

## **SEARCHING FOR THE ELUSIVE DD214-DISCHARGE HOW IMPORTANT IS IT**

My Journey on this mission started when a dear friend and wife of a veteran notified me that her husband had passed. She went on to tell me that she wanted him buried in Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery. The funeral director contacted Garrison Forest who promptly said “no problem”, just present us with a copy of his DD-214 or Discharge papers. The widow was not familiar with these documents and I explained to her that these papers proved his military service history. I suggested that she look through his important papers especially anything related to his military service. Her husband passed away on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021. After a short period of time she asked if I could assist her in obtaining a copy of this paper. “Sure”, I said what could go wrong?

My first call was to the War Memorial building and it's Director, Mr. Josh. I knew that some records of WWII and the Korean War Veterans were housed at the War Memorial building. Mr. Josh asked for the veteran's dates of service, which was 1945 to 1948 and was he a resident of the State of Maryland at the time of his induction and or discharge? Mr. Josh reported back to me that their records had no record of this veteran.

The widow informed me that the veteran enlisted in the State of North Carolina and was discharged in the State of New York. He also served in the Pacific theater in the Philippines under General Douglas MacArthur. He was in the Army Air Corp. Well, I said to myself, I will just have to go to my contact who has assisted me many times in the pass. So, I called Miss Melissa Miller, of the MDVA who I knew was working out of the Garrison Forest Office. I called and asked to speak to Miss Miller, only to be told that she had retired. My heart sunk, so I asked to speak to the person who took her place and it was a lady named Miss Cindy. Miss Cindy informed me what the family needed to do was to request a copy of this veterans DD-214 and/or Discharge papers through the Department of Defense. I informed the widow of my findings and to be on the look out for this letter from Miss Cindy.

Upon receipt of the VA form, the family completed it. It was sent off to St. Louis, Mo., which is one of the locations that housed the records of military veterans. After several weeks the family received a reply from St. Louis stating that back in 1973 there had been a fire which destroyed a lot of military records and this veterans records could have possibly been included in that fire. The records department in St. Louis also requested additional information to help narrow their search field, such as the spelling of his name: is it Dave or David, Bob or Robert, Karl or Carl. What was his date of birth, etc. Several

weeks passed and the Widow received word back that they were not successful in locating his records.

Not being able to prove his military service to me meant that he would not be buried in a veterans cemetery. My “No Problem” had turned into “Oh Crap”, what should be done next. Because I serve on the board of the nominating committee for the Naval Academy under Congressman C.A. “Dutch” Ruppberger, I reached out to his executive staff member and explained that I needed their assistance to do a formal Congressional request for these records. I was told that they do these kinds of request frequently, so the information was provided and a formal Congressional request was made. Back and forth requests were made for additional information on this veteran.

In the meantime, the Widow’s printer malfunctioned adding just another obstacle to resolve. So the Widow would e-mail the information to me and I would print it out. She would fill out these forms and I would hand deliver them to the Congressman's office. Easy right? Well, the first time I went to deliver the first set of documents, there was construction which blocked the entire front entrance to this building. Knowing how important it was to deliver these documents, I found my way around this construction site to the back of this building and to the Congressman's office where I rang the bell and knocked on the door. Due to Covid-19, I was instructed to slide the papers under the door. I did this several times knowing that this had to be done. These efforts going back and forth seemed to do the trick because shortly thereafter, I received a call from the Widow informing me that a “CERTIFICATION OF MILITARY SERVICE” had been found and sent to her as well as the funeral home. Job completed?? That would be too easy, because the funeral home now wanted additional proof of this veteran's ID. So I was asked to take his “Driver's License” and “Social Security Card” to the funeral home where they made a copy of these items.

At 10:30am, four (4) months later on a bright, clear, sunny day the veteran received final honors. The American Flag was presented to the Widow, a hand salute was rendered, followed by the playing of “TAPS”. His coffin was loaded back into the hearse and taken to his final resting place. This WWII veteran who participated in this world crisis, put his life on the line for his country.

The only difference with this case was this African American adopted the Double “V” Meaning victory overseas and victory at home against racism and bigotry. Thus laying the foundation for ending JIM CROW and facilitating the advancement towards a more perfect union. He returned to his civilian

endeavors to be a pillar of his community. What a shame it would have been for him and his family not to have received this honor which he earned. Rest in Peace dear friend from your labors for a job well done.

**So I ask again how important is a DD214/ Discharge paper?**