

HB0125 Courts - Military Records - Recordation and Inspection
Judiciary Committee – January 24, 2024
Sponsor: Delegate Mike Rogers
Position: Favorable

Testimony of Denise Robinson, founder, The Legacy of Honor Project.

Thank you, Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the committee, for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 125. For the record, my name is Denise Robinson, in 2016 I founded what is today known as The Legacy of Honor Project.

I support this bill. For the purpose of this hearing, to keep my testimony short, I am going to concentrate my testimony to WWII discharge papers and why they should be opened for historical and other purposes.

Over 16 million Americans served in WWII. Approximately 288,000 Marylanders served- of those- 61% drafted, 39% enlisted. Service members at the end of the war were issued a WD-AGO- 53-55- separation papers. If they were part of the National Guard or the Reserves they were issued a Certificate of Service.

After World War II, service members could **voluntarily** file their papers at the local courthouse. The papers were filed to prove honorable discharge status so they could receive military benefits such as hospital care, college tuition, mortgages, land lotteries, burial rights, etc.

Besides their WD-AGO 53-55 papers the only other proof of honorable service was the service member's military record which were filed in St. Louis at the National Archives by the military. On 12 July 1973, there was a massive fire at the Archives in St. Louis- 80% of the records were destroyed for men/women who served between 1

November 1912- January 1950. 80% of Air Force records were destroyed for those who served from 25 September 1947 – 1 January 1964.

If a person requests WWII service records from the National Archives, the archives staff will try to recreate the record- i.e. see what burned pieces may be left and put together a partial record. Sometimes that isn't even possible. This process from start to finish could take years- for only a partial or no record. There is also a fee for their research.

The one document that has a service member's complete history is the WD-AGO 53-55. If a service member filed their papers at the courthouse, an accurate and complete military history can be compiled in less time.

At the end of this written testimony – inserted is my great Uncle Howard's discharge papers. Like the majority who served in WWII, my Uncle Howard did not talk about his WWII service. We knew my grandfathers served in the Pacific (one died while serving) and my Great Uncle Howard in Europe, all were in the Army. There were 91 divisions in the Army during WWII- without any knowledge of unit, it is almost impossible to discover when and where a person served. Uncle Howard died young; when I was three.

Everything a historian/researcher needs to accurately put together a full military history is listed in this one document. Starting with -

Box 9- company, and unit. With this information one can search unit histories, morning reports (usually listed promotions, transfers), after-action reports, rosters, and general orders. Can also search for oral histories of others who served in the unit for additional details. The other vitally important boxes are 7- date of discharge- 24- Date of entry - 33 decorations and citations.

These boxes are proof of service and awards which allow myself and others to register a service member in the Purple Heart Registry, the ABMC WWII Registry, the WWII Theater Registry. The WD-AGO allows me and others to complete the family service record of our Gold Star families.

The most urgent need today- the proof of service for the VA to obtain a headstone for our service members who served in WWII who are lying in unmarked graves. Until I began work on The Legacy of Honor Project I had no idea how many men who served and died in WWII that are buried in unmarked graves. The vast majority never married/had children. Until I found them, they never had a flag placed on their grave on Memorial Day or Veterans Day. No flowers on their birthday, no wreath at Christmas. Their graves were often walked over, and no realized they had just crossed the grave of a hero.

Many of these men in unmarked graves were only children, so under the current law, there is no one who can access their discharge papers, prove their service so a headstone can be placed on their grave. Placing a headstone on an unmarked grave is the very least we can do for the men and women who fought for our freedom.

I urge the committee to give a favorable report on HB 125 so we can honor the men and women who fought and died for our Freedom.

I would like to thank Delegate Rogers for sponsoring this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and I am available if you have any questions.

Denise Robinson

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ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at Separation Center Ft Sheridan, Illinois Date 25 October 1945

A Bettwy

Maj Inf

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION
HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. Last Name — First Name — Middle Initial Robinson Jacob H			2. Army Serial No. 37 196 101	3. Grade S Sgt	4. Arm or Service Inf	5. Component AUS
6. Organization Co E 338 Inf			7. Date of Separation 25 Oct 45	8. Place of Separation Separation Center Fort Sheridan Illinois		
9. Permanent Address for Mailing Purposes 906 E Williams St Ottumwa Iowa			10. Date of Birth 7 Sep 05	11. Place of Birth Monroe Co Iowa		
12. Address from which Employment will be sought See 9			13. Color Eyes Blue	14. Color Hair Brown	15. Height 5 7	16. Weight 147 lbs.
18. Race White <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Negro <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/>		19. Marital Status Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/>		20. U.S. Citizen Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		21. Civilian Occupation and No. Refrigeration Mechanic

MILITARY HISTORY

22. Date of Induction 22 May 42	23. Date of Enlistment	24. Date of Entry Into Active Service 22 May 42	25. Place of Entry Into Service Ft Des Moines Ia
SELECTIVE Service Data Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	26. Registered Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	27. Local S. S. Board No. 1	28. County and State Mills Ia
29. Home Address at Time of Entry Into Service See 9		30. Military Occupational Specialty and No. Motor NCO 607	
31. Military Qualification and Date (i. e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) Combat Infantryman Badge			

32. Battles and Campaigns
Tunisian Naples Foggia Rome Arno No Appennines Po Valley

33. Decorations and Citations
American Theater Ribbon European African Middle Eastern Theater Ribbon w/1 Silver Battle Star 3 overseas Service Bars 1 Service Stripe Good Conduct Medal Purple Heart Medal GO 16 Hq 338 Inf 44 Bronze Star Medal

34. Wounds Received in Action

35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES				36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN		
Smallpox Im Sept 44	Typhoid St Sept 44	Tetanus St Jan 45	Other (Specify) --	Date of Departure 29 Dec 43	Destination ETO	Date of Arrival 7 Jan 44
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE				38. Highest Grade Held		
CONTINENTAL SERVICE		FOREIGN SERVICE		27 Sep 45 USA 13 Oct 45		
Years 1	Months 7	Days 19	Years 1	Months 9	Days 15	S Sgt

39. Prior Service
None

40. Reason and Authority for Separation
Conv of Govt RR 1-1 Demobilization AR 615-365 15 Dec 44

41. Service Schools Attended None	42. EDUCATION (YEARS)		
	Grammar 8	High School 1	College 0

PAY DATA

43. Longevity for Pay Purposes 3 Years 5 Months 16 Days	44. Mustering Out Pay Total \$300 This Payment \$100	45. Soldier Deposits None	46. Travel Pay \$24.90	47. Total Amount 210.37	Name of Disbursing Officer Leland E Rice Capt
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INSURANCE NOTICE

IMPORTANT If Premium is not paid when due or within thirty-one days thereafter, insurance will lapse. Make checks or money orders payable to the Treasurer of the U. S. and forward to Collections Subdivision, Veterans Administration, Washington 25, D. C.

48. Kind of Insurance Natl. Serv. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U. S. Govt. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>	49. How Paid Allotment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct to <input type="checkbox"/>	50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance 31 Oct 45	51. Date of Next Prem. Due (One month after 50) 30 Nov 45	52. Premium Due Each Month \$7.90	53. Intention of Veteran to Continue <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue <input type="checkbox"/>
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