and wanted to rejoin or who wanted to switch services would have a form that reflected their previous service and reason for discharge. This new form could also be used to adjudicate final pay and other benefits. In light of these needs, DoD decided to consolidate the different service-specific documents into one form.

² VA, "About VA," webpage, undated.

³ VA, *VA History in Brief*, Washington, D.C., undated, p. 14.

DD Form 214

With the publication of DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1336.01, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States* on January 1, 1950, a new consolidated form was created. DD Form 214, *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*, which is an appendix to DoDI 1336.01, became the one authoritative document to verify a servicemember had served on active duty. When a servicemember separates from active duty military service, a DD Form 214 is required to summarize the details of his or her period of service and the conditions of the servicemember's separation.

The current version of DD Form 214 is composed of 30 blocks of varied information, as shown in Figure 1.1.

The blocks in the current DD Form 214 fall into the following groups:

- **Administrative (blocks 1–6).** These blocks contain identifying information, including name; department, component, and branch; Social Security number; grade; pay grade; date of birth; and reserve obligation termination date (the date after which the servicemember has completed his or her required military service).
- **Entry and exit (blocks 7–10).** These blocks record information about first and last duty assignments and location. Block 9, Command to Which Transferred, is filled in if the member transfers to the reserve component. Block 10 records the coverage amount for Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI)—life insurance coverage that is offered to servicemembers.
- **Occupation, awards, education (blocks 11, 13, 14).** These blocks include the servicemember's primary specialty (11), any decorations earned during the course of a servicemember's career (13), and any military education (14).
- **Record of service (block 12).** The sub-blocks record details about a servicemember's service, including foreign service and initial entry training.

4 Servicemember Separation: Updating DD Form 214

Figure 1.1
Current Version of DD Form 214

CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY This Report Contains Information Subject to the Privacy Act of 1974. As Amended.			
1. NAME (Last, First, Middle)		2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH	
4a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK		5. DATE OF BIRTH (YYYYMMDD)	
b. PAY GRADE		6. RESERVE OBLIGATION TERMINATION DATE (YYYYMMDD)	
7a. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE DUTY		b. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY (City and State, or complete address if known)	
8a. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND		b. STATION WHERE SEPARATED	
9. COMMAND TO WHICH TRANSFERRED		10. SGLI COVERAGE AMOUNT: \$ <input type="text"/>	
11. PRIMARY SPECIALTY (List number, title and years and months in specialty. List additional specialty numbers and titles involving periods of one or more years.)		12. RECORD OF SERVICE	
		YEAR(S)	MONTH(S)
		DAY(S)	
		a. DATE ENTERED AD THIS PERIOD	
		b. SEPARATION DATE THIS PERIOD	
		c. NET ACTIVE SERVICE THIS PERIOD	
		d. TOTAL PRIOR ACTIVE SERVICE	
		e. TOTAL PRIOR INACTIVE SERVICE	
		f. FOREIGN SERVICE	
		g. SEA SERVICE	
		h. INITIAL ENTRY TRAINING	
		i. EFFECTIVE DATE OF PAY GRADE	
13. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED (All periods of service)		14. MILITARY EDUCATION (Course title, number of weeks, and month and year completed)	
15a. COMMISSIONED THROUGH SERVICE ACADEMY		YES	NO
b. COMMISSIONED THROUGH ROTC SCHOLARSHIP (10 USC Sec. 2107b)		YES	NO
c. ENLISTED UNDER LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM (10 USC Chap. 109) (If Yes, year of commitment _____)		YES	NO
16. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID		17. MEMBER WAS PROVIDED COMPLETE DENTAL EXAMINATION AND ALL APPROPRIATE DENTAL SERVICES AND TREATMENT WITHIN 90 DAYS PRIOR TO SEPARATION	
		YES	NO
18. REMARKS			
<p>The information contained herein is subject to computer matching within the Department of Defense or with any other affected Federal or non-Federal agency for verification purposes and to determine eligibility for, and/or continued compliance with, the requirements of a Federal benefit program.</p>			
19a. MAILING ADDRESS AFTER SEPARATION (Include ZIP Code)		b. NEAREST RELATIVE (Name and address - include ZIP Code)	
20. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 6 BE SENT TO (Specify state/locality)		OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS	
a. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 3 BE SENT TO THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (WASHINGTON, DC)		YES	NO
21a. MEMBER SIGNATURE		b. DATE (YYYYMMDD)	
b. DATE (YYYYMMDD)		22 a. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO SIGN (Typed name, grade title, signature)	
		b. DATE (YYYYMMDD)	
SPECIAL ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (For use by authorized agencies only)			
23. TYPE OF SEPARATION		24. CHARACTER OF SERVICE (Include upgrades)	
25. SEPARATION AUTHORITY		26. SEPARATION CODE	27. REENTRY CODE
28. NARRATIVE REASON FOR SEPARATION			
29. DATES OF TIME LOST DURING THIS PERIOD (YYYYMMDD)		30. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 4 (initials)	

NOTE: DD Form 214 has changed multiple times over the years. This is the current version of DD Form 214 at the time this report was written.

- **Commission source, leave paid, dental exam (blocks 15–17).** These blocks cover the commissioning source (15), days of accrued leave paid (16), and whether the member has completed a dental exam within 90 days of separation (17).
- **Remarks (block 18).**
- **Contact after separation (blocks 19–22).** These blocks cover contact information after separation (mailing address and nearest relative) (19), where copies of DD Form 214 should be sent (20), and signatures (21 and 22).
- **Special additional information (blocks 23–30).** These blocks include additional information on military service. They are type of separation (23), character of service (24), separation authority (25), separation code (26), reentry code (27), narrative reason for separation (28), dates of time lost during this period (29), and member requests copy 4 (30).⁴ DD Form 214 is the most recognizable and widely accepted way to document service in the military, containing the most information in the shortest possible space (typically one page). Servicemembers use DD Form 214 for a variety of reasons, including accessing state-specific benefits, VA benefits and entitlements, Department of Labor unemployment compensation, and veteran-related discounts. However, it is not the only way to verify military service. Other methods include the VA identification card or Uniformed Services ID Card, which only show military service and provide no specific information on a servicemember. The Reserves and National Guard can issue a DD Form 256 Certificate of Discharge upon completion of a service agreement in the National Guard, Reserves, or Individual Ready Reserve, but this document is not compulsory or as well-known as DD Form 214. Additionally, it only demonstrates that a member separated from the military, not the reasons why he or she did so. Individual documents in a servicemember's profes-

⁴ At one point, several different copies of the form existed (servicemember, service, Department of Veterans Affairs, State Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor). Only some of the copies contain all of a servicemember's information. Copy 4 is still in use today and is the copy that contains all of the detailed information on the form.

sional military file can also serve to show military service, but most of these documents are not succinct as DD Form 214, nor are they accessible to most servicemembers after separating from the military.

As DoD has modernized over the years, it has continued to update DD Form 214 in response to requests from the services, the VA, the Department of Labor, and others. DD Form 214 also has changed in response to congressional interest, and new sections of the National Defense Authorization Act have mandated that specific data elements on DD Form 214 be added, altered, or removed. These revisions to DD Form 214 have resulted in changes to DoD and service-specific policy and regulations. In addition to changing the content of DD Form 214, changes have been made in how DD Form 214 is completed, reviewed, transmitted, and used by servicemembers and other governmental agencies. The evolution of DD Form 214 and policies governing the form are discussed in detail in Chapters Two and Three of this report.

More recently, DoD has a growing demand for accurate and timely information. New issues include electronic systems, process automation, big data, information privacy, and access to information, as well as how the connections between these systems and processes are creating increasingly complicated problems. These issues must be taken into consideration as DoD develops new policies and regulations that govern the creation, use, and transmission of DD Form 214. DoD must carefully consider how the data contained on DD Form 214 are captured, stored, adjudicated, and made available to separated servicemembers. Careful consideration must be taken so that all segments of the veteran population, including veterans who may be more comfortable with a paper copy of DD Form 214, still have a document that proves their military service. At the same time, DoD must ensure that only the necessary data are shared with other agencies and that the process to move DD Form 214 from paper to a fully electronic system of record takes place in a coordinated fashion.

Study Objective

The objective of this study was to review and analyze DD Form 214 to determine if it still meets the needs of government agencies and military departments. Because the form has existed since the early 1950s, and has not been drastically overhauled since that time, a holistic review of DD Form 214 was needed. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) commissioned this review to ensure that the policies and procedures that govern the use of DD Form 214 are comprehensive and that DoD properly plans for the transition from paper to an electronic system of record.

The research team was asked to do a number of things for this study.

1. **Review the laws, statutes, and policies that govern the use of DD Form 214 from a department-wide perspective.** As DD Form 214 has changed over the years, policies and regulations have at times not kept pace with the newest version. Any review needed to ensure that laws, statutes, and policies support the current version of DD Form 214 and provide the necessary oversight for DoD and the services.
2. **Provide an in-depth historical analysis of DD Form 214** to document how DD Form 214 has changed, the main reasons for these changes, how the form's use by servicemembers and other end users has changed, and how and why the policies that govern DD Form 214 have changed.
3. **Validate the information collected by DD Form 214** to ensure that all critical information remains and highlight elements that are either unnecessary or no longer relevant because of updated systems, policies, and procedures. As part of this review, DoD asked for an in-depth analysis of current DD Form 214 use to identify ways in which it could be improved to meet the diverse needs of the organizations and individuals who use and depend on it.
4. **Provide recommendations for a strategic path forward that addresses all relevant stakeholders.**

Study Approach

Our research methodology combined a literature review and stakeholder interviews. The literature review used open-source publications from government sources (including DoD and service-specific policy documents)⁵ and both current and proposed laws that impact DD Form 214. We reviewed websites of the end-user agencies for relevant policies and related documents, as well as government sites, such as the Defense Technical Information Center. In addition, we did an internal search of RAND reports, spoke with RAND experts who directed us to relevant sources, and received documents from interviewees. The purpose of the literature review was to understand the scope and scale of existing U.S. law, as well as DoD, service-specific, and other governmental agency policy that relates to DD Form 214, and provide documentation for the historical analysis. The literature review also provided insight into the development of DD Form 214.

We then used this baseline documentation to prepare for and conduct the subsequent stakeholder interviews with non-DoD federal agencies.⁶ The team identified four categories of potential interview candidates—policymakers, suppliers, data transfer personnel, and end users—and selected interview candidates based on the extent of their firsthand practical experience in one of these categories. Individuals in the policymaker category developed the policies, practices, and regulations that govern DD Form 214. The intent of supplier interviews was

⁵ The OSD is the principal staff element of the Secretary of Defense in the exercise of policy development. The Executive Services Division within the OSD manages the production of all directives and issuances, which are the overarching policy documents for DoD. Throughout this report, when DoD policy is referenced, we are specifically referencing these OSD-maintained policies. The military services are the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard; for the remainder of this report, the term *services* will refer to these four organizations. Each service enacts specific policies to govern and control their respective organizations.

⁶ These interviews are attributed anonymously throughout the document in compliance with the U.S. Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. We note that interviewees were not asked to represent their organizations. While they were asked to respond based on their professional experiences, they were, in all cases, speaking for themselves rather than for their organizations in an official capacity.

to understand how DD Form 214 is completed; which information is drawn from where by the current electronic systems; and what information is prepopulated. In addition, suppliers could help us understand the service-specific processes for completing DD Form 214. In talking with data-transfer personnel, the intent was to determine how the process looks today, ascertain where the information on DD Form 214 comes from, and determine whether or not the current processes are robust enough as DoD moves to a fully electronic record. Last, in the end-user category, interviews provided valuable insight into how DD Form 214 is used today, who uses the form, and which data elements are critical for other governmental agency processes.

Personnel were selected for interviews from the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, National Guard and Reserve Components, policy offices, data transmission centers, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, both the national headquarters and state divisions of the VA and Department of Labor, and the Boards of Military Correction. Some individuals had spent time in several of these organizations during their career. The research team sought to engage as wide a range of perspectives as possible, speaking with 92 individuals in the interview portion of the study.

Organization of This Report

Chapter Two of this report provides a historical review of DD Form 214, including the policy and regulations that have governed it from its creation through the present. Chapter Three describes what DD Form 214 looks like today, the various laws and policies that govern it, and which organizations use DD Form 214. Chapter Four details the specific DD Form 214 elements, emphasizing how interviewees described their use and the importance of the various blocks.

Chapter Five describes the conclusions from the historical review and the interview analysis. Chapter Six concludes the study with recommendations to help DoD implement an electronic-based record and standardize policies and practices. Appendix A describes the interview methodology and how the data were collected. It also describes the

thematic analysis and coding software and provides a thorough categorization of the interview organizations. Appendix B presents the interview protocols, and Appendix C provides additional information on the different data elements contained in DD Form 214.

Evolution of DD Form 214

Before 1950, all the military services had their own discharge forms and certificates for servicemembers leaving active duty.¹ Although there were similarities among these forms, they differed in important ways. Many of the data elements on the service-specific forms were not found in the same places, nor were the same data blocks included on all the forms. These differences could cause confusion.

For example, the 1944 Army Enlisted Record and Report of Separation Honorable Service included more personal information and military history than the 1940 Marine Corps Honorable Discharge Certificate. A key use of these early forms was for VA health insurance. The 1940 Marine Corps form included the notice:

Issued by the [VA] to be used for the future request of any guaranty or insurance benefit under Title 111 of the serviceman's reenlistment act of 1944, as amended, that may be available to the person to whom this separation paper was issued. . . .²

However, the Army form included the statement that “if premium is not paid when due or within [31] days thereafter, insurance will lapse.”³

On January 1, 1950, DoD issued DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1336.01, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members*

¹ The Road to Acquire Your DD214. . . , “Welcome to DD214,” webpage, 2007.

² U.S. Marine Corps, 1940 Marine Honorable Discharge Certificate.

³ U.S. Army, 1944 Army Enlisted Record and Report of Separation Honorable Service.

of the Armed Forces of the United States, consolidating the separate service discharge forms into the first DD Form 214 (*Report of Separation from the Armed Forces of the United States*).⁴ From this point forward, DD Form 214 was the one authoritative document that separated servicemembers from active duty military service.

Multiple Copies of the Form and Derivative Forms

Since 1955, there have been two other forms relevant to servicemember discharge: DD Form 214WS (originally called DD Form 214a) and DD Form 215.⁵ DD Form 214WS is a worksheet that was provided to help relevant separating authorities prepare DD Form 214. Specific regulations on how to use and dispose of the worksheet are to be provided by the military services in their regulations.⁶ DD Form 215 is provided to correct mistakes or missing information on a DD Form 214 after the latter has been delivered or distributed. A recent DoDI called for the eventual elimination of DD Form 215, as it should no longer be required

as capabilities evolve to reissue an electronic DD Form 214 to correct errors in the DD Form 214 discovered after the original has been delivered or copies of the form have been distributed, and to furnish to separating member information not available when the DD Form 214 was prepared.⁷

⁴ We did not find a version of the 1950 DoDI 1336.01, but we did find the 1950 DD 214.

⁵ DoDI 1336.1: *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, November 8, 1955, p. 1.

⁶ DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, August 26, 1968, p. 5; DoDI 1336.01, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, December 29, 2014, p. 16.

⁷ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, p. 16.

In addition, a continuation sheet exists for DD Form 214, first referenced in the 1989 DoDI. At the time, this sheet was simply an additional piece of paper on which to add information that did not fit on DD Form 214. It had to refer to the original DD Form 214 being continued and include the servicemember's name; department, component, and branch; Social Security number; grade, rate or rank, and pay grade; the blocks being continued; the servicemember's signature and date; and the authorizing official's signature.⁸ In a more recent DoDI, the continuation sheet must include the servicemember's name; department, component, and branch; and Social Security number as well as the blocks being continued.⁹

Multiple copies of DD Form 214 are sent to various users. The specific users who receive DD Form 214 have changed over time, but since at least 1966, the original was provided to the separating servicemember and a copy was sent to the central office of the VA. In 1967, a requirement to send a copy to the relevant local VA office was added. The individual military services provided additional distribution requirements in their regulations. In 2003, the requirement to send a copy to the Department of Labor was added.¹⁰ As of the most current DoDI, the distribution of the various copies is as follows: copy 1 (the original) is sent to the servicemember; copy 2 to the military service; copy 3 to the VA; copy 4 to the servicemember; copy 5 to the Department of Labor; copy 6 to the appropriate state VA office; and copies 7 and 8 are used in accordance with the appropriate service regulations.¹¹

⁸ DoDI 1336.1, 1968, p. 5; DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, January 6, 1989, p. 3.

⁹ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, p. 10.

¹⁰ DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, February 28, 2003, p. 7.

¹¹ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, pp. 15–16.

How DD Form 214 Has Evolved over Time

There have been many versions of DD Form 214 since its first release in 1950,¹² but it is still remarkably similar in many ways. The individual blocks have changed, there are fewer blocks than there once were, and the emphasis has shifted increasingly toward benefits, but the general categories of information that are collected have remained the same, with some exceptions. The categories of information that have remained on the form through nearly 70 years of iterations are personal administrative data; entry and exit data; service record; insurance information; contact after separation; training, military educations, and awards; characterization of separation; and authorization. Figure 2.1 illustrates the evolution of DD Form 214 over time.

1950: The First DD Form 214

The first DD Form 214 made clear that “all entries apply to current period of service (unless otherwise indicated).”¹³ This DD Form 214 was lengthy and asked for details that soon dropped off the form, such as race, hair color, and weight. DD Form 214 was divided up into the following sections:

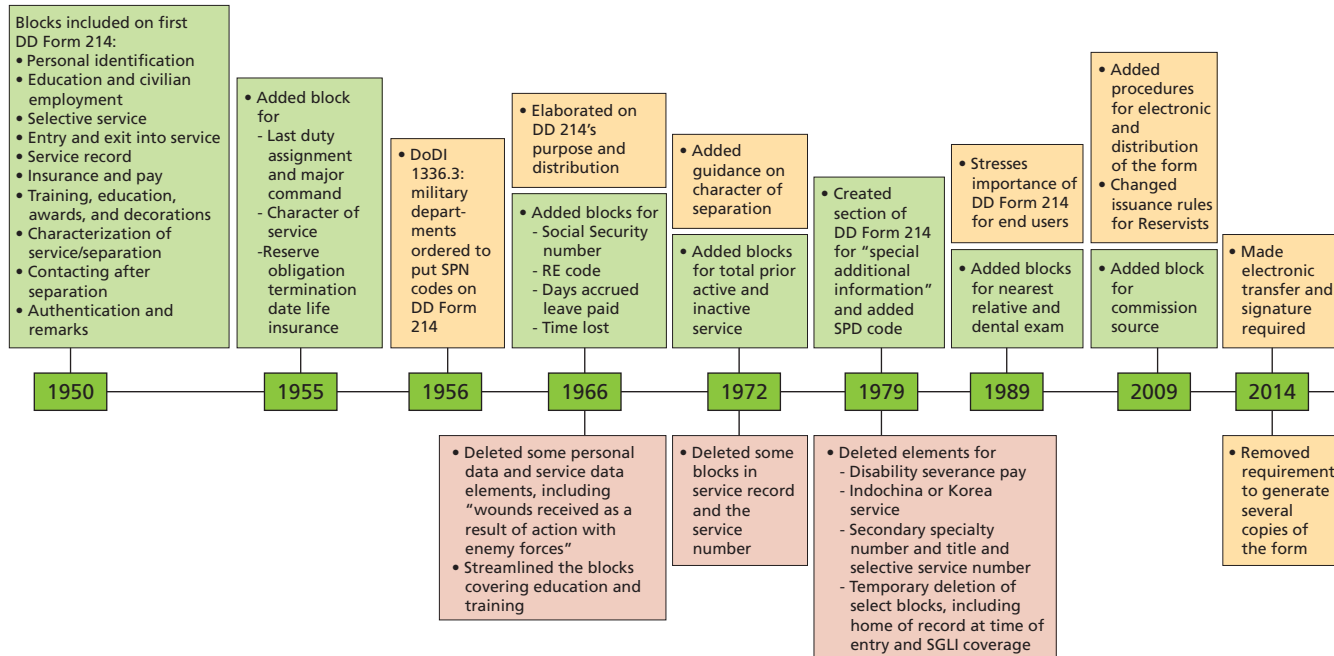
- personal identification
- education and civilian employment
- selective service
- entry and exit into service
- service record
- insurance and pay
- training, education, awards, and decorations
- characterization of service/separation
- contacting after separation
- authentication and remarks.¹⁴

¹² One interviewee stated there have been “at least 65 different versions” (Interview 195).

¹³ U.S. Department of Defense, DD Form 214, Washington, D.C., January 1, 1950.

¹⁴ This differs from how the form was actually categorized.

Figure 2.1
DD Form 214—Timeline



NOTES: All information on the timeline is from the relevant DoDIs and DD Form 214s; SPN = separation program number; RE Code = reentry code; SPD = separation program designator.

1955 Revision to DoDI 1336.1

On November 8, 1955, five years after its initial release, DoDI 1336.1 was updated. This new DoDI did not make drastic changes to DD Form 214; it moved some elements around, renamed sections, and added some important elements. The updated DD Form 214 contained three elements that remain on DD Form 214 today: last duty assignment and major command, character of service, and reserve obligation termination date. Another important element indicated whether or not the servicemember had elected to enroll in government life insurance. The 1950 version asked what kind of insurance the servicemember had and whether VA insurance benefits had previously been applied for, but the 1955 form was the first to include life insurance, which remains as an element on DD Form 214 today.¹⁵

1956 Issuance of DoDI 1336.3

In 1956, DoDI 1336.3 ordered the military departments to put a Separation Program Number (SPN code) on DD Form 214,¹⁶ although they had apparently been doing so in some respect prior to 1956. These codes were a three-digit alphanumeric code that represented the reason for the servicemember's discharge. SPN codes were often assigned in a subjective manner, making it hard for the member to challenge them. There were multiple issues with these codes. The services had different meanings for them, which led to confusion and misinterpretation. They were also repeatedly changed, adding room for misinterpretation. Employers were not supposed to know what the SPN codes meant, but many found them out. SPN codes were replaced by Separation Program Designators (SPD codes) by the early 1970s.¹⁷

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, DD Form 214, Washington, D.C., November 8, 1955.

¹⁶ DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, June 11, 1956.

¹⁷ The Road to Acquire Your DD214. . . , "DD214 and Jobs," webpage, 2007.

1966 Revision of DoDI 1336.1

In 1966, DoDI 1336.1 was updated again.¹⁸ This DoDI was lengthier and more detailed than the 1956 edition. It elaborated upon the purpose of DD Form 214, explaining that it had three main objectives: to provide (1) the member with “a brief, clear-cut record of a term of active service with the Armed Forces at the time of his transfer or discharge from active duty, or when he undergoes a change of status¹⁹ or component while on active duty”; (2) government agencies, including the VA and Department of Labor, with the authoritative source of information that they need to administer laws that apply to members that have been discharged from active duty or transferred to the reserve component; and (3) the “services with a source of active service information for administrative purposes, to include determinations of eligibility for enlistment or reenlistment.”²⁰ The DoDI also provided information and instructions about preparation, issuance, and distribution. Regarding distribution, the DoDI required that the original DD Form 214 be forwarded to the servicemember and copies to the Selective Service and (unless the servicemember reenlisted or continued on active duty) the VA headquarters. If a servicemember was transferred to a VA hospital, copy 4 was sent with his or her health records.²¹

Several important elements were added to DD Form 214 in 1966: Social Security number, reenlistment code, days accrued leave paid, and non-pay periods/time lost (preceding time lost). This last element was added in light of Public Law 85-861 of 1958, which stated that an

¹⁸ DoDI 1336.1, 1966.

¹⁹ *Change of status* refers to discharge for immediate reenlistment, accepting a warrant or commissioned officer position with another service, or when moving from one component to another (moving from the reserve component to the active component or from the active component to the reserve component). This is a specific explanation of the term and does not refer to the more common usage of the term today.

²⁰ DoDI 1336.1, 1966, p. 1.

²¹ DoDI 1336.1, 1966. In 1967, the DoDI was modified slightly to say that in cases of separations other than to a VA hospital, copy 4 is to be forwarded to the relevant VA regional office (DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, November 20, 1967).

enlisted servicemember who deserts; is absent for more than one day without authority; is confined for more than one day and is awaiting trial and disposition and whose conviction is final or whose sentence is final; or is unable to perform his duties for more than one day due to drugs or alcohol or injury or disease due to misconduct is liable to serve the days lost when he returns to full duty.²² Various personal data elements were deleted from DD Form 214. In addition, the service data were streamlined, eliminating the “wounds received as a result of action with enemy forces” entry and streamlining the blocks covering education and training.

Another important change was made to the block asking whether government life insurance was in force. This block was replaced by a block asking about SGLI coverage.²³ This change was made because the VA stopped providing life insurance in 1965.²⁴ This is when Congress created SGLI,²⁵ which provided up to \$10,000 of group term life insurance to Vietnam-era servicemembers.²⁶

Ultimately, the VA purchased a group life insurance policy from the Prudential Insurance Company of America. Today, SGLI is still offered by Prudential, and now provides 120 days of coverage in multiples of \$50,000 up to \$400,000.²⁷

1972 Revision to DoDI 1336.1

The 1972 update to DoDI 1336.1 added guidance regarding character of separation, explaining that the authority for transfer or discharge

²² Public Law 55-561, An Act to Amend Titles 10, 14, and 32, United States Code, to Codify Recent Military Law, and to Improve the Code, September 2, 1958.

²³ Now called Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance.

²⁴ Interview 232.

²⁵ Public Law 89-214, An Act to Amend Title 38, United States Code, in Order to Provide Special Indemnity Insurance for Members of the Armed Forces Serving in Combat Zones, and for Other Purposes, September 29, 1965.

²⁶ Glenn L. Miles II and Armaad R. Morman, *Veterans Benefits: Current Life Insurance Programs*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, CRS 7-5700, September 30, 2010, p. 2.

²⁷ VA, “Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance (SGLI),” webpage, undated.

was to be followed by the SPD, and no narrative description would be entered.²⁸ These codes were intended to be used primarily for internal DoD and VA use only. They were not intended to be used by civilian employers, who would often reference these codes when determining whether or not to hire a veteran. This version also updated the instructions for distribution of the various copies of DD Form 214.²⁹ It also made some important changes to DD Form 214, including adding a secondary specialty and occupation number, presumably also in recognition of the use of DD Form 214 by members to procure civilian employment after military service. The new version of DD Form 214 also included blocks for whether the member had received disability severance pay, and had served in Korea or Indochina since August 5, 1964. In the service data section, DD Form 214 added total prior active and inactive service to the record of service and deleted several other blocks.³⁰ DD Form 214 also eliminated the service number in favor of the Social Security number.³¹

1979 and 1987 Revisions to DoDI 1336.1

In 1979, DD Form 214 was updated again. Although various elements regarding character of separation data had been required on DD Form 214 for many years, the 1979 update created the bottom section of DD Form 214 entitled “special additional information section for use by authorized agencies only,” with the present-day blocks 23–30. Many of the blocks in this section were moved from other areas, but this DD Form 214 also added the separation code. Copy 1 of DD Form 214, which is delivered to the servicemember, does not

²⁸ DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, December 15, 1972, p. 5.

²⁹ DoDI 1336.1, 1972, pp. 5–6.

³⁰ The inclusion of inactive service time was added specifically for Reserve and National Guard servicemembers in an attempt to capture the time that they spent not on active duty. This time was typically spent in active duty training and inactive duty training statuses, two categories that do not require the generation of a DD Form 214.

³¹ National Archives, “Service Numbers and Social Security Numbers,” webpage, undated.

include this bottom section, although copy 4, which can be requested by the servicemember, does. Copies 3, 5, and 6, which are delivered to the VA, Department of Labor, and state VA, respectively, have blocks 25 (separation authority), 26 (separation code), and 27 (reentry code) redacted.³²

Among the other blocks added was one regarding whether the member contributed to the post-Vietnam era Veteran's Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). The VEAP was introduced by Congress in 1976 to

provide educational assistance to those men and women who enter the Armed Forces after December 31, 1976 [. . .] to assist young men and women in obtaining an education they might not otherwise be able to afford, and [. . .] to promote and assist the all-volunteer military program of the United States by attracting qualified men and women to serve in the Armed Forces.³³

Eligibility required, in part, monthly contributions by the servicemember.

Many elements of DD Form 214 were also deleted in the 1979 version, including disability severance pay, Indochina or Korea Service, and secondary specialty number and title, as well as some elements that were later reinserted, including home of record at time of entry and SGLI coverage. The Selective Service number was also deleted, as the draft had ended a few years prior, on January 27, 1973.³⁴

³² This information comes from the 1989 DoDI. We were unable to find a copy of the 1979 DoDI, but we assume this was in place in 1979 (DoDI 1336.01, 1989, pp. 12–19).

³³ Public Law 94-502, An Act to Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Set a Termination Date for Veterans' Educational Benefits Under Chapters 34 And 36, to Increase Vocational Rehabilitation Subsistence Allowances, Educational and Training Assistance Allowances, and Special Allowances Paid, October 15, 1976.

³⁴ Note that the Selective Service still requires registration. Selective Service System, "Frequently Asked Questions," webpage, 2018.

In 1987, the DoDI was changed again, updating in a few relatively minor ways the requirements regarding for whom DD Form 214 is prepared.³⁵

1989 Reissuance of DoDI 1336.1

In 1989, the DoDI was canceled and reissued. This is the first DoDI to mention the importance of DD Form 214 “in obtaining veterans benefits, reemployment rights, and unemployment insurance.”³⁶ Earlier versions of DD Form 214 included information relevant for these three concerns, such as the member contribution to the VEAP program, reenlistment code, and SGLI coverage, respectively. However, this statement on the 1989 DD Form 214 is an acknowledgment of the growing importance of DD Form 214 for the myriad benefits available to veterans and the variety of purposes by end users.

In terms of changes to the design of DD Form 214, two additions were made: nearest relative and whether the member was provided a complete dental examination and appropriate services within 90 days prior to separation.³⁷ This was added to DD Form 214 because the VA provided free dental examinations to veterans who served on active duty for 90 days or more and whose DD Form 214 “show[ed] that you received a complete dental examination and all appropriate dental care prior to your separation.”³⁸

2009 Reissuance of DoDI 1336.01

The DoDI was reissued in 2009, making several important changes.³⁹ The first major change in the 2009 DoDI is that it added procedures

³⁵ DoDI 1336.1, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, June 12, 1987, pp. 3–4.

³⁶ DoDI 1336.01, 1989, p. 9.

³⁷ DoDI 1336.1, 1989, p. 12.

³⁸ VA, “VA Dentistry—Improving Veterans’ Oral Health,” webpage, undated.

³⁹ The 2009 DoDI was also renumbered (DoDI 1336.01, *Standardization of Forms for Report of Transfer or Discharge of Members of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, August 20, 2009).

for the preparation and distribution of electronic copies.⁴⁰ It states that electronic signature and transfer are acceptable, and that DD Form 214 will be provided in electronic format, if the capability to transmit and receive exists.⁴¹

The second major change is that the 2009 DoDI added that personnel in the reserve component who have been ordered to active duty for a contingency operation are to be issued a DD Form 214 regardless of the number of days served.⁴² This had major implications for certain reservists, particularly those in the Air Force, where reservists are often activated for a single day.⁴³ Indeed, the Air Force relies heavily on the Reserve and National Guard components to meet operational demands, and the requirement to generate a DD Form 214 for each servicemember that supported a named contingency operation became so onerous that they requested an exception to the policy.

The third major change in the 2009 DoDI was the note that servicemembers may elect to enter an email address and telephone number in the remarks block. Furthermore, it explains that the “e-mail for life” is preferred if the military service has the capability. Relatively minor changes were made regarding distribution of copies as well.⁴⁴

In terms of changes made to the design of DD Form 214, an element about the commissioning source was added, as well as a place for the member to request that copy 3 be sent to the central office of the VA, as required by the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act.⁴⁵ The only element that was deleted was whether the member contributed to the VEAP. The VEAP applies to members who went into the service for the first time between January 1, 1977, and June 30, 1985,

⁴⁰ DoDI 1336.01, 2009, p. 1.

⁴¹ DoDI 1336.01, 2009, p. 3.

⁴² DoDI 1336.01, 2009, p. 9.

⁴³ Interview 78.

⁴⁴ DoDI 1336.01, 2009, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Section 596 of Public Law 110-181, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, January 28, 2008, modified DD Form 214 to allow a servicemember to forward his or her form to the central VA office in Washington, D.C., as well as the appropriate state or local VA office.

and must be used within ten years of discharge from active service.⁴⁶ This block was likely removed due to its dwindling relevance.

2014 Revision to DoDI 1336.01

The most recent update to the DoDI was in 2014. This update made many changes regarding the electronic transfer and distribution of DD Form 214, resulting in fewer paper copies required. Regarding the transition of DD Form 214 to a more electronic capability, the DoDI made electronic transfer and signature required for all DD Form 214s produced on or after January 1, 2015, rather than merely acceptable, as they had been under the 2009 DoDI. It also made the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) the “official distribution source of the Military Services authoritative and certified information for all periods of active duty that are completed on or after January 1, 2015.”⁴⁷

Regarding changes in distribution requirements, the DoDI stated that because the services were to make electronic DD Form 214 data available to DMDC by December 31, 2014, production and distribution of paper copies to the VA and to the services would not be required if the data were in fact being sent to DMDC.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the DoDI added that representatives from the VA, Department of Labor, and (if servicemembers so elected) the state VA either would have access to DD Form 214 through DMDC’s electronic data sharing capability or would have access to the actual image from the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS). Distribution of paper copies 5 and 6, to the Department of Labor and state VA, respectively, would be eliminated as the capacity to transmit the data electronically to these users are put in place.⁴⁹

The last major change is that the *DD Form 215: Correction to DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*,

⁴⁶ VA, “Veterans’ Educational Assistance Program (VEAP),” webpage, undated; Veterans Benefits Administration, *Annual Benefits Report: Fiscal Year 2015*, Washington, D.C., undated, p. 147.

⁴⁷ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, p. 3.

⁴⁸ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, p. 3.

⁴⁹ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, p. 3.

which was required to be completed and issued for any corrections to a member's DD Form 214, will be eliminated

as capabilities evolve to reissue an electronic DD Form 214 to correct errors in DD Form 214 discovered after the original has been delivered or copies of the Form have been distributed, and to furnish to separating member information not available when DD Form 214 was prepared.⁵⁰

In 2017, legislation was proposed to add a block to DD Form 214 where servicemembers can include their email addresses.⁵¹

Summary of Changes to DD Form 214

In general, the changes made to DD Form 214 from 1950 to the present were gradual and responsive to changes in the military and the benefits determination process at the VA and Department of Labor. The major changes were in the following areas:

- an overall streamlining of DD Form 214 and reduction in the amount of information required
- an increase in the information required for the VA and other end-user benefits
- an increase in the number of blocks used to characterize the service period and changes to the types of information requested
- an increase in the amount of information about education and training
- movement toward electronic data entry and electronic distribution of DD Form 214 in the 2000s.

⁵⁰ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, p. 16.

⁵¹ U.S. House of Representatives, DD-214 Modernization Act, Bill 3036, June 23, 2017.

Current Policies and Key Stakeholders

This chapter discusses three levels of policy that govern DD Form 214: (1) the U.S. Code (U.S.C.) and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), (2) DoD policy, and (3) service-specific regulations. The U.S.C. provides the legal requirement and authority for DD Form 214. DoD policy, as implemented through DoDI 1336.0, is more specific and governs a number of DoD-specific requirements. The most-specific documents are the service regulations. This chapter also covers the key DD Form 214 stakeholders.

U.S. Code and Code of Federal Regulations

Current U.S.C. and CFR policy establishes the requirement to produce DD Form 214s for servicemembers separating from active duty.

Clearly defining “active duty” is the first step to understanding the requirements to produce a DD Form 214. U.S. Code, Title 38, Section 101 defines the terms *active duty*, *active duty for training*, and *inactive duty training*. According to these sections, “the term ‘active duty’ means, (A) full-time duty in the Armed Forces, other than active duty for training.” Active duty for training is defined as “full-time duty in the Armed Forces performed by Reserves for training purposes,” and *inactive duty training* is defined as, “duty (other than full-time duty) prescribed for the Reserves [. . .] by the Secretary [of Defense]”.¹

¹ 38 U.S.C. 101.

38 CFR, Section 17.31 defines *active duty* with the exact words as 38 U.S.C. 101 (21) (A). These sections are important because they clearly state that both active and inactive duty for training do not qualify as active duty.

U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 1168 establishes the requirement to generate DD Form 214. It is quite sparse in its direction, stating that “[a] member of an armed force may not be discharged or released from active duty until they receive a discharge certificate [DD Form 214] and their final pay.”² Lengthy regulation had addressed DD Form 214 and its requirements, but it was removed from the CFR in December 2017 because it was determined that it was an internal DoD management and personnel rule that did not affect the general public.³ Additionally, there is no requirement in the USC or the CFR for servicemembers not on active duty to receive a DD Form 214. This includes periods of active duty for training, inactive duty training, or other periods of inactive duty typical for reserve and National Guard servicemembers. In short, the requirement to produce a DD Form 214 for Reserve and National Guard servicemembers does not exist in law today.

DoD Policy

As discussed in Chapter Two, DoDI 1336.01 is the current DoD policy for DD Form 214 within DoD. This DoDI outlines the procedures for handling, issuing, preparing, and distributing DD Form 214. The section on issuance contains the rules about who is and is not entitled to a DD Form 214. The section on preparation is brief and, while it references specific blocks, does not include block-by-block instructions for filling out the entire form.⁴ The rules of filling out the individual blocks are left to the services, as are systems, source documents, and safeguarding.

² 10 U.S.C. 1168.

³ 32 CFR 45.

⁴ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, pp. 12–15.

Enclosure 5 of the DoDI consists of the procedures for electronic data reporting to DMDC, which, as described in Chapter Two, was first provided for in policy in 2009. This enclosure leaves specifics up to the military services, but it provides useful general guidance for electronic data reporting. The enclosure also contains a list of the data elements, corresponding to blocks on DD Form 214, or specific items that might be entered in the blocks that are being transmitted to DMDC and new requirements for transmittal to DMDC.⁵

The usefulness and comprehensiveness of DoDI 1366.01 was discussed by some interviewees. The consensus of this relatively small sample was that this DoDI 1336.01 was sufficient to meet their needs.⁶ Although one interviewee noted that the DoDI is more specific than typical DoD instructions usually are,⁷ two interviewees pointed out it is still relatively broad guidance, but this was appropriate⁸ because the services generally go into greater detail in their regulations. As one interviewee explained, the DoDI “provides enough information but not too much, so the services can go forward and document what they need to document.”⁹ Two interviewees also pointed out that the last update to the DoDI occurred in 2014, and it needs to be updated.¹⁰

Service Regulations

Much of the specific guidance on production and issuance of DD Form 214 is found in service regulations. This section contains an overview of the service-specific policies governing DD Form 214.

⁵ DoDI 1336.01, 2014, pp. 44–45.

⁶ This was stated by six interviewees. Interviews 44, 58, 113, 115, 136, 243.

⁷ Interview 139.

⁸ Interviews 93, 243.

⁹ Interviews 136, 243.

¹⁰ Interviews 58, 130.

Army

The Army policy on DD Form 214, which applies to the Army and the Army National Guard, is found in *Army Regulation 635-8: Separation Processing and Documents*, last updated in 2014. This regulation is not specific to DD Form 214, but contains chapters focused on the preparation and distribution of the form. The chapter on DD Form 214 preparation is succinct, addressing the circumstances under which the form is to be prepared, the form's security protocol, its data sources, and its specific policies for preparation. The source documents for the data included in DD Form 214 are the servicemember's computer-generated record brief, separation approval documents, separation orders, and "any other document authorized for filing in the Army Military Human Resource Records." The Military Personnel Transition Point Processing System is listed as the system to be used for creating a DD Form 214.¹¹

In the policy subsection, some very specific directions are given regarding the completion of some of the blocks, but the bulk of the chapter is made up of a subsection regarding the rules for completion that "provides detailed instructions for data required in each block."¹² This section is particularly useful and is likely the section most heavily relied upon by the individuals responsible for completing DD Form 214. The rule for block 18, "Remarks," is particularly detailed, specifying and explaining both the mandatory and conditional entries.¹³

The chapter on distribution contains more details about the distribution of the various copies than is provided in the DoDI. Specifically, it explains that if a DD Form 214 is prepared in the Military Personnel Transition Point Processing System and digitally signed by the official authorized to sign, copy 2 will be automatically forwarded to the interactive Personnel Electronic Records Management System.¹⁴ Provisions for the digital signature by the official, as well as by the

¹¹ Army Regulation 638-8: *Separation Processing and Documents*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army, February 10, 2014, p. 12.

¹² Army Regulation 638-8, 2014, p. 13.

¹³ Army Regulation 638-8, 2014, pp. 16–17.

¹⁴ Army Regulation 638-8, 2014, p. 22.

servicemember, are included in the regulation,¹⁵ but electronic transfer and distribution are not addressed.

Only two interviewees addressed the usefulness of the Army Regulation, and they both were relatively satisfied with it.¹⁶ They both also noted that the regulation is currently being updated.

Navy

The relevant Navy doctrine is Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS) Instruction 1900.8D: *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214/DD Form 214WS and DD Form 215)*, last updated in 2010. Unlike the Army document, this document is specific to DD Form 214. It covers the same general issues, such as who the form is and is not prepared for and sources of information, as well as some topics not addressed in the Army document, such as times of issuance. In terms of data sources, the instruction is quite vague, simply noting that the “data to be entered on DD Form 214 will be obtained from service, health, pay records, and official orders, as appropriate.” The instruction contains very detailed block-by-block rules for filling out DD Form 214. The block 18 instructions are very detailed, outlining all the specific information that should or can be entered in that section.¹⁷

Electronic signature by the servicemember and official authorized to sign is stated as the preferred method. Regarding distribution of the copies, the instruction explains that copy 2 goes to Navy Personnel Command and that electronic submission is the preferred method when such a capability is available. That same instruction, to transmit in an electronic format if and when available, is included for the distribution requirements for copy 3 to the VA and copy 5 to the Depart-

¹⁵ Army Regulation 638-8, 2014, p. 12.

¹⁶ Interviews 136, 244.

¹⁷ Bureau of Naval Personnel Instruction 1900.8D, *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD 214/DD 214WS and DD 215)*, Enclosure 1, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Navy, June 11, 2010, pp. 13–17.

ment of Labor. The BUPERS Instruction also includes a list of all reentry codes.¹⁸

Although Navy procedures and policies were discussed by multiple interviewees, only one person directly discussed the instruction, stating that “it’s actually one of the better written instructions.”¹⁹ The interviewee also said that the instruction was in the process of being revised and that this was necessary, as the last update took place in 2010.²⁰

Marine Corps

The Marine Corps policy is found in Marine Corps Order P1900.16, *Ch. 1: Separation and Retirement Manual*, which includes a section dedicated to DD Form 214,²¹ an appendix with detailed instructions about the form, and a second appendix containing reentry codes. It was last updated in 2015.

The section on DD Form 214 states at the outset that the form should be prepared using the Document Tracking and Management System in Marine Online, where possible. This section also outlines when and for whom DD Form 214 is prepared, presents safeguarding rules, and contains some general rules of thumb for the preparation of DD Form 214, such as not using abbreviations and only entering data regarding the current period of active service, except where specified.²² Appendix B of Marine Corps Order P1900.16 contains more detailed instructions, notably the block-specific rules for preparation

¹⁸ Bureau of Naval Personnel Instruction 1900.8D, Enclosure 2, 2010, pp. 1–3.

¹⁹ Interview 243.

²⁰ Interview 243.

²¹ Marine Corps Order P1900.16, *Separation and Retirement Manual*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps, August 7, 2015.

²² Marine Corps Order P1900.16, 2015, p. 1202.

of DD Form 214,²³ including the mandatory and nonmandatory comments for block 18.²⁴ Appendix I also contains the reentry codes.²⁵

The one interviewee who commented on the Marine Corps doctrine stated that policy guidance was satisfactory and that there are “very few requests for information or guidance on completion of DD Form 214.”²⁶

Air Force

The general Air Force policy document concerning DD Form 214 is *Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-3202: Separation Documents*, most recently updated in 2016. The document outlines the requirements for who receives DD Form 214 and when, including a useful chart that simplifies this information. The block-by-block instructions are provided in a chart format, along with examples for what each entry should look like.²⁷

The AFI also includes the guidance that “multiple periods of active duty by Air Force Reserve Component members ordered to active duty for a noncontingency/contingency operation are authorized to be documented on a single DD Form 214.” As mentioned in Chapter Two of this report, this change was made to help address a unique problem of the Air Force, where reserve component members often activate for one-day contingency operations and end up with hundreds of DD Form 214s. The instruction states that the Air Force is to “issue a single cumulative DD Form 214 when a member is active duty in direct support of contingency operations upon accumulation of 90 days or more, member’s transfer to another component, separation, retirement, or by member’s request.”²⁸

²³ Marine Corps Order P1900.16, Appendix B, 2015, pp. 1–9.

²⁴ Marine Corps Order P1900.16, Appendix B, 2015, pp. 5–6.

²⁵ Marine Corps Order P1900.16, Appendix I, 2015.

²⁶ Interview 93.

²⁷ Air Force Instruction 36-3202, *Separation Documents*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Air Force, January 14, 2016, pp. 23–39.

²⁸ Air Force Instruction 36-3202, 2016.

In addition to the AFI, the Air Force has a second document pertaining to DD Form 214, *Total Force Personnel Services Delivery (PSD) Guide: DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*. The PSD Guide is a long, detailed manual with instructions about filling out DD Form 214. In addition, this document contains very specific step-by-step instructions for each party in terms of responsibilities for filling out, preparing, and issuing DD Form 214. It also repeats some information from the AFI, such as the tables explaining when and how to fill out DD Form 214.²⁹ This is the most detailed guidance of any of the services and is extremely up to date with regard to electronic distribution of the form copies and electronic transfer of data to DMDC. As one interviewee told us, the guide is “like one-stop shopping. It’s a big help to the people in the field producing the forms.”³⁰

As described, these documents have some overlapping information and vary in how up-to-date they are. Three interviewees explained that the AFI, which is a bit outdated, was currently under revision.³¹ One interviewee explained that

the PSD Guide, we keep that up to date, has a little of the latest procedures, based off the latest policies, and realistically, we don’t get very many questions about the 214 based on the AFI. People understand that while 3202 is still talking about paper copies, everyone understands we’ve moved beyond that.³²

Following the revision, the AFI will focus on policies governing DD Form 214, with instructions on filling out the blocks contained in the guide.³³ It is important to note, however, that there is still debate within the Air Force as to the amount of technical information to be

²⁹ U.S. Air Force, *Total Force Personnel Services Delivery (PSD) Guide: DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*, October 1, 2017, pp. 14–16, 18–34.

³⁰ Interview 130.

³¹ Interviews 58, 130, 132.

³² Interview 132.

³³ Interview 132.

contained in the new AFI. One interviewee mentioned that although the Air Force is trying to shorten the AFI, it is also said that “[they] can’t have a technical guide so they might be changing the AFI back to [a] much lengthier technical document.”³⁴

Coast Guard

The Coast Guard policy document concerning DD Form 214 is Coast Guard Personnel Service (CGPS) Instruction 19001.1A: *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, DD Form 214*, updated in 2017. This document provides somewhat high-level instructions for filling out DD Form 214 and indicates that Direct Access is to be the system utilized for the creation of DD Form 214.³⁵ The vast majority of the instruction consists of the block-by-block rules, including instructions specific to Direct Access.³⁶ It does not contain rules about who receives the form, distribution of the various copies, or safeguarding. Nevertheless, the one Coast Guard interviewee who discussed DD Form 214 mentioned that it was “very detailed.”³⁷

DD Form 214 Stakeholders

A number of individuals and organizations, both military and civilian, are involved with DD Form 214, and the interaction between these stakeholders creates a sort of DD Form 214 lifecycle. It cannot be overstated that DD Form 214 processes may be complicated by a number of factors, such as an inability to communicate with separating service-members and veterans, missing or inaccurate data, or backlogs because of a high number of service requests; however, the following is a very simple model that illustrates how basic stakeholder interactions may occur.

³⁴ Interview 58.

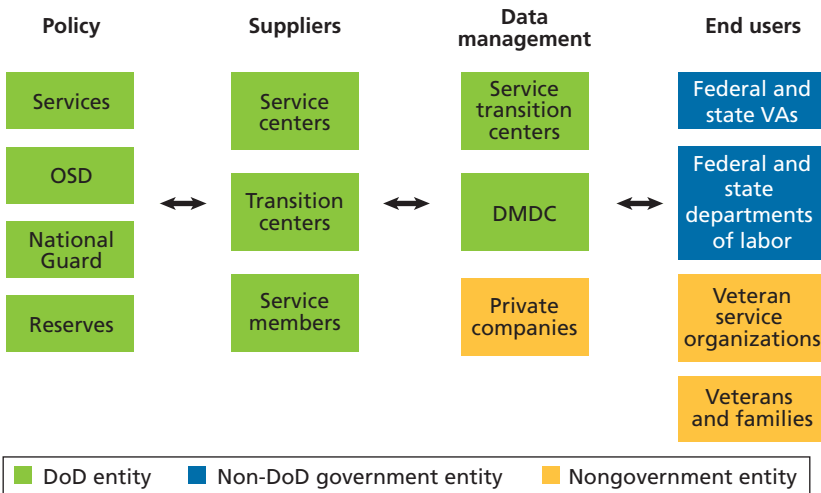
³⁵ CGPS Instruction 19001.1A, *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, DD Form 214*, Enclosure 1, July 2017, p. 1.

³⁶ CGPS Instruction 19001.1A, 2017, pp. 3–21.

³⁷ Interview 172.

When DD Form 214 is created, service centers, military transition centers, and (sometimes) the separating servicemember supply information to populate the form. Completed DD Form 214s (either a hard copy or an electronic version) are pushed to data management centers—most notably the DMDC—which permanently house the data and distribute the information to relevant end users, such as veteran affairs offices, the Department of Labor and state departments of labor, and the veterans themselves. If information is errant or missing, veterans and other end users may contact the data management centers or submit a request to boards, such as the Board for Correction of Military Records (BCMR). A schematic of this interaction between DD Form 214 stakeholders is shown in Figure 3.1. Key stakeholders include servicemembers and veterans, the military services, DMDC, federal and state VAs, federal and state departments of labor, VSOs, and private data management companies. These stakeholders are described in more detail in the following sections.

Figure 3.1
Interaction Between DD Form 214 Stakeholders



Policy Stakeholders

The entities interviewed in the policy category are from the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard headquarters offices that produce the service-specific policy that governs the use of DD Form 214. This section also includes interviews from organizations within the OSD and with the Army and Air Force National Guard headquarters and with offices that represent Reserve equities.

Military Services

Some of the most involved stakeholders are the military services. They house their own data management centers; process DD Form 214 changes and replacement requests through boards, such as the BCMR; use DD Form 214 data for internal research and analysis; and create, review, and revise policy surrounding the administration and use of DD Form 214.³⁸

Office of the Secretary of Defense

OSD stakeholders are very involved in research and data collection, as well as interagency collaboration, policy interpretation, and resolution of questions and concerns. Within OSD, the Transition to Veterans Program Office collaborates with other OSD offices, the Department of Labor, and VA to document and share transition-related policy changes and updates with members.

National Guard and Reserves

National Guard and Reserve DD Form 214 stakeholders represented all the services, the National Guard Bureau, and multiple offices within OSD. These stakeholders must respond to specific policy challenges facing Guard and Reserve members. The biggest is the dual challenge of handling multiple, even hundreds of, DD Form 214s for some reservists and a total lack of DD Form 214s for others.³⁹

³⁸ Interviews 133, 151.

³⁹ Interviews 27, 129.

Suppliers

The suppliers of the form are the organizations that produce DD Form 214s for servicemembers. They create DD Form 214 from a variety of sources, including manpower and personnel databases, individual personnel records, and hard copies of existing source documents. Groups included in this category include service centers, transition centers, and individual servicemembers.

Service Centers

Individuals who work at service centers are among those who most frequently interact with DD Form 214. They sit down with the separating servicemember, input the data, and transmit the data to DMDC. Additionally, these centers handle DD Form 214 corrections and updates.⁴⁰ Each service handles the creation and distribution of DD Form 214 in different ways. For example, the Air Force Personnel Center processes all DD Form 214s for active-duty personnel. The vast majority of these personnel never travel to the Air Force Personnel Center; instead, the Air Force pulls much of the data from existing databases and then references other documents to create DD Form 214. In contrast, the Army and Navy process DD Form 214s at personnel processing centers, which exist on most installations. The Army and the Navy auto-populate servicemembers' forms using data from existing databases, but also rely to a greater degree on input from the servicemember.

Transition Centers

Transition centers are similar to the service centers, but they provide assistance to National Guard and Reserve servicemembers. When guard and reserve personnel are activated for a deployment, they are routinely processed through one of several installations selected for this task. As part of the demobilization process, when required, these centers create DD Form 214s for Reservists and National Guard servicemembers. The National Guard, in particular, uses state Transition Centers for the completion of DD Form 214.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Interview 189.

⁴¹ Interview 244.

Servicemembers

Typically, the servicemember plays only a small role in creating his or her DD Form 214, with service and transition centers personnel inputting most of the data. If the servicemember is available, he or she may help verify that the information is accurate and complete. DD Form 214 does have a block for the servicemember to sign; however, DD Form 214 is often issued with the phrase “member not available” in lieu of the servicemember’s signature.⁴²

Defense Manpower Data Center

DMDC is housed under OUSD P&R. The organization’s mission is to

collect and maintain an archive of automated manpower, personnel, training, and other data for the DoD; support the information requirements of the OUSD P&R and other members of the DoD manpower, personnel, and training communities with accurate, timely, and consistent data; and operate DoD-wide personnel programs and conduct research and analysis as directed by the OUSD P&R.⁴³

DMDC is the authoritative distributor of DD Form 214 data to end user organizations, such as the VA and Department of Labor.⁴⁴

End-user organizations requiring information about a servicemember or veteran will send a request to DMDC that includes PII about the individual, such as name, date of birth, or Social Security number. DMDC will send back a subset of the data available on DD Form 214. The type and amount of information received by each end user is governed by agreements between those organizations and the DoD.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that this transaction may take place without

⁴² Interviews 46, 129, 130.

⁴³ DMDC, “DMDC Overview,” webpage, undated.

⁴⁴ In the recent past, physical copies of the form had been sent to the Department of Labor and to state VAs, but at the time of the interviews, DoD was transitioning to discontinue the paper copies, making DMDC the official provider of information to those organizations (Interview 78).

⁴⁵ Interview 87.

any of the involved entities ever receiving a physical copy of DD Form 214. DMDC does not receive or compile any data from DD Form 214s themselves; rather, they pull the data elements directly from an individual's personnel files, and transmit that data directly to end users.⁴⁶

Private Data Management Companies

Most DD Form 214 data is managed through government organizations within the DoD, with one notable exception. The private online identity verification company ID.me, launched initially as Troop ID, began as a way for veterans to verify their status online with end-user organizations like the Department of Labor.⁴⁷ The company is now integrated into programs with the VA and the U.S. Department of Commerce and was granted federal accreditation in 2014.⁴⁸ At the time of this study, its network comprises eight federal agencies, the state of California, the VA, USAA, and approximately 200 retailers.⁴⁹ The company's existence is evidence that existing architecture for verifying veteran status with paper DD Form 214s can be burdensome for the veteran. Its methods also highlight potential solutions for online veteran identity verification and the online transmission of sensitive personal data between government and nongovernment organizations.

ID.me offers servicemembers data management of their DD Form 214 information. The veteran can elect to have the National Personnel Records Center send ID.me an official copy of their DD Form 214. When an end-user organization requests the data, ID.me determines whether the requested data elements are needed and whether the veteran has consented to share that information. Based on this adjudication, ID.me releases a subset of DD Form 214 data to the requesting organization. As a representative of ID.me described it, "essentially we have already digitized the DD [Form] 214. We're just pulling subsets off of it based on the transaction."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Interview 79.

⁴⁷ Interview 203.

⁴⁸ ID.me, "About Us," webpage, undated.

⁴⁹ Interview 203.

⁵⁰ Interview 203.

End Users

This group represents the organizations and personnel that use DD Form 214 as an end product. This group includes the VA, Department of Labor, servicemembers, and VSOs. These organizations use DD Form 214 to establish a servicemember's identity and to provide services and benefits. The type of discharge is one of the most important pieces of information for these groups as it determines what entitlements a servicemember can receive.

Federal and State Departments of Veterans Affairs

The VA is one of the most active end users of DD Form 214. Entities or offices at the federal, state use DD Form 214 data to determine eligibility for benefits, including SGLI, GI Bill educational benefits, mortgages, healthcare, and military burial honors. The VA tends to require a lot of information from DD Form 214 because many entitlements depend on details such as where the individual enlisted in or separated from the military; whether the individual served overseas or in a combat zone; whether they received any specific medals, honors, or awards; or whether they have any service-connected disabilities.⁵¹ As one state-level VA interviewee explained, "We can use the data to form policies and look at things like wage trends, focus on reducing unemployment for servicemembers."⁵²

Federal and State Departments of Labor

The Department of Labor is another very active end user of DD Form 214, as there are entities at the federal, state, and sometimes local levels, and these entities are major providers of benefits and entitlements to veterans. Federal and state departments of labor use DD Form 214 data to determine unemployment compensation, Veterans Employment Opportunities Act, Veterans Recruitment Appointment, and disabled veteran's appointments.⁵³

⁵¹ VA interviews, state VA interviews.

⁵² State VA interview.

⁵³ Interviews 78, 87, 210; U.S. Department of Labor, "Special Hiring Authorities," webpage, undated-a.

Veterans

The completed DD Form 214 is a veteran's most critical document for substantiating details of his or her military service. It is required to establish eligibility for benefits and entitlements, including VA medical benefits and home loans, burial services, educational benefits, employment and retirement benefits, membership in veteran organizations, and corporate discounts. As they would with a birth or marriage certificate, many individuals also keep the physical DD Form 214 in their personal records as part of their family history.

Veteran Service Organizations

VSOs include congressionally chartered organizations, such as the African American Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Association, the American Legion, the American Red Cross, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Wounded Warrior Project. VSOs also include many organizations that are not congressionally chartered but serve the interests of U.S. veterans, like Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans of America, Association of Military Surgeons, National American Indian Veterans, and the National Association of Black Military Women.⁵⁴ These entities require proof of service to determine or verify eligibility for membership, generally provided through a veteran's DD Form 214. Like the VA and Department of Labor, these organizations often require detailed DD Form 214 data because membership eligibility may be based on specific criteria about the veteran's service or personal/family history.⁵⁵

Summary of Stakeholder Needs

The key stakeholders use DD Form 214 in different, but often complementary, ways. The end users—the VA (including state VAs), Department of Labor, and VSOs—primarily rely on DD Form 214 for case management and benefit adjudication. Some of the specific uses by

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, "Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)," webpage, undated-b.

⁵⁵ VSO interviews.

the VAs and the Department of Labor include burials, education, insurance, and disability and medical benefits.⁵⁶ State VAs also rely on DD Form 214 for outreach to veterans and, to a lesser extent, strategic analysis. VSOs also rely on DD Form 214, primarily for membership eligibility but also to help veterans obtain entitlements.⁵⁷ Veterans also rely on it for state benefits and corporate discounts, for their employment searches, and as a supplement to their resumes.⁵⁸ The services also use DD Form 214, for various analytics and tracking of members and veterans, and discharge review boards use DD Form 214 for discharge upgrades.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ VA, state VA, Department of Labor interviews.

⁵⁷ VSO interviews.

⁵⁸ VSO, state VA, Department of Labor interviews.

⁵⁹ Service interviews.

Evaluating the Utility of DD Form 214 Today

The evolution of DD Form 214, the policies governing the form, and the stakeholders that make use of its information provide an essential foundation for evaluating the form's utility today. Is the information collected by DD Form 214 meeting diverse stakeholder needs? Are policies governing DD Form 214 adequate to support a fully electronic user environment? What improvements can be made to ensure DD Form 214's relevance into the future?

To answer these questions, the research team conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with 92 individuals from across the stakeholder community representing policy, supplier, data management, and end users.¹ Interviews were arranged using a snowball sampling technique, in which one interviewee refers several other experts to the team to interview. While every effort was made to elicit as many different opinions as possible, some interview categories had more interviewees than others, and our sampling may not be representative of DD Form 214 stakeholders. This is a limitation of this research approach. In aggregate though, the interviews provided a wealth of information, comments, and recommendations on policy and administrative process, data management, DD Form 214 replacement options, and specific challenges with DD Form 214 as it is used for reserve component servicemembers. They also addressed specific data elements on DD Form 214. This chapter details the findings from these discussions.

¹ Additional detail on the interview methodology and data analysis is contained in Appendix A, and the interview protocol is replicated in Appendix B.

Form Data Elements

During the interviews, respondents were questioned about each data element, or “block,” on DD Form 214. Our aim was to improve our understanding of which form elements are important to which stakeholders, whether certain parts of the form are hardly or no longer used, and stakeholder views on where improvements might be made and why. Respondents were asked to start at the top of DD Form 214 and discuss each block individually. They were told to rate if the block was important or unimportant (respondents could also reply that they were not sure). As the interviews were semistructured, not every interviewee commented on every block on DD Form 214. This led to a variation in response rates across blocks.

The following weighted average of responses was used to determine a block’s overall importance quotient:²

$$\text{importanceQuotient} = \frac{n\text{Important} + 0.5 * n\text{Unsure}}{n\text{Total}}$$

$$n\text{Total} = n\text{Important} + n\text{Unsure} + n\text{Unimportant},$$

where

- $n\text{Important} = 1$: the number of respondents who indicated the block was important
- $n\text{Unsure} = 0.5$: the number of respondents who indicated they were unsure about a block’s importance
- $n\text{Unimportant} = 0$: the number of respondents who indicated the block was unimportant.

² Unsure responses were given a partial weight to account for cases where unsure responses were the majority answer. Without a partial weight, these items would be improperly labeled “unimportant” because few people stated the item was important. By providing a partial weight to unsure responses, a block with equal (or close to equal) numbers of respondents indicating the block is important and indicating the block is not important would yield an importance quotient of around 0.5 and a “mixed” categorical rating. Similarly, a block with all (or almost all) respondents indicating they are unsure of the block’s importance would yield an importance quotient of around 0.5 and a “mixed” categorical rating.

Different stakeholders have different concerns and preferences, so this methodology was specifically designed to ascertain the overall level of importance from the interviews. The intent was to determine, from subject-matter experts, the blocks that the majority of the stakeholder community finds to be important. We chose not to first average the responses by organization and then compare the level of importance ratings across organizations. We did this because we did not have representative samples across organizations and did not want respondent ratings from one organization to have more preference than others. Instead, we chose to average responses across organizations, irrespective of organization affiliation. By constructing and analyzing the data this way, the research team was able to clearly see what blocks were most important to the majority of the community. However, this approach masks individual responses, as the use of central tendency obscures individual variations. To mitigate this approach, individual responses are highlighted in the primary use sections below. (Table C.3 and Table C.4 in Appendix C show the categorical importance of each DD Form 214 block as reported by individuals from different organizations.)

Working as a team, two researchers coded block responses based on interviewee comments using the established coding framework.³ Each block's quantitative importance quotient was translated into a four-point categorical rating of very important, important, mixed, or not important, depending on the proportion of important, unimportant, and uncertain responses from the interviewees, as shown in Table 4.1.⁴

³ For more information on the coding framework and how individual responses were coded, see Appendix A. One of the codes used in the framework was labeled "Level of Importance." This code allowed individual segments of text to be highlighted according to the above-mentioned levels of importance (important, unimportant, and uncertain responses) for each block indicated during an interview. As the interviews were semistructured, and not a formal questionnaire, not all individuals interviewed made a comment on each block. When an individual did make a comment about a block, it was coded appropriately.

⁴ The overall importance ratings in this chapter do not take into account respondents' organizations; however, there is some variation in item importance based on this variable. For a breakdown of item importance by organization, see Appendix C.

Table 4.1
Categorical Importance Rating Scale

Importance Quotient	Importance Rating
Above 80%	Very Important
60.1–80%	Important
40.1–60%	Mixed
Under 40%	Not Important
No respondents	N/A

For example, if six people indicated a block was important, one person indicated the block was not important, and one person indicated he or she was unsure about the block’s importance, the block’s importance quotient would be 0.81, and the block would be rated Very

$$importanceQuotient = \frac{nImportant + 0.5 * nUnsure}{nImportant + nUnsure + nUnimportant} = \frac{6 + 0.5 * 1}{6 + 1 + 1} = \frac{6.5}{8}$$

$importanceQuotient = 0.81 = \text{Very Important.}$

Important:

By this equation, a block with equal (or close to equal) numbers of respondents indicating the block is important and indicating the block is not important would yield an importance quotient of around 0.5 and a “Mixed” categorical rating. Similarly, a block with all (or almost all) respondents indicating they are unsure of the block’s importance would yield an importance quotient of around 0.5 and a “Mixed” categorical rating.

For the purposes of this analysis, the project team grouped DD Form 214 blocks together by their primary use, sorting each block into one of ten primary use categories: identification, separation infor-

mation, catch-all,⁵ service record, benefits, veteran use, contact after separation, reserve duty, verification, and pay. Overall, responses from interview participants indicate that the identification, separation information, and catch-all categories are very important; the service record category is important; benefits, veteran use, contact after separation, reserve duty, and verification categories are of mixed importance; and pay category is not important. Table 4.2 lists the number of blocks in each primary use category and the overall response regarding the importance of blocks in the category.

The remainder of this section, organized by primary use, outlines each of the blocks, describes notable differences in how the data are entered by each service, and reviews the comments made by the interview respondents regarding the data's importance and whether changes could be made to make the data more useful. For a full summary table of DD Form 214 blocks, their primary use, and overall interviewee-

Table 4.2
Overall Importance of Primary Use Categories

Primary Use	Overall Response	Number of Blocks
Identification	Very important	6
Separation information	Very important	7
Catch-all	Very important	1
Service record	Important	9
Benefits	Mixed	10
Veteran use	Mixed	4
Contact after separation	Mixed	2
Reserve duty	Mixed	2
Verification	Mixed	2
Pay	Not important	2

⁵ *Catch-all* refers to block 18, which is titled “remarks” on DD Form 214. This block serves to capture data that is not represented elsewhere on the form.

rated importance (including importance broken out by respondents' organizations), see Appendix C.

Identification

DD Form 214 contains six identification blocks, which are each considered very important. All respondents agreed that name (block 1) is necessary. Most respondents considered department, component, and branch (block 2) important; a handful suggested that, for simplicity, they be replaced with the DoD identification number. Most respondents considered Social Security number (block 3) important for identifying the servicemember or veteran; a handful suggested that, for security purposes, it be replaced with the DoD ID. Around 80 percent of respondents indicated that the grade, rate, or rank and pay grade blocks (blocks 4a and 4b) are important. Of those who consider them unimportant, many are end-user respondents from the federal and state labor departments and the federal and state VAs. Many interviewees recommended combining these blocks, or using only one of these blocks. The majority of respondents considered date of birth (block 5) important; others said that it could be replaced with the DoD ID. All identification blocks are prepopulated by the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard; none are prepopulated by the Navy. These findings are shown in Table 4.3.

Separation Information

Seven blocks contain separation information, which are also considered to be very important to stakeholders. The large majority of respondents indicated that type of separation (block 23) is necessary. One group proposed making a clear distinction in this section between active and reserve component servicemembers, and suggested that this may include building new separation codes.⁶ The character of service block (block 24) indicates whether the servicemember's military discharge was honorable, dishonorable, or other than honorable. There was no disagreement over the importance of this block; 100 percent of respondents indicated that this block is necessary for determining eligi-

⁶ Group interviews 244, 246, 254, 255, 256.

Table 4.3
Identification Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
1	Name	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
2	Department, Component, and Branch	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
3	Social Security Number	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
4a	Grade, Rate, or Rank	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
4b	Pay Grade	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
5	Date of Birth	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important

NOTE: For a consolidated table of these findings for the entire DD Form 214, see Appendix C.

bility for benefits, reenlistment, and all other types of adjudication. The majority of respondents indicated that separation authority (block 25) is necessary because it provides the regulatory directive authorizing separation.

The majority of respondents indicated that separation code (block 26) is necessary, though many complained that the data can often be inaccurate.⁷ One said this block is particularly important in conjunction with the narrative reason for separation (block 28).⁸ A respondent from the Department of Labor reported that it would be useful to receive the information in this block, which is currently

⁷ Interviews 172, 224, 231.

⁸ Interview 146.

only used internally by DoD.⁹ Another interviewee suggested updating policy to use these codes for officers and warrant officers instead of just enlisted personnel.¹⁰

Almost 90 percent of respondents considered reentry code (block 27) to be an important data block. One respondent stated that it is important because some people are not eligible for reentry, even if they received an honorable discharge (e.g., if they have a barring injury).¹¹ Like the separation code, one interviewee suggested updating policy to use these codes for officers and warrant officers instead of just enlisted personnel.¹² One interviewee from a state VA noted that reentry code is not often used, but in cases where a veteran has lost his or her DD Form 214 and wants to reenlist, it is helpful to have that information on the form. The respondent explained that “on a case by case basis, we just download [the member copy DD Form 214] for them. We don’t need [reentry code] in the dataset [that we receive].”¹³

Most respondents indicated that the narrative reason for separation (block 28) is important and said that it is used to determine eligibility. One person identified it as the most important piece of data in this section, along with type of separation and character of service (blocks 23 and 24).¹⁴ One respondent indicated that it is a redundant block since it repeats the separation code (block 26) information in words; however, another respondent commented that separation codes change occasionally, so it is good to have a note on what the code meant at that point in time.¹⁵ Several interviewees commented that this block is error-prone.¹⁶ Around two-thirds of respondents indicated dates of time lost during this period is an important block. It is par-

⁹ Interview 210.

¹⁰ Interview 236.

¹¹ Interview 195.

¹² Interview 236.

¹³ Interview 160.

¹⁴ Interview 213.

¹⁵ Interviews 130, 146.

¹⁶ Interviews 130, 231, 224.

ticularly important for Department of Labor end users, who report using it along with character of service and narrative reason for separation (blocks 24 and 28) to assign their own code of eligibility.¹⁷ One respondent suggested moving it to the remarks section (block 18).¹⁸ The Marine Corps and Air Force autopopulate all of the separation information blocks, while the Coast Guard populates only the narrative reason for separation. Army and Navy do not autopopulate any of these blocks. These results are summarized in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4
Separation Information Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
23	Type of Separation	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
24	Character of Service	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
25	Separation Authority	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
26	Separation Code	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
27	Reentry Code	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
28	Narrative Reason for Separation	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
29	Dates of Time Lost During This Period	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important

¹⁷ Interviews 78, 211.

¹⁸ Interview 166.

Catch-All

The remarks block was described as a “catch-all” section and was very important to interviewees because it is a good way to add important information that is not covered elsewhere. It also can be used as a continuation block for several other items if extra space is needed. Interviewees from the VA, Department of Labor, and VSOs all said that they use information in this box to help verify benefits and entitlements. The Marine Corps and the Army autopopulate this block with select information (e.g., disability or separations pay authorizations, combat history) and allow the addition of free-form text. The Marine Corps also has an extensive drop-down menu to allow additional information.¹⁹ The Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard do not autopopulate information in this section.²⁰ All the services can add information through free text, which leads to information in this block being entered in a non-standardized fashion. These findings are shown in Table 4.5.

Service Record

Nine blocks (blocks 12a through 12i) contain information about the veteran’s service record. These blocks report the year(s), month(s), and day(s) of the following:

- (a) date entered active duty this period
- (b) separation date this period
- (c) net active service this period

Table 4.5
Catch-All Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
18	Remarks	Catch-All	Y	N	Y	N	N	Very important

¹⁹ Interviews 4, 93, 130, 136, 140, 172.

²⁰ Interviews 5, 172.

- (d) total prior active service
- (e) total prior inactive service
- (f) foreign service
- (g) sea service
- (h) initial entry training
- (i) effective date of pay grade.

Many respondents stated that all of the blocks in this section are important, while others identified only a handful that they would retain. Overall, the date entered active duty this period, separation date this period, net active service this period, and total prior active service (blocks a, b, c, and d) were overwhelmingly considered the most important. Foreign service (block f) was reported to be a very important data point to BCMR as a lot of veterans apply for DD Form 214 modifications to document overseas service. State VA respondents also indicated it is important for burials and for discharge upgrades. DMDC respondents generally did not indicate that this block is important. One interviewee suggested changing this block from foreign service to reflect service in a contingency, while another suggested *adding* contingency and boots-on-the-ground time here.²¹

Most respondents were confused about the inclusion of sea service (block g). Many indicated that it is important for the Navy and Marine Corps, but reported that it is not important to them. One respondent explained that sea service is essentially the Navy's term for foreign service, and that there should be no distinction between the two. The individual suggested combining these (blocks f and g) into a single block.²²

Initial entry training and effective date of pay grade (blocks h and i) may be used to calculate promotions and promotion eligibility. These blocks were reported to be the least important in this section, though a majority of respondents do find them useful. One respondent noted that these blocks may be more important for National Guard and Reserves servicemembers because active duty uses different data

²¹ Interviews 166, 243.

²² Interview 191.

(basic active service date) to measure length of service.²³ Another mentioned that these blocks are often problematic because some people code the block as a single-entry date while others list a length of time. This respondent suggested there should be a clear policy about what DD Form 214 is asking for to help standardize these data.²⁴

In the Air Force, these data are autopopulated but verified (with the exception of sea service, for which the servicemember has to submit a source document, if applicable).²⁵ These data are also autopopulated but verified in the Marine Corps.²⁶ In the Coast Guard, date entered active duty this period (block a) is autopopulated but the remainder of the data fields are filled by hand.²⁷ The Army and Navy do not autopopulate these blocks.

Several respondents said that while the information in this section is useful, it is often inaccurate.²⁸ Many suggested adding data blocks in this section to capture the following: service in support of a contingency or named operation, combat service, hostile fire/imminent danger pay, order authority, full history of duty commands, full history of overseas assignments, whether reserve members served 180 consecutive days of service, total “good” years toward reserve retirement, and high school attended.²⁹ One interviewee suggested that if DD Form 214 becomes a career document, rather than capturing periods of service, this section should capture types of service (e.g., total duration of active duty, total duration of reserve duty, total duration of nonpaid service or hold status).³⁰

Findings regarding service record blocks are summarized in Table 4.6.

²³ Interview 130.

²⁴ Interview 78.

²⁵ Interviews 5, 142.

²⁶ Interviews 130, 140.

²⁷ Interview 172.

²⁸ Interviews 172, 231, 224.

²⁹ Interviews 27, 150, 163, 166, 183, 188, 191, 233.

³⁰ Interview 237.

Table 4.6
Service Record Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
12a	Date Entered Active Duty This Period	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
12b	Separation Date This Period	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12c	Net Active Service This Period.	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12d	Total Prior Active Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12e	Total Prior Inactive Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12f	Foreign Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
12g	Sea Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	N	N	Important
12h	Initial Entry Training	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
12i	Effective Date of Pay Grade	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important

Benefits

Ten blocks are primarily used to determine benefits; however, only two of these (7a: Place of Entry into Active Duty and 7b: Home of Record at Time of Entry) are generally considered important. Elements 8a: Last Duty Assignment and Major Command and 8b: Station Where Separated have mixed responses. The remainder of the benefits blocks are considered unimportant. These results are summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7
Benefits Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
7a	Place of Entry into Active Duty	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y ^a	N	Important
7b	Home of Record at Time of Entry	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y ^a	Y	Important
8a	Last Duty Assignment and Major Command	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	N	Mixed
8b	Station Where Separated	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
10	SGLI Coverage Amount	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Not important
15a	Commissioned Through Service Academy	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
15b	Commissioned Through ROTC Scholarship	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
17	Member Was Provided Complete Dental Examination and All Appropriate Dental Services and Treatment Within 90 Days Prior to Separation	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
20	Member Requested Distribution of DD Form 214 Copy 6	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important

Table 4.7—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
20a	Member Requests a Photo Copy of DD Form 214 Copy 3 Be Sent to the Central Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Washington, D.C.)	Benefits	Y	N	Y	N ^b	N	Not important

^a Air Force autopopulated information in the Military Personnel Data System is generally wrong upon initial review and will be later manually corrected in DD Form 214.

^b Future application will default to yes.

Blocks 7a: Place of Entry into Active Duty and 7b: Home of Record at Time of Entry are often used by end-user organizations, especially those at the state and local levels, to verify eligibility for benefits and entitlements. About two-thirds of respondents considered these blocks important; less than a third said they are unimportant, and a small percentage were unsure. One respondent found that home of record was useful for tracking down veterans if they lose their physical DD Form 214. A few noted that home of record is often incorrect.³¹ Some recommend combining these blocks, or to use only home of record, which is generally agreed to be more important than place of entry. One respondent considered home of record redundant information because it can be tracked through pay.

³¹ Interview 231.

End-user respondents said they use blocks 8a: Last duty assignment and major command and 8b: Station where separated, for verifying data or making inferences if data on DD Form 214 are missing or unclear and for tracking down evidence for disability or sexual assault claims. A VSO respondent also noted that these blocks are especially important if the servicemember is discharged overseas. Less than half of respondents indicated that 8a is important, about a third indicated that 8a is unimportant, and several said they were unsure. More respondents (about two-thirds) indicated that 8b is important. Some respondents recommended combining these blocks; one suggested combining both blocks with block 9 (command to which transferred) to just capture “which command is completing DD Form 214.”³² Another respondent indicated a preference to have a full record of locations where the servicemember has served.³³

Block 10 reports the veteran’s SGLI coverage amount. SGLI is life insurance coverage offered to servicemembers. If eligible, servicemembers are automatically enrolled but can opt to change their coverage amount. To retain life insurance after separation, SGLI must be converted to Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) within one year and 120 days of separation.³⁴ One VA respondent remarked that because SGLI coverage amount is listed on DD Form 214 (a permanent document), many veterans and/or their family members often believe they hold life insurance even after the coverage has lapsed. This individual suggested adding wording on DD Form 214 to clarify the requirement to convert to VGLI.³⁵

Respondents from the VA reported that they use the SGLI coverage amount block to determine insurance programs and that it is important when dealing with casualties, but about two-thirds of respondents said this block is unimportant. Most respondents do not use this block. Some agreed that it is important information, but they

³² Interview 172.

³³ Interview 163.

³⁴ VA, “Life Insurance,” webpage, undated.

³⁵ Interview 232.

are “not sure why it’s on the [DD Form] 214 . . . Why is that on a permanent document when they have the SGLI form?”³⁶ One pointed out that this information is available to the VA online through the SGLI Online Enrollment System database.³⁷

The majority of respondents indicated that blocks 15a: commissioned through service academy and 15b: commissioned through Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) scholarship were not important and reported that they do not use them to determine benefits and entitlements. Others admitted that the information may be helpful for some people, but that it should not be on this form because it exists in the Military Personnel Data Systems. Many recommend removing these blocks; one noted that they do not include all of the possible commissioning sources (e.g., it omits servicemembers who enter through an Officer Training School).

About two-thirds of respondents indicated that block 17 (“Member was provided complete dental examination and all appropriate dental services and treatment within 90 days prior to separation”) was unimportant, while about 20 percent indicated it was important, and about 15 percent were unsure. Two interviewees explained that this block can be useful as an investigative block for the VA. For example, if a servicemember leaves active duty without going through the proper outprocessing procedures, including a final dental checkup, then that servicemember could be entitled to dental benefits through the VA. The VA will see this on the servicemember’s record and register him or her for those benefits.³⁸ Most respondents said they cannot think of a reason this block would be included on DD Form 214. A few questioned why dental is included but not medical; these individuals suggest adding a statement to cover medical examinations.³⁹ Two respondents explained

³⁶ Interview 237.

³⁷ Interview 78.

³⁸ Interviews 164, 244.

³⁹ Interviews 58, 151, 233.

that this is a holdover from the Vietnam era.⁴⁰ One respondent suggested moving this to the remarks section (block 18).⁴¹

Blocks 20 and 20a allow the servicemember to indicate a state VA office where he or she would like a copy of his or her DD Form 214 to be sent, and whether he or she would like a copy to be sent to the Central VA Office in Washington, D.C. The majority of respondents indicated that these blocks are unimportant, though about 18 percent said it will be helpful even if DD Form 214 becomes electronic. One respondent said these blocks can be used to determine “stability in their postservice life. They went to Washington, they’re still in Washington.”⁴² One group suggested allowing servicemembers to choose multiple states.⁴³ Most recommended dropping these blocks.

Veteran Use

Four blocks are used primarily by the veteran, often for verifying experience and education to potential schools and employers.

Primary specialty (block 11) reports a specialty code indicating the servicemember’s primary career field while serving. Almost two-thirds of respondents said that this block is important. These individuals indicated that the block is important for people who reenter the military and for verifying resumes to potential employers. A VSO respondent noted that it can also be used to uncover fraud: “We’ve had cases where someone claimed they were a pilot and got the distinguished flying cross, but his primary specialty doesn’t reflect pilot training so we’ll question whether that’s a legitimate [DD Form 214].”⁴⁴ An interviewee from the VA explained that this block can also be used to help justify an injury claim by determining whether, through the individual’s primary specialty, he or she was at risk for that specific injury.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Interviews 130, 182.

⁴¹ Interview 166.

⁴² Interview 164.

⁴³ Interviews 113, 178, 179, 199.

⁴⁴ Interview 195.

⁴⁵ Interview 111.

One person recommended changing the block name to “military or service specialty” because with the title “primary,” people tend to put only the primary specialty and exclude the secondary or tertiary ones, which are just as important.⁴⁶ Another recommended that this should be placed next to the military education block (block 14).⁴⁷ About one-third indicated that primary specialty is unimportant, and a handful were unsure. Many of these individuals said that the information is not useful to them; others pointed out that these data do not have to be on DD Form 214 because they are available in other places, such as Verification of Military Experience and Training or through the VA.

Block 13 contains data on decorations, medals, badges, citations, and campaign ribbons awarded or authorized. A majority of respondents indicated that this information is important, although some respondents reported that they do not use this block. Interviewees from end-user organizations indicated that they use this information to validate service in a combat zone and determine eligibility for benefits that are based on honors (e.g., Purple Heart, certain state benefits). One VSO respondent said this block would be most useful if it was cumulative instead of reflecting the awards received in a single period of active duty.⁴⁸ Another interviewee suggested adding a checkbox for hostile fire or imminent danger pay, adding a block for wounded date and location, and using two-digit codes for countries served around the world to easily recognize countries of service.⁴⁹

A little over half of respondents indicated that the block containing military education information (block 14) is useful. These interviewees reported using the information to determine rehabilitative services and establish eligibility for education, unemployment, and pension benefits; they also found it important for military reentry. Many said that the servicemembers especially like this item. However,

⁴⁶ Interview 237.

⁴⁷ Interview 241.

⁴⁸ Interview 191.

⁴⁹ Interview 188.

almost half of respondents do not use this block and said that, for their uses, it is not needed to establish entitlements.

Box 30 is a checkbox indicating whether the servicemember would like to receive copy 4 of DD Form 214. This indicates if a servicemember will receive a hard copy of his or her DD Form 214. Most respondents stated that this block is unimportant and supported removing it from DD Form 214. One interviewee admitted he had never noticed this block before.⁵⁰

A summary of the findings for Veteran Use blocks is given in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8
Veteran Use Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
11	Primary Specialty	Veteran Use	N	N	Y	N	N	Important
13	Decorations, Medals, Badges, Citations, and Campaign Ribbons Awarded or Authorized	Veteran Use	N	N	N/Y ^a	N/Y ^a	N/Y ^a	Very important
14	Military Education	Veteran Use	N	N		N	N	Mixed
30	Member Requests Copy 4	Veteran Use	N	N	N	Y	N	Not important

^a Marine Corps campaign medals are not autopopulated; Coast Guard decorations and medals are not autopopulated; Air Force badges are not prepopulated.

⁵⁰ Interview 151.

Contact After Separation

Two blocks (19a: Mailing Address After Separation and 19b: Nearest Relative) are used to contact the veteran after separation. A little less than half of respondents indicated that mailing address after separation (19a) is important. Many cited this block's inaccuracies and the fact that it can change quickly, and some raised concerns about including this on DD Form 214 for privacy reasons.⁵¹ Most preferred removing this block and having the servicemember provide a civilian address or phone number instead.⁵² Even fewer respondents indicated that nearest relative (19b) is useful (in fact, it is no longer required by the Coast Guard), though one noted that it is helpful when the veteran is deceased.⁵³ Respondents raised similar concerns about including this on DD Form 214 for privacy reasons.⁵⁴ One interviewee suggested changing the wording to "designated relative" to clarify that the relative should not necessarily be geographically nearest, but next of kin.⁵⁵ These results are shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9
Contact After Separation Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
19a	Mailing Address After Separation	Contact After Separation	N	N	N	N	N	Mixed
19b	Nearest Relative	Contact After Separation	N	N	N	N	N	Mixed

⁵¹ Interviews 5, 58, 78, 89, 130.

⁵² Interviews 58, 130, 142, 232.

⁵³ Interviews 172, 225.

⁵⁴ Interview 130.

⁵⁵ Interview 237.

Reserve Duty

The reserve obligation termination date is the date after which the servicemember has completed his or her required military service; in other words, the servicemember is under no obligation to serve in the armed forces after this date. These data are given in block 6 of DD Form 214. About half of respondents indicated that this block is unimportant, a little less than half indicated that this block is important, and a small percentage was unsure. One interviewee noted that this information is only important for individuals who leave active duty before their contract is up (meaning they are required to serve for a certain amount of time as a reserve component member), but it is no longer important if the contract time has already been served. Many did not see a reason to include this information. There was one suggestion to move this information to Section 12: Record of Service.⁵⁶ If the separating servicemember is transferring to the reserve component, block 9 gives information about the reserve command to which the servicemember is transferring. This block is especially important if the member still has a service obligation (block 6). Almost two-thirds of respondents considered this block important, though many said they often do not use it. A summary of the Reserve Duty blocks is given in Table 4.10.

Verification

A block for the servicemember's signature and a block for an official's signature are both included for DD Form 214 verification. Respondents were split on whether the servicemember's signature (block 21) is important. Many said that this block is unimportant and should be removed from DD Form 214 because the signature is often missing; in fact, it has become standard procedure for the Air Force to issue DD Form 214 without the member's signature.⁵⁷ Others indicated that even if not everyone can sign, servicemembers should sign when they are able, and that it can be helpful to see whether or not the member was available to sign and to check the member's signature against other

⁵⁶ Interview 237.

⁵⁷ Interviews 46, 129, 130.

Table 4.10
Reserve Duty Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
6	Reserve Obligation Termination Date	Reserve Duty	N	N	Y	N	N	Mixed
9	Command to Which Transferred	Reserve Duty	N	N	Y	N/Y ^a	N	Important

^a The block will autopopulate if the servicemember is being discharged from the military. If the servicemember is returning to the Air National Guard or the Reserves, the state or command to which the servicemember is transferring will have to be manually entered.

records for verification.⁵⁸ About two-thirds of respondents indicated that an official's signature (block 22) is important. Many said this is because DD Form 214 should be verified by *someone* to add legitimacy to the document. One individual agreed that verification is important but expressed concerns over who is classified as "official," and that the certifying official should always electronically sign DD Form 214 so that there is a record of who created and approved the document in the event there is an issue with it in the future.⁵⁹ These findings are summarized in Table 4.11.

Pay

Two blocks contain information about veteran pay. Block 15c: Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program states whether a servicemember joined the military under this program and whether he or she has completed his or her mandatory service obligation or not. If not, this block indicates that service commitment based on the servicemember's initial

⁵⁸ Interviews 136, 225, 244.

⁵⁹ Interview 233.

Table 4.11
Verification Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
21	Signature of Member Being Separated; Date	Verification	N	N	N	N	N	Mixed
22	Official Authorized to Sign; Date	Verification	N	N	N	N	N	Important

service contract. This block was considered unimportant by interviewees. Block 16: Days Accrued Leave Paid shows the “number of days of accrued leave being paid to the soldier” upon separation.⁶⁰ The majority of respondents indicated that this block is unimportant. Although one respondent indicated that this information is important because to his knowledge it is not tracked anywhere except on DD Form 214, many others said that it is available through the Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) or elsewhere.⁶¹ One said that it may be relevant for the first two weeks after separation but that it quickly becomes irrelevant.⁶² Many recommended removing this block. One respondent suggested moving this to the Entry and Exit section (blocks 7–10) and another suggested moving it to the remarks section (block 18).⁶³ These findings are summarized in Table 4.12.

⁶⁰ Army Regulation 635-5, *Separation Documents*, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, September 15, 2000, p. 6.

⁶¹ Interviews 133, 202, 233.

⁶² Interview 123.

⁶³ Interviews 166, 191.

Table 4.12
Pay Blocks

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Autopopulated by Service					Overall Response
			Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	
15c	Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program	Pay	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
16	Days Accrued Leave Paid	Pay	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

The categorical importance rating scale was the method we utilized to ascertain individual preferences across these categories: Identification, Separation Information, Catch-All, Service Record, Benefits, Veteran Use, Contact After Separation, Reserve Duty, Verification, and Pay. Of those categories, Identification, Separation Information, and Catch-All were rated very important and the Pay category was rated not important. The analysis of stakeholder interviews provided a wealth of information which helped to drive the summary of findings, presented in the next chapter, and the recommendations, presented in Chapter Six.

Summary of Findings to Address the Utility of DD Form 214

Based on information gathered from the literature review and stakeholder interviews the study team concluded the following:

- Future changes to DD Form 214 should be well coordinated to account for all stakeholders.
- New policies and data management processes are needed to help ensure DD Form 214 content is more complete and accurate.
- Current Reserve and National Guard policy does not adequately address some key issues.
- Not all blocks on DD Form 214 are of equal importance: Some are obsolete, others are critical.
- There are multiple options to prove veteran status and for accessing data on DD Form 214.
- Various options exist for moving toward an electronic record, each with advantages and disadvantages.

The following section details these conclusions.

Changes Should Be Coordinated to Account for All Stakeholders

Changes to DD Form 214 have been gradual and responsive to changes in the military and the benefits adjudication process at the VA and Department of Labor.¹ While the original version of DD Form 214 created in 1950 included details such as race, hair color, and weight,

¹ Historical changes of the DD Form 214 are detailed in Chapter Two in the section, “How the Form Has Evolved over Time.”

the information contained on the DD Form 214 has gradually shifted to focus on items needed by the VA and other end users, as specifically referenced in the 1989 version of DoDI 1336. In addition to other changes, data blocks such as Social Security number and character of service were added, blocks for education and training were streamlined, and the SPD code was created, all contributing to better functionality for end users.

Today, DD Form 214 is easily recognized and well understood by servicemembers, end users, and others. While the physical DD Form 214 is still widely used, growing electronic capabilities and processes have become inextricably tied to DD Form 214's use by various stakeholders. The VA and Department of Labor, for example, rely heavily on the effective transmission of servicemember data (VA/DoD Identity Repository [VADIR]) for all of the business lines, especially veteran's outreach and benefits adjudication.

New Policies and Data Management Processes Are Needed to Help Ensure DD Form 214 Content Is More Complete and Accurate

Data inconsistencies are a major cause of concern as DD Form 214 is generated. One way to reduce those inaccuracies is to ensure that as much information as possible is pulled from authoritative personnel databases and that it prepopulates DD Form 214. To facilitate the connection of these various electronic systems and to help improve data accuracy and transmission, new policies need to be put in place. Currently, there is no policy that directs the services to use a specific system for filling the blocks on DD Form 214, and each service has different systems and methods. These systems have differing capabilities, with some more advanced than others. For example, the Air Force and Marine Corps autopopulate most of DD Form 214 data, the Army only autopopulates about 25 percent of the data blocks, and the Navy does not autopopulate anything.² Often, though not always, when a data block autopopulates, there is an option to verify and update the block through a drop-down menu or free text response; other auto-

² Interviews 4, 5, 135, 140, 243.

populated blocks, like the servicemember's name and Social Security number, do not provide the option to be altered.

Two Air Force respondents commented that their process of filling out DD Form 214 is efficient and accurate. One of the respondents attributed this success to the way the Air Force has automated its data entry: Because so many blocks are autopopulated, a lot of time is saved so the tech can focus on ensuring accuracy on the prefilled DD Form 214 rather than manually entering everything.³ The other respondent attributed the Air Force's proficiency to the experience of the workforce, who have been involved with preparing DD Form 214 for a long time and "know all the ins and outs, what needs to be done, how they're done, [and] what documents they need to verify."⁴

Another respondent had very different observations about DD Form 214 generation in the Navy. This individual explained how entire sections have had to suspend normal operations to deal with separation paperwork for a 500-person reserve battalion, and described the process as "very time and resource intensive." The interviewee also reported that the Navy is currently restructuring the process to be more centralized and automated, a development "that would be nirvana."⁵

Twelve respondents indicated that policy that reduces data inaccuracies and improves clean data management process between service branches, including guard and reserve, would improve DD Form 214 processing.⁶ Nine of these respondents explicitly supported the idea of utilizing DMDC as a centralized DoD database for DD Form 214 data, with one noting that it would help when a servicemember switches branches (e.g., if a former member of the Marine Corps reenlists with the Army).⁷ One respondent from the VA indicated that while a centralized database is helpful, centralized policy to help ensure the

³ Interview 202.

⁴ Interview 132.

⁵ Interview 238.

⁶ Interviews 44, 46, 88, 93, 113, 132, 137, 140, 141, 160, 191, 178, 179, 199, 229, 236, 237, 238, 243.

⁷ Interviews 44, 46, 88, 93, 113, 132, 137, 139, 140, 141, 160, 178, 179, 191, 199, 229, 238.

transmission of accurate service information is also needed.⁸ This individual noted that while data can be pulled from each military branch from the same data repository—through VADIR—it is still often necessary to come to unique agreements with each service regarding what data can be accessed and how they may be used.

The differences between services' DD Form 214 systems and methods often leads to errors and incorrect data in systems of record. One theme consistently emphasized throughout the interviews was the need for processes that will output more complete, consistent, and accurate DD Form 214 content. We heard many comments such as: "we just really need to improve data accuracy," "we would like to be able to rely on the fact that the data was accurate and was in a predictable format," "having the data doesn't make the data correct," and "the document is only going to be as good as the data."⁹ Respondents reported data inaccuracies, such as mistakes due to filling out data elements by hand (e.g., "fat-finger" mistakes or typos) and data that are difficult or impossible to read due to poor photocopies.¹⁰ Respondents also described data inconsistencies that make end users' jobs difficult (e.g., spelling out "Washington" versus abbreviating "WA," or formatting the data in columns where others do not).¹¹ Overall, 17 individuals indicated that DD Form 214 data need to be more accurate.¹²

Seven individuals indicated that digital data will help ensure accurate content, particularly if blocks have mandatory formatting or drop-down menus.¹³ However, one interviewee commented that data entry automation can lead to incorrect or incomplete DD Form 214s because people will assume that the automated data are correct without verify-

⁸ Interview 224.

⁹ Interviews 142, 164, 224, 236.

¹⁰ Interviews 130, 139, 164, 172, 229.

¹¹ Interviews 160, 172.

¹² Interviews 27, 44, 58, 78, 130, 136, 142, 160, 163, 164, 172, 189, 224, 228, 230, 236, 243.

¹³ Interviews 113, 149, 160, 164, 166, 178, 179, 191, 199, 243.

ing anything.¹⁴ Other respondents suggested policy changes to help improve accuracy. One respondent proposed assigning specific entities oversight of each data block to track the data throughout a service-member's career.¹⁵ Another respondent related how DMDC will often change DD Form 214 data without relaying those changes back to the services. Because the data conflict with the service records, veterans are being denied benefits claims; to avoid this, the individual suggested policy that requires all data changes to be made at the service level.¹⁶

Decentralized DD Form 214 handling processes can also complicate data transmission among stakeholder organizations. The services are required to distribute DD Form 214 to both internal and external organizations. Internally, the services send electronic DD Form 214 data to DMDC, where the data are stored in a merged electronic DD Form 214/DD Form 215 database. The data are then reconciled across five report fields with DMDC's Person Data Repository (PDR), which compares the data elements between the two databases. DMDC will update the PDR data if one of the five fields are blank or null based on separate agreements with each of the services. To send data externally, DMDC takes a subset of the PDR data and sends it through a VA satellite database to VADIR. However, there are issues with data transmissions internally (from the services to DMDC) and externally (from DMDC to the VA and Department of Labor) which also need to be improved if DD Form 214 is to become fully digital. A respondent from a Marine Corps data management organization—whose role is to store DD Form 214s and distribute information to veterans, federal agencies, veteran organizations, and other end users—noted that not all DD Form 214s that are issued are received, and that it is often necessary to reconstruct DD Form 214s that are not on file.¹⁷ One Army respondent explained that several issues have arisen with transmitting data to DMDC. While the technical aspects of transmitting the data

¹⁴ Interview 243.

¹⁵ Interview 236.

¹⁶ Interview 189.

¹⁷ Interview 88.

work properly, DMDC pulls Army data from more than one source, which often leads to inaccuracies.¹⁸

Data transmission between military data centers and end-user organizations also needs to be improved if DD Form 214 is to become fully digital. Two individuals in Army Policy noted that the Army would like to move to digital transmissions instead of mailing paper DD Form 214s to state VAs. These individuals reported that the Army is set up well for transmitting electronic information but there are “still a handful of states . . . that aren’t ready to receive it digitally.”¹⁹ Interviewees from the Ohio Department of Veterans Services reported that their organization was one of the first state VA organizations to move to electronic transfers, and that this has been a good transition because it cuts down on expensive physical storage. However, the interviewees reported there is a long delay before they receive DD Form 214 (about 130 days), which hurts their outreach efforts and makes it difficult for them to communicate with recently separated veterans.²⁰

These interview responses indicate that improving data accuracy and improving the transmission of data are needed before DD Form 214 becomes fully electronic.

Reserve, National Guard Policy Does Not Address Some Key Issues

Current policy does not adequately address specific challenges that National Guard and Reserve members face regarding the processes and content of DD Form 214. First, the issuance of multiple DD Form 214s has created large administrative backlogs, confuses servicemembers, and leads to inefficiencies. The policy that governs when a DD Form 214 is required can be extremely problematic for National Guard and Reserve servicemembers, whose active-duty time can be very difficult to track.²¹ Currently, DD Form 214 is required for every servicemember separating from an active duty service period that is 90 or more

¹⁸ Interview 136.

¹⁹ Interviews 133, 136.

²⁰ Interviews 113, 178, 179, 199.

²¹ Interviews 44, 58, 129, 130, 168, 210, 234.

consecutive days if the service period is classified as “noncontingency.” However, if the active duty service period is classified as “contingency,” DD Form 214 is required for every service period of *one day or greater*.²²

The ability to track even short periods of active duty contingency time is important because time in contingency operations is often used to establish eligibility for benefits;²³ however, this also means that some reserve component members accrue a large number (sometimes hundreds) of DD Form 214s. This can create huge administrative backlogs and can be confusing for the servicemember and for end-user organizations when the individual applies for benefits.²⁴ Interviewees reported that the problem is especially rampant within the Air Force because its reserve members are frequently activated for short periods of time. As one respondent described it, an Air Force reserve component servicemember could “hop on an airplane, fly somewhere, fly back, and you’re off active duty.”²⁵ Two interviewees indicated that OSD has updated policy to allow cumulative DD Form 214s. They reported this change has relieved a large amount of the administrative backlog, but that the cumulative DD Form 214 can be problematic for end-user organizations, which are not used to cumulative data on a single DD Form 214.²⁶

The issuance policy also leaves some reserve component servicemembers with no DD Form 214 at all, even if they have accrued a large amount of active duty service time. U.S. Code Title 10, Section 1168 establishes the requirement to generate a DD Form 214 for ser-

²² Interviews 44, 58, 78, 237.

²³ Interview 157.

²⁴ Importance of tracking contingency time: Interview 157; Backlogs: Interviews 44, 58; Problems applying for benefits: A few end-user respondents indicated that multiple DD Form 214s are generally not a problem if the servicemember only needs to prove service. In these cases, the end-user organization only needs to see the most recent one (or two) to establish a claim (Interviews 210, 213). However, multiple forms can be a huge problem if the end-user organization needs to look at the details of service to dissect eligibilities, such as VA education entitlements (Interview 168). Another end user indicated reserve component members often do not receive their DD Form 214s in a timely manner (Interview 150).

²⁵ Interviews 44, 58, 237. Quote from Interview 78.

²⁶ Interviews 44, 78.

vicemembers separating from active duty, which is based on the definition of *active duty* in 10 U.S.C. 101 (21)–(24). As there is no mention in either the U.S.C. or the CFR which mandates the creation of a DD Form 214 for any other duty status, the services specifically follow the established policy, as outlined in DoDI 1336.1. For noncontingency active duty service, members of the National Guard and Reserves who provide less than 90 consecutive days of active duty do not receive a DD Form 214. One respondent noted that:

You could do over 20 years of service [with] ten years of active duty, but never get a DD [Form] 214 I'll give you an example. Operation Deep Freeze out of Pennsylvania or New York does missions to Alaska, and they're five-day missions. They do them a lot. So those five-day missions add up, but they don't get DD [Form] 214s because it's not a contingency.²⁷

For reservists, DD Form 214 is the only separation document they might receive, but those separating from the National Guard have an alternative: They receive NGB Form 22, which contains much of the same information and can also be used to establish eligibility for benefits and entitlements. However, two interviewees reported that end-user organizations find working with the NGB Form 22 to be difficult because they are more familiar with DD Form 214 and would prefer to see data presented in the same format.²⁸

Further, DD Form 214 blocks are not designed for reserve component and National Guard servicemembers, and the type of data captured (or not captured) can be problematic for reserve component servicemembers. One interviewee noted that there are different types of active duty under which a guard or reserve member can serve (and which matter when trying to determine eligibility for benefits), but because DD Form 214 was written for active component members, DD Form 214 does not capture those different types of active duty.²⁹

²⁷ Interview 129.

²⁸ Interview 27, 232.

²⁹ Interview 233.

The same individual also noted that DD Form 214 does not accurately capture important awards and promotions for reserve component members.

Another respondent indicated that the reserve component separation codes are different than active component codes and are not adequate to capture the range of separation types for the reserve component. The respondent noted, for example, that “you could have a discipline where a guard member is taken off active duty but can stay a drilling member. No code exists for that.”³⁰

Some Blocks Are Obsolete, Others Are Critical

During the interviews, respondents were questioned about each block on DD Form 214 with the aim of improving our understanding of which elements of DD Form 214 are important to which stakeholder, whether certain parts of DD Form 214 are no longer used or are used to such a limited extent that they may be candidates for deletion, and where improvements might be made and why.³¹ Based on these results the study team determined that while some DD Form 214 data are critical, not all blocks on DD Form 214 are important and some are obsolete.

Blocks on DD Form 214 that establish identity, service records, and character of service are considered the most important. These data are used widely among various DD Form 214 stakeholders to establish benefits and entitlements, locate other records of the servicemember, and identify fraudulent forms. In contrast, blocks that have a narrow focus or are specific to a subset of the servicemember population were found to have the lowest utility by interviewees. These blocks include commissioning source, loan repayment, and information regarding dental treatment. Blocks that reference paper copies of DD Form 214 (e.g., whether a paper copy should be sent to a state veterans affairs office, whether the member requests to receive copy 4), were overwhelmingly found to be obsolete.

³⁰ Interview 244.

³¹ Detailed findings are reported in Chapter Four in the section titled “Form Data Elements.”

Multiple Options to Prove Veteran Status for Accessing Data on DD Form 214

There are multiple options for accessing the data on DD Form 214. One is a “proof of service letter” that can be used to validate service. The services have already developed this type of document. These paper documents include far less detail than DD Form 214 and would be sufficient for veterans to supply to end users who require proof of service. End users who require further information would be able to request the data from DMDC. One interviewee noted that using a proof-of-service letter in lieu of DD Form 214 could be problematic and cause confusion for end users unless a DoD-wide standard DD Form 214 was adopted rather than each service fielding its own version.³² A concept similar to the proof of service letter is the “VA identification card,” which has been implemented by the VA. Many interviewees expressed a preference for keeping the data that are shared on a physical form minimal, secure, and free of PII, such as Social Security number and date of birth.³³ Replacing DD Form 214 with either a proof-of-service letter or a VA identification card (which both contain minimal sensitive information) would help alleviate these concerns.

Another alternative is to develop an “on demand” DD Form 214 that supplies select information based on who will be using the data. The data used to populate DD Form 214 are already collected, stored, and transmitted by DMDC; thus, the possibility exists to build a user interface that can create different combinations of data based on need. This option would address four common concerns from interviewees. First, 12 respondents liked the idea of DMDC providing and certifying data without requiring a paper DD Form 214.³⁴ With an on-demand DD Form 214, appropriate data could be transmitted directly to the end user with no physical DD Form 214 required. Second, five individuals felt it would be useful for DD Form 214 data to be available not only when a servicemember’s active duty time ends, but also

³² Interview 237.

³³ Interviews 89, 130, 191, 203; group interviews 46, 88, 93, 137, 139, 140, 141.

³⁴ Interviews 44, 46, 78, 88, 93, 126, 128, 132, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142, 166, 189.

while the servicemember is actively serving.³⁵ As a living document, the on-demand DD Form 214 would show cumulative information rather than information pertinent only to the current active duty period; many respondents indicated that this would be a more useful presentation than the existing system.³⁶ Third, as is done with the proof of service letter or VA identification card, controlling the data that go to end users through an on-demand DD Form 214 would alleviate many privacy concerns by limiting the amount of PII that is shared. Finally, a digital on-demand DD Form 214 could help reduce fraud and forgery. Seven interviewees voiced concerns or provided anecdotes about fraud and forgery, especially with paper copies of DD Form 214.³⁷ Five respondents described being able to identify fraudulent DD Form 214s by looking at data blocks that should corroborate each other, but do not (e.g., if a DD Form 214 says the servicemember received a Purple Heart but has no record of overseas service).³⁸ One respondent proposed adding a seal or DoD watermark to DD Form 214 to help verify its authenticity.³⁹ Five expressed their belief that moving the form to a centralized, authoritative digital database will help with data verification, “even if it’s just to compare to a [DD Form 214] that a veteran is holding in front of us.”⁴⁰

Some individuals had reservations about the concept of a digital, on-demand DD Form 214. For example, one respondent indicated that it could be bureaucratically cumbersome for DD Form 214 data to be constantly updated.⁴¹ Another respondent was wary of making fluid DD Form 214s so readily available to servicemembers, because it could be confusing to end users (who are used to DD Form 214 being a static document) or open up doors for benefits fraud and abuse. As

³⁵ Interviews 58, 139, 233, 235, 237.

³⁶ Interviews 151, 191.

³⁷ Interviews 128, 129, 150, 180, 182, 183, 191.

³⁸ Interviews 164, 182, 191, 195, 225.

³⁹ Interview 183.

⁴⁰ Interviews 129, 180, 182, 191, 228.

⁴¹ Interview 233.

DD Form 214 is widely used, any changes to the content, location of the content, or how the content is displayed could cause end users to question the meaning of the information or misinterpret the authenticity of the document. This individual was also concerned that it may be challenging to change mindsets—not only of veterans but also of congressional lawmakers—because of the strong culture of requiring a paper DD Form 214.⁴²

Various Issues Need to Be Considered for Electronic DD Form 214

Various issues need to be considered for moving toward an electronic record. Twenty-six respondents liked the idea of the data becoming electronic, and 12 explicitly supported the concept of DMDC pulling data from the services and sharing controlled information with end users, including sharing data across state VAs.⁴³ Four respondents remarked that DD Form 214 data should not only be electronic (e.g., an image file or a PDF with text blocks), but that the data should exist in a format that supports data mining; (e.g., in a database format that allows queries and searches on blocks such as service, period of service, state, and primary specialty).⁴⁴ Respondents also discussed how an electronic DD Form 214 could improve information flow between form suppliers and end users. Unlike a paper form, electronic versions would give servicemembers and supplier organizations the options to release only select information to end-user organizations. Many individuals expressed that this would benefit both the servicemembers and end users.

However, there were concerns about housing DD Form 214 as digital files or in an electronic database. One respondent thought formatting everything into a database would be a waste of time: “Why not just turn the piece of paper into a PDF and push that to us? It gives

⁴² Interview 132.

⁴³ Supported electronic data: interviews 44, 46, 58, 89, 111, 113, 120, 126, 128, 132, 133, 142, 149, 150, 160, 164, 166, 168, 178, 179, 180, 189, 199, 210, 213, 224, 225, 234, 238. Supported DMDC pulling data from services and sharing with end users: interviews 44, 46, 78, 88, 93, 111, 113, 129, 132, 137, 139, 140, 141, 160, 163, 178, 179, 199, 202.

⁴⁴ Interviews 88, 160, 180, 238.

us a better picture of what the veteran's service was."⁴⁵ Six interviewees expressed concern that moving to electronic databases would require a significant amount of reorienting on the part of suppliers and end users who are accustomed to DD Form 214 in its current version.⁴⁶ Eleven interviewees were uneasy about moving to a fully electronic system, noting that servicemembers will likely still want a paper copy, and that electronic-only options might isolate some veteran populations including older veterans (who are reported by end-user organizations to be the more difficult population to reach), homeless, or underprivileged populations.⁴⁷ Finally, two respondents (one from the VA and one from a state VA) explained that many of their older historical records either exist only in a physical format or exist in an electronic version that is incompatible with modern systems. They noted that recreating this historical data into a single database could be problematic, and at the very least would require a large amount of manpower.⁴⁸

When considering moving toward a fully electronic DD Form 214, there are two primary types of issues that DoD needs to consider: data transmission issues and information content issues. Table 5.1 provides a synopsis of the issues and concerns that need to be considered as DoD moves toward a fully electronic DD Form 214.

These interview results suggest that course of action decisions, senior leader endorsement, and test piloting any changes are required to implement successful change to DD Form 214. Furthermore, a phased-in approach to a fully electronic DD 214 needs to include an effective communication strategy with servicemembers and end users.

⁴⁵ Interview 111.

⁴⁶ Interviews 5, 157, 182, 224, 225, 236.

⁴⁷ Interviews 46, 88, 93, 113, 127, 132, 133, 137, 139, 140, 141, 146, 149, 163, 164, 178, 179, 182, 199, 225.

⁴⁸ Interviews 180, 224.

Table 5.1
Issues and Concerns for an Electronic DD Form 214

Transmission of Data Issue	Transmission of Data Concern
Increased information flow between suppliers and end users	Suppliers and end users would have to reorient to new process
DMDC has ability to share information digitally with end users	Some veterans would still want a paper copy
DMDC has the ability to pull data from the services	Older DD Form 214s exist in formats that are incompatible with modern systems
Information Content Issue	Information Content Concern
Ability to share only selected information	Some end users want access to all the information
Data should be in a format that is searchable	Formatting information would take considerable time

Recommendations and a Strategic Way Toward an Updated DD Form 214

Based on the findings from our legal and policy reviews, as well as our interviews with DD Form 214 stakeholders, we developed the following recommendations:

- Develop education and training for servicemembers, suppliers, and end users of DD Form 214 as it transitions to an electronic form.
- Develop policies and data management processes that help to ensure DD Form 214 content is more complete and accurate.
- Assess the policy governing the issuance of DD Form 214 for Reserve and National Guard members.
- Modify the current version of DD Form 214 in response to stakeholder feedback.
- Explore options for accessing the data on DD Form 214.
- Employ a phased approach to updating DD Form 214 to a completely electronic record.

The majority of the analysis conducted for this research was done through stakeholder interviews to understand different concerns, preferences, and viewpoints regarding DD Form 214. As we did not have representative samples across organizations, we choose to average responses across organizations to ascertain what blocks were important to the majority of the stakeholder community. However, this approach masks individual responses as the use of central tendency obscures individual variations and is a limit of this research methodology. To mitigate this approach, Appendix C, Table C.3 and Table C.4 show

the categorical importance of each DD Form 214 block as reported by individuals from different organizations. This chapter provides more detail about these recommendations and lays out a strategic way to update DD Form 214.

Develop Education and Training for Servicemembers, Suppliers, and End Users

We recommend that DoD implement a communication strategy to effectively communicate to stakeholders what the changes to DD Form 214 will be, when the changes will happen, and how the new DD Form 214 will be accessed. Part of this strategy will be to clearly articulate what information was removed, what information was added, and how the removed information can be accessed. This will be critical in DoD's efforts to socialize any changes to DD Form 214 with stakeholders. Such socialization of information can also go a long way in minimizing confusion about the updated form and processes, which can facilitate the implementation process.

Develop Policies and Data Management Processes That Help Ensure Content Is More Complete and Accurate

We also recommend that DoD mandate that the services have systems that pull from existing personnel data sources and autopopulate the blocks of DD Form 214 to the maximum extent possible. However, autopopulating will only help if the services maintain accurate and up-to-date content in their databases. Ensuring that clean data are used to autopopulate the form along with minimizing the number of individuals who have to manually input data, will help ensure that data on DD Form 214 are more accurate and complete. In addition, we recommend that DoD reduce the number and types of systems that store DD Form 214 data, reduce duplicative systems, and leverage the IPPS integration effort to consolidate data. These efforts will help to ensure

that verified and accurate data are transmitted and stored in systems of record which are used to populate DD Form 214.

Assess Policy for Reserve and National Guard Members

We also recommend that DoD reexamine policies governing the issuance of DD Form 214 for Reserve and National Guard members. As DD Form 214 has moved more toward a benefits adjudication document, there is a need for Reservists and National Guard members who have not been on active duty to still receive a DD Form 214. OSD should consider changing the policies that mandate a DD Form 214 only for servicemembers separating from active duty. With the integration of the IPPS and the movement toward an electronic DD Form 214s, it is timely to consider providing a DD Form 214 to all servicemembers, not just those separating from active duty.

Additionally, DoD should reassess the current policy that requires the services to generate a DD Form 214 for servicemembers that spend one day in support of a named contingency. This requirement creates a large backlog for the services; if DoD decides to continue the current policy, changes will need to be made to current processes to be able to keep up with this backlog. To mitigate this, personnel systems could have the capability to automatically tabulate days served in support of a contingency operation. These dates could be stored and then be entered into block 12c (Net Active Service This Period) on a yearly basis. This would reduce the requirement to generate a DD Form 214 after every period of active duty in support of a contingency and still capture the total time served. Another possible solution would be to provide additional resources to the services to help with the DD Form 214 generation process.

We also recommend that DoD update DD Form 214 to include awards, promotions, and other important items specific to the Reserves and National Guard. These items should be pulled from the corresponding personnel service databases and autopopulate DD Form 214 in much the same way as with other servicemember information.

Modify the Current Version in Response to Stakeholder Feedback

Given the findings from our interviews with stakeholders, we also recommend that DoD remove the blocks that stakeholders told us were unimportant to them. These blocks are Commissioning Source, Loan Repayment, Dental, Pay, Location of DD 214 Copies, and Servicemember Initials. Removing these blocks would provide the opportunity to add in additional, more important content, and reduce unneeded information. Table 6.1 shows the response rates for both DoD and non-DoD organizations.

However, some stakeholders indicated that they want to see that all content remain on DD Form 214, but it should be noted that the electronic systems that share data can continue to transmit the information contained in these blocks uninterrupted. Just because the element is removed from DD Form 214 does not mean that it has to be removed from electronic systems. In addition, we recommend that DoD add in blocks that identify time and location of service in support of operations. Fourteen individuals from the interviews noted that it would be helpful to have specific blocks for dates and locations of contingency or overseas service. Most of this information is currently being placed into block 18.¹

Explore Options for Accessing the Data on DD Form 214

We also recommend that DoD explore options for accessing DD Form 214. To reduce needlessly exposing PII contained on DD Form 214, additional options to verify military service should be considered. These options could include (1) creating an approved “proof of service” letter that can be used to validate service, (2) partnering with the “VA identification card” project to add the ability to access additional servicemember information (QR code, microchip), and (3) creating an “On Demand DD Form 214” system administered by DMDC,

¹ Interviews 27, 58, 88, 135, 136, 157, 163, 164, 166, 172, 191, 202, 228, 243.

Table 6.1
Analysis of Recommended Blocks to Be Removed

Block Number	Block Name	DoD Organizations				Non-DoD Organizations			
		Not Important	Mixed	Important	Very Important	Not Important	Mixed	Important	Very Important
15a	Commissioned Through Service Academy	36	3	0	1	36	0	3	1
15b	Commissioned Through ROTC Scholarship	36	3	0	1	36	0	3	1
15c	Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program	36	3	0	1	36	0	3	1
16	Days Accrued Leave Paid	39	1	0	2	39	6	0	0
17	Member Was Provided Complete Dental Examination and All Appropriate Dental Services and Treatment Within 90 Days Prior to Separation	35	5	0	0	35	0	0	3
20	Member Requested Distribution of DD Form 214 Copy 6	33	1	0	0	33	9	0	0
20a	Member Requests a Photo Copy of DD Form 214 Copy 3 Be Sent to the Central Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Washington, D.C.)	33	1	0	0	33	9	0	0
30	Member Requests Copy 4	29	0	1	0	29	4	0	2

which has a user interface where veterans can select which blocks of their DD Form 214 (or other servicemember data) to share. These three options are not mutually exclusive and could be pursued separately or at the same time. Ultimately, DoD's short- and long-term goals will determine which options are best suited to achieving those goals. DoD will need to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of the potential options as it moves toward a fully electronic DD Form 214.

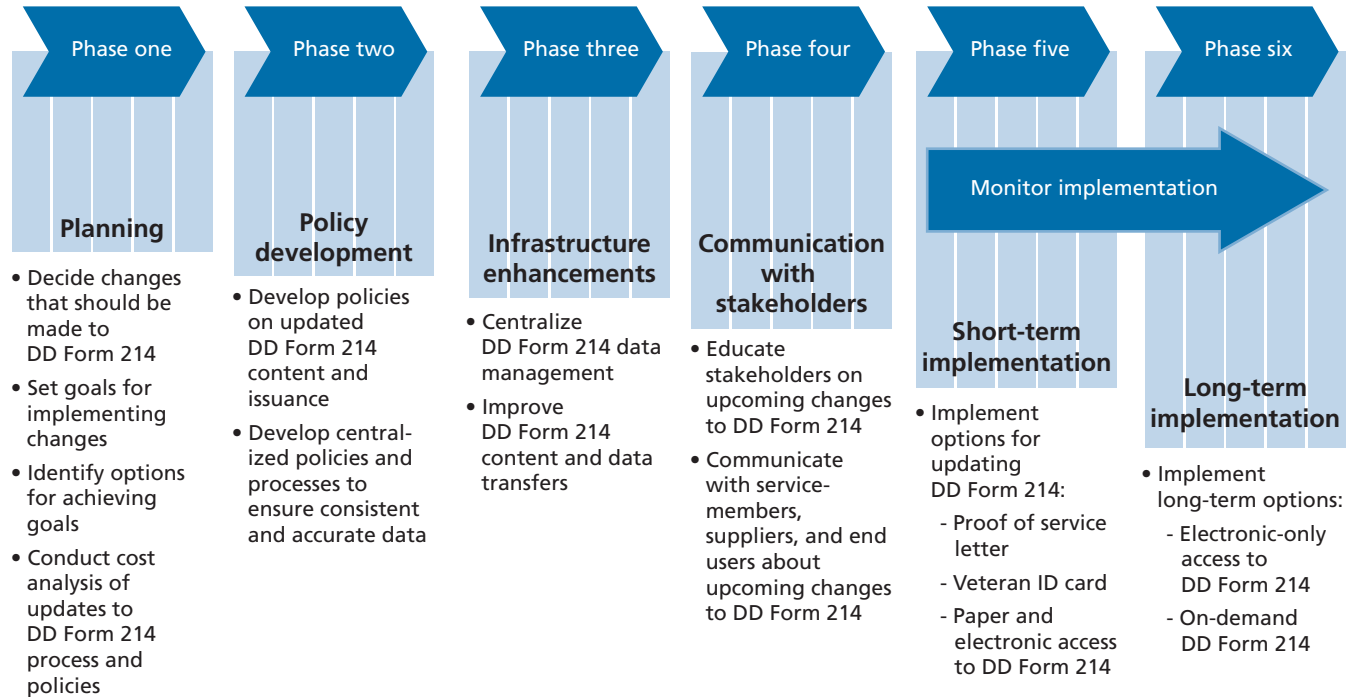
Employ a Phased Approach to Updating DD Form 214 to a Completely Electronic Form

Finally, we recommend that DoD employ a phased approach to updating DD Form 214 to a completely electronic form. DoD needs to carefully consider how the data are transmitted from the services to the end users. DoD also needs to closely examine what type of information is contained on DD Form 214 and how the information is presented. Our roadmap for implementation lays out a proposed phased approach. Such a phased, gradual approach allows for frequent status checks and course corrections, as well as any necessary adaptations in response to problems during implementation. The next section of this chapter describes a strategic roadmap that we developed to assist DoD in implementing an updated DD Form 214. It consists of six phases.

A Strategic Roadmap for Updating DD Form 214

Given our findings and recommendations, the RAND team developed a strategic roadmap to assist DoD in implementing an updated DD Form 214. This roadmap consists of a phased approach composed of six phases: (1) planning, (2) policy development, (3) infrastructure enhancements, (4) communication with stakeholders, (5) short-term implementation, and (6) long-term implementation. A key element of this roadmap is monitoring both short-term and long-term implementation of any changes made to DD Form 214. Figure 6.1 illustrates this strategic roadmap and each phase is described in more detail below.

Figure 6.1
A Strategic Roadmap for Updating DD Form 214



Phase One: Planning

During the planning phase, DoD will need to decide which changes should be made to the current DD Form 214. This will require consultation with key stakeholders, as well as data collection to determine the following: how stakeholders use the current DD Form 214, which pieces of information on the current DD Form 214 are helpful or not helpful to stakeholders, and whether there are any pieces of information that stakeholders need that are not currently on DD Form 214. The findings from this report help answer those questions and could inform DoD's decisions about which changes should be made to the current DD Form 214.

Once DoD decides which changes should be made to the current DD Form 214, it will then need to set the appropriate goals for implementing those changes and identify options to achieving those goals. This report lays out three options for moving toward a fully electronic DD Form 214:

1. a proof of service letter that can be used to validate service in a form that is far less detailed than DD Form 214 and would be sufficient for veterans to supply to end users who require proof of service
2. a veteran ID card that contains minimal sensitive information and PII
3. an on-demand DD Form 214 in which appropriate data could be transmitted directly to the end user with no physical form required; the data would be available while the servicemember is still serving.

Last, a key component of the planning phase is to conduct comprehensive cost analyses of the planned updates to DD Form 214 policies and processes. The potential costs could include the time involved in rewriting any changes to DoD and service policies, as well as any necessary changes to information technology systems and infrastructure. These cost analyses will help DoD assess the feasibility of the options for achieving its goals, and they will help further narrow the options for updating DD Form 214.

Phase Two: Policy Development

During the policy development phase, DoD will need to develop policies on any changes to the content of the current DD Form 214 and new guidance on the issuance of the updated DD 214. This will include updating any relevant DoDIs, as well as relevant service-specific policies. During this phase, DoD will also have to develop centralized policies and processes to ensure that data collection for the updated DD Form 214 is consistent and accurate.

Phase Three: Infrastructure Enhancements

During phase three, DoD will need to make any necessary enhancements to information systems and infrastructure to update DD Form 214. These enhancements will include centralizing DD Form 214 data management, as well as improving the accuracy of DD Form 214 content and data transfers. One of the critical elements of this phase will be identifying and implementing a way to certify that the information on the updated DD Form 214 is accurate and authentic. Given the interconnectivity and interoperability needed across DoD systems, as well as across different government agencies (e.g., DoD and the VA), this phase may prove to be one of the most challenging and lengthy phases in the implementation process.

Phase Four: Communication with Stakeholders

In order to maximize the chances of successful implementation of any changes to the current DD Form 214 process, DoD will need to communicate with and educate stakeholders about upcoming changes to DD Form 214 and the issuance process. This will include communicating with servicemembers, suppliers, and end users about upcoming changes to DD Form 214. This phase will also be key to socializing any upcoming changes, which, in turn, could facilitate the efficient implementation of those changes and minimize confusion about the updated DD Form 214.

Phase Five: Short-Term Implementation

Phase five includes the short-term implementation of options for updating DD Form 214. These options include a proof-of-service

letter (which the services have already developed), a veteran ID card, and allowing a time period in which servicemembers are allowed to access their DD Form 214s both in paper form and electronically. It will be critical to ensure that as changes are made toward a fully electronic DD Form 214, servicemembers are still able to access their DD Form 214s—particularly veterans who may not have access to an electronic version or who may be more comfortable with a paper copy of DD Form 214. DoD could also consider implementing pilot programs for options it would like to implement. This would allow DoD to begin implementing changes with a small population and identify problems before rolling out the changes to the broader population. The implementation of these short-term options would allow for progress to be made while the necessary infrastructure technology and systems are put into place to facilitate a fully electronic version of DD Form 214.

Phase Six: Long-Term Implementation

The last phase of this proposed strategic roadmap includes the implementation of DoD's long-term goals. These long-term goals could include providing electronic-only access to DD Form 214, and developing an on-demand DD Form 214 that could serve as a “living document” that servicemembers could access while they are still serving in the military. DoD could also consider implementing pilot programs for the long-term options it would like to implement. As with the previous phase, a pilot program would allow DoD to begin implementing changes with a small population and identify any problems before rolling out the changes to the broader veteran population.

The Importance of Monitoring the Implementation of Changes

Successful implementation of an updated DD Form 214 will require that DoD develop and continuously maintain a robust monitoring framework and periodically evaluate the impact of changes made to DD Form 214. We recommend routine monitoring of the implementation process. However, we recommend that DoD periodically conduct

a comprehensive evaluation of the updated DD Form 214 process. We recommend that an initial evaluation be conducted about three years after implementation and then every five years. Regardless of the outcome of these evaluations, we also emphasize the need for long-term, sustained routine monitoring to identify potential problems quickly as they evolve over time.

Methodology and Theme Development

In this appendix, we discuss how the research team identified interview candidates and conducted the interviews and then developed the themes that were used in this study. It starts with a discussion of the interview categories and then explains the coding software utilized during this research to develop our themes.

Data and Data Collection—Semistructured Interviews

We conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with 92 DD Form 214 stakeholders. The interviews were conducted via telephone or in person between October 2017 and May 2018. Interviews were transcribed but not audio recorded.

The majority of interviewees were DD Form 214 end users representing organizations such as federal and state VA offices, the Department of Labor, and VSOs ($n = 38$). We also spoke with individuals associated with DD Form 214 policy from OSD, the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, including those working with the Reserves and National Guard ($n = 28$). Other interviewees included data suppliers from service centers and transition centers ($n = 10$), data management personnel from service transition organizations or the DMDC ($n = 9$), and personnel from boards, such as the BCMR ($n = 7$). The breakdown of interviewees by organization type and organization is given in Tables A.1 and A.2.

Initial interviewees were selected based on suggestions by the project sponsor and by reaching out to individuals participating in rel-

Table A.1
Types of Organizations Interviewed

Organization Type	Interview Count
End User	38
Policy	28
Supplier	10
Data management	9
Boards	7

Table A.2.
Number of Respondents by Organization

Organization	Interview Count
Air Force	16
State VA	12
Navy	10
Army	8
VSO	8
Marine Corps	7
VA	7
State Department of Labor	6
National Guard	5
DMDC	3
Department of Labor	3
OSD	3
Coast Guard	1
DFAS	1
Joint Staff	1
Private company	1

evant working groups or who had contributed to prior relevant reports and studies. Other potential respondents were identified through referrals from interviewees (i.e., snowball sampling). Of the 249 potential interviewees, 90 completed an interview with the authors (response rate = 36 percent). To ensure an appropriate breadth of responses, we interviewed individuals in all the services and across the relevant agencies and departments.

An interview protocol was developed and provided in advance to interviewees along with a color-coded DD Form 214.¹ The protocol was used to structure the interview, with some questions emphasized more than others depending on the type of interviewee. The initial questions—those regarding descriptors, roles and responsibilities, and interaction with DD Form 214—were asked of most interviewees, and all interviews included a walk-through of the individual form items guided by the color-coded DD Form 214. Any remaining interview time was generally guided by the interviewees' experience and knowledge, with the protocols used loosely to structure the conversation. Group interviews generally followed the same format, though richer content was collected through conversation and discussion among the interviewees.

Coding and Thematic Analysis

The research team used the coding software tool Dedoose for this research, which is a collaborative mixed-methodology tool that leverages both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis. As Dedoose is a cloud-based service, it creates a readily available analytic environment where multiple team members were able to collaborate and work on the data at the same time, allowing real-time visibility across the team. To fill this environment, interviews were transcribed and then imported for coding and analysis.

¹ See Appendix B for a description of the interview protocol and Appendix C for details on the color-coded form.

To create this coding framework, two coders worked with a qualitative coding expert to develop an initial round of interview codes and then worked independently to code several interviews. This was an iterative process where multiple interview coders became familiar with the content of the data and from that developed patterns or themes. The process was as inductive as it was deductive where themes were identified from reading the transcribed text and then structured deductively within the coding framework.² These coders would then highlight individual segments of text and tag them according to which interview codes were appropriate. The team then reviewed these independently coded interviews to ensure the team had a shared sense of which each code and subcode meant. As the team members built a shared understanding of the coding process, they would continue to discuss issues with the code tree and work with the senior qualitative researcher to combine redundant codes, refine codes that were too general, and clarify the descriptors. As more interviews were conducted and more data were brought into the analytic environment, new patterns began to emerge, which subsequently altered the subcodes. The research team then went back and recoded previous interviews to entirely encompass the full code-tree. The end result was the creation of ten separate codes, each with multiple subcodes, for a total of 162 individual codes.

In addition to highlighting segments of text to create codes, each interview was also categorized with “descriptors,” which allowed interviews to be categorized across different blocks. Descriptor fields included organization, office role (one of the four interview categories), rank or grade of individual interviewees, and time in current position. The research team used a total of 78 individual descriptors throughout this analysis. We used the codes and descriptors to describe and order the qualitative data from the interviews in a way that we were systematically able to count similar responses and map them to interview respondents.

² Jennifer Fereday and Eimear Muir-Cochrane, “Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2006, pp. 80–92; Greg Guest, Kathleen M. MacQueen, and Emily E. Namey, *Applied Thematic Analysis*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2011.

Interview Protocol

This appendix contains the interview protocol used to guide the semi-structured interview process. Initially, four interview protocols were designed for the different stakeholder categories: policy, supplier, data transmission, and end user. As the research team became more familiar with the interview process, the individual protocols were consolidated into one. The protocol evolved over time as adjustments were made to reflect changes to the thematic analysis. Not all questions were asked in every interview session, because time did not always allow us to cover each question in full. The interview protocol included here is the final version.

Final Interview Protocol

[Script] In this interview, we are looking to identify how the DD Form 214 was developed, how it is used, and whether the current elements of the form are adequate. In the course of this research, we will be interviewing people from a variety of organizations who are involved in the production, management, and use of the DD Form 214 to get a fuller perspective of the form's life from end-to-end. We hope with this research to be able to ensure that all the required data is captured effectively and efficiently for everyone in this process as the DD Form 214 is converted to a fully digital format. We have a variety of questions on this for you, including how your office has historically been involved in the development or usage of the DD Form 214, how your office currently uses the form, and then an overview of each of the elements of the form and how

you interact with them (plus any you might think are unnecessary or are necessary but absent).

Background [*Note to interviewer: Some of this information may be available before the interview.*]

Before we get started, there is some information we would like to note:

- Date
- Time
- Number of interviewees
- Interviewee's office
- Office role with respect to DD Form 214:
supplier/data management/policy/end user
- Interviewee's rank/grade
- Interviewee's time in their current position
- Interviewer name

History and Use of the DD Form 214

- What policy documents, laws or regulation documents govern the usage of DD Form 214?
- Development of the DD Form 214
 - Was your office involved in the development of the DD Form 214 in the past?
 - What inputs or recommendations did your office provide and why?
 - What, if any, policies were involved in your process for making recommendations?
 - Was this office involved in any working groups related to the improvement of the DD Form 214?
 - If so, can you describe those working groups and their outcomes?
 - Is the form and/or process more effective for you now than it was in the past? What changes have improved or worsened things?

Use of the DD Form 214 Now

- Can you walk us through how your office currently uses the DD Form 214?
 - [*Prompts: Where does data or the DD Form 214 come from, where does it go, how is it input into the system, where does it go, etc.*]
- What computer systems and databases do you use in your interactions with the DD Form 214?
 - *Possible prompt about VMETS-Oracle, etc.*
 - [*Prompts: For filling out parts of the DD Form 214, for storing the DD Form 214, for sending the DD Form 214 on*]
- What format do you receive and send the DD Form 214 in?
 - [*Prompts: All digital Forms in a shared folder, computable digital Forms, scanned PDFs of hard copies, mailed hard copies, etc.*]
 - Do you send different formats to different people?
- **[For Suppliers]**
 - Can you walk us through the separation process?
 - Where and how do you access all the data you need?
 - Who can access the data?
 - How long does this take?
 - Has access to data improved over the past few years?
- **[For Data Management/Policy]**
 - A DoD/VA share system was developed. Can you describe what you know about that system and how you use it?
 - Can you talk about the Verification of Military Experience and Training–Oracle Database?
 - Who can access the data?
 - Have your processes for data management changed at all over the past few years? Please describe, if so.
 - How accurately does the current DD Form 214 match policy regulations?
 - How often is data incorrect or missing on DD Form 214s?
 - What do you do when that happens?
 - Copy 5 (the [VA] copy) of the DD Form 214 is due to be eliminated October 1, 2017. Is that on track?
- **[For End Users]**
 - What sorts of things do you use the DD Form 214 for?

- Where and how do you access all the data you need?
- Do you have access to all the data?
- How long does accessing the data take?
- How often is data incorrect or missing on forms?
 - What do you do when that happens?
- Has access to data improved over the past few years?
- **[Data Questions for Everyone]**
 - Do you interact at all with the DMDC’s Service Transaction Files?
 - If so, where does that data come from?
 - Is any of the data duplicated through this process?
 - How useful and accessible are these files?
 - Do you use the [PDR] at all?
 - If so, what information does it contain?
 - How useful and accessible is the PDR?
 - How do you manage privacy protection? Has that changed at all since the efforts to update the DD Form 214 process began in 2010?
 - How do you manage data quality assurance? Has that changed at all since the efforts to update the DD Form 214 process began in 2010?
 - Do you have recommendations on how access to information could be improved going forward?

Form Walkthrough

Part of this research involves identifying the different pieces of information on the current DD Form 214, assessing how they are used, and identifying any gaps in or excess information on the form. To do this, we would like to walk through the DD Form 214 with you, and ask you about each element.

Provide interviewee with the color-coded DD Form 214.

- **[For Suppliers]**
 - **[For each element section]**
 - Where does this information come from?
 - How readily available is this information?
 - If it is missing, how long does it take to find this information?

- **[For the Remarks Section]**
 - What do you routinely include here?
- **[Overview]**
 - Is there other information you think should be included routinely in the Form?
 - Is there information in the Form that you think is unimportant today?
- **[For Data Management/Policy]**
 - Where does this information come from?
 - How do you use or annotate this information?
 - [For the Remarks Section]: How do you handle this information?
- **[For End Users]**
 - **[For each element section]**
 - When, if at all, do you use this information?
 - How often is this block incorrect or missing data?
 - If data is missing in this block, how do you proceed?
 - **[For the Remarks Section]**
 - How do you use the information here?
 - **[Overview]**
 - In your estimation, what are the most important elements on this DD Form 214?
 - Given how your office uses the DD Form 214, are there elements of information that are not on the Form that should be included routinely?
 - Given how your office uses the Form, are there elements included that are unnecessary?

Wrap Up

- Is there anyone else we should interview for this research?
- What could replace the DD Form 214 to verify service
 - *[Prompt: Short document, CAC Card?]*
- Do you have any relevant documents you could share with us?
- Is there anything you would like us to walk away with about the DD Form 214?
 - Facilitators, drawbacks

DD Form 214 Data Items

To help guide the interview process, the study team organized each data block into a specific group (generally based on the form's section headings) and created a color-coded version of the form based on these groupings. Each interview included a walk-through of the individual DD Form 214 items guided by the color-coded form. DD Form 214's data block and the assigned groupings are shown in Table C.1, and a copy of the color-coded form is shown in Figure C.1.

Table C.1
DD Form 214 Data Blocks and Groupings

Block Number	Block Title	Group Title	Color
1	Name	Administrative	Yellow
2	Department, Component, and Branch		
3	Social Security Number		
4	(a) Grade, Rate, or Rank (b) Pay Grade		
5	Date of Birth		
6	Reserve Obligation Termination Date		

Table C.1—Continued

Block Number	Block Title	Group Title	Color
7	(a) Place of Entry into Active Duty (b) Home of Record at Time of Entry	Entry and Exit	Orange
8	(a) Last Duty Assignment and Major Command (b) Station Where Separated		
9	Command to Which Transferred		
10	SGLI Coverage Amount		
11	Primary Specialty	Occupation, Awards, Education	Gray
12	(a) Date Entered AD This Period (b) Separation Date this Period (c) Net Active Service This Period (d) Total Prior Active Service (e) Total Prior Inactive Service (f) Foreign Service (g) Sea Service (h) Initial Entry Training (i) Effective Date of Pay Grade	Record of Service	White
13	Decorations, Medals, Badges, Citations, and Campaign Ribbons Awarded or Authorized	Occupation, Awards, Education	Gray
14	Military Education		

Table C.1—Continued

Block Number	Block Title	Group Title	Color
15	(a) Commissioned Through Service Academy (b) Commissioned Through ROTC Scholarship (c) Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program	Commission Source, Leave Paid, Dental Exam	Blue
16	Days Accrued Leave Paid		
17	Member Was Provided Complete Dental Examination and All Appropriate Dental Services and Treatment Within 90 Days Prior to Separation		
18	Remarks	Remarks	Green
19	(a) Mailing Address After Separation (b) Nearest Relative	Contact After Separation	Gray
20	Member Requests Copy 6 Be Sent to _____ Office of Veterans Affairs (a) Member Requests Copy 3 Be Sent to the Central Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Washington, D.C.)		
21	(a) Member Signature (b) Date		
22	(a) Official Authorized to sign (b) Date		

Table C.1—Continued

Block Number	Block Title	Group Title	Color
23	Type of separation	Special Additional Information	Purple
24	Character of service		
25	Separation authority		
26	Separation code		
27	Reentry code		
28	Narrative reason for separation		
29	Dates of time lost during this period		
30	Member requests Copy 4		

Figure C.1
Color-Coded DD Form 214

CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY This Report Contains Information Subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, As Amended.			
1. NAME (Last, First, Middle)		2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT, AND BRANCH	
3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER I I		4a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK	
b. PAY GRADE		5. DATE OF BIRTH (YYYYMMDD)	
6. RESERVE OBLIGATION TERMINATION DATE (YYYYMMDD)		7a. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE DUTY	
b. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY (City and State, or complete address if known)		8a. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND	
b. STATION WHERE SEPARATED		9. COMMAND TO WHICH TRANSFERRED	
10. SGLI COVERAGE AMOUNT: \$		<input type="text"/>	
11. PRIMARY SPECIALTY (List number, title and years and months in specialty. List additional specialty numbers and titles involving periods of one or more years.)		12. RECORD OF SERVICE	
		YEAR(S)	MONTH(S)
		DAY(S)	
		a. DATE ENTERED AD THIS PERIOD	
		b. SEPARATION DATE THIS PERIOD	
		c. NET ACTIVE SERVICE THIS PERIOD	
		d. TOTAL PRIOR ACTIVE SERVICE	
		e. TOTAL PRIOR INACTIVE SERVICE	
		f. FOREIGN SERVICE	
		g. SEA SERVICE	
		h. INITIAL ENTRY TRAINING	
		i. EFFECTIVE DATE OF PAY GRADE	
13. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED (All periods of service)		14. MILITARY EDUCATION (Course title, number of weeks, and month and year completed)	
15a. COMMISSIONED THROUGH SERVICE ACADEMY		YES	NO
b. COMMISSIONED THROUGH ROTC SCHOLARSHIP (Ø USC Sec. 2107b)		YES	NO
c. ENLISTED UNDER LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM (Ø USC Chap. 109) (If Yes, year of commitment)		YES	NO
16. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID		17. MEMBER WAS PROVIDED COMPLETE DENTAL EXAMINATION AND ALL APPROPRIATE DENTAL SERVICES AND TREATMENT WITHIN 90 DAYS PRIOR TO SEPARATION	
		YES	NO
18. REMARKS			
The information contained herein is subject to computer matching within the Department of Defense or with any other affected Federal or non-Federal agency for verification purposes and to determine eligibility for, and/or continued compliance with, the requirements of a Federal benefit program.			
19a. MAILING ADDRESS AFTER SEPARATION (Include ZIP Code)		b. NEAREST RELATIVE (Name and address - include ZIP Code)	
20. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 6 BE SENT TO (Specify state/locality)		OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS	
		YES	NO
a. MEMBER REQUESTS COPY 3 BE SENT TO THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (WASHINGTON, DC)		YES	NO
21a. MEMBER SIGNATURE		b. DATE (YYYYMMDD)	22 a. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO SIGN (Typed name, grade title, signature)
			b. DATE (YYYYMMDD)
23. TYPE OF SEPARATION			
25. SEPARATION AUTHORITY		26. SEPARATION CODE	27. REENTRY CODE
28. DATES OF TIME LOST DURING THIS PERIOD (YYYYMMDD)			

Table C.2 outlines each block, categorizes its primary use, notes how the data are entered by each service, and indicates the block's categorical importance rating. A "Y" and a "N" in the same block indicates that some elements are autopopulated, while other elements are not.

Table C.3 and Table C.4 show the categorical importance of each DD Form 214 block as reported by individuals from different organizations. The row headers indicate the organization of the respondent. In the row headers, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of individuals from that organization the team interviewed over the course of this study. In the cells that indicate a block's importance, the numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of individuals from the organization that commented on that item, as well as how many of them indicated the item was important, indicated the item was unimportant, or indicated uncertainty about the item's importance. Note that the latter numbers may differ from the number of individuals interviewed, as not all interviewees commented on all DD Form 214 blocks.

Table C.2
Data Blocks Summary Table

Autopopulated by Service								
Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Overall Response
1	Name	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
2	Department, Component, and Branch	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
3	Social Security Number	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
4a	Grade, Rate or Rank	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
4b	Pay Grade	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
5	Date of Birth	Identification	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
6	Reserve Obligation Termination Date	Reserve Duty	N	N	Y	N	N	Mixed
7a	Place of Entry into Active Duty	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
7b	Home of Record at Time of Entry	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Important

Table C.2—Continued

Autopopulated by Service								
Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Overall Response
8a	Last Duty Assignment and Major Command	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	N	Mixed
8b	Station Where Separated	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
9	Command to Which Transferred	Reserve Duty	N	N	Y	N Y	N	Important
10	SGLI Coverage Amount	Benefits	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Not important
11	Primary Specialty	Veteran Use	N	N	Y	N	N	Important
12a	Date Entered Active Duty This Period	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12b	Separation Date This Period	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12c	Net Active Service This Period	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important

Table C.2—Continued

Autopopulated by Service								
Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Overall Response
12d	Total Prior Active Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12e	Total Prior Inactive Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
12f	Foreign Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
12g	Sea Service	Service Record	N	N	Y	N	N	Important
12h	Initial Entry Training	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
12i	Effective Date of Pay Grade	Service Record	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
13	Decorations, Medals, Badges, Citations, and Campaign Ribbons Awarded or Authorized	Veteran Use	N	N	N Y	N Y	N Y	Very important
14	Military Education	Veteran Use	N	N		N	N	Mixed
15a	Commissioned Through Service Academy	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important

Table C.2—Continued

Autopopulated by Service								
Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Overall Response
15b	Commissioned Through ROTC Scholarship	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
15c	Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program	Pay	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
16	Days Accrued Leave Paid	Pay	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
17	Member was Provided Complete Dental Examination and All Appropriate Dental Services and Treatment Within 90 Days Prior to Separation	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
18	Remarks	Catch-All	Y	N	Y	N	N	Very important

Table C.2—Continued

Autopopulated by Service								
Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Overall Response
19a	Mailing Address After Separation	Contact After Separation	N	N	N	N	N	Mixed
19b	Nearest Relative	Contact After Separation	N	N	N	N	N	Mixed
20	Member Requested Distribution of DD Form 214 Copy 6	Benefits	N	N	Y	N	N	Not important
20a	Member Requests a Photo Copy of DD Form 214 Copy 3 Be Sent to the Central Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Washington, D.C.)	Benefits	Y	N	Y	N	N	Not important
21	Signature of Member Being Separated; Date	Verification	N	N	N	N	N	Mixed
22	Official Authorized to Sign; Date	Verification	N	N	N	N	N	Important

Table C.2—Continued

Autopopulated by Service								
Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Overall Response
23	Type of Separation	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
24	Character of Service	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
25	Separation Authority	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
26	Separation Code	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
27	Reentry Code	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Very important
28	Narrative Reason for Separation	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Very important
29	Dates of Time Lost During This Period	Separation Information	N	N	Y	Y	N	Important
30	Member Requests Copy 4	Veteran Use	N	N	N	Y	N	Not important

**Table C.3
Data Block Importance by DoD Organizations**

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
1	Name	Identification	Very Important (42)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)
2	Department, Component, and Branch	Identification	Very Important (40)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Important (3)	Very Important (1)
3	Social Security Number	Identification	Very Important (47)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (5)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (3)	N/A	Very Important (2)	N/A
4a	Grade, Rate or Rank	Identification	Very Important (43)	Important (8)	Very Important (7)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (2)	N/A
4b	Pay Grade	Identification	Very Important (43)	Important (8)	Very Important (7)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (2)	N/A
5	Date of Birth	Identification	Very Important (43)	Very Important (7)	Important (5)	Not Important (5)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
6	Reserve Obligation Termination Date	Reserve Duty	Mixed (39)	Mixed (7)	Mixed (5)	Important (3)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Important (3)	N/A	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)
7a	Place of Entry into Active Duty	Benefits	Important (27)	Very Important (3)	Important (3)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Mixed (2)	N/A	Important (2)	Very Important (1)
7b	Home of Record at Time of Entry	Benefits	Important (28)	Very Important (3)	Important (3)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Mixed (2)	N/A	Important (2)	Very Important (1)
8a	Last Duty Assignment and Major Command	Benefits	Mixed (33)	Not Important (7)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Mixed (2)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Very Important (1)
8b	Station Where Separated	Benefits	Mixed (30)	Not Important (6)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (2)	N/A	Important (2)	Very Important (1)
9	Command to Which Transferred	Reserve Duty	Mixed (27)	Very Important (4)	Not Important (1)	Important (3)	Mixed (1)	N/A	Very Important (2)	N/A	Important (2)	Not Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
10	SGLI Coverage Amount	Benefits	Not Important (36)	Not Important (6)	Not Important (4)	Not Important (4)	Mixed (1)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Important (3)	Mixed (1)
11	Primary Specialty	Veteran Use	Important (36)	Important (4)	Important (6)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	N/A	Not Important (1)
12a	Date Entered Active Duty This Period	Service Record	Very Important (32)	Very Important (5)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
12b	Separation Date This Period	Service Record	Very Important (32)	Very Important (5)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
12c	Net Active Service This Period.	Service Record	Very Important (30)	Very Important (4)	Important (3)	Very Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
12d	Total Prior Active Service	Service Record	Very Important (32)	Very Important (6)	Important (3)	Very Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
12e	Total Prior Inactive Service	Service Record	Important (30)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
12f	Foreign Service	Service Record	Important (34)	Very Important (6)	Important (3)	Very Important (7)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
12g	Sea Service	Service Record	Important (29)	Very Important (4)	Important (3)	Important (6)	Mixed (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)
12h	Initial Entry Training	Service Record	Important (33)	Mixed (6)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (6)	Mixed (1)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
12i	Effective Date of Pay Grade	Service Record	Important (29)	Mixed (4)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (6)	N/A	N/A	Mixed (2)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
13	Decorations, Medals, Badges, Citations, and Campaign Ribbons Awarded or Authorized	Veteran Use	Very Important (33)	Very Important (5)	Important (6)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Very Important (1)
14	Military Education	Veteran Use	Mixed (34)	Mixed (5)	Important (3)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)
15a	Commissioned Through Service Academy	Benefits	Not Important (36)	Not Important (9)	Not Important (6)	Not Important (3)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Mixed (2)	N/A	Mixed (1)	Very Important (1)
15b	Commissioned Through ROTC Scholarship	Benefits	Not Important (36)	Not Important (9)	Not Important (6)	Not Important (3)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Mixed (2)	N/A	Mixed (1)	Very Important (1)
15c	Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program	Pay	Not Important (36)	Not Important (9)	Not Important (6)	Not Important (3)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Mixed (2)	N/A	Mixed (1)	Very Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
16	Days Accrued Pay Leave Paid		Not Important (39)	Not Important (7)	Not Important (5)	Not Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	N/A	Mixed (1)	Very Important (1)
17	Member Was Provided Complete Dental Examination and All Appropriate Dental Services and Treatment Within 90 Days Prior to Separation	Benefits	Not Important (35)	Not Important (7)	Not Important (4)	Not Important (3)	Mixed (1)	Not Important (1)	Mixed (2)	N/A	Mixed (1)	Mixed (1)
18	Remarks	Catch-All	Very Important (29)	Very Important (5)	Important (5)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	N/A
19a	Mailing Address After Separation	Contact After Separation	Mixed (33)	Not Important (7)	Mixed (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Mixed (2)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
19b	Nearest Relative	Contact After Separation	Mixed (28)	Not Important (4)	Important (3)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Mixed (3)	Not Important (1)
20	Member Requested Distribution of DD Form 214 Copy 6	Benefits	Not important (33)	Not Important (5)	Not Important (5)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (2)	Mixed (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)
20a	Member Requests a Photo Copy of DD Form 214 Copy 3 Be Sent to the Central Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Washington, D.C.)	Benefits	Not important (33)	Not Important (5)	Not Important (5)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (2)	Mixed (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
21	Signature of Member Being Separated; Date	Verification	Mixed (29)	Not Important (6)	Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)	Mixed (2)	Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Not Important (1)
22	Official Authorized to Sign; Date	Verification	Important (14)	Important (3)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Mixed (1)	Very Important (1)
23	Type of Separation	Separation Information	Very Important (38)	Very Important (8)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (2)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (1)
24	Character of Service	Separation Information	Very Important (43)	Very Important (8)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)
25	Separation Authority	Separation Information	Very Important (32)	Very Important (7)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (2)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)

Table C.3—Continued

Block Number	Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	Air Force (16)	Navy (10)	Army (8)	Marine Corps (7)	Coast Guard (1)	National Guard (5)	DMDC (3)	OSD (3)	DFAS (1)
26	Separation Code	Separation Information	Very Important (36)	Very Important (7)	Very Important (4)	Important (3)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
27	Reentry Code	Separation Information	Very Important (40)	Very Important (8)	Very Important (5)	Very Important (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)
28	Narrative Reason for Separation	Separation Information	Very Important (40)	Very Important (8)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (2)	Mixed (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (2)	Very Important (1)
29	Dates of Time Lost During This Period	Separation Information	Important (27)	Important (4)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Mixed (2)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)	Not Important (1)
30	Member Requests Copy 4	Veteran Use	Not Important (29)	Not Important (6)	Not Important (2)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Important (3)	Not Important (1)

**Table C.4
Data Block Importance by Non-DoD Organizations**

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
1	Name	Identification	Very Important (42)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (8)	N/A	Very Important (4)	Very Important (3)
2	Department, Component, and Branch	Identification	Very Important (40)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (7)	N/A	Very Important (4)	Very Important (3)
3	Social Security Number	Identification	Very Important (47)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (11)	N/A	Very Important (4)	Very Important (3)
4a	Grade, Rate, or Rank	Identification	Very Important (43)	Important (4)	Important (7)	Not Important (1)	Important (4)	Very Important (3)
4b	Pay Grade	Identification	Very Important (43)	Important (4)	Important (7)	Not Important (1)	Important (4)	Very Important (3)
5	Date of Birth	Identification	Very Important (43)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (8)	N/A	Very Important (2)	Very Important (3)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
6	Reserve Obligation Termination Date	Reserve Duty	Mixed (39)	Mixed (4)	Important (7)	N/A	Not Important (2)	Not Important (3)
7a	Place of Entry into Active Duty	Benefits	Important (27)	Mixed (5)	Important (4)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Not Important (1)
7b	Home of Record at Time of Entry	Benefits	Important (28)	Mixed (5)	Very Important (5)	N/A	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)
8a	Last Duty Assignment and Major Command	Benefits	Mixed (33)	Mixed (5)	Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (2)	Very Important (2)
8b	Station Where Separated	Benefits	Mixed (30)	Mixed (5)	Important (6)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)
9	Command to Which Transferred	Reserve Duty	Mixed (27)	Mixed (5)	Not Important (5)	N/A	Very Important (1)	Mixed (2)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
10	SGLI Coverage Amount	Benefits	Not Important (36)	Very Important (5)	Not Important (6)	N/A	Not Important (1)	Not Important (2)
11	Primary Specialty	Veteran Use	Important (36)	Important (5)	Important (8)	N/A	Not Important (2)	Not Important (3)
12a	Date Entered Active Duty This Period	Service Record	Very Important (32)	Mixed (4)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)
12b	Separation Date This Period	Service Record	Very Important (32)	Important (5)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)
12c	Net Active Service This Period.	Service Record	Very Important (30)	Important (3)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (1)
12d	Total Prior Active Service	Service Record	Very Important (32)	Mixed (2)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (1)	Important (3)	Very Important (1)
12e	Total Prior Inactive Service	Service Record	Important (30)	Mixed (2)	Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
12f	Foreign Service	Service Record	Important (34)	Mixed (2)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)
12g	Sea Service	Service Record	Important (29)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)
12h	Initial Entry Training	Service Record	Important (33)	Not Important (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)
12i	Effective Date of Pay Grade	Service Record	Important (29)	Not Important (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (1)	Not Important (3)	Very Important (1)
13	Decorations, Medals, Badges, Citations, and Campaign Ribbons Awarded or Authorized	Veteran Use	Very Important (33)	Important (5)	Very Important (6)	N/A	Not Important (2)	Very Important (3)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
14	Military Education	Veteran Use	Mixed (34)	Important (6)	Mixed (7)	N/A	Not Important (2)	Not Important (3)
15a	Commissioned Through Service Academy	Benefits	Not Important (36)	Important (3)	Not Important (8)	N/A	N/A	Very Important (1)
15b	Commissioned Through ROTC Scholarship	Benefits	Not Important (36)	Important (3)	Not Important (8)	N/A	N/A	Very Important (1)
15c	Enlisted Under Loan Repayment Program	Pay	Not Important (36)	Important (3)	Not Important (8)	N/A	N/A	Very Important (1)
16	Days Accrued Leave Paid	Pay	Not Important (39)	Mixed (4)	Not Important (8)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Not Important (3)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
17	Member Was Provided Complete Dental Examination and All Appropriate Dental Services and Treatment Within 90 Days Prior to Separation	Benefits	Not Important (35)	Very Important (3)	Not Important (9)	N/A	N/A	Not Important (3)
18	Remarks	Catch-All	Very Important (29)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (5)	N/A	Very Important (3)	Very Important (4)
19a	Mailing Address After Separation	Contact After Separation	Mixed (33)	Very Important (4)	Mixed (5)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Not Important (1)
19b	Nearest Relative	Contact After Separation	Mixed (28)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (4)	N/A	Not Important (1)	Very Important (1)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
20	Member Requested Distribution of DD Form 214 Copy 6	Benefits	Not Important (33)	Not Important (4)	Mixed (5)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Mixed (2)
20a	Member Requests a Photo Copy of DD Form 214 Copy 3 Be Sent to the Central Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Washington, D.C.)	Benefits	Not Important (33)	Not Important (4)	Mixed (5)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Mixed (2)
21	Signature of Member Being Separated; Date	Verification	Mixed (29)	Not Important (2)	Important (4)	N/A	Mixed (2)	Very Important (1)
22	Official Authorized to Sign; Date	Verification	Important (14)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (2)	N/A	Not Important (1)	N/A

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
23	Type of Separation	Separation Information	Very Important (38)	Important (4)	Very Important (6)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (2)
24	Character of Service	Separation Information	Very Important (43)	Very Important (4)	Very Important (7)	Very Important (1)	Very Important (3)	Very Important (2)
25	Separation Authority	Separation Information	Very Important (32)	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (2)
26	Separation Code	Separation Information	Very Important (36)	Very Important (4)	Important (6)	Not Important (1)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (2)
27	Reentry Code	Separation Information	Very Important (40)	Important (4)	Very Important (7)	Not Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (3)
28	Narrative Reason for Separation	Separation Information	Very Important (40)	Important (4)	Very Important (7)	Not Important (1)	Important (4)	Very Important (2)

Table C.4—Continued

Block Number	Block Name	Primary Use	Overall (92)	VA (7)	State VA (12)	Department of Labor (3)	State Department of Labor (6)	VSO (8)
29	Dates of Time Lost During This Period	Separation Information	Important (27)	Important (4)	Not Important (4)	Not Important (1)	Very Important (3)	Mixed (2)
30	Member Requests Copy 4	Veteran Use	Not Important (29)	Not Important (3)	Mixed (4)	Not Important (1)	N/A	Very Important (2)

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Electronic systems are becoming increasingly complicated and interconnected, and those of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) are no exception. Due to the evolution of electronic systems, combined with the need to save time, energy, and money, DoD plans to replace paper delivery of servicemember separation information with electronic delivery. A timely analysis is critical to ensure DoD is best positioned to optimize and effectively orchestrate this opportunity. Clear, authoritative information on characterization of service and reasons for separation is critical for individuals as they re-enlist, change duty status, or transfer into civilian employment; for dependents and survivors; for government agencies that adjudicate veteran status and benefits; and for military departments, as they move toward fully integrated digital databases. DoD's DD Form 214 has existed since the 1950s, when it standardized information across the services by replacing service-level forms. The form is largely unchanged since that time and has remained the defining document to verify a servicemember's discharge from active duty.

As electronic information supplants paper, information provided by the services must continue to meet the important purposes of DD Form 214. To ensure consistency across the services and avoid omission of critical information, DoD needs an in-depth analysis of the current use of DD Form 214 to identify ways in which it could be improved to meet the diverse needs of the numerous organizations and individuals who use and depend on it.



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