COMMANDING OFFICER SUPPORT LETTER

Submitted in Support of Discharge Upgrade & RE Code Correction Petition | ADRB-2023-AF-00591

FROM:
Major (Ret.) Derek S. Okafor, USA
United States Army (Retired)
Commanding Officer, C Company, 1st Battalion
82nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team
82nd Airborne Division — Fort Bragg, NC 28310

DATE:
March 11, 2023

TO:
Army Discharge Review Board (ADRB)
Office of the Adjutant General
Department of the Army
251 18th Street South, Suite 385
Arlington, Virginia 22202

CASE REFERENCE SUMMARY

Veteran (Anonymized)	Branch / MOS	Era / Operation	Original Discharge	RE Code
J.D.W.	U.S. Army 11B Infantryman	Operation Allies Refuge Kabul, Afghanistan (Aug 2021)	**Other Than Honorable (OTH)**	**RE-4 (Ineligible)**

RE: Letter of Support — Discharge Upgrade (OTH → Honorable) & RE Code Correction (RE-4 → RE-1) | Veteran J.D.W. | ADRB-2023-AF-00591

I am Major Derek S. Okafor, United States Army, Retired. I served seventeen years on active duty as an Infantry officer, culminating in command of C Company, 1st Battalion, 82nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. In August 2021, my company was among the first units deployed to Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) in Kabul, Afghanistan in support of Operation Allies Refuge — the noncombatant evacuation operation conducted during the final withdrawal of U.S. forces. Specialist J.D.W. was a member of my company. I write this letter with complete conviction that what happened to him afterward was a failure of the Army, not a failure of character.

Specialist J.D.W. had served four years as an 11B Infantryman prior to the Kabul deployment. His record through July 2021 was without meaningful blemish. He was a reliable, physically capable, and professionally motivated soldier who was preparing his paperwork for reenlistment at the time we received our alert order. He had every intention of making the Army a career.

What SPC J.D.W. experienced at Abbey Gate on August 26, 2021 is a matter of documented historical record. He was present during the suicide bombing that killed thirteen U.S. service members and more than 170 Afghan civilians. He rendered first aid under chaos to wounded soldiers and civilians alike. He carried a fellow soldier —

who did not survive — from the blast site. I was twenty meters away when it happened and I saw what he did. He performed his duty in full under conditions that no training can truly prepare a person for.

When we redeployed in September 2021, SPC J.D.W. was a changed man. That is not a character flaw — that is a human response to what he witnessed and survived. He was irritable, withdrawn, and struggling to sleep. He began drinking heavily. In January 2022, following a verbal altercation with a noncommissioned officer that he acknowledges, he was processed for separation under Chapter 14 (Pattern of Misconduct) and received an Other Than Honorable discharge. He was twenty-four years old. His RE code was entered as RE-4, permanently barring him from reenlistment in any branch of service.

I want this Board to understand what that sequence of events means. A soldier who survived the Abbey Gate bombing, who performed his duty under fire while his comrades were dying around him, came home with the invisible wounds that we now understand to be Moral Injury and Combat PTSD — and received no meaningful mental health intervention before his command initiated separation proceedings. The Army's own suicide prevention and behavioral health programs that were supposed to catch soldiers in his condition did not catch him. What followed was predictable and preventable.

I am asking this Board to do two things. First, upgrade SPC J.D.W.'s discharge characterization from Other Than Honorable to Honorable. The misconduct cited in his Chapter 14 proceedings was a direct manifestation of untreated PTSD and Moral Injury causally connected to his combat service and to his presence at one of the deadliest terrorist attacks on U.S. forces in the twenty-year history of the Afghanistan conflict. It does not reflect the soldier he was for four years or the man he remains.

Second, I am asking this Board to correct his RE code from RE-4 to RE-1. SPC J.D.W. has informed me that, following treatment for PTSD at a VA facility in 2022 and 2023, he wishes to reenlist and continue serving his country. An RE-4 code makes that impossible. That code was assigned based on a Chapter 14 proceeding that should never have been initiated — not while a soldier was in acute psychological crisis following a mass casualty event, and not without meaningful mental health intervention first. Correcting the RE code is not a special accommodation. It is the accurate reflection of a soldier who is now stable, treated, and ready to serve again.

I served beside soldiers for seventeen years. J.D.W. is not a soldier who deserved what he got. He is a soldier who deserved better from the institution he gave four years of his life to. I am asking this Board to give it to him now.

Respectfully submitted,

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Derek S. Okafor

Major, United States Army (Retired)
Former Commanding Officer, C Company, 1-82nd IN, 1st BCT, 82nd Airborne Division
Operation Allies Refuge — HKIA, Kabul, Afghanistan (August–September 2021)
17 Years Active Duty | Bronze Star Medal | Combat Infantryman Badge | Meritorious Service Medal

RELIEF REQUESTED — SUMMARY			
No.	**Relief Requested**	**Current Status**	**Requested Correction**
1	Discharge Characterization Upgrade	**Other Than Honorable (OTH)**	**Honorable**
2	RE Code Correction	**RE-4 (Ineligible for Reenlistment)**	**RE-1 (Fully Eligible)**
3	Narrative Reason for Separation	**Pattern of Misconduct (Chap. 14)**	**Secretarial Authority**
4	Issue Corrected DD Form 214	**Reflects OTH / RE-4 / Chap. 14**	**Reflects upgraded character and RE code**

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