

SBO159 Courts - Military Records - Recordation and Inspection
Judicial Proceedings Committee – January 30, 2024
Sponsor: Senator Dawn Gile
Position: Favorable

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

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Waldstreicher, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 159. For the record, my name is Denise Robinson, in 2016 I founded The Legacy of Honor Project: researching, telling the stories, and honoring the men and women who served in WWI and WWII with an emphasis on those who died while serving.

To keep my testimony short, I am going to concentrate my testimony to WWII discharge & separation paper and why access be granted for historical and other purposes- Why I support this bill.

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. Their discharge 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, and a right to a headstone by the VA.

Besides their WD-AGO 53-55 papers the only other proof of honorable service was the service member's actual military record which was 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 a WWII service record 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. The process from start to finish could take months to 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 chronological history is the WD-AGO 53-55. If a service member filed their papers at the courthouse, a more accurate and complete military history can be compiled in less time.

Some of the information on the discharge papers the National Archives and the State of Maryland have already been released to the public. In 1965 The War Records Division of Maryland released a 5-volume set, Maryland in the World War II; Register of Service Personnel containing the name and service number of every Marylander that enlisted or was drafted from Maryland. In 2004, the National Archives released enlistment records which included the person's name, place of enlistment, home state, birth year and service number.

The above information is not enough to compile a person's service record or prove benefits. In World War II- there were 91 Army Division, 42 National Guard Divisions. Each Division had approximately 15,000 troops. The Army Air Corps (Air Force) had an additional 15 divisions. The Navy had 7,601 ships, add land units, and Air wings- over 10,000 division type records to search. The Marines had 6 Divisions- 589,852 Marines served in those six. To find one person's military history in over 17

million records is near impossible unless a person has access to the service member's discharge papers.

(To help with the next section, at the end of this written testimony I have included my great Uncle Howard's discharge papers.)

The most important information a historian or researcher needs to accurately put together a full military history or prove 'actual' service are;

The top stamp-Honorable Discharge- proves eligibility for VA benefits- including burial and the right to a VA headstone (even if burial is in a private cemetery)

Box 9- company and unit. This one box narrows the search from 17 million records to their company of 150 – 200 troops. Now one can search unit histories, morning reports (usually listed promotions, transfers), after-action reports, rosters, and general orders. One can also search for oral histories of others who served in the unit for additional details.

Box 7- date of discharge- this date is needed to complete an application for a headstone request from the VA.

Box 24- Date of entry – date of enlistment and date of entry can be different. It verifies they served. A person can enlist, have a service number and never serve- example they were denied service due to medical conditions.

Box 33 decorations and citations. This box is proof needed to register a service member in the National Purple Heart Registry and other military registries. This box entitles them to designation of the award on their headstone.

The discharge papers allow me and others to complete the family service record of our Gold Star families. Many of our fallen had siblings, nieces, nephews, fathers, uncles, aunts, and grandfathers who served.

The most urgent need today- discharge papers are proof of honorable service. It allows historians, relatives, cemeteries, churches, etc, to request and obtain a VA headstone and place it on the unmarked graves of our service members.

Until I began work on The Legacy of Honor Project I had no idea how many men who served and/or died in WWII that are buried in unmarked graves. The vast majority never married/had children. Until I located their final resting place, 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 unmarked graves over time have become a path to other graves. No one realizing as they walked across the empty plot of grass, they were walking across the grave of one of our heroes.

Many of the 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. It is the final benefit promised to them from a grateful nation and state for their service.

I urge the committee to give a favorable report on SB 159 so we can honor the men and women who fought and died for our freedom.

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

Denise Robinson

Denise@thelegacyofhonor.com 443-510-9330

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 <u>Robinson Jacob H</u>			2. Army Serial No. <u>37 196 101</u>	3. Grade <u>S Sgt</u>	4. Arm or Service <u>Inf</u>	5. Component <u>AUS</u>
6. Organization <u>Co E 338 Inf</u>			7. Date of Separation <u>25 Oct 45</u>	8. Place of Separation <u>Separation Center Fort Sheridan Illinois</u>		
9. Permanent Address for Mailing Purposes <u>906 E Williams St Ottumwa Iowa</u>			10. Date of Birth <u>7 Sep 05</u>	11. Place of Birth <u>Monroe Co Iowa</u>		
12. Address from which Employment will be sought <u>See 9</u>			13. Color Eyes <u>Blue</u>	14. Color Hair <u>Brown</u>	15. Height <u>5 7</u>	16. Weight <u>147 lbs.</u>
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. <u>Refrigeration Mechanic</u>

MILITARY HISTORY

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

29. Home Address at Time of Entry Into Service
See 9

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 <u>Im</u>	Typhoid <u>St</u>	Tetanus <u>St</u>	Other (Specify) <u>--</u>	Date of Departure <u>29 Dec 43</u>	Destination <u>ETO</u>	Date of Arrival <u>7 Jan 44</u>
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE				38. Highest Grade Held <u>S Sgt</u>		
CONTINENTAL SERVICE		FOREIGN SERVICE		39. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN		
Years <u>1</u>	Months <u>7</u>	Days <u>19</u>	Years <u>1</u>	Months <u>9</u>	Days <u>15</u>	Date of Departure <u>27 Sep 45</u>
39. Prior Service <u>None</u>				Date of Arrival <u>13 Oct 45</u>		

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

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

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

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 <u>31 Oct 45</u>	51. Date of Next Prem. Due (One month after 50) <u>30 Nov 45</u>	52. Premium Due Each Month <u>\$7.90</u>	53. Intention of Veteran to Continue <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue <input type="checkbox"/>
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