



A project of Public Counsel

OUR NATION'S PROMISE

A Newsletter Dedicated to the Legal Issues Facing Veterans and Their Families

August 2013

Former United States Army Ranger Clerks for Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement

Los Angeles, CA -

The Center for Veterans Advancement (CVA) expresses its gratitude for its summer clerk, Geoffrey Cleveland. Geoff worked diligently to prepare numerous memos and was invaluable for his research regarding military veteran issues. His experience in the Army as a Ranger helped to bring additional insight to our cases. In addition, Geoffrey was a major contributor in responding for CVA to Senate Bill S.928, which is currently being reviewed by the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Join us in wishing Geoff continued success in his career.

- **Rick Little**, Director, Center for Veterans Advancement at Public Counsel



Summer Law Clerk Geoffrey Cleveland



Geoff Cleveland grew up in Riverside, California and received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of California, Riverside. After graduation, he enlisted in the United States Army and served with the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment.

He deployed six times in support of the Global War on Terrorism to both Iraq and Afghanistan, the majority of which he served as a Ranger fire-team leader. His experience overseas enabled him to connect with CVA clients in a more personal way.

During his time at CVA, Geoff's diligence and hard work in the areas of family, consumer, and laws

regarding veteran issues has helped advance the legal services provided to veterans and their families both locally and nationally. His self-effacing nature was key to his ability to interface effectively with veterans at CVA's legal services office at the VA West Los Angeles Medical Center. Recently, at the invitation of the California State of California Ombudsman/Department of Health and Human Services Agency, Geoff and CVA attorney Nancy Wheeler provided an educational seminar to state advocates and senior citizens on how to effectively respond to "scammers" who attempt to attach protected VA benefits.

Geoff helped to found the Armed Forces Law Society at Southwestern Law School, a group intended to create camaraderie and assist other veteran law students in navigating their way through law school and beyond. He is currently a rising second year law student at Southwestern Law School, and a research assistant to his criminal law professor.

"My summer at the Center for Veterans' Advancement was both rewarding and enjoyable. It was a true comfort to be able to work with such talented, dedicated and passionate individuals and at the same time gain a practical legal experience. I was welcomed right from the start, and I'm happy to say the CVA "fire-team" will be life long friends." - Geoff Cleveland

Ed Casey wins back "Class A" Uniform for National Guardsman



"Chester Winworthy" has been active in the Army National Guard since 2008. He sought assistance from the Center for Veterans Advancement in order to regain possession of several items, including his dress uniform that his ex-girlfriend refused to return to him upon his deployment to Afghanistan. The ex-girlfriend also failed to pay off debts that she incurred under our client's name. This poor credit had the potential to affect the soldier's military clearance level, and could result in possible discipline by his command. It was later discovered that the ex-girlfriend asked a friend, employed by a law firm, to send our client a purported cease and desist letter, threatening prosecution under civil and military law. This letter was sent on an attorney's letterhead, but apparently without the attorney's knowledge.

CVA enlisted the assistance of Ed Casey, of the law firm Alston + Bird, LLP. Mr. Casey was able to obtain a settlement in the amount of \$1,500.00 for improper threats of criminal prosecution for a potential civil matter. Mr. Casey was able to successfully obtain settlements with three of four outstanding creditors, and pay off the debts with the settlement money. The final creditor refused to settle, but did acknowledge that the debt was from 2008, and thus time-barred from suit. Mr. Casey also filed suit against the ex-girlfriend, utilizing the services of a private investigator to serve her for the two complaints necessary to ensure return of all the soldier's personal items, including his dress uniform.

The Good Life

Crawling through North Vietnamese burrows, "Tommy" anxiously hunted the enemy hiding underground. Having already been wounded in combat, he was ever vigilant of enemy attack. Yet, in the damp and dark confined spaces of enemy shelter, Tommy thought to himself that if he survived Vietnam, he would live the "good life" in his home town of Seattle. Little did Tommy know...

Tommy never thought finding work would be so hard. Businesses had no interest in hiring a successful Tunnel Rat no matter how many medals Tommy had to his name. Tommy also suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, claustrophobia and severe depression, making access to employment even more unlikely. Destitute and without hope, Tommy turned to other methods to survive and cope.

Leaving prison for the last time, he reached out for help and connected with the director of Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement (CVA). However, while Tommy's claim for income stability and healthcare moved forward, he was diagnosed with cancer, heart-failure, hypertension and diabetes. Then, out of nowhere, Tommy suffered a stroke, making it difficult for him to communicate.

His claim progressed at a glacial pace. With no relief in sight, all seemed lost to Tommy. At times suicide seemed to make the most sense. Finally, after many years, he was awarded the financial income and medical care he desperately needed. Indeed, thanks to the perseverance of CVA staff, Tommy was awarded over \$178,000 in benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Tommy now lives near a wooded area of Seattle. He frequently warms himself by the fireplace in his home and finds comfort with the love of his life, Jane. The "good life", albeit late, had arrived.



Jeremy Jass *Pro bono Partner*

Jeremy Jass recently established his own firm, Jass Law, to focus on his clients' needs and the community. Prior to attending law school, Mr. Jass served the community as a police officer with a local Southern California agency. Before serving his community as a police officer, Mr. Jass attended California State University, Long Beach, where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice. He earned his Juris Doctorate Degree from Chapman University School of Law where he was a member of the Mock Trial Board and received the Commitment to Service Award.

Upon passing the California State Bar Exam, Mr. Jass took an associate position with a reputable Southern California firm practicing in the areas of labor & employment law, constitutional law, and



criminal defense. Ultimately, Mr. Jass started Jass Law in an effort to better serve the community. He currently practices in the areas of criminal defense, automobile liability, premises liability, labor & employment law, medical malpractice, law enforcement liability, and constitutional law. He is an active member of the California State Bar, Consumer Attorneys' Association of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Bar Association, and the Orange County Bar Association. Mr. Jass is a graduate of the Orange County Bar Association's College of Trial Advocacy. He is admitted to practice in California State Courts, as well as the United States District Court, Central, Southern, and Northern Districts.

Earlier this year, Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement (CVA) was in need of volunteer attorneys to represent indigent military veterans. Through the CVA-LACBA Pro Bono Veterans Project, Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Ely Grinvald contacted attorney Jeremy Jass regarding Clifford Breed, a retired military veteran with over 20 years of service with the United States Navy. Mr. Breed needed representation for two misdemeanor charges of sleeping in public. Mr. Jass quickly agreed to represent Mr. Breed.

During the initial consultation, Mr. Jass discovered that Mr. Breed actually had five misdemeanor cases pending; three in Long Beach for sleeping in public, and two in Los Angeles for loitering. Mr. Jass agreed to represent Mr. Breed in all five cases.

Appearing on all five of Mr. Breed's cases, Mr. Jass was successful in getting three of the five charges dropped. When Mr. Jass appeared for Mr. Breed on the two remaining charges of sleeping in public, the Clerk stated that there was no arraignment on the calendar and that Mr. Breed just needed to pay a fine of \$486 for each count. Mr. Jass immediately asserted that Mr. Breed could not be fined without due process, and that to subject him to a fine at such an early stage violated Mr. Breed's constitutional rights. The Clerk then quickly put Mr. Breed's cases on the court calendar. The arraignment is scheduled for September 30, 2013.

You can contact Mr. Jass by phone at 562-787-2594 or by email at Jeremy@jasslaw.com

CVA-LACBA Veterans Pro Bono Project Helps Veterans Remove Legal Barriers to Employment and Housing

Join us and help America's veterans rebuild their lives

The Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA), the largest metropolitan private bar association in the United States, and Public Counsel's nationally acclaimed Center for Veterans Advancement have joined forces to help "uphold our nation's promise to veterans and their families" and to stem the tide of poverty among our nation's veterans and their families.

LACBA will work with CVA to recruit and train *pro bono* attorneys to provide free legal assistance and representation to Veterans on a range of legal matters,



Veterans Pro Bono Project

including family law, and ticket and warrant matters, which can become major obstacles to employment or housing stability. This joint partnership will assist veterans throughout Los Angeles County.

If you are interested in providing *pro bono* legal assistance to low-income veterans, please contact Project Coordinator Barbara Luttenberger at 213-385-2977 x189, or LACBA Pro Bono Coordinator, Laurie Aronoff at 213-833-6776.

Other Opportunities to Serve

Pro bono attorneys are always welcome!

These veterans need your help now. Opportunities are open to all attorneys in the California bar and throughout the United States.

- Twenty-six year old veteran, honorably discharged from the Army in 2012, needs legal assistance with a ticket for driving with a suspended license and two additional speeding tickets. Client is currently at a sober living facility in West Los Angeles.
- Fifty-two year old veteran residing in Long Beach, CA, discharged honorably from the Marine Corps in 1979, needs assistance with twenty-two warrants for recycling and other minor offenses.
- US Marine Corps veteran, suffered from a brain trauma after his medical discharge. SSA granted him SSI benefits in 2006, but they revoked it after a period of incarceration. His application to reinstate his SSI has been denied, though his severe epilepsy persists. He has timely appealed *pro se*, but would appreciate representation once a hearing is scheduled.

If you are interested in helping these veterans, please contact Project Coordinator Barbara Luttenberger 213-385-2977 x189, or bluttenberger@publiccounsel.org.

Center for Veterans Advancement

Rick Little, Director
610 South Ardmore Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90005

Newsletter Editor
Barbara Luttenberger
bluttenberger@publiccounsel.org
213-385-2977 x189
