



Archivist of the
United States

12 July 2022

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

I am writing to provide you with an update on the backlog of requests for military records at the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA), National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).

On March 7, 2022, NPRC staff were directed back to on-site work and all building occupancy limitations were lifted. At that time, the backlog stood at approximately 603,000 requests. Since then, the NPRC has received approximately 351,000 new requests. In the four months since March 7, NPRC has processed approximately 455,000 requests and reduced the backlog to 499,000 requests.

NPRC's backlog falls into two categories: requests for separation documents, which account for about 60% of new requests; and other requests, which account for about 40% of new requests.

- We are prioritizing the requests for separation documents, because these are the documents typically needed by veterans and their dependents to prove eligibility for a variety of benefits. We expect to eliminate this portion of the backlog by the end of this fiscal year, and restore our pre-pandemic response times of under ten days for these requests later this fall.
- Other requests are more complex and involve more than reproducing documents. These include requests for complete copies of personnel and non-emergency medical records, many of which require extensive review and redaction of third party personal data before they may be released; the extraction of information to verify participation in specific campaigns or the award of specific medals; or the extensive research of organizational records, including morning reports and unit rosters. This category also includes many requests which require the reconstruction of records lost in the [1973 fire](#). As we make progress on eliminating the backlog of requests for separation documents, we will shift resources to address these requests.

In addition to the work described above, and as it has done since the beginning of the pandemic, NPRC staff prioritize and promptly respond to time-sensitive emergency requests, such as those

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involving funeral services for deceased veterans or obtaining shelter for homeless veterans. The NPRC also continues to prioritize requests from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for the temporary loan of original records needed to adjudicate claims. Nearly all requests from the VBA are being serviced in three days or less, and the NPRC Director meets regularly with the Director of the VA Regional Office in St. Louis to ensure responsiveness.

Please note that veterans who are making an initial or supplemental benefits claim through the Veterans Benefits Administration do not need to request their records from the NPRC before beginning the claim process. The VA's [*Duty to Assist*](#) in retrieving records involves working directly with the NPRC to obtain the records necessary to adjudicate a claim. For veterans who do not have a copy of their records, this is the most efficient and expedient manner to initiate a claim with the VA.

While service has been restored to pre-pandemic levels for the VBA and other Federal agencies, and service times have been significantly improved for veterans seeking separation documents, eliminating the other portion of the backlog and restoring pre-pandemic response times for those cases will take additional time and considerable effort. By the end of this fiscal year, the NPRC will be able to more accurately project a timeline for this backlog and report it in a follow up letter to you. In the meantime, the NPRC will continue to hire additional staff, operate multiple shifts between the hours of 6:00 a.m. thru 3:00 a.m. daily, and operate overtime shifts on most Saturdays, Sundays, and select holidays.

Thank you for your continued support of our Nation's veterans and the NPRC's mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debra Steidel Wall".

DEBRA STEIDEL WALL
Acting Archivist of the United States

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Members of the U.S. Senate