

## Can You Trust Your Department's Leadership?

Navy SEAL Team 6 operator relinquished to cleaning toilets, mowing lawns over 'false accusations'. "Guilty until proven innocent."

*By Eddie Molina*

If you were accused of misconduct by your department's leadership and the case lacked any real evidence- do you think they would have your back afterward? What if you were part of an elite unit and have the awards and medals to prove your commitment to serve- would your upper echelon leaders back you up then? One would think so- but not for Navy Seal Team 6 Special Operator First Class Aaron Howard.

The ousted Navy Seal Team 6 member (the most elite among the Seal teams) has been cast aside from his original unit as he painfully awaits the conclusion of his fight to medically retire and restore his reputation his leadership has taken from him. The reason he's been reassigned stemmed from a loose case that had zero physical evidence and lacked any form of credibility.

That's quite the turnaround for the 2016 Navy Sailor of the Year with a Bronze Star with Combat Valor.



In December 2017, Aaron was called in to his military bosses' office for a briefing.

"When I walked into the commander's office, they sat me down and told me I may be facing charges but they could not elaborate on any details. Then they expected me to sign legal documents that I didn't fully understand, that's when I asked to speak to my lawyer." Aaron told LET.

His response was that of any law enforcement officer sitting in a hot seat like that. That is the equivalent of an officer asking for a PBA rep for an administrative hearing that may lead to criminal charges.

That is the most reasonable response anyone should have in that position, but his chain of command disagreed. In an environment built on a foundation of extreme discipline, they expected him to blindly sign forms that could lead to prosecution. He chose not to sign anything legal until he consulted with an attorney.

*'How dare you say no to me'* is the position his leaders took. Once he acquired a civilian attorney, Michael Waddington, the details started to emerge. His chain of command wanted to charge him with 'catfishing' - which in itself is not even a crime. And the prosecution had one huge problem- no real evidence.

Aaron even passed two polygraph tests but they still went after him.

"One of the women who was 'catfished' was extremely close to the command leadership, and they were looking for the culprit." Said Aaron. "Once I asked for a lawyer, they took it as a sign of guilt and came after me with everything they had."

During the trial, there were no images sent or received from either Aaron or the victims. There was no proof that Aaron ever had the messaging App used to 'catfish' these women.

"The NCIS agent testified under oath that Apple does not keep track of apps downloaded from their app Store." Said Aaron's attorney Michael Waddington.



According to the Support page on the Apple website, they track all apps you download for marketing purposes.

"I was shocked that they convicted Howard, especially after NCIS stated that they could not get a search warrant from a local judge because they had "No Probable Cause" to link Howard to the cat fishing." Said Michael Waddington.

That's just one example of the complexities of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

"In the military, the defense does not have the ability to subpoena people or documents." Said Michael Waddington.

"Before I was ever charged with a crime, they illegally took all my pay away to include special pays- diving, parachute, demolition pay, special duty incentive pay, and advanced incentive pay." Said Aaron.

Sounds a lot like guilty until proven innocent.

Now Aaron spends his days in an administrative unit cleaning toilets, mowing grass and picking up trash. A symbolic gesture to the way his leadership has treated him from the beginning of this unnecessary trial- which is no way to treat one of America's heroes.



*When Aaron's dress uniform was finally returned, his command took it apart to further take away his dignity.*

“My goal at this point is to medically retire and walk away with something after they tried to take everything from me.”  
Said Aaron.

Even though any true professional law enforcement officer always puts the mission first, when push comes to shove, your leadership may take a surprising position. That should never stop you from doing your job, but know who you can *really* trust.

If you want to support Aaron Howard and his fight to restore his reputation, go to

<https://www.change.org/Pardonahero>

*About the writer: Eddie Molina voluntarily writes Law Enforcement and military articles to help keep the community informed. He also works with the End of Watch with Bootsy and Sal podcast, link available on [www.eddiemolina.com](http://www.eddiemolina.com)*