

Buddy Statement Field Guide

How to write a firsthand statement that actually helps a VA claim



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WHAT A BUDDY STATEMENT IS

A buddy statement — VA calls it a Lay/Witness Statement (VA Form 21-10210) — is a written account from someone who personally witnessed something relevant to a veteran's disability claim: an in-service event, injury, or exposure, or the way a condition affects the veteran's life today. Anyone can write one. No medical or legal training is required. VA reviews lay evidence alongside medical and service records.

A buddy statement is most useful when it describes something the writer actually saw, heard, or experienced firsthand — not a summary of what the veteran told them happened, and not a medical judgment about causes or diagnosis.

WHO CAN WRITE ONE

- A fellow service member who witnessed an in-service event, injury, accident, or incident
- A spouse, family member, or close friend who has observed the veteran's symptoms or limitations over time
- A coworker, supervisor, or employer who has observed functional effects on work
- Anyone else with direct, firsthand knowledge relevant to the claim

OBSERVED FACT VS. ASSUMPTION VS. MEDICAL CONCLUSION

This is the most important distinction in a useful buddy statement.

TYPE	WHAT IT IS	EXAMPLE	USE IN A STATEMENT?
Observed fact	Something you personally saw, heard, or experienced	"I was in the truck when it hit the IED. I saw him hit his head on the dash."	Yes — the core of a strong statement
Assumption	A guess or inference you didn't actually witness	"He probably has PTSD from that."	No — leave this out
Medical conclusion	A diagnosis, causation opinion, or clinical judgment	"His back injury caused his depression."	No — this is for a medical professional

A statement built on specific, dated, firsthand observations is more useful to a claim than one built on strong opinions about what caused what. If you believe something but didn't witness it directly, say how you know it (e.g., "he told me at the time") rather than presenting it as something you saw.

ETHICAL PROMPTS BEFORE YOU WRITE

- Only describe what you actually witnessed or experienced directly.
- Be specific about dates, locations, and circumstances where you can — but don't guess at details you don't actually remember. "I don't recall the exact date, but it was during our deployment to ___ in the fall of ___" is honest and still useful.
- Don't add detail to make a statement sound more dramatic or certain than what you actually remember.
- Don't write a statement for someone else's experience that you didn't observe, even if you believe it's true.
- If you're the veteran writing about your own experience, describe your actual symptoms, frequency, and functional impact — not what you think will help the claim.

EXAMPLES OF STRONG SPECIFICITY

(Illustrative examples only — not any veteran's actual story.)

Weak:

"He was never the same after the war."

Stronger:

"I served with him in the same unit from 2009 to 2011. Before our deployment, he was talkative and went out with the group most weekends. After we got back in late 2011, I noticed he stopped coming to unit gatherings, seemed jumpy around loud noises like fireworks, and told me more than once that he wasn't sleeping well."

Weak:

"She has bad knees from the Army."

Stronger:

"I worked alongside her at [employer] from 2018 to the present. Starting around 2020, I noticed she began using the elevator instead of the stairs, asked to be reassigned from a role that required standing for long periods, and mentioned needing to ice her knees most evenings after work."

Notice these examples describe what the witness saw and when — not a diagnosis, and not an opinion about what caused the condition.

FILLABLE BUDDY STATEMENT OUTLINE

Veteran's name: _____

Your name: _____

Your relationship to the veteran (unit, family, coworker, friend): _____

How long you've known the veteran, and in what context:

What did you personally witness or observe? Be as specific as you can about time, place, and circumstances.

If your statement concerns ongoing symptoms or functional effects rather than a single event, describe what you've observed and over what period of time:

Anything else you personally observed that you believe is relevant:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact information (for VA follow-up only — phone or email). Do not include Social Security number, VA file number, or banking details.

HOW TO SUBMIT

- Complete VA Form 21-10210, Lay/Witness Statement, and submit it online or by mail, or
- Write and submit a plain statement on paper — VA accepts either format, along with the Statement in Support of Claim (VA Form 21-4138) for a veteran's own statement.

Buddy statements are typically submitted with the veteran's claim, or added later as supplemental evidence — including as new and relevant evidence with a Supplemental Claim.

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS NOT

This guide helps a witness or veteran organize an accurate, firsthand account. It does not tell anyone what to say, does not coach exaggeration or invented detail, and does not offer legal or medical advice. It does not establish service connection or guarantee any outcome. Veteran Claims is not part of, and is not endorsed by, the Department of Veterans Affairs.

VERIFIED AS OF AND SOURCES

Verified as of: August 11, 2026.

RULES CHANGE: Form versions and submission options can change — confirm current requirements at the official source links below.

- Lay witness statement form, VA Form 21-10210 — <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-10210/>
- Evidence needed for your disability claim (lay evidence) — <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>
- Statement in Support of Claim, VA Form 21-4138 — <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-4138/>
- Supplemental Claims (buddy statements as new and relevant evidence) — <https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/supplemental-claim/>

Continue at the official source: <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-10210/>