

To the Chairman and Members of the PEB Board,

For the last 14 years I have served our nation's Navy with "Honor, Courage and Commitment." Each day of my service I served purposefully and proudly, with a desire only to honor my country and those who served before me.

During my time in the Navy I overcame many personal barriers to achieve success I worked on the Flight Deck of the USS Ronald Reagan and the USS Tarawa, each for a duration of two years. During that period I not only earned my qualifications as a Flight Deck Director and Launch Officer, but I also earned my EAWS and ESWS Qualifications as a Third Class Petty Officer, along with many other qualifications; Air Duty Officer being the most significant to my rate. I have also been honored to serve as an Augmented Sailor assigned to the 16th MP Airborne, a division of the coveted 82nd Airborne, where I qualified as a the Battle Captain for the Detention Facility in Parawn, the highest position possible for an enlisted person, at the facility, making me the lowest ranked Enlisted member to hold a position of leadership in Afghanistan.

In 2003, the Flight Deck of an Aircraft Carrier and Amphibious Assault Ship was considered the 6th most dangerous job in the world, according to a report from CBS, and I know firsthand, the dangers associated with it. I have seen a near fatal deck strike, helicopters land without permission, and have seen a wire snap. In 2015, the 9th most Dangerous Job in the world, according to a report from Forbes, was a Correction Officer. I have guarded Terrorists, processed intakes, reviewed files, and sent reports to the Pentagon and Senate on a daily basis, and was charged with guarding the most dangerous men in the world, many who were sent to the Gallows in Iraq.

I have seen exactly what can happen when you are distracted by PTSD on the flight deck. In September of 2009 after returning from Camp Bucca, Iraq, I volunteered to go on AT with the USS John C. Stennis, despite struggling with sleep, having nightmares about the detainees and having panic and anxiety attacks on a daily basis. The most important thing you are taught as a flight deck worker is to always have your head on a swivel and never ever suit up if you are distracted by personal or family problems. Like most people with PTSD, I was doing a good job of hiding my problems and since the Active Duty sailors had never interacted with me before, they probably just thought I was excited to be back on the flight deck. I worked my way around the deck, stroking birds here and there, focusing on some of the easier jobs and doing what I liked best, driving the tractors to help with re-spot, pushbacks and startups. I think I got complacent, because after a few days, I made my way up to catapult 2. I watched the director for a few launches, re-familiarized myself with the procedure to launch aircraft and asked permission from aircraft control to take control an F-18 next for launch. I put the cat between my legs and start bringing the bird into place, once the steam from the catapult made me loose vision, I started thinking of the sand storms and black smoke from the burn pits, that I just spent the last 9 months living through. As the steam cleared, I seen the shadows of the flight deck workers, and that's when I found myself thinking of anything but the \$80 million aircraft in front of me, and more about the men I had just guarded and how I'd rather be doing this than deploying to Afghanistan for a second tour of Detainee Operations back to back in a few weeks. Then the Active Duty Director slapped me in the back, and brought my focus back to the aircraft. I had to do a push back because I brought the aircraft too far forward, which lead to us doing a push back. Once the bird was back in the launch position, I started the launch procedure, but I couldn't shake the thoughts in my mind, all I could think about was the detainees and my best friend who had recently committed suicide after our deployment. I started

to get a little upset as I realized I was giving the pilot the wrong signals, I started to get more anxious and frustrated and it was when I put tension on the aircraft I had to cancel the launch and turned the aircraft over to the Active Duty director. While most of the directors brushed it off as me being a reservist and being out of practice, it was the 4 hours I spent in the berthing crying because I could have killed 2 flight deck workers who were under the aircraft and 2 pilots, and could only think about how awful my recent deployment was. It was at this point I realized Captain Ireland was probably right in telling me I had Combat Operational Stress Injuries. I haven't stepped foot on the flight deck since this happened and after my recent AT to Greece a year ago, it became evident that even working on the flight line of an Air Field was just not the safest situation for me or my Shipmates. I have been ashamed to call myself an ABH following this incident, and wearing my uniform knowing Sailors look up to me because of my background, my rank, and because of the amount of ribbons I have been awarded. It is the respect I have my Shipmates I don't want to ever endanger another Sailor as long as I live.

It has taken me 5 years, and the death of 10 of my Shipmates to accept the fact that I have PTSD. I suffer from daily depression and anxiety attacks. As a result of this service connected disability, I can no longer conduct myself to the standards required on a Sailor of my rating. When I think of putting on my uniform and attending drill, I get so overwhelmed and anxious that I spend the night before going to drill suffering from multiple panic attacks, and have had to take Zanax to get me through the drill weekends. While I am at drill, I usually stay away from other Sailors and seclude myself from my Shipmate. I spend the largest portion of my time in my car crying, shaking and trying not to break down, so I can go home and convince my wife everything went well, because I don't want her to worry more about me than she already does.

As a Sailor in Navy Wounded Warrior Safe Harbor, I have had the honor of getting to know many Sailors who are missing limbs, or have visible scars. I ask them how hard it is for them to fit in, and most tell me it isn't too hard because their wounds are visible. If I didn't have invisible wounds, I think it would be easier for me to find a common ground and deal with the fact I no longer fit in. It scares me thinking of continuing my service in the United States Navy, I can no longer contribute to the team, and if the board finds me fit for duty, it is only just a short amount of time before my command discharges me with an Administrative Discharge, which would be a disgrace for a Sailor with my record.

In my civilian job, when my disabilities prevent me from working, my boss has made arrangements for me to work at home or leave early. I have missed many important meetings, and due to my anxiety and depression, I have had melt downs on the job, and at when at meetings representing my association and Sailors. These attacks not only effect my job, but I have missed many appointments at Walter Reed, because I am so overwhelmed that I can't stomach the thought of driving. Due to the amount of appointments I have missed, Walter Reed has recently enrolled me in tele health, so it helps that I can just walk to the hospital at Ft. Belvoir and do a video chat with my doctors.

Since starting my procedure with Stellate Ganglion Block in December, I have been able to be more focused when the depression and anxiety attacks hit me. While I still get them, it is a lot easier to calm down once they start. The procedure does help, and has made living my life a lot easier, but this does not mean I no longer have PTSD, it just means I am able to be more focused to my treatments. I still struggle to sleep and have frequent night mares, and I still get such severe headaches that I can't go to work and have to cancel a lot of events. Stellate Ganglion Block helps me be a productive Disabled Veteran, but it in no way would it be safe for me to work on the Flight Deck and have to get a monthly

or bi monthly injection in my neck. I do not know for certain, but I would imagine a medication of this sort, would be an instant disqualification for an Aviation worker.

I love the Navy and I love my shipmates. It has taken me a long time to accept that I have a disability that is going to affect me for the rest of my life. All I ask is for the Board to consider allowing me to end my Navy Career, as a Navy Retiree, so I can continue my treatments at Walter Reed, I can continue to receive Stellate Ganglion Block, and I can continue to be an ambassador for my Navy and my Shipmates with my head held high. There is not a day that doesn't go by that I don't think of my 10 shipmates who have committed suicide, and there is not a day that I don't think of the mental hardships I endured during my time in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Navy will always be a part of my life, and my current job allows me to use my disabilities to my advantage when I am fighting for Sailors like me who need a voice, but the truth of the matter is I need to leave the Navy and focus on my health, not only for me, but for my wife and my first child who is going to be born in September.

I appreciate all the witnesses who came here today, I am thankful for the members of the Board giving me a chance to present my case in front of you today, and I am thankful for my lawyers taking on my case. I want to thank everyone who is here today especially FORCM Snee, and RADM Hall, it was an honor to serve aboard a ship you commanded, and it's even more of honor to have you covering my six, and showing me I have a life after the Navy. Most importantly I am thankful for my wife, because since she came back into my life almost 4 years ago, she helped me from going down a path of darkness, that so many of my friends took after we got home. I was on a path of self-destruction, and she saved me! I know it's not easy living with me Liz, but without you I don't think I can say I would still be here today. I love you with all my heart!

Very Respectfully,

ABH2 (AW/SW) Michael Joseph Little
United States Navy Reserve