Obtaining recognition for traumatic events should be a lot easier than it currently is. It feels like we have to jump through hoops and over high hurdles to get the VA to realize that we were traumatized due to something that happened during our military service. There are several reasons that have been thrown around as to why the VA makes it so hard to get recognized for PTSD. The bottom line is, when you do get recognized, you will receive benefits until you pass on. This is a good reason as to why it does take so long and why it is so difficult. There are only a few ways that you can get service connection for PTSD. Each one of those ways has a lot to do with what your records show.

If you have Purple Heart or Combat Action Ribbon or an award that signifies that you were involved in a combat situation, then you don’t have to provide an account of what happened to you. The VA will concede that a stressful event happened. All you would need then is a current diagnosis of PTSD and a link between your PTSD and your service. 

**EXAMPLE**
The veteran has expressed stressful events that happened while on active duty to cause him to currently suffer from PTSD. I believe that he currently does have PTSD and that it is attributed to the stressors he faced as a result of his military service.

If you do not have a Purple Heart or Combat Action Ribbon, the issue of PTSD becomes much more difficult to get granted. If you have a mental condition that has been with you for the last several years, it is likely that your memory is not so good. With that being said, if you file a claim for PTSD without your DD-214 showing combat action, you will have to use your bad memory as best you can, to recall the exact month and year the incident that caused you to suffer from PTSD, took place. If you remember filing a claim for PTSD and not meeting the above combat verified criteria of having a medal or award that signifies combat, you would have to provide the exact month and year that your stressful event took place. I understand how difficult this request is, but it is what you have to do. If you say that you can’t remember the exact month and year the VA will deny your claim. We have argued that a month is not really good enough and that we need more of a time window because most of us cannot remember dates that well. The VA changed the criteria to allow for 2 months! So now you have a 2-month window that you can use to justify your stressor.

**EXAMPLE**
In January or February of 1971 I was involved in the following stressful event...
If you did not use a 2-month window and simply said, “In 1971 I was involved in a stressful event...” you will be denied because you did not provide adequate information to afford a unit records search to try and verify your stressful event.

The VA has to send your information off to a records research center for verification. Your unit records will be looked at to try and verify that a stressful event possibly took place. They will not send your statement off to the research center if you do not provide the exact month and year, of the stressful event, up to a 2-month period.

There is a specific application form that everyone applying for PTSD should fill out and will probably have to fill out before being granted. This form is called a VA Form 21-0781 STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF CLAIM FOR SERVICE CONNECTION FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) The instructions for this form reads as follows: INSTRUCTIONS List the stressful incident or incidents that occurred in service that you feel contributed to you current condition. For each incident, provide a description of what happened, the date, the geographic location, your unit assignment and dates of assignment, and the full names and unit assignments of servicepersons you know of who were killed or injured during the incident. Please provide dates within at least a 60-day range and do not use nicknames. It is important that you complete the form in detail and be as specified as you can so that research or military records can be thoroughly conducted. If you do not know the answer, write “unknown.” If more space is needed, attach a separate sheet, indicating the item number to which the answers apply.

If you do not know the specific 60 day period and put “unknown” in that box, your issue will not be sent to the research center for verification. If you do not put the place you were, or the unit assignment and length you were assigned to the unit, you will not have your issue sent off for verification. You will get a denial letter saying that there was insufficient evidence to send your records off, for a unit records search.

The stressful event you discuss has to be something that would be verified by reviewing your unit records, meaning something that would be recorded in your unit's records. Events that are against the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) would not be recorded in your unit records and would probably not be varifiable. I had a veteran say that he was a fuel truck driver in Vietnam, he contended that he was constantly under fire and that soldiers used his diesel to burn bodies and villages. We can't say that those things didn't happen, but we can say that they wouldn't have been recorded. The veteran had been continuously denied service connection for PTSD. I asked him if there were any firefights or explosions that he could recall during one of his routes. He stated that an ammo dump was blown up not far from where he had parked his truck. When he used that statement for his stressful event, his unit records were reviewed and it did show that he was in the area when the ammo dump was assaulted. His PTSD was then granted. Make sure that the events you discuss can be verified by a search of your unit’s records.
Most of the time, we are not going to remember the exact names of people we saw killed or wounded in battle. Partly because of the traumatic event itself, partly because of the amount of time since the incident occurred, but mostly because we hardly knew our fellow service members first and last names. Usually veterans tell me that they only remember what was on their shirts, which was a last name, or that they only went by a nickname. You still have to put something down, to the best of your knowledge. Remember to fill out the form completely or it may not even be sent to the research center. The VA will just deny you and say that they didn't have enough information to send it off for verification.

A mental health doctor saying that you have PTSD and that it is due to your service does not help you, unless you have shown the doctor evidence that can verify your story. If you have not provided evidence for the doctor to review, the VA will deny you stating, "Even though the doctor diagnosed you with PTSD and stated that it was likely due to your service in the military, he was using your unsubstantiated accounts and was not privy to any evidence of record". The medical diagnosis is only good if your stressor can be verified. I understand how difficult this is for most veterans, but it is something that has to be accomplished if you wish to be recognized for PTSD.

1. Write a stressor statement. Explain what happened to you as vividly as you can. You want the person reading it to be able to put himself in your position and see what you went through.

2. Try and remember the specific date (60 day window) that the stressful event took place, the location of the event, the unit you were assigned to at the time of the event, and the length of time you were in that unit. Place this information on a VAF 21-0781. If you do not follow these instructions, the VA will not send your records off for research and verification of your stressor.

3. Ensure that a doctor has diagnosed you with PTSD, and that he has linked it to your military service, based on the stressor statement you provided.

4. File your claim for service connection for PTSD. If your decision is unfavorable, we will be able to continue our appeal and you will receive a clear reasons and bases as to why they denied you. You will then be able to adequately respond.

It is not easy to remember traumatic incidents and be as accurate as you need to be, but it is something that has to be done. Follow these steps when filing a claim for combat related PTSD.

Disabled American Veterans

Service Officer, Louisiana