

Vietnam veterans sue US military over trauma

3 March 2014, by John Christoffersen

The U.S. military has failed to upgrade the discharges of Vietnam war veterans who developed post-traumatic stress disorder, resulting in stigma and loss of benefits, according to a federal lawsuit filed Monday.

Five Vietnam veterans and three veterans organizations are suing the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. The veterans say they suffered PTSD before it was recognized and were discharged under other-than-honorable conditions that made them ineligible for benefits.

The lawsuit, which seeks class-action status to represent tens of thousands of veterans, says the military has systematically denied applications for upgrades involving evidence of PTSD.

"Unfortunately, the Pentagon has refused to correct the decades of injustice experienced by tens of thousands of veterans who suffer from PTSD but were discharged before it was a diagnosable condition," V Prentice, a law student intern in the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School, which represents the plaintiffs, said in a news release. "This action seeks to compel appropriate action by the military and to finally secure justice for these veterans."

Lt. Col. Damien Pickart, a Pentagon spokesman, said the department doesn't comment on pending litigation. The Department of Defense has said the agency is committed to addressing concerns related to PTSD.

Conley Monk, who served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, developed PTSD after suffering traumatic events including a barrage of enemy mortar rounds and the gassing of his unit, according to the lawsuit. He later experienced flashbacks and hyper vigilance when he was stationed in Japan and went absent without leave, the suit said.

"My discharge status has been a lifetime scar,"

Monk said. "If I were discharged today, my PTSD would be recognized and treated and I wouldn't be punished for having a service-connected medical condition."

Since 1993, only 4.5 percent of about 375 applications for discharge upgrades involving PTSD have been granted for Vietnam [veterans](#), according to the lawsuit, which seeks what it calls consistent and medically appropriate standards for considering the effects of PTSD when determining whether to upgrade a discharge.

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