



CVLC Corrects a 20 Year Injustice for Local Veteran

In 1994, at age 18, John R. joined the Navy. He became a seaman on an aircraft carrier that supported bombing sorties in the Bosnian conflict. John's superiors commended him for his dependability and for being hard working. But after 2 years, grueling 20-hour shifts supporting constant bombing missions began to take a toll. After witnessing gruesome injuries and a death at sea, John began to suffer from symptoms of PTSD. These symptoms manifested in misconduct. Six months shy of his active service end-date, John was discharged with an Other Than Honorable discharge (OTH).

For the next 12 years, John struggled with his invisible wounds of war—intrusive thoughts, nightmares, hypervigilance, and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness—which caused him to grow apart from his family. He survived on sporadic and meager employment and experienced bouts of homelessness.

“My only regret in life is my OTH discharge from the Navy.... because of that I lost everything.”

In 2010, John committed himself to mental health treatment but was not eligible for VA benefits due to his OTH. Obtaining a discharge upgrade (DU) and gaining access to long-term VA mental health care became an important part of his recovery plan. For more than a decade, John tried unsuccessfully to upgrade his discharge status. *“Nothing was moving or happening when I was doing the paperwork on my own,”* explained John.

Although the military now better understands PTSD and has officially recognized that many discharges were unjust, very few veterans who independently petition for discharge upgrades are successful. With CVLC in his corner, John finally saw his dream become a reality. On December 22nd, John was notified that the board granted CVLC's petition and upgraded him to fully honorable. He no longer has the burden and stigma of an OTH, and can now access VA healthcare and disability benefits.

When asked what made this attempt successful, John credits his attorney's diligence and knowledge of the system. *“Having someone push on my behalf was a life-changer. I've been working on this for 18 years, and it wouldn't have been possible without the support of CVLC. If it weren't for them, none of the paperwork would have been in and no one would have taken it seriously.”*

The obstacles that had prevented John from accomplishing his goals are not unique in the veteran community. He is only one of many veterans with unjust discharges who can benefit from legal advocacy. *“It's unfortunate that not everyone has the help of CVLC,”* said John. He wishes for other veterans to find hope—and help—through his success story. *“Hope is necessary – we need to shed light and bring hope to the veteran community. I am very pleased with the results and the help I received—help is an understatement when it comes to what CVLC did for me.”*