

The Evidence Blueprint Field Manual

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Welcome to The Evidence Blueprint Field Manual

Welcome, Veteran. The Evidence Blueprint Field Manual is your professional, calm, and trustworthy companion on your journey to a stronger VA disability claim. Designed to look and feel like a modern field manual, this field manual is both practical and easy to use. Whether you're new to the VA claims process or experienced and refining your approach, you'll find guidance, organization, and ready-to-use tools on every page. This field manual is not legal or medical advice, but an educational guide to help you organize, evaluate, and strengthen your evidence. Included are clear layouts, robust worksheets, and space to reflect and plan. Our priority: clarity, confidence, and a streamlined path to support your VA disability claim.

This field manual is a companion to the 14-lesson YouTube series "The Evidence Blueprint" by Veteran Claims Made Easy. The design reflects our commitment to organization: minimalist navy, charcoal, and white with muted red accents—all chosen for readability and focus. Typography uses Merriweather for headings and Lato for clear, modern body text. White space, legible fonts, and interactive checklists empower you to take control of your evidence. You'll find tables, writing space, and actionable checklists—no unnecessary clutter, no cartoon graphics—just field-tested veteran tools. Let's get started building your claim.

Using This Field Manual



Purpose

This field manual gives you a step-by-step system for organizing and evaluating the evidence you need for your VA claim—so you know exactly what matters most.



How to Use

Complete each worksheet, checklist, and table as you work through the sections. Write out your action steps and keep track of your evidence.



Who It's For

All U.S. military veterans preparing or improving a VA disability claim—whether your case is simple or complex, new or ongoing.

Disclaimer

This field manual is for educational purposes only. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or accredited representation. The content does not substitute for professional legal or medical counsel. While we strive for accuracy and clarity, always consult a VA-accredited professional if you have specific medical or legal questions about your disability claim. This field manual does not create a client relationship, and Veteran Claims Made Easy does not act as your representative before the VA. Use all materials responsibly and at your own discretion.

A top-down photograph of a vintage map with a compass, a spiral notebook, and pressed flowers. The map is green with brown contour lines and blue lines for rivers. A compass is in the top left corner. A spiral notebook is open in the center, with a yellow flower and a purple flower pressed on its pages. The text "PART I – Foundations" is overlaid on the notebook page.

PART I – Foundations

Understanding Your Claim Type

Before gathering evidence, it's crucial to identify which type of VA disability claim you're pursuing. Each claim type has unique requirements and may need different supporting evidence. Direct Service Connection, Secondary Service Connection, Presumptive Claims, Increased Rating, and other special claim paths each have distinct elements that must be proven. Understanding your claim's type is the foundation for building a strategic approach. In the worksheet below, write down your current claim's type(s) and note your initial thoughts on what evidence might be most relevant:

Common VA Claim Types



Direct Service Connection

Your current condition was directly caused by an event, injury, or disease during military service and needs clear evidence from your service medical records and provider opinions.



Secondary Service Connection

Your disability results from or is worsened by a condition already recognized by the VA as service-connected, requiring strong medical linkage.



Presumptive Claim

For certain conditions, the VA assumes a connection to service under defined circumstances (e.g., Agent Orange exposure)—supporting evidence focuses on eligibility and diagnostic confirmation.

Diagnostic Questions – The Heart of Your Evidence Plan

The Four Diagnostic Questions focus your thinking and keep your evidence-gathering efforts intentional. Use the prompt questions below to clarify what you must prove, identify which claim element is at issue, figure out what kind of evidence will strengthen your application, and spot what gaps still remain. Complete the reflection space to set the stage for successful evidence collection.

1. What am I trying to prove with my claim?
2. Which element (event, nexus, current diagnosis, severity, etc.) is actually disputed or uncertain?
3. What evidence sources (records, opinions, statements) could competently address this?
4. What does my current record fail to establish, and how will I close that gap?

Evidence Inventory

Assemble every piece of evidence you have already collected. Use this section to list out each item, indicate its source and type, and rate its potential value. Be honest—clear records and honest assessment make future steps easier. Here is where you describe your strongest and weakest evidence, as well as any apparent missing documentation.

Worksheet: List each piece of evidence below. Label its type (medical, service, lay, etc.), source, and whether you believe it is strong, moderate, or weak.

Evidence Description	Type	Source	Strength

Finding Your Evidence Gap

Now that you have identified the claim type, run through your core evidence, and asked the diagnostic questions, you should have a sense of where your strongest and weakest points are. In this section, analyze what crucial evidence is missing. Explain why the gap exists—is it missing records, unclear medical opinions, or lack of documentation? Write your strategy for closing the gap. This can include requesting more medical exams, gathering statements, or finding missing service records.

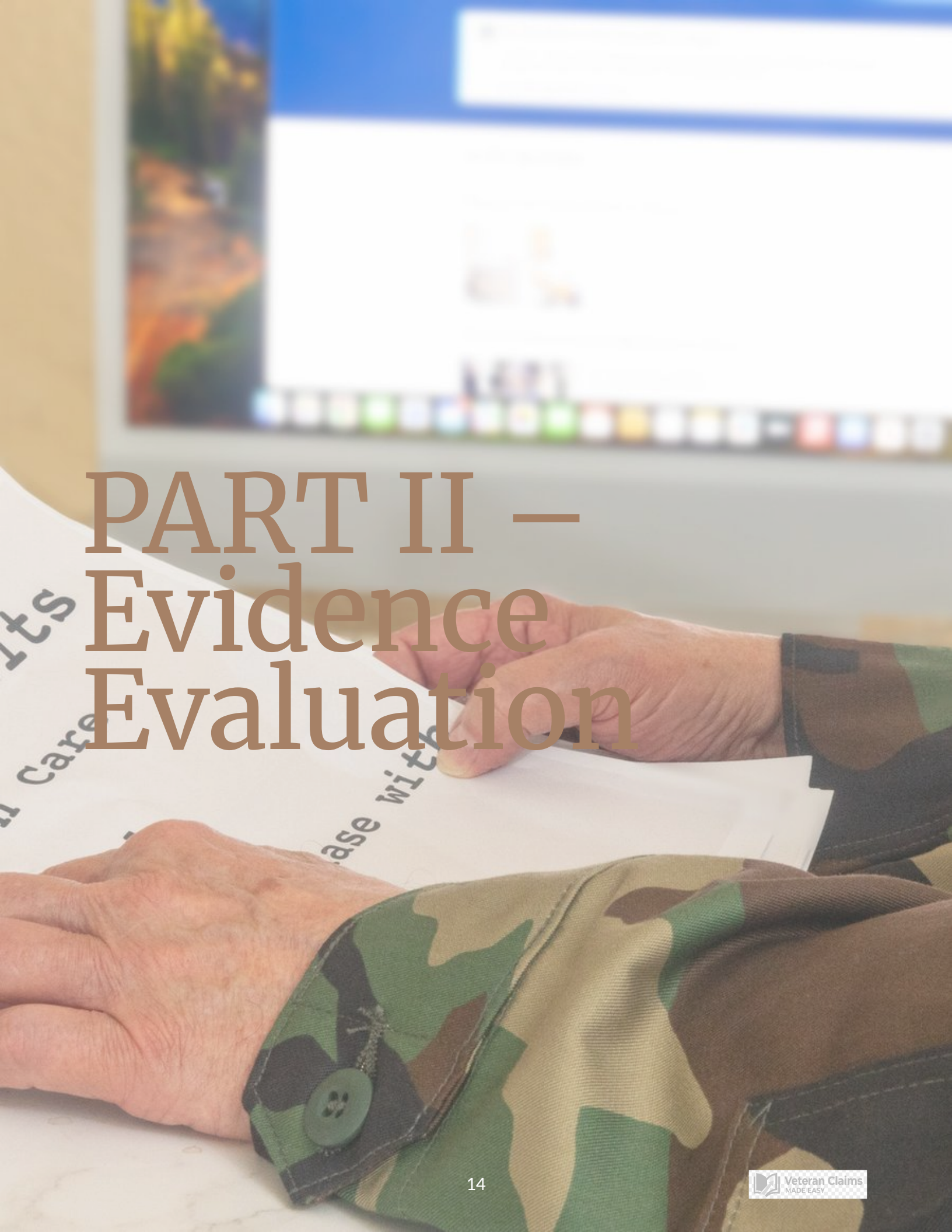
Action Plan

With your claim type defined, diagnostic questions answered, and evidence gaps noted, it's time to build a concrete action plan. Prioritize your next steps. List who you need to contact (doctors, fellow veterans, records offices), which documents you need to gather, and any questions that could help clarify your claim. Write your top three actions below and outline the resources and support you need from family, friends, or advocates.

“

In preparing
for battle, I
have always
found that
plans are
useless but
planning is
indispensable.

Dwight D. Eisenhower



PART II – Evidence Evaluation

The Three-Lens Evidence System



Competency

Does this evidence come from a source who is qualified to give it? (e.g., medical opinions, in-service records, firsthand observations).



Credibility

Is the evidence trustworthy and believable?
Look for details, consistency, and reliability in statements and documentation.



Weight

How important is this piece of evidence compared to others? Will it have a meaningful impact on the outcome of your claim?

Evaluating Competency in Evidence

Evaluate each piece of evidence for competency: is the person making the statement or writing the note actually able to do so based on qualifications or experience? For example, only a medical doctor may offer a competent diagnosis, while another veteran can offer a competent buddy statement about a witnessed event. Use the checklist below to grade the competency of each entry in your inventory. Reflection: Did you discover any evidence you cannot use due to lack of competency? Note your findings.

Evaluating Credibility of Evidence

Credibility is the measure of trust you and the VA can place in a piece of evidence. A document that is detailed, clear, consistent, and matchable to other verified records will have higher credibility than vague or self-contradictory evidence. In your worksheet, list specific reasons why each evidence source is credible or note any issues that reduce its trustworthiness. Reflection: Which pieces of evidence are most and least credible in your case?

Evaluating the Weight of Evidence

Weight refers to how significant each piece of evidence is toward proving your claim. Not all evidence carries the same weight—a signed diagnosis from a specialist is usually more persuasive than a brief statement from a friend. Use the weight checklist to prioritize stronger pieces over weaker ones, and reflect on how your evidence mix will impact your claim.

Evidence Evaluation Worksheets

For each major item of evidence, complete the following worksheet. Complete as many as needed. Describe the evidence, then assess its competency, credibility, and weight. Make note of any doubts or follow-up required.

Evidence Description	Evidence Type	Competency Review	Credibility Review	Weight Review	Notes	Overall Assessment



PART III – Medical Evidence

Medical Evidence Planner

Effective medical evidence is the backbone of nearly every successful VA claim. Start by listing each medical item that may help prove your case: treatment records, private doctor notes, specialist evaluations, test results, and more. Use this space to list which records you have, which you need, and any planned appointments. Organize provider names, facility contact info, and key facts for each. Check off each item as you collect it.

Provider Visit Planner

Use this section to prepare for your next provider appointment. What questions should you ask? What documentation do you need to request? List them here so nothing important gets missed. Write space is provided below to record follow-up items and any special instructions from your provider.

Medical Evidence Checklist

This checklist helps ensure you have covered the key pieces of medical documentation the VA may require. Check each box that applies to your claim and highlight any missing items to prioritize before you file.

- Current diagnosis from a qualified provider
- Treatment records documenting ongoing care
- Specialist reviews or assessments
- Relevant test results (X-ray, MRI, labs, etc.)
- Provider statement or nexus opinion
- Documentation of symptom continuity

— “ —

**The best preparation for
tomorrow is doing your best
today.**

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.



PART IV – Service Records

Military Timeline

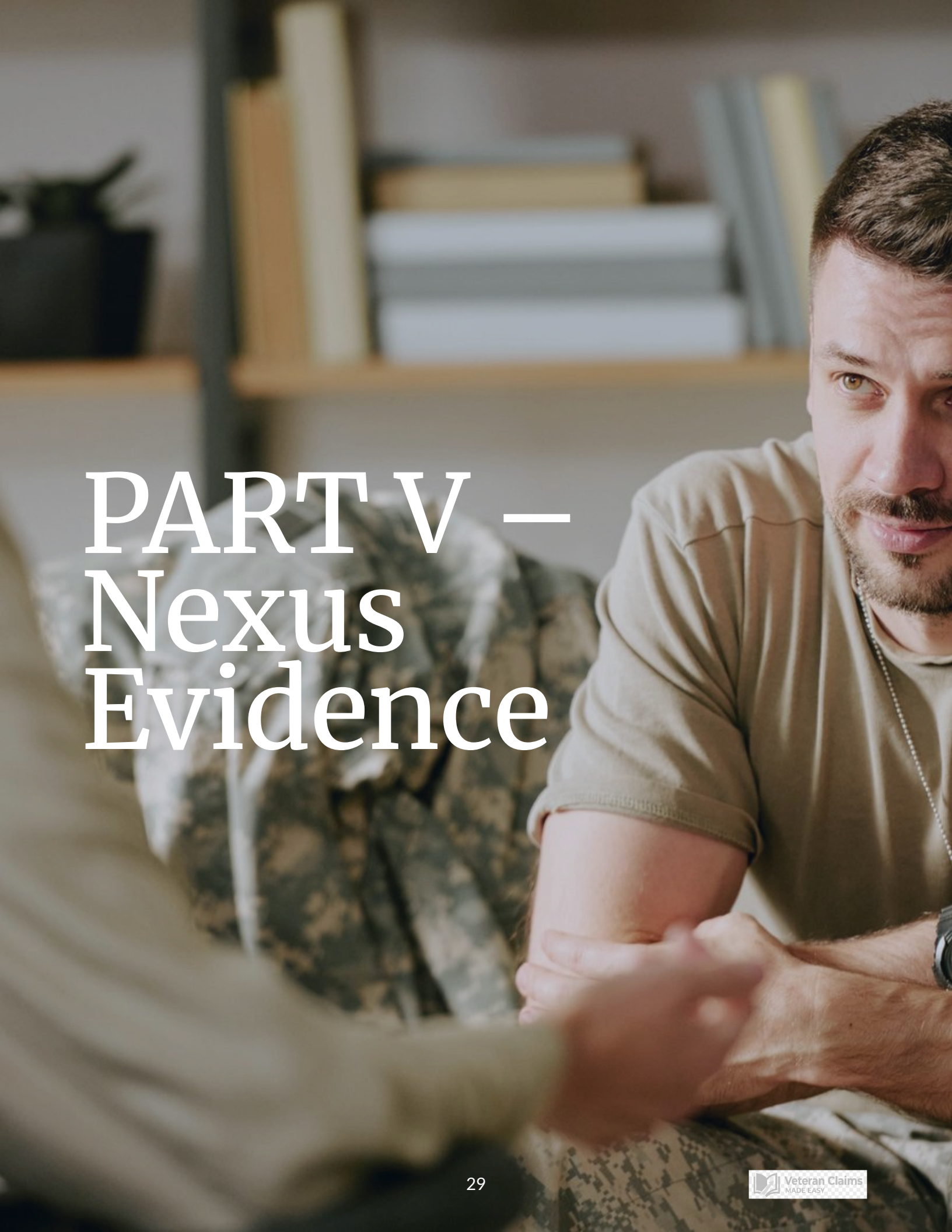
Map out your military service chronologically: dates of enlistment/discharge, deployments, injuries, medical visits, and significant duty events. This timeline will help you spot gaps or find supporting references for your claim.

Service Records Inventory

List all available service records by type and date (DD214, STRs, Line of Duty, awards, etc.). Note the source (personal file, eBenefits, NPRC, etc.). Highlight records you believe are missing or incomplete and outline steps to request replacements.

Missing Records Action Plan

If any service records cannot be found, list who you will contact (e.g., NPRC, VA, unit archives), what forms are required, and your communication plan for requests and follow-up. Document any obstacles and alternate sources for evidence.



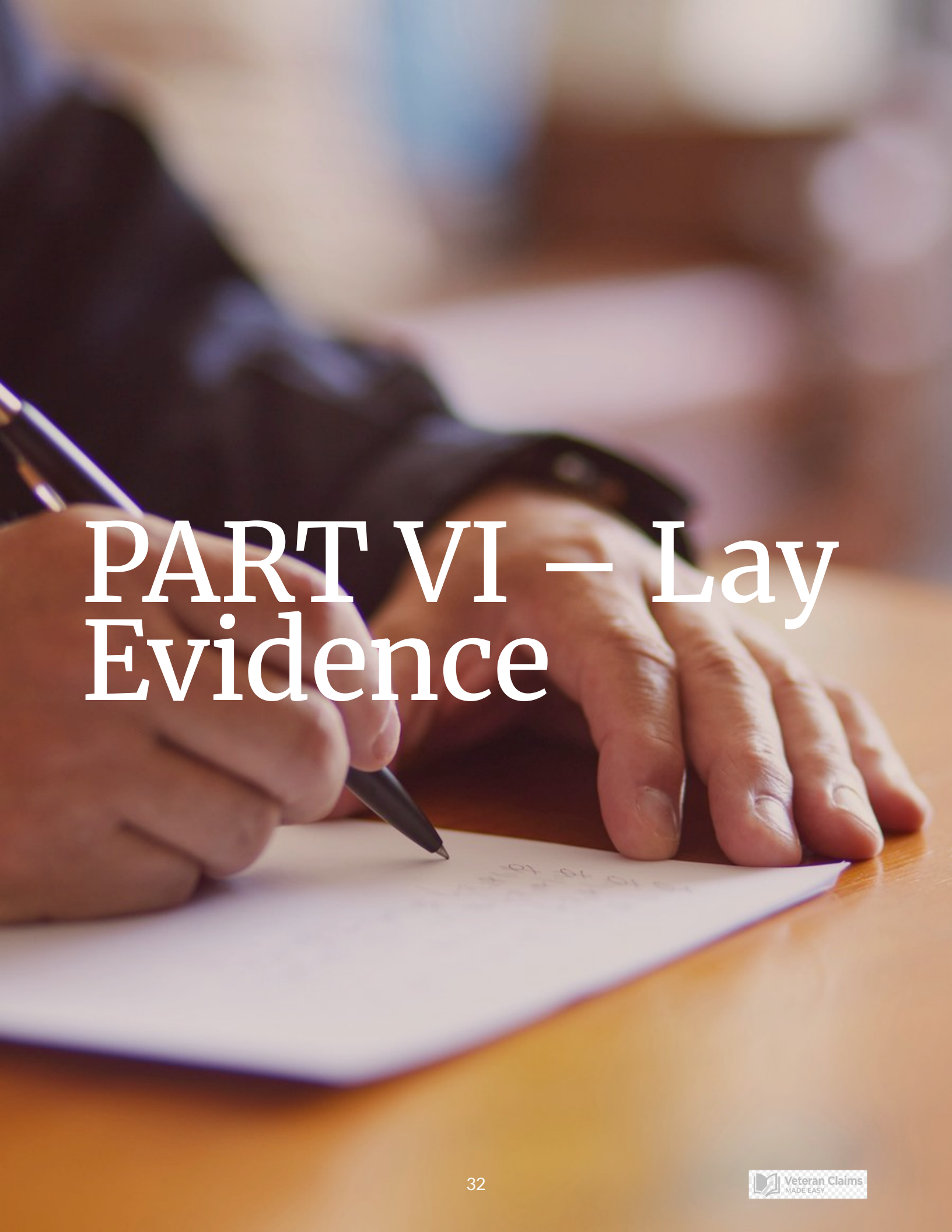
PART V — Nexus Evidence

Nexus Planning Worksheet

The nexus connects your in-service event or exposure with your current medical condition. Use this worksheet to outline the event, describe the current condition, and note what (if any) provider nexus statement you have or need. Identify additional supporting evidence to strengthen the linkage.

Questions for Provider & Opinion Tracker

List questions you will ask your provider about cause, aggravation, or severity. Use the tracker to document each provider's opinion, date provided, and strength level.



PART VI – Lay Evidence

Buddy Statement Planner

Lay statements from other veterans, family members, or yourself can fill in gaps where other documentation is lacking. Use this section to plan who might write a statement, what events they can describe, and which details to request for credibility.

Personal Statement Planner

Prepare your own lay statement: what do you want the VA to know about your symptoms, their origin, or their daily impact? Outline the major points, then draft your statement for clarity and credibility.

Observation Worksheet

Document the observations of coworkers, friends, or family members that directly relate to your disability claim. Note the date, setting, and specific behaviors or symptoms witnessed. Consider obtaining signed written statements for your file.



PART VII — DBQs

DBQ Checklist and Tracker

Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) can provide structured evidence for your claim.

Checklist: Have you obtained all relevant DBQs? Are they fully completed by qualified providers?

Tracker: Record each completed DBQ by date, provider, and condition addressed.

DBQ Questions

Prepare questions about the DBQ process, completion, or clarification. List who you need to ask (VA, provider, advocate) and write their responses. Use this record to follow up as your claim progresses.



PART VIII — Continuity of Symptoms

Symptom Timeline

Draw a timeline of your symptoms from onset through present day. Include dates, medical visits, worsening or improvement, and impact on daily activities. Add notes for major changes or gaps in treatment. This can clarify long-term symptom continuity.

Treatment Timeline & Gap Analysis

Outline all significant treatments and interventions. For any period where there was no care, explain why: lack of access, improvement, or other reasons. Noting these gaps and reasons helps the VA see a logical flow in your medical story.

A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a tan military uniform, is sitting on a couch. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. His hands are clasped in his lap. In the background, there is a bookshelf with several books. The overall tone is warm and professional.

PART IX – Secondary Service Connection

Secondary Service Connection Worksheet

Identify your primary service-connected condition, the secondary disability you believe is related, and the medical opinion or evidence linking the two. Attach checklists and space for supporting documentation.



PART X – Presumptive Claims

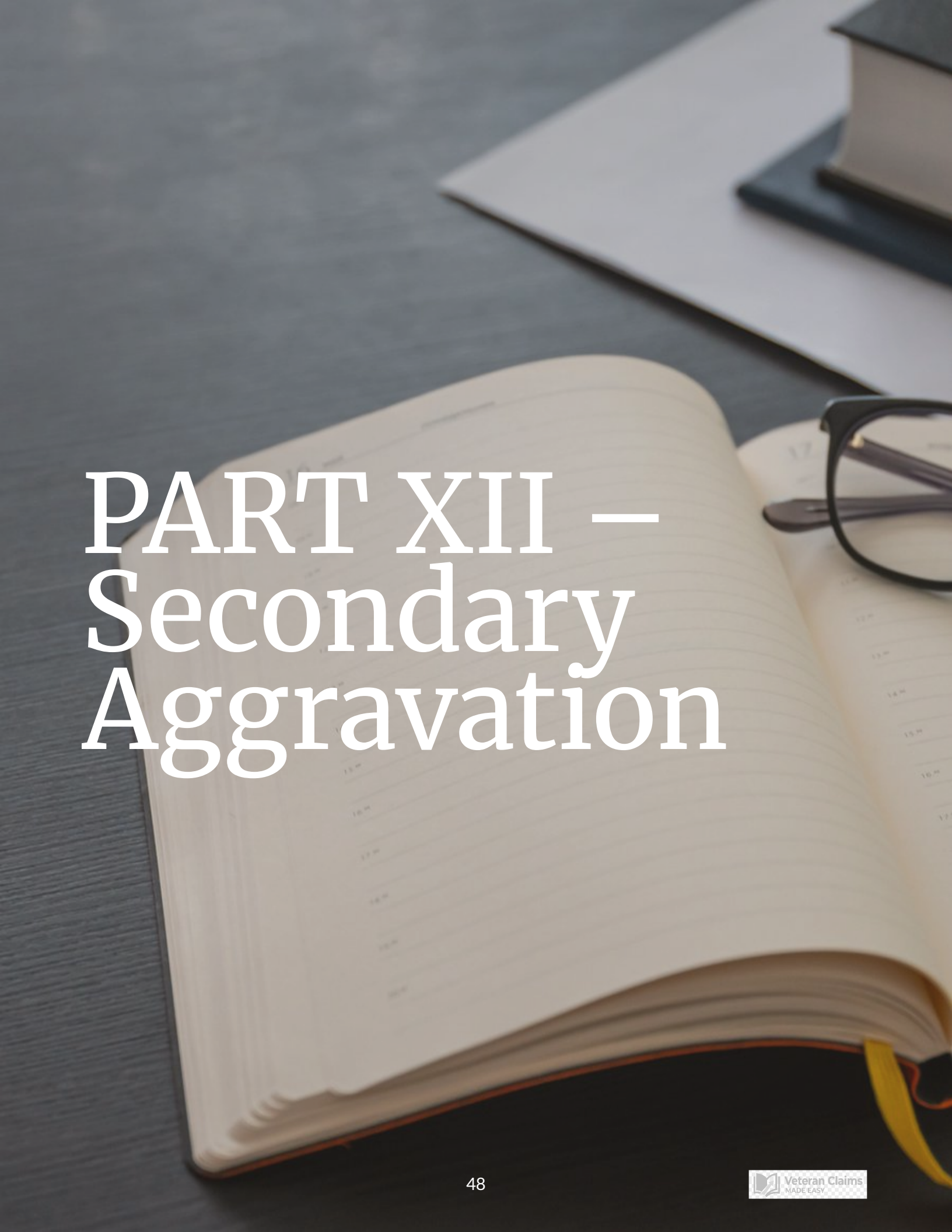
Presumptive Claim Checklist & Evidence Inventory

Confirm eligibility using the VA's criteria for presumptive service connection (e.g., time/place of service, diagnosis within presumptive period). List all evidence that supports the claim and note missing items.

PART XI – Aggravation

Aggravation Claim Worksheet

If your claim is based on a preexisting condition that was worsened during military service, outline the baseline condition, incident of aggravation, and current severity. Note what evidence is available for each. Attach action steps for missing documentation.



PART XII – Secondary Aggravation

Planning Worksheet & Checklist

For claims involving aggravation of a non-service-connected condition by a service-connected disability, use this space to document the affected conditions, the medical linkage, and all supporting evidence. Review with the checklist and reflect on any follow-up actions needed.



PART XIII – Evidence Organization

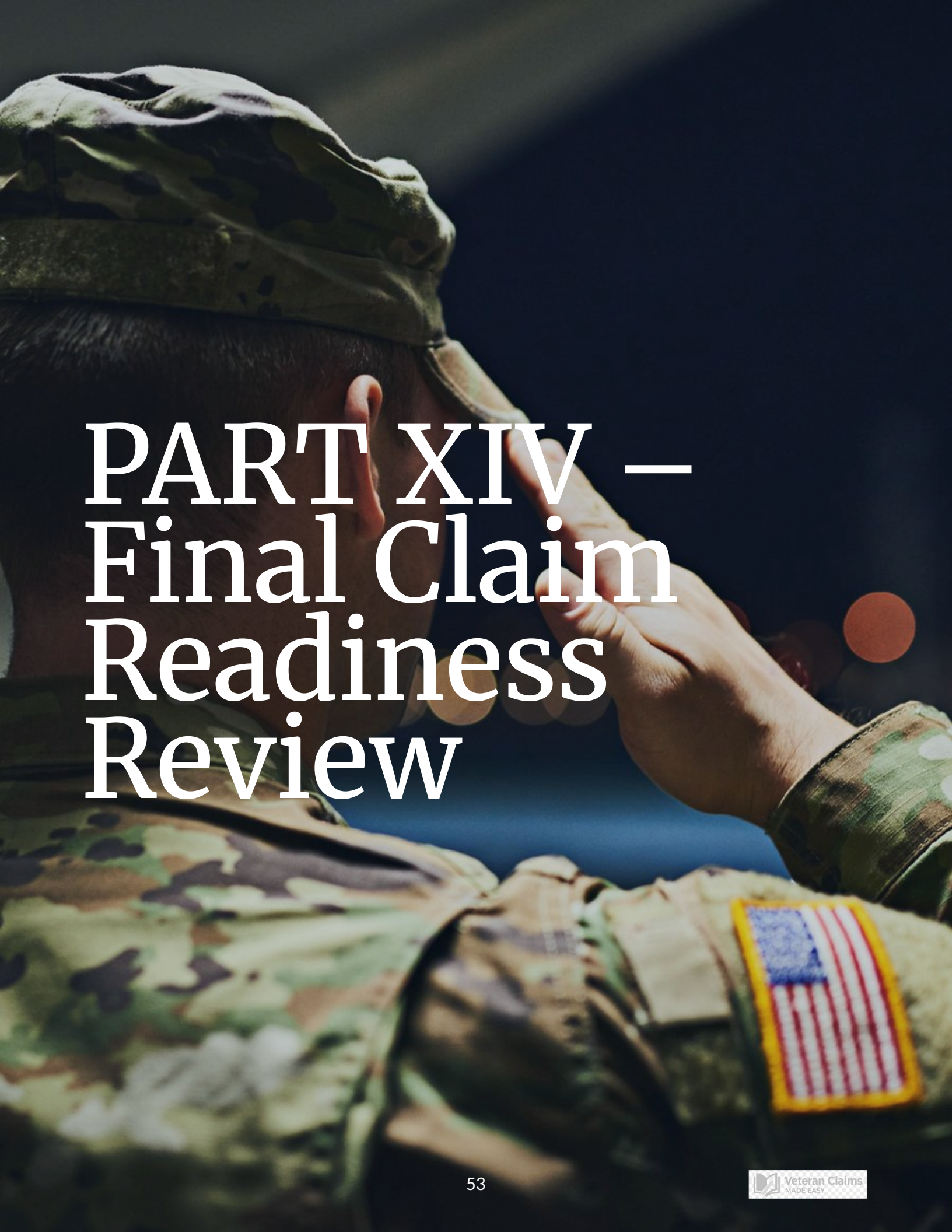
Master Evidence Inventory & Index

Summarize your entire collection of evidence here. Group it by type and order by date or relevance. Include a status field—received, requested, or missing. This table will help you find any remaining documentation needs before you file.

Evidence	Type	Date	Status

Submission Checklist

Ensure every vital piece is collected and included before submission. Use the checklist to confirm you have: Current medical evidence, service records, credible lay statements, completed forms/DBQs, and have addressed all gaps. Final review for clarity and confidence.



PART XIV – Final Claim Readiness Review

Overall Readiness & Next Steps

Review: What are you trying to prove? Which evidence is strongest? What are the weakest links? List any remaining evidence gaps and unanswered questions. Plan your final steps before submission—schedule one last review, contact needed sources, ready your application for submission with full confidence. Assess your confidence level in your claim readiness.

Mission Summary

Summarize what you have learned in this process. Write your biggest takeaway about claim preparation and evidence gathering. List your next three personalized action steps and sign your commitment to follow through. Thank you for investing in your claim and for your service.

Version Information

Version 1.0 | August 2026 - This is the original edition of The Evidence Blueprint Field Manual, adapted for the educational YouTube series by Veteran Claims Made Easy.

Resources

- VeteranClaimsMadeEasy.com
- Free digital resources and templates
- YouTube: Veteran Claims Made Easy channel
- Companion tools and guides

Clarity Before You File

The goal isn't to collect more paperwork: it's to gather the evidence that answers the VA's question with clarity, organization, and focus. Revisit this field manual whenever you need to plan, organize, or update your evidence blueprint. You are your own best advocate. – Gunny Rios, Veteran Claims Made Easy