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AUTHORITY: 38 U.S.C. 1155, unless otherwise noted.

SOURCE: 29 FR 6718, May 22, 1964, unless otherwise noted.

## Subpart A—General Policy in Rating

### § 4.1 Essentials of evaluative rating.

This rating schedule is primarily a guide in the evaluation of disability resulting from all types of diseases and injuries encountered as a result of or incident to military service. The percentage ratings represent as far as can practicably be determined the average impairment in earning capacity resulting from such diseases and injuries and their residual conditions in civil occupations. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are considered adequate to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses proportionate to the severity of the several grades of disability. For the application of this schedule, accurate and fully descriptive medical examinations are required, with emphasis upon the limitation of activity imposed by the disabling condition. Over a period of many years, a veteran's disability claim may require reratings in accordance with changes in laws, medical knowledge and his or her physical or mental condition. It is thus essential, both in the examination and in the evaluation of disability, that each disability be viewed in relation to its history.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

### § 4.2 Interpretation of examination reports.

Different examiners, at different times, will not describe the same disability in the same language. Features

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of the disability which must have persisted unchanged may be overlooked or a change for the better or worse may not be accurately appreciated or described. It is the responsibility of the rating specialist to interpret reports of examination in the light of the whole recorded history, reconciling the various reports into a consistent picture so that the current rating may accurately reflect the elements of disability present. Each disability must be considered from the point of view of the veteran working or seeking work. If a diagnosis is not supported by the findings on the examination report or if the report does not contain sufficient detail, it is incumbent upon the rating board to return the report as inadequate for evaluation purposes.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

**§ 4.3 Resolution of reasonable doubt.**

It is the defined and consistently applied policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs to administer the law under a broad interpretation, consistent, however, with the facts shown in every case. When after careful consideration of all procurable and assembled data, a reasonable doubt arises regarding the degree of disability such doubt will be resolved in favor of the claimant. See § 3.102 of this chapter.

[40 FR 42535, Sept. 15, 1975]

**§ 4.6 Evaluation of evidence.**

The element of the weight to be accorded the character of the veteran's service is but one factor entering into the considerations of the rating boards in arriving at determinations of the evaluation of disability. Every element in any way affecting the probative value to be assigned to the evidence in each individual claim must be thoroughly and conscientiously studied by each member of the rating board in the light of the established policies of the Department of Veterans Affairs to the end that decisions will be equitable and just as contemplated by the requirements of the law.

**§ 4.7 Higher of two evaluations.**

Where there is a question as to which of two evaluations shall be applied, the higher evaluation will be assigned if

the disability picture more nearly approximates the criteria required for that rating. Otherwise, the lower rating will be assigned.

**§ 4.9 Congenital or developmental defects.**

Mere congenital or developmental defects, absent, displaced or supernumerary parts, refractive error of the eye, personality disorder and mental deficiency are not diseases or injuries in the meaning of applicable legislation for disability compensation purposes.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

**§ 4.10 Functional impairment.**

The basis of disability evaluations is the ability of the body as a whole, or of the psyche, or of a system or organ of the body to function under the ordinary conditions of daily life including employment. Whether the upper or lower extremities, the back or abdominal wall, the eyes or ears, or the cardiovascular, digestive, or other system, or psyche are affected, evaluations are based upon lack of usefulness, of these parts or systems, especially in self-support. This imposes upon the medical examiner the responsibility of furnishing, in addition to the etiological, anatomical, pathological, laboratory and prognostic data required for ordinary medical classification, full description of the effects of disability upon the person's ordinary activity. In this connection, it will be remembered that a person may be too disabled to engage in employment although he or she is up and about and fairly comfortable at home or upon limited activity.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

**§ 4.13 Effect of change of diagnosis.**

The repercussion upon a current rating of service connection when change is made of a previously assigned diagnosis or etiology must be kept in mind. The aim should be the reconciliation and continuance of the diagnosis or etiology upon which service connection for the disability had been granted. The relevant principle enunciated in § 4.125, entitled "Diagnosis of mental

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disorders," should have careful attention in this connection. When any change in evaluation is to be made, the rating agency should assure itself that there has been an actual change in the conditions, for better or worse, and not merely a difference in thoroughness of the examination or in use of descriptive terms. This will not, of course, preclude the correction of erroneous ratings, nor will it preclude assignment of a rating in conformity with § 4.7.

[29 FR 6718, May 22, 1964, as amended at 61 FR 52700, Oct. 8, 1996]

**§ 4.14 Avoidance of pyramiding.**

The evaluation of the same disability under various diagnoses is to be avoided. Disability from injuries to the muscles, nerves, and joints of an extremity may overlap to a great extent, so that special rules are included in the appropriate bodily system for their evaluation. Dyspnea, tachycardia, nervousness, fatigability, etc., may result from many causes; some may be service connected, others, not. Both the use of manifestations not resulting from service-connected disease or injury in establishing the service-connected evaluation, and the evaluation of the same manifestation under different diagnoses are to be avoided.

**§ 4.15 Total disability ratings.**

The ability to overcome the handicap of disability varies widely among individuals. The rating, however, is based primarily upon the average impairment in earning capacity, that is, upon the economic or industrial handicap which must be overcome and not from individual success in overcoming it. However, full consideration must be given to unusual physical or mental effects in individual cases, to peculiar effects of occupational activities, to defects in physical or mental endowment preventing the usual amount of success in overcoming the handicap of disability and to the effect of combinations of disability. Total disability will be considered to exist when there is present any impairment of mind or body which is sufficient to render it impossible for the average person to follow a substantially gainful occupation; *Provided*, That permanent total disability shall be taken to exist when

the impairment is reasonably certain to continue throughout the life of the disabled person. The following will be considered to be permanent total disability: the permanent loss of the use of both hands, or of both feet, or of one hand and one foot, or of the sight of both eyes, or becoming permanently helpless or permanently bedridden. Other total disability ratings are scheduled in the various bodily systems of this schedule.

**§ 4.16 Total disability ratings for compensation based on unemployability of the individual.**

(a) Total disability ratings for compensation may be assigned, where the schedular rating is less than total, when the disabled person is, in the judgment of the rating agency, unable to secure or follow a substantially gainful occupation as a result of service-connected disabilities: *Provided* That, if there is only one such disability, this disability shall be ratable at 60 percent or more, and that, if there are two or more disabilities, there shall be at least one disability ratable at 40 percent or more, and sufficient additional disability to bring the combined rating to 70 percent or more. For the above purpose of one 60 percent disability, or one 40 percent disability in combination, the following will be considered as one disability: (1) Disabilities of one or both upper extremities, or of one or both lower extremities, including the bilateral factor, if applicable, (2) disabilities resulting from common etiology or a single accident, (3) disabilities affecting a single body system, e.g. orthopedic, digestive, respiratory, cardiovascular-renal, neuropsychiatric, (4) multiple injuries incurred in action, or (5) multiple disabilities incurred as a prisoner of war. It is provided further that the existence or degree of nonservice-connected disabilities or previous unemployability status will be disregarded where the percentages referred to in this paragraph for the service-connected disability or disabilities are met and in the judgment of the rating agency such service-connected disabilities render the veteran unemployable. Marginal employment shall not

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be considered substantially gainful employment. For purposes of this section, marginal employment generally shall be deemed to exist when a veteran's earned annual income does not exceed the amount established by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, as the poverty threshold for one person. Marginal employment may also be held to exist, on a facts found basis (includes but is not limited to employment in a protected environment such as a family business or sheltered workshop), when earned annual income exceeds the poverty threshold. Consideration shall be given in all claims to the nature of the employment and the reason for termination.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501)

(b) It is the established policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs that all veterans who are unable to secure and follow a substantially gainful occupation by reason of service-connected disabilities shall be rated totally disabled. Therefore, rating boards should submit to the Director, Compensation and Pension Service, for extra-schedular consideration all cases of veterans who are unemployable by reason of service-connected disabilities, but who fail to meet the percentage standards set forth in paragraph (a) of this section. The rating board will include a full statement as to the veteran's service-connected disabilities, employment history, educational and vocational attainment and all other factors having a bearing on the issue.

[40 FR 42535, Sept. 15, 1975, as amended at 54 FR 4281, Jan. 30, 1989; 55 FR 31580, Aug. 3, 1990; 58 FR 39664, July 26, 1993; 61 FR 52700, Oct. 8, 1996]

**§ 4.17 Total disability ratings for pension based on unemployability and age of the individual.**

All veterans who are basically eligible and who are unable to secure and follow a substantially gainful occupation by reason of disabilities which are likely to be permanent shall be rated as permanently and totally disabled. For the purpose of pension, the permanence of the percentage requirements of § 4.16 is a requisite. When the percentage requirements are met, and the disabilities involved are of a perma-

nent nature, a rating of permanent and total disability will be assigned if the veteran is found to be unable to secure and follow substantially gainful employment by reason of such disability. Prior employment or unemployment status is immaterial if in the judgment of the rating board the veteran's disabilities render him or her unemployable. In making such determinations, the following guidelines will be used:

(a) Marginal employment, for example, as a self-employed farmer or other person, while employed in his or her own business, or at odd jobs or while employed at less than half the usual remuneration will not be considered incompatible with a determination of unemployability, if the restriction, as to securing or retaining better employment, is due to disability.

(b) Claims of all veterans who fail to meet the percentage standards but who meet the basic entitlement criteria and are unemployable, will be referred by the rating board to the Adjudication Officer under § 3.321(b)(2) of this chapter.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 1155; 38 U.S.C. 3102)

[43 FR 45348, Oct. 2, 1978, as amended at 56 FR 57985, Nov. 15, 1991]

**§ 4.17a Misconduct etiology.**

A permanent and total disability rating under the provisions of §§ 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17 will not be precluded by reason of the coexistence of misconduct disability when:

(a) A veteran, regardless of employment status, also has innocently acquired 100 percent disability, or

(b) Where unemployable, the veteran has other disabilities innocently acquired which meet the percentage requirements of §§ 4.16 and 4.17 and would render, in the judgment of the rating agency, the average person unable to secure or follow a substantially gainful occupation.

[40 FR 42536, Sept. 15, 1975, as amended at 43 FR 45349, Oct. 2, 1978]

**§ 4.18 Unemployability.**

A veteran may be considered as unemployable upon termination of employment which was provided on account of disability, or in which special consideration was given on account of

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the same, when it is satisfactorily shown that he or she is unable to secure further employment. With amputations, sequelae of fractures and other residuals of traumatism shown to be of static character, a showing of continuous unemployability from date of incurrence, or the date the condition reached the stabilized level, is a general requirement in order to establish the fact that present unemployability is the result of the disability. However, consideration is to be given to the circumstances of employment in individual claims, and, if the employment was only occasional, intermittent, try-out or unsuccessful, or eventually terminated on account of the disability, present unemployability may be attributed to the static disability. Where unemployability for pension previously has been established on the basis of combined service-connected and non-service-connected disabilities and the service-connected disability or disabilities have increased in severity, § 4.16 is for consideration.

[40 FR 42536, Sept. 15, 1975, as amended at 43 FR 45349, Oct. 2, 1978]

**§ 4.19 Age in service-connected claims.**

Age may not be considered as a factor in evaluating service-connected disability; and unemployability, in service-connected claims, associated with advancing age or intercurrent disability, may not be used as a basis for a total disability rating. Age, as such, is a factor only in evaluations of disability not resulting from service, i.e., for the purposes of pension.

[29 FR 6718, May 22, 1964, as amended at 43 FR 45349, Oct. 2, 1978]

**§ 4.20 Analogous ratings.**

When an unlisted condition is encountered it will be permissible to rate under a closely related disease or injury in which not only the functions affected, but the anatomical localization and symptomatology are closely analogous. Conjectural analogies will be avoided, as will the use of analogous ratings for conditions of doubtful diagnosis, or for those not fully supported by clinical and laboratory findings. Nor will ratings assigned to organic dis-

eases and injuries be assigned by analogy to conditions of functional origin.

**§ 4.21 Application of rating schedule.**

In view of the number of atypical instances it is not expected, especially with the more fully described grades of disabilities, that all cases will show all the findings specified. Findings sufficiently characteristic to identify the disease and the disability therefrom, and above all, coordination of rating with impairment of function will, however, be expected in all instances.

[41 FR 11293, Mar. 18, 1976]

**§ 4.22 Rating of disabilities aggravated by active service.**

In cases involving aggravation by active service, the rating will reflect only the degree of disability over and above the degree existing at the time of entrance into the active service, whether the particular condition was noted at the time of entrance into the active service, or it is determined upon the evidence of record to have existed at that time. It is necessary therefore, in all cases of this character to deduct from the present degree of disability the degree, if ascertainable, of the disability existing at the time of entrance into active service, in terms of the rating schedule, except that if the disability is total (100 percent) no deduction will be made. The resulting difference will be recorded on the rating sheet. If the degree of disability at the time of entrance into the service is not ascertainable in terms of the schedule, no deduction will be made.

**§ 4.23 Attitude of rating officers.**

It is to be remembered that the majority of applicants are disabled persons who are seeking benefits of law to which they believe themselves entitled. In the exercise of his or her functions, rating officers must not allow their personal feelings to intrude; an antagonistic, critical, or even abusive attitude on the part of a claimant should not in any instance influence the officers in the handling of the case. Fairness and courtesy must at all times be shown to applicants by all employees

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whose duties bring them in contact, directly or indirectly, with the Department's claimants.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

**§ 4.24 Correspondence.**

All correspondence relative to the interpretation of the schedule for rating disabilities, requests for advisory opinions, questions regarding lack of clarity or application to individual cases involving unusual difficulties, will be addressed to the Director, Compensation and Pension Service. A clear statement will be made of the point or points upon which information is desired, and the complete case file will be simultaneously forwarded to Central Office. Rating agencies will assure themselves that the recent report of physical examination presents an adequate picture of the claimant's condition. Claims in regard to which the schedule evaluations are considered inadequate or excessive, and errors in the schedule will be similarly brought to attention.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

**§ 4.25 Combined ratings table.**

Table I, Combined Ratings Table, results from the consideration of the efficiency of the individual as affected first by the most disabling condition, then by the less disabling condition, then by other less disabling conditions, if any, in the order of severity. Thus, a person having a 60 percent disability is considered 40 percent efficient. Proceeding from this 40 percent efficiency, the effect of a further 30 percent disability is to leave only 70 percent of the efficiency remaining after consideration of the first disability, or 28 percent efficiency altogether. The individual is thus 72 percent disabled, as shown in table I opposite 60 percent and under 30 percent.

(a) To use table I, the disabilities will first be arranged in the exact order of their severity, beginning with the greatest disability and then combined with use of table I as hereinafter indicated. For example, if there are two disabilities, the degree of one disability will be read in the left column and the degree of the other in the top row, whichever is appropriate. The figures

appearing in the space where the column and row intersect will represent the combined value of the two. This combined value will then be converted to the nearest number divisible by 10, and combined values ending in 5 will be adjusted upward. Thus, with a 50 percent disability and a 30 percent disability, the combined value will be found to be 65 percent, but the 65 percent must be converted to 70 percent to represent the final degree of disability. Similarly, with a disability of 40 percent, and another disability of 20 percent, the combined value is found to be 52 percent, but the 52 percent must be converted to the nearest degree divisible by 10, which is 50 percent. If there are more than two disabilities, the disabilities will also be arranged in the exact order of their severity and the combined value for the first two will be found as previously described for two disabilities. The combined value, exactly as found in table I, will be combined with the degree of the third disability (in order of severity). The combined value for the three disabilities will be found in the space where the column and row intersect, and if there are only three disabilities will be converted to the nearest degree divisible by 10, adjusting final 5's upward. Thus, if there are three disabilities ratable at 60 percent, 40 percent, and 20 percent, respectively, the combined value for the first two will be found opposite 60 and under 40 and is 76 percent. This 76 will be combined with 20 and the combined value for the three is 81 percent. This combined value will be converted to the nearest degree divisible by 10 which is 80 percent. The same procedure will be employed when there are four or more disabilities. (See table I).

(b) Except as otherwise provided in this schedule, the disabilities arising from a single disease entity, e.g., arthritis, multiple sclerosis, cerebro-vascular accident, etc., are to be rated separately as are all other disabling conditions, if any. All disabilities are then to be combined as described in paragraph (a) of this section. The conversion to the nearest degree divisible by 10 will be done only once per rating decision, will follow the combining of

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all disabilities, and will be the last procedure in determining the combined degree of disability.

TABLE I—COMBINED RATINGS TABLE  
[10 combined with 10 is 19]

	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
19 .....	27	35	43	51	60	68	76	84	92
20 .....	28	36	44	52	60	68	76	84	92
21 .....	29	37	45	53	61	68	76	84	92
22 .....	30	38	45	53	61	69	77	84	92
23 .....	31	38	46	54	62	69	77	85	92
24 .....	32	39	47	54	62	70	77	85	92
25 .....	33	40	48	55	63	70	78	85	93
26 .....	33	41	48	56	63	70	78	85	93
27 .....	34	42	49	56	64	71	78	85	93
28 .....	35	42	50	57	64	71	78	86	93
29 .....	36	43	50	57	65	72	79	86	93
30 .....	37	44	51	58	65	72	79	86	93
31 .....	38	45	52	59	66	72	79	86	93
32 .....	39	46	52	59	66	73	80	86	93
33 .....	40	46	53	60	67	73	80	87	93
34 .....	41	47	54	60	67	74	80	87	93
35 .....	42	48	55	61	68	74	81	87	94
36 .....	42	49	55	62	68	74	81	87	94
37 .....	43	50	56	62	69	75	81	87	94
38 .....	44	50	57	63	69	75	81	88	94
39 .....	45	51	57	63	70	76	82	88	94
40 .....	46	52	58	64	70	76	82	88	94
41 .....	47	53	59	65	71	76	82	88	94
42 .....	48	54	59	65	71	77	83	88	94
43 .....	49	54	60	66	72	77	83	89	94
44 .....	50	55	61	66	72	78	83	89	94
45 .....	51	56	62	67	73	78	84	89	95
46 .....	51	57	62	68	73	78	84	89	95
47 .....	52	58	63	68	74	79	84	89	95
48 .....	53	58	64	69	74	79	84	90	95
49 .....	54	59	64	69	75	80	85	90	95
50 .....	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95
51 .....	56	61	66	71	76	80	85	90	95
52 .....	57	62	66	71	76	81	86	90	95
53 .....	58	62	67	72	77	81	86	91	95
54 .....	59	63	68	72	77	82	86	91	95
55 .....	60	64	69	73	78	82	87	91	96
56 .....	60	65	69	74	78	82	87	91	96
57 .....	61	66	70	74	79	83	87	91	96
58 .....	62	66	71	75	79	83	87	92	96
59 .....	63	67	71	75	80	84	88	92	96
60 .....	64	68	72	76	80	84	88	92	96
61 .....	65	69	73	77	81	84	88	92	96
62 .....	66	70	73	77	81	85	89	92	96
63 .....	67	70	74	78	82	85	89	93	96
64 .....	68	71	75	78	82	86	89	93	96
65 .....	69	72	76	79	83	86	90	93	97
66 .....	69	73	76	80	83	86	90	93	97
67 .....	70	74	77	80	84	87	90	93	97
68 .....	71	74	78	81	84	87	90	94	97
69 .....	72	75	78	81	85	88	91	94	97
70 .....	73	76	79	82	85	88	91	94	97
71 .....	74	77	80	83	86	88	91	94	97
72 .....	75	78	80	83	86	89	92	94	97
73 .....	76	78	81	84	87	89	92	95	97
74 .....	77	79	82	84	87	90	92	95	97
75 .....	78	80	83	85	88	90	93	95	98
76 .....	78	81	83	86	88	90	93	95	98
77 .....	79	82	84	86	89	91	93	95	98
78 .....	80	82	85	87	89	91	93	96	98
79 .....	81	83	85	87	90	92	94	96	98
80 .....	82	84	86	88	90	92	94	96	98
81 .....	83	85	87	89	91	92	94	96	98
82 .....	84	86	87	89	91	93	95	96	98
83 .....	85	86	88	90	92	93	95	97	98
84 .....	86	87	89	90	92	94	95	97	98

TABLE I—COMBINED RATINGS TABLE—Continued  
[10 combined with 10 is 19]

	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
85 .....	87	88	90	91	93	94	96	97	99
86 .....	87	89	90	92	93	94	96	97	99
87 .....	88	90	91	92	94	95	96	97	99
88 .....	89	90	92	93	94	95	96	98	99
89 .....	90	91	92	93	95	96	87	38	99
90 .....	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99
91 .....	92	93	94	95	96	96	97	98	99
92 .....	93	94	94	95	96	97	98	98	99
93 .....	94	94	95	96	97	97	98	99	99
94 .....	95	95	96	96	97	98	98	99	99

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 1155)

[41 FR 11293, Mar. 18, 1976, as amended at 54 FR 27161, June 28, 1989; 54 FR 36029, Aug. 31, 1989]

**§ 4.26 Bilateral factor.**

When a partial disability results from disease or injury of both arms, or of both legs, or of paired skeletal muscles, the ratings for the disabilities of the right and left sides will be combined as usual, and 10 percent of this value will be added (i.e., not combined) before proceeding with further combinations, or converting to degree of disability. The bilateral factor will be applied to such bilateral disabilities before other combinations are carried out and the rating for such disabilities including the bilateral factor in this section will be treated as 1 disability for the purpose of arranging in order of severity and for all further combinations. For example, with disabilities evaluated at 60 percent, 20 percent, 10 percent and 10 percent (the two 10's representing bilateral disabilities), the order of severity would be 60, 21 and 20. The 60 and 21 combine to 68 percent and the 68 and 20 to 74 percent, converted to 70 percent as the final degree of disability.

(a) The use of the terms "arms" and "legs" is not intended to distinguish between the arm, forearm and hand, or the thigh, leg, and foot, but relates to the upper extremities and lower extremities as a whole. Thus with a compensable disability of the right thigh, for example, amputation, and one of the left foot, for example, pes planus, the bilateral factor applies, and similarly whenever there are compensable disabilities affecting use of paired ex-

tremities regardless of location or specified type of impairment.

(b) The correct procedure when applying the bilateral factor to disabilities affecting both upper extremities and both lower extremities is to combine the ratings of the disabilities affecting the 4 extremities in the order of their individual severity and apply the bilateral factor by adding, not combining, 10 percent of the combined value thus attained.

(c) The bilateral factor is not applicable unless there is partial disability of compensable degree in each of 2 paired extremities, or paired skeletal muscles.

**§ 4.27 Use of diagnostic code numbers.**

The diagnostic code numbers appearing opposite the listed ratable disabilities are arbitrary numbers for the purpose of showing the basis of the evaluation assigned and for statistical analysis in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and as will be observed, extend from 5000 to a possible 9999. Great care will be exercised in the selection of the applicable code number and in its citation on the rating sheet. No other numbers than these listed or hereafter furnished are to be employed for rating purposes, with an exception as described in this section, as to unlisted conditions. When an unlisted disease, injury, or residual condition is encountered, requiring rating by analogy, the diagnostic code number will be "built-up" as follows: The first 2 digits will be selected from that part of the schedule most closely identifying the part, or system, of the body involved; the last 2 digits will be "99" for all unlisted conditions. This procedure will facilitate a

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close check of new and unlisted conditions, rated by analogy. In the selection of code numbers, injuries will generally be represented by the number assigned to the residual condition on the basis of which the rating is determined. With diseases, preference is to be given to the number assigned to the disease itself; if the rating is determined on the basis of residual conditions, the number appropriate to the residual condition will be added, preceded by a hyphen. Thus, rheumatoid (atrophic) arthritis rated as ankylosis of the lumbar spine should be coded "5002-5289." In this way, the exact source of each rating can be easily identified. In the citation of disabilities on rating sheets, the diagnostic terminology will be that of the medical examiner, with no attempt to translate the terms into schedule nomenclature. Residuals of diseases or therapeutic procedures will not be cited without reference to the basic disease.

[41 FR 11293, Mar. 18, 1976]

### § 4.28 Prestabilization rating from date of discharge from service.

The following ratings may be assigned, in lieu of ratings prescribed elsewhere, under the conditions stated for disability from any disease or injury. The prestabilization rating is not to be assigned in any case in which a total rating is immediately assignable under the regular provisions of the schedule or on the basis of individual unemployability. The prestabilization 50-percent rating is not to be used in any case in which a rating of 50 percent or more is immediately assignable under the regular provisions.

	Rating
Unstabilized condition with severe disability— Substantially gainful employment is not feasible or advisable .....	100
Unhealed or incompletely healed wounds or injuries— Material impairment of employability likely ..	50

NOTE (1): Department of Veterans Affairs examination is not required prior to assignment of prestabilization ratings; however, the fact that examination was accomplished will not preclude assignment of these benefits. Prestabilization ratings are for assignment in the immediate postdischarge period. They will continue for a 12-month period following discharge from service. However,

prestabilization ratings may be changed to a regular schedular total rating or one authorizing a greater benefit at any time. In each prestabilization rating an examination will be requested to be accomplished not earlier than 6 months nor more than 12 months following discharge. In those prestabilization ratings in which following examination reduction in evaluation is found to be warranted, the higher evaluation will be continued to the end of the 12th month following discharge or to the end of the period provided under § 3.105(e) of this chapter, whichever is later. Special monthly compensation should be assigned concurrently in these cases whenever records are adequate to establish entitlement.

NOTE (2): Diagnosis of disease, injury, or residuals will be cited, with diagnostic code number assigned from this rating schedule for conditions listed therein.

[35 FR 11906, July 24, 1970]

### § 4.29 Ratings for service-connected disabilities requiring hospital treatment or observation.

A total disability rating (100 percent) will be assigned without regard to other provisions of the rating schedule when it is established that a service-connected disability has required hospital treatment in a Department of Veterans Affairs or an approved hospital for a period in excess of 21 days or *hospital observation at Department of Veterans Affairs expense* for a service-connected disability for a period in excess of 21 days.

(a) Subject to the provisions of paragraphs (d), (e), and (f) of this section this increased rating will be effective the first day of continuous hospitalization and will be terminated effective the last day of the month of hospital discharge (regular discharge or release to non-bed care) or effective the last day of the month of termination of treatment or observation for the service-connected disability. A temporary release which is approved by an attending Department of Veterans Affairs physician as part of the treatment plan will not be considered an absence.

(1) An authorized absence in excess of 4 days which begins during the first 21 days of hospitalization will be regarded as the equivalent of hospital discharge effective the first day of such authorized absence. An authorized absence of 4 days or less which results in a total of more than 8 days of authorized absence

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during the first 21 days of hospitalization will be regarded as the equivalent of hospital discharge effective the ninth day of authorized absence.

(2) Following a period of hospitalization in excess of 21 days, an authorized absence in excess of 14 days or a third consecutive authorized absence of 14 days will be regarded as the equivalent of hospital discharge and will interrupt hospitalization effective on the last day of the month in which either the authorized absence in excess of 14 days or the third 14 day period begins, except where there is a finding that convalescence is required as provided by paragraph (e) or (f) of this section. The termination of these total ratings will not be subject to § 3.105(e) of this chapter.

(b) Notwithstanding that hospital admission was for disability not connected with service, if during such hospitalization, hospital treatment for a service-connected disability is instituted and continued for a period in excess of 21 days, the increase to a total rating will be granted from the first day of such treatment. If service connection for the disability under treatment is granted after hospital admission, the rating will be from the first day of hospitalization if otherwise in order.

(c) The assignment of a total disability rating on the basis of hospital treatment or observation will not preclude the assignment of a total disability rating otherwise in order under other provisions of the rating schedule, and consideration will be given to the propriety of such a rating in all instances and to the propriety of its continuance after discharge. Particular attention, with a view to proper rating under the rating schedule, is to be given to the claims of veterans discharged from hospital, regardless of length of hospitalization, with indications on the final summary of expected confinement to bed or house, or to inability to work with requirement of frequent care of physician or nurse at home.

(d) On these total ratings Department of Veterans Affairs regulations governing effective dates for increased benefits will control.

(e) The total hospital rating if convalescence is required may be continued for periods of 1, 2, or 3 months in addition to the period provided in paragraph (a) of this section.

(f) Extension of periods of 1, 2 or 3 months beyond the initial 3 months may be made upon approval of the Adjudication Officer.

(g) Meritorious claims of veterans who are discharged from the hospital with less than the required number of days but need post-hospital care and a prolonged period of convalescence will be referred to the Director, Compensation and Pension Service, under § 3.321(b)(1) of this chapter.

[29 FR 6718, May 22, 1964, as amended at 41 FR 11294, Mar. 18, 1976; 41 FR 34256, Aug. 13, 1976; 54 FR 4281, Jan. 30, 1989; 54 FR 34981, Aug. 23, 1989]

**§ 4.30 Convalescent ratings.**

A total disability rating (100 percent) will be assigned without regard to other provisions of the rating schedule when it is established by report at hospital discharge (regular discharge or release to non-bed care) or outpatient release that entitlement is warranted under paragraph (a) (1), (2) or (3) of this section effective the date of hospital admission or outpatient treatment and continuing for a period of 1, 2, or 3 months from the first day of the month following such hospital discharge or outpatient release. The termination of these total ratings will not be subject to § 3.105(e) of this chapter. Such total rating will be followed by appropriate schedular evaluations. When the evidence is inadequate to assign a schedular evaluation, a physical examination will be scheduled and considered prior to the termination of a total rating under this section.

(a) Total ratings will be assigned under this section if treatment of a service-connected disability resulted in:

(1) Surgery necessitating at least one month of convalescence (Effective as to outpatient surgery March 1, 1989.)

(2) Surgery with severe postoperative residuals such as incompletely healed surgical wounds, stumps of recent amputations, therapeutic immobilization of one major joint or more, application of a body cast, or the necessity for

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house confinement, or the necessity for continued use of a wheelchair or crutches (regular weight-bearing prohibited). (Effective as to outpatient surgery March 1, 1989.)

(3) Immobilization by cast, without surgery, of one major joint or more. (Effective as to outpatient treatment March 10, 1976.)

A reduction in the total rating will not be subject to §3.105(e) of this chapter. The total rating will be followed by an open rating reflecting the appropriate schedular evaluation; where the evidence is inadequate to assign the schedular evaluation, a physical examination will be scheduled prior to the end of the total rating period.

(b) A total rating under this section will require full justification on the rating sheet and may be extended as follows:

(1) Extensions of 1, 2 or 3 months beyond the initial 3 months may be made under paragraph (a) (1), (2) or (3) of this section.

(2) Extensions of 1 or more months up to 6 months beyond the initial 6 months period may be made under paragraph (a) (2) or (3) of this section upon approval of the Adjudication Officer.

[41 FR 34256, Aug. 13, 1976, as amended at 54 FR 4281, Jan. 30, 1989]

#### § 4.31 Zero percent evaluations.

In every instance where the schedule does not provide a zero percent evaluation for a diagnostic code, a zero percent evaluation shall be assigned when the requirements for a compensable evaluation are not met.

[58 FR 52018, Oct. 6, 1993]

### Subpart B—Disability Ratings

#### THE MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM

##### § 4.40 Functional loss.

Disability of the musculoskeletal system is primarily the inability, due to damage or infection in parts of the system, to perform the normal working movements of the body with normal excursion, strength, speed, coordination and endurance. It is essential that the examination on which ratings are based adequately portray the anatom-

ical damage, and the functional loss, with respect to all these elements. The functional loss may be due to absence of part, or all, of the necessary bones, joints and muscles, or associated structures, or to deformity, adhesions, defective innervation, or other pathology, or it may be due to pain, supported by adequate pathology and evidenced by the visible behavior of the claimant undertaking the motion. Weakness is as important as limitation of motion, and a part which becomes painful on use must be regarded as seriously disabled. A little used part of the musculoskeletal system may be expected to show evidence of disuse, either through atrophy, the condition of the skin, absence of normal callus or the like.

##### § 4.41 History of injury.

In considering the residuals of injury, it is essential to trace the medical-industrial history of the disabled person from the original injury, considering the nature of the injury and the attendant circumstances, and the requirements for, and the effect of, treatment over past periods, and the course of the recovery to date. The duration of the initial, and any subsequent, period of total incapacity, especially periods reflecting delayed union, inflammation, swelling, drainage, or operative intervention, should be given close attention. This consideration, or the absence of clear cut evidence of injury, may result in classifying the disability as not of traumatic origin, either reflecting congenital or developmental etiology, or the effects of healed disease.

##### § 4.42 Complete medical examination of injury cases.

The importance of complete medical examination of injury cases at the time of first medical examination by the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot be overemphasized. When possible, this should include complete neurological and psychiatric examination, and other special examinations indicated by the physical condition, in addition to the required general and orthopedic or surgical examinations. When complete examinations are not conducted covering