

'He Gave Me Hope'

When her VA claim was denied, Navy veteran Brandi Rice turned to a VFW Accredited Service Officer for help

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Navy veteran Brandi Rice, 57, lives in Wichita, Kansas, with her former shipmate and husband of 32 years, John.

“Together, we have raised three wonderful daughters: Cori, Kyra and Cassidy,” she said.

Before becoming a wife and mother, Rice set out to travel the world while continuing a family tradition.

“My father, grandfather and uncles were all Navy veterans, and my younger brother enlisted just before I did,” she said.

Rice joined the Navy in 1985. After boot camp, she was sent to Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois to train as an electrician. While she was there, Rice said, a Saudi Arabian officer who was attending another school on the base raped her.

“Not knowing where to turn, I reached out to a base chaplain, who told me that foreign students had diplomatic immunity,” she said. “I was afraid if I reported it, I would be discharged, so I stayed quiet.”

Rice did her best to put the incident behind her. She was looking forward to boarding her ship, USS Acadia, and her first overseas assignment in the Philippines. But after a Navy ship was bombed during the Iran-Iraq War in 1987, Rice’s crew — en route from Subic Bay to Diego Garcia — was sent to the Middle East to provide support and make repairs.

“Once I heard my ship was rerouted to Saudi Arabia, I fell apart,” she said. “Not only was I being taken to a ship where 37 sailors lost their lives, but also [I was being taken] to the country of my rapist.”

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Rice began suffering from depression and started self-harming. Once she completed service, her condition did not improve. Rice continued having flashbacks, nightmares, suicidal thoughts and feelings of unworthiness.

“Raising my three girls was a struggle because I always worried about them being abused,” she said. “I sought help many times and have stayed in mental facilities, always to be released with little help.”

Eventually, it was suggested to Rice that she apply for VA disability.

“I filed a claim and was denied,” she said. “I tried a second time and included statements from shipmates but was denied again.”

Three years ago, Rice learned about the VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) and made an appointment with VFW Accredited Service Officer Todd Schroeder.

“With care and kindness, he reviewed the details of my case thoroughly. He was understanding and thoughtful and made me feel safe and heard,” Rice said. “He gave me hope.”

With Schroeder’s help, Rice received a disability rating of 50 percent.

“Now, things seem a little less difficult,” Rice said. “I’m working with a therapist, and I feel like I’m on the right track, finally. I’m very thankful for Todd. I can only hope other veterans go to the VFW to find the help they need too.”

Learn more about the [VFW's National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).