

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
for the
District of Rhode Island

United States of America
v.
SARAH JANE CAVANAUGH, YOB: 1991
Case No. 1:22MJ17LDA
Defendant(s)

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date(s) of August 2021 to present in the county of in the
District of Rhode Island, the defendant(s) violated:

Table with 2 columns: Code Section, Offense Description. Rows include 18 U.S.C. § 498; 18 U.S.C. § 1343; 18 U.S.C. § 704(b) & (d)(1); and 18 U.S.C. § 1028A. Offense descriptions include Military or Naval Discharge Certificates; Fraud by Wire, Radio, or Television; Collectively Military Medals or Decorations; and Aggravated Identity Theft.

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:

See the attached Affidavit of Special Agent Thomas Donnelly of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Inspector General ("VA OIG").

Continued on the attached sheet.

Handwritten signature of Thomas Donnelly

Complainant's signature

Special Agent Thomas Donnelly - VA OIG

Printed name and title

Sworn to before me and signed Telephone

Date: March 11, 2022

City and state: Providence, Rhode Island

Handwritten signature of Lincoln D. Almond

Judge's signature

Lincoln D. Almond, U.S. Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

AFFIDAVIT OF VA OIG SPECIAL AGENT THOMAS DONNELLY

I, Special Agent Thomas Donnelly, depose and state as follows:

INTRODUCTION AND AGENT BACKGROUND

1. I am a Special Agent with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Inspector General (VA OIG), where I have been employed since June 2021. Prior to joining VA OIG, I was employed as a Special Agent with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) for approximately six years. I am a graduate of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's Criminal Investigator Training Program and the NCIS Special Agent Basic Training Program. Prior to NCIS, I served as a uniformed police officer for the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.
2. I am currently assigned to the Manchester, NH Resident Agency of the VA OIG. Among my duties, I investigate violations of Title 18 of the United States Code, including conducting investigations related to fraud and violations of the Stolen Valor Act.
3. During my law enforcement career, I have participated in investigations involving fraud, identity theft, and falsified documents.
4. As described below, there is probable cause to believe that SARAH JANE CAVANAUGH (YOB: 1991) committed violations of federal law, namely, 18 U.S.C. § 498 (Military or Naval Discharge Certificates), 18 U.S.C. § 1343 (Fraud by

Wire, Radio, or Television), 18 U.S.C. § 704(b) & (d)(1) (collectively Military Medals or Decorations), and 18 U.S.C. § 1028A (Aggravated Identity Theft).

5. I am aware, based on my training and experience, that 18 U.S.C. § 498 makes it a federal offense for any person to counterfeit, forge, or alter United States military discharge papers, and 18 U.S.C. § 704(b)(d)(1) makes it a federal offense for any person to claim receipt of military medals for the purposes of obtaining a tangible benefit. Further, 18 U.S.C. § 1343 makes it a federal offense for any person to use false pretenses to obtain money or property by means of wire communication transmitted in interstate commerce. Finally, I know that 18 U.S.C. § 1028A makes it a federal offense for any person, while committing wire fraud, to knowingly use a means of identification of another individual without lawful authority.
6. Having so stated, I submit this affidavit in support of a criminal complaint charging CAVANAUGH with having made false statements regarding her purported military service in order to obtain both monetary and non-monetary benefits. I also make this affidavit in support of a criminal complaint charging CAVANAUGH with unlawfully using the means of identification of others in furtherance of committing this fraud and, further, using wire and electronic communications to facilitate her fraudulent scheme.
7. The statements contained in this affidavit are based on my participation in this investigation and conversations with other law enforcement officers involved in the investigation. This affidavit is submitted for the limited purpose of

establishing probable cause to believe that CAVANAUGH violated 18 U.S.C. § 498, 18 U.S.C. § 704(b)(d)(1), 18 U.S.C. § 1028A, and U.S.C. § 1343 and, accordingly, I have set forth the information obtained by me and other law enforcement personnel during the course of the investigation deemed necessary to establish said probable cause.

**CAVANAUGH ALTERED OR FORGED A MILITARY DISCHARGE
CERTIFICATE IN FURTHERANCE OF FRAUD**

8. On January 27, 2022, Wesley Archambault-Beach, the Associate Chief of Patient Services at the Providence, RI Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), received an inquiry from Chelsey Simoni. Simoni represents the non-profit organization "HunterSeven." This organization conducts research on military veteran-specific issues and also provides monetary aid to veterans in need of assistance. Simoni stated her organization received a request from CAVANAUGH for help with paying medical bills. Simoni sought assistance in determining if CAVANAUGH was a veteran of the United States Marine Corps (USMC). Archambault-Beach conducted inquiries of various VA databases and found no evidence that CAVANAUGH ever served in the USMC. Archambault-Beach advised Simoni of this fact and relayed this information to Veterans Affairs Police Service.
9. Simoni provided copies of medical bills, a medical diagnosis for cancer, and a DD Form 214 ("DD-214") - a military Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty - in CAVANAUGH's name. The medical bills appeared to show that CAVANAUGH was undergoing cancer treatments at the Dana Farber Institute

in Boston, MA. CAVANAUGH alleged she had lung cancer from exposure to burn pits in Iraq/Afghanistan as well as inhaling particulate matter in the aftermath of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack. The DD-214 indicated CAVANAUGH served in the USMC from 2009 to 2016 and achieved the rank of Corporal. Further scrutiny of the DD-214 provided by CAVANAUGH to Simoni revealed inconsistencies. CAVANAUGH's alleged discharge date was circa December 2016. However, the DD-214 was signed by a personnel officer in November 2015. Based on your affiant's experience, DD-214s are signed by the personnel officer on or near the date of discharge. The DD-214 submitted by CAVANAUGH reflects a signing date nearly a year in advance of her alleged discharge date. Additionally, the DD-214 indicated CAVANAUGH served as a Marine Security Guard (MSG). These Marines serve at all US Embassies overseas. Under the block for military education, no mention of MSG training was entered. This DD-214 credited CAVANAUGH with earning a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star with "V" device. The Purple Heart is given to military members who suffer wounds from enemy action. The Bronze Star with "V" device is awarded for meritorious or heroic acts performed during actual combat.

10. Your affiant conducted independent queries of the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS) for CAVANAUGH. As background, DPRIS generally contains digital military service records for members of all branches of the military, excepting the United States Coast Guard. Military servicemembers who were discharged or retired after 1999 are generally

contained in this system. Searches are conducted by last name and Social Security Number. No records were found for CAVANAUGH in this system. The DD-214 CAVANAUGH used to attempt to get monetary donations from Chelsey Simoni and HunterSeven was therefore not an authentic document.

CAVANAUGH CLAIMED MILITARY MEDALS TO WHICH SHE WAS NOT ENTITLED IN FUTURE OF FRAUD

11. Several media outlets reported on CAVANAUGH and her alleged military service at various events. For example, CAVANAUGH appeared in a US Marine Corps uniform at an event dedicating the Purple Heart Trail in Rhode Island in August 2021. Photographs of the event depict CAVANAUGH in a Marine Corps dress uniform wearing a Purple Heart medal and a Bronze Star, among other awards:¹



Purple Heart recipient Staff Sgt. Sarah Cavanaugh, of the U.S. Marine Corps, listens to a speech during a dedication for the newly-named "Purple Heart Trail" last Saturday afternoon at the Westerly Elks Lodge.

¹ See https://www.independentri.com/news/article_01a382f2-faf3-11eb-aa71-bbdb86784c57.html (August 12, 2021).

CAVANAUGH also was elected to be the commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 152 in North Kingstown, RI. The VFW is a veteran's organization open only to former military service personnel who meet certain criteria. Prospective members must produce evidence of their military status to gain admittance to the organization. CAVANAUGH has appeared in numerous social media posts and media reports wearing a USMC uniform and/or VFW regalia.

12. Your affiant conducted a review of the contents of CAVANAUGH's official VA email account. As background, employees of the VA are issued an email account (va.gov domain) for the purposes of conducting official business. Users of VA computer systems have no reasonable expectation of privacy and must acknowledge a statement regarding the fact all official computer activity is subject to monitoring prior to logging into a VA computer. Your affiant reviewed an email sent from CAVANAUGH's official VA account to a business in San Diego specializing in military ribbons and medals. On September 24, 2021, CAVANAUGH emailed this business and requested to purchase, among other awards, a Bronze Star with "V" Device and a Purple Heart. CAVANAUGH requested that the medals be shipped to her home address.
13. The aforementioned altered or forged DD-214 CAVANAUGH submitted to various organizations and charities reflected that she received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with "V" device. Available Department of Defense records

support neither her claims of military service nor her being awarded such medals.

14. CAVANAUGH's claim of being a Purple Heart and Bronze Star recipient was used to obtain benefits from a charity called "CreatiVets" during 2018 and 2019. This organization uses donor money to send veterans to various art programs for therapeutic reasons. Due to limited funds, CreatiVets stated the admissions process is highly competitive. CreatiVets gave CAVANAUGH preference due to her claims of possessing both a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with "V" Device. CreatiVets spent a total of \$16,472 USD on travel, tuition in an art program, and other benefits for CAVANAUGH.

CAVANAUGH USED WIRE COMMUNICATIONS TO COMMIT FRAUD

15. At least one social media fundraising effort was initiated on CAVANAUGH's behalf. The social media fundraising website "GoFundMe" hosted a campaign for CAVANAUGH in November 2021. The campaign raised \$4,766 USD. The purpose of the fundraiser was to help CAVANAUGH pay for mounting medical bills allegedly related to her cancer. The fundraiser additionally falsely identified CAVANAUGH as a Purple Heart and Bronze Star recipient, along with a statement regarding CAVANAUGH's participation in saving US Marines following the detonation of an improvised explosive device (IED).
16. Donors from around the United States gave money to the campaign. Donor locations were logged by zip code and Internet Protocol (IP) address by

GoFundMe. Funds were transferred from donors electronically to GoFundMe.

Following the conclusion of the fundraising campaign, the money was disbursed via multiple Automated Clearing House (ACH) wire transfers directly to a People's Credit Union account controlled by CAVANAUGH.

17. CAVANAUGH had extensive contact with a non-profit organization called "Code of Support." This organization provides financial aid to veterans in need. Code of Support also interfaces with third-party charities across the United States to obtain financial aid for veterans. Code of Support is based in Virginia. CAVANAUGH utilized email to solicit money by posing as a combat veteran. In an email dated January 12, 2021, CAVANAUGH sent Code of Support a photograph of the aforementioned altered/forged DD-214 portraying herself as a US Marine veteran in receipt of the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. CAVANAUGH sent the DD-214 to prove she was eligible for receiving benefits from Code of Support and the various charities that work with that organization.
18. On January 6, 2021, Code of Support contacted another organization identified as the Matthew Pucino Foundation via email. As background, the Matthew Pucino Foundation, based in Massachusetts, was created to honor the memory of its namesake, who was a US Army soldier killed in combat. CAVANAUGH had previously sought assistance from Code of Support to pay for repairs to her home's furnace. The Matthew Pucino Foundation agreed to give money to help repair CAVANAUGH's furnace based on the fact that she claimed to be a combat veteran. The Matthew Pucino Foundation requested a copy of CAVANAUGH's

DD-214 to verify eligibility. Code of Support provided the Foundation with the same copy of the falsified DD-214 CAVANAUGH originally provided. The Matthew Pucino Foundation provided \$10,372 USD to repair CAVANAUGH's home furnace believing she was a wounded combat veteran ill with cancer.

19. On April 18, 2019, CAVANAUGH directly asked Code of Support via email to help pay for her gym membership. CAVANAUGH provided an invoice from her gym which indicated she owed \$900 USD for a six-month membership. On June 17, 2019, Code of Support advised CAVANAUGH "one of their donors" paid for the gym membership, and the gym would receive a check within seven business days.
20. On July 18, 2021, CAVANAUGH emailed Code of Support and requested assistance with paying her mortgage. CAVANAUGH included a screenshot of what appears to be a Citizens Bank page showing her home address and a mortgage payment due in the amount of \$2,474.08.
21. On September 02, 2021, CAVANAUGH emailed Code of Support and asked for additional financial assistance. In the email, CAVANAUGH falsely claimed she normally receives \$6,184 USD per month from the VA. CAVANAUGH further states this amount was cut due to an "overpayment." CAVANAUGH then requests \$1,500 USD from Code of Support to pay unspecified monthly bills. In a follow-up email the same day, CAVANAUGH reminded Code of Support she was a Purple Heart recipient.

22. Code of Support stated the total amount of money or benefits collected by CAVANAUGH throughout the organization's association with her amounted to \$18,472 USD. Code of Support stated all communication with CAVANAUGH was done electronically via email or phone call.
23. CAVANAUGH also had extensive contact with the Wounded Warrior Program (WWP) between 2017 and 2021. CAVANAUGH represented herself as a wounded combat veteran to WWP. WWP provided CAVANAUGH with benefits such as a check in the amount of \$500 per month for groceries and physical therapy sessions. The total amount of money expended by WWP for CAVANAUGH is approximately \$207,000 USD.

**CAVANAUGH USED THE MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION
OF OTHERS IN FUTUREANCE OF WIRE FRAUD**

24. An analysis of the aforementioned DD-214 CAVANAUGH presented to various organizations as proof of her military service was conducted. In Block 18 ("Remarks" section) of CAVANAUGH's falsified DD-214, an Electronic Data Interchange Personal Identifier (EDIPI) number is displayed. The EDIPI is commonly referred to as a Department of Defense (DoD) Identification number, or DoD ID number. The EDIPI is a completely unique number used to identify specific individuals who are affiliated with the Department of Defense. The EDIPI was created to replace using an individual's Social Security Number (SSN) on many official forms, while still allowing positive identification. The EDIPI is directly linked with the Common Access Card (CAC) which is an official

Department of Defense identification card. For members of the military, the CAC can facilitate international travel in place of a passport and serves as Geneva Convention identification to establish the holder as a lawful combatant during armed conflict. The CAC card is used by individuals (civilian DoD employees and military members alike) to gain access to secure military installations and access DoD computer systems. The CAC, and its associated EDIPI, is a highly secure identification document that requires background investigations and submission of biometric data prior to being issued. The EDIPI is also associated with DoD medical records to, for example, track vaccination history. Once an EDIPI number is assigned to a person, it is never reused and will follow that individual for life, much like an SSN. The EDIPI is also used by member of the military when interacting with the Veterans Administration. Eligible veterans can be issued a VA identification card. That card contains the EDIPI, and the EDIPI is also contained within a veteran's sensitive medical records.

25. The EDIPI number appearing on CAVANAUGH's falsified DD-214 was researched. The EDIPI number was an actual EDIPI number that was issued real to a former Marine named Patrick Hurney. On February 24, 2022, Hurney was interviewed by your affiant and other law enforcement officers. Hurney actually served in the US Marine Corps from 2011 to 2016. Hurney is currently employed as a civilian with the US Navy in Newport, Rhode Island. Hurney brought a copy of his DD-214 to the interview. Additionally, Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) Special Agent John Deveney requested Hurney's service records

from the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS) to independently obtain a copy of the DD-214.

26. During the interview, Hurney confirmed he utilizes VA services and has visited both the VA Clinic in Middletown, RI and the Providence VAMC. Hurney denied ever interacting with CAVANAUGH at the VA. Hurney was shown a picture of CAVANAUGH, and he stated he did not recognize her.

27. Hurney reviewed CAVANAUGH's fictitious DD-214 and stated he recognized the signature in Block 21A as his own. Hurney also compared the aforementioned EDIPI number in Block 18 to his current DoD civilian CAC. Hurney and your affiant noted the numbers were identical. Hurney compared his VA identification card to the EDIPI in Block 18 of the fictitious DD-214, and both he and your affiant noted the numbers were identical. Finally, Hurney reviewed the initials in Block 30 of CAVANAUGH's fictitious DD-214 and recognized the initials as his own, in his own handwriting.

28. Hurney stated he never authorized CAVANAUGH, or anyone else, to use or modify his DD-214 or to use his EDIPI number, initials, or the signature of his name or initials. Hurney pointed out several blocks of the fictitious DD-214 that differed from his genuine document, such as those wherein CAVANAUGH's name, SSN, and date of birth appeared. Hurney further stated he never lost a copy of his DD-214 and had no information regarding how CAVANAUGH could have obtained a copy of his DD-214 and altered it to appear as though the document belonged to her.

29. Your affiant reviewed a list of veteran records accessed by CAVANAUGH during the course of her employment at the Providence, RI Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). This list was generated by the VAMC. Your affiant noted Hurney's records were viewed by CAVANAUGH. The business reason, if any, as to why CAVANAUGH accessed Hurney's records is not readily apparent.

30. As previously mentioned, your affiant conducted a review of CAVANAUGH's official VA email account. On March 27, 2020, CAVANAUGH emailed herself a copy of a letter on official Providence VAMC letterhead. The name of the attachment was "COVID medical letter.doc." The letter, addressed to American Airlines, asked the airline to issue a ticket refund to Sarah BREGLER and Anna Samantha Fallon after alleging both were unable to travel due to infection with COVID-19. CAVANAUGH, whose spouse is named Nicole BREGLER, has been known to use the last name of BREGLER on occasion, while Anna Samantha Fallon is a known associate of CAVANAUGH's. On March 30, 2020, an automated email to CAVANAUGH's official account from a VA scanner/copier contained the same document, this time with a signature. As background, VA employees can use their Personal Identification Verification (PIV) card to use government furnished scanners. Those devices then send scanned documents to a specified VA email address. The scanned letter appeared to come from, and be signed by, "Ivy Teixeira," a Registered Nurse (RN) Case Manager of the Providence, RI VAMC.

31. On February 23, 2022, your affiant and FBI Special Agent Christina Grady interviewed Ivy Tumlinson. A review of staff at the Providence, RI VAMC identified Ivy Tumlinson (neè Teixeira) as a current social worker at the facility. Tumlinson stated she knew CAVANAUGH and the two had, on occasion, worked together since both were employed as VA social workers in Providence. Your affiant showed Tumlinson the aforementioned letter. Tumlinson denied writing the letter and stated the signature “Ivy Teixiera” was not her own. Tumlinson also stated she hasn’t used her maiden name since circa 2016 and that her maiden name was spelled incorrectly in the letter (“Teixiera, instead of the proper “Teixeira”).

CONCLUSION

32. Based on these facts, I submit there is probable cause to believe that Sarah CAVANAUGH knowingly:
- a. used or exhibited a military discharge certificate, knowing the same to be forged, counterfeited, or falsely altered, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 498;
 - b. transmitted wire communications in interstate commerce of writings or pictures to obtain money or property by fraudulent pretenses or representations while executing a scheme or artifice to defraud, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1343;
 - c. with intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit, fraudulently held herself out to be the recipient of the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with V device, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 704(b) and (d)(1); and

- d. committed Aggravated Identity Theft by using a means of identification of another individual without lawful authority while committing wire fraud, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1028A.



THOMAS DONNELLY
SPECIAL AGENT, VA OIG

Attested to by the applicant in accordance with the requirements of Fed. R. Crim. P. 4.1 by:

Telephone

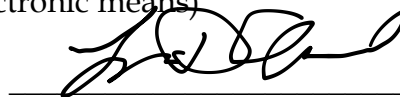
(specify reliable electronic means)

March 11, 2022

Date

Providence RI

City and State



Judge's signature

Lincoln D Almond USMJ

U.S. Magistrate Judge

United States v. Sarah Jane Cavanaugh
COMPLAINT COVER SHEET ATTACHMENT

Count 1: (18 U.S.C. § 498 - Used or exhibited a military discharge certificate, knowing the same to be forged, counterfeited, or falsely altered)

MAX PENALTY

- a. 1 year imprisonment;
- b. \$100,000 fine
- c. 1 year supervised release; and
- d. \$25 special assessment

Count 2: (18 U.S.C. § 1343 - Fraud by Wire, Radio, or Television)

MAX PENALTY

- a. 20 years imprisonment;
- b. \$250,000 fine;
- c. 3 years supervised release; and
- d. \$100 special assessment

Count 3: (18 U.S.C. § 704(b) & (d)(1) - With intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit, fraudulently held herself out to be the recipient of the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with V devices)

MAX PENALTY

- a. 1 year imprisonment;
- b. \$100,000 fine
- c. 1 year supervised release; and
- d. \$25 special assessment

Count 4: (18 U.S.C. § 1028A - Aggravated Identity Theft)

MAX PENALTY

- a. 2 years imprisonment;
- b. \$250,000 fine;
- c. 1 year supervised release; and
- d. \$100 special assessment

DEFENDANT INFORMATION RELATIVE TO A CRIMINAL ACTION - IN U.S. DISTRICT COURT

BY: INFORMATION INDICTMENT COMPLAINT

CASE NO. 1:22MJ17LDA

Matter Sealed: Juvenile Other than Juvenile
 Pre-Indictment Plea Superseding Defendant Added
 Indictment Charges/Counts Added
 Information

USA vs.
 Defendant: SARAH JANE CAVANAUGH

Address: 

Name of District Court, and/or Judge/Magistrate Location (City)
 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT RHODE ISLAND
 DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND Divisional Office

Name and Office of Person Furnishing Information on THIS FORM ZACHARY A. CUNHA
 U.S. Atty Other U.S. Agency
 Phone No. (401) 709-5000
 Name of Asst. U.S. Attorney Ronald R. Gendron
 (if assigned)

Interpreter Required Dialect: _____

Birth Date  Male Alien
 Female (if applicable)

Social Security Number _____

PROCEEDING

Name of Complainant Agency, or Person (& Title, if any)
VA/Office of the Inspector General

person is awaiting trial in another Federal or State Court (give name of court)

this person/proceeding transferred from another district per (circle one) FRCrP 20, 21 or 40. Show District

this is a reprosecution of charges previously dismissed which were dismissed on motion of:

U.S. Atty Defense

this prosecution relates to a pending case involving this same defendant. (Notice of Related Case must still be filed with the Clerk.)

SHOW DOCKET NO.

prior proceedings or appearance(s) before U.S. Magistrate Judge regarding this defendant were recorded under

MAG. JUDGE CASE NO.

Place of offense RHODE ISLAND County

DEFENDANT

Issue: Warrant Summons

Location Status:

Arrest Date _____ or Date Transferred to Federal Custody _____

Currently in Federal Custody

Currently in State Custody

Writ Required

Currently on bond

Fugitive

Defense Counsel (if any): _____

FPD CJA RET'D

Appointed on Target Letter

This report amends AO 257 previously submitted

OFFENSE CHARGED - U.S.C. CITATION - STATUTORY MAXIMUM PENALTIES - ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS

Total # of Counts 4

Set	Title & Section/Offense Level (Petty = 1 / Misdemeanor = 3 / Felony = 4)	Description of Offense Charged	Felony/Misd.
	See Attached Sheet.	See Attached Sheet.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor
		Estimated trial days: 7 days	<input type="checkbox"/> Felony <input type="checkbox"/> Misdemeanor