

# Honoring the Oath of Service

## VFW Helps Veteran with PTS Access Overdue Benefits

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After more than 25 years, Richard Chavez's VA disability rating recently jumped from 10% to 100%. Chavez says all credit is due to Anthony Lowe, who not only provided expert claim assistance, but also made sure Chavez had the support he needed when recalling traumatic events from his military service.

Lowe was recently appointed as the VFW's Associate Director of Economic Opportunity & Transition Policy. In his new role, he develops organizational strategy to implement the VFW's programs and policies. Even with his increased duties, Lowe maintains VA accreditation and continues to share expert VA claim assistance as a veteran service officer.

Lowe says, "These claims aren't only about financial compensation — they're about getting the VA to recognize that they are no longer the same person after their military service. Their lives have been changed, and in Mr. Chavez's case, forever changed due to his experiences during the Vietnam War."

Chavez served in the Air Force, and achieved the rank of master sergeant. Like so many veterans, he suffered with undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) for years before finally going through the VA examinations he needed to obtain benefits.

While serving in the Vietnam War, Chavez endured several horrific tragedies. A night permanently etched in his memory began with a mortar attack on his barracks. Chavez was returning home from dinner when he saw the wooden dorms go up in a blaze. He ran to pull friends out of the fire, but for many, it was already too late.

"Some were still alive," he said, "but others were nothing but bones and skin. I buried this memory for decades..."

Chavez continued his military career, and retired after 24 years of honorable service. He held numerous leadership positions, and worked with the Social Actions Office to increase recognition of female and minority officers. He said, "The best aspect of my military service

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was serving as a first sergeant for three squadrons for three years, until I retired in 1992. At this assignment I was able to truly assist and aid our ‘total force,’ 24/7!”

He previously tried to increase his VA rating, but a negative experience with a VA physician — coupled with his struggle with undiagnosed PTS — caused Chavez to abandon the process.

Lowe understood the overwhelming pain Chavez felt when recalling certain events from his service. So in a break from procedure, he volunteered to go with Chavez to his psychiatric exam.

“We went through talking points and brought the meticulous records Chavez had kept to the appointment. He made it through the entire interview and kept his composure. I was so proud of him,” Lowe said. “In less than six months, his rating went from 10% to 90% (later increased to 100%).”

When asked what advice he had for other veterans going through the VA claims process, Lowe said, “I would encourage all veterans to seek help from an accredited veteran service officer. We know the process and can help a veteran navigate that process.”

“We all took the same Oath, so whether you served 50 years or five months ago — you earned these benefits.”

Learn more about the [VFW’s National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#), or find a VFW Service Officer near you.