# War on Terror Vet Wins Back Postal Service Job After 14 Years

         By [Charles S. Clark](https://www.govexec.com/voices/charles-s-clark/2332/)

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**REATED**

A letter carrier from Auburn, Maine, last week won a legal victory when the U.S. Postal Service was forced to reinstate him in a job after he was absent for 14 years while deployed in the “Global War on Terrorism.”

John Patrie, who was called up by the Maine National Guard soon after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists attacks, served almost continuously in U.S. military campaigns that included combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, before his honorable discharge in December 2015, the OSC reported in an April 25 release.  During those years, Patrie regularly provided copies of his orders to his Postal Service managers, maintained his job benefits and expressed a desire to return to mail carrying, the special counsel said.

But the Postal Service informed him in January 2016 that it would not reinstate him because he had “abandoned” his civilian post. His attorneys saw that as a violation of the 1994 Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, which is enforced for federal employees by OSC.

At first, Patrie filed a complaint with the Labor Department, whose investigation concluded that USPS violated the veterans protection law, for which Patrie had met the criteria. But after USPS again refused to reinstate him, the department referred his case to OSC, which took it to the Merit Systems Protection Board.  That board’s judges held an evidentiary hearing and ruled for Patrie.

“Patrie did everything he could under the law, and he had no idea how long he would be away,” OSC attorney Patrick Boulay told Government Executive. The veteran even kept his locker and union membership. “The whole idea of USERRA is to maintain the employment as an 'unburned bridge.' It is the service member’s choice whether to cross that bridge, but the Postal Service decided at the last moment to burn the bridge.”

The Postal Service, Boulay added, has been applying its own standards in such cases similarly for years, and is the only agency that doesn’t follow the exceptions to the law’s [five-year limit on employment eligibility.](https://www.military.com/benefits/military-legal-matters/userra/userra-frequently-asked-questions.html)

 “We are very pleased to have won this victory not just for Mr. Patrie but for service members everywhere,” said Special Counsel Henry Kerner. “Our country must honor its commitments to those who serve in uniform and defend our freedoms.”

In its initial decision, the merit board ordered the Postal Service to reinstate Patrie to his position retroactive to January 2016 and provide back pay and benefits.

USPS spokesman David Coleman said in a statement: “The Postal Service does not comment on litigation matters; this includes decisions or findings issued for litigation matters.”