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New Report Reveals Military Veterans Are Overrepresented on Death Row; 1 in 7 Individuals Executed Were Veterans

Juries Often Never Learn Critical Information about Defendants' Military Service

Washington, D.C. – On death rows across the United States, about 200 military veterans await execution — and one of every seven executed people in the modern death penalty era has been a veteran. Many of the juries that sentenced these men and women to death never heard about their honorable military service, their physical and psychological wounds, or their struggles after returning home from combat. This report, released on the eve of Veterans Day by the Death Penalty Information Center (DPI), presents new data and analysis about how military veterans are treated in the criminal justice system. It confirms the many failures that have led to an overrepresentation of military veterans on death rows -- and the troubling mischaracterization of many veterans as the "worst of the worst."

The report, *Forgotten Service, Lasting Wounds: Military Veterans and the Death Penalty* is available at: https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/research/analysis/reports/forgotten-service-lasting-wounds

"Our research shows that the military service of capital defendants is often minimized or forgotten, even when the experience has been life altering," says Robin M. Maher, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. "Veterans' untreated physical and psychological wounds can result in serious addiction and behavior problems that juries should meaningfully understand before making life-or-death sentencing decisions. Unfortunately, that does not happen in too many death penalty cases."

This report is issued as the execution of veterans is drawing sharp criticism from veteran advocacy groups, especially in Florida, which has already executed five veterans this year. Florida has sentenced at least 117 veterans to death — the highest number of any U.S. state, accounting for nearly 15% of the total number of veterans sentenced to death nationally. Just two days after a national holiday to honor servicemembers, Florida will carry out its sixth execution of a veteran, and 16th overall, with the scheduled execution of

Bryan Jennings, a former member of the Marine Corps. A week later, the state is scheduled to execute Richard Randolph, a former member of the Army.

"*Forgotten Service, Lasting Wounds* provides what practitioners have long needed: concrete data showing that combat trauma is a major factor defining the veteran experience. Combat changes people indelibly. DPI's report gives us the facts and figures to ensure combat veterans' unique experiences receive the attention they deserve in capital cases," said Art Cody, Ret. U.S. Navy Captain, and Director of the Center for Veteran Criminal Advocacy.

DPI has now assembled the largest database of death-sentenced veterans known to exist. In total, 42 states, the federal government, and the military have sentenced more than 800 veterans to death since 1972. Our country has sentenced to death veterans from every major conflict since World War II, who served in every branch of the armed forces, and held every rank from private to colonel.

Forgotten Service, Lasting Wounds follows *Battle Scars*, DPI's preliminary report about military veterans on death row, issued ten years ago.

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The **Death Penalty Information Center** (DPI) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to serve the media, policymakers, and the public with data and analysis on issues concerning capital punishment and the people it affects. DPI is funded entirely by individuals and charitable foundations. DPI does not take a position on the death penalty itself but is critical of problems in its application.

Founded in 1990, DPI promotes insightful discourse on the death penalty by curating and presenting expansive, authoritative data from credible sources and offering clear, trustworthy, and timely information and research about the history and current application of the death penalty. DPI produces groundbreaking reports on issues such as arbitrariness, secrecy, costs, innocence, and racial disparities. Each year, DPI also releases an annual year-end report highlighting significant developments and trends. A wide variety of free online resources are available on DPI's award-winning website, including searchable databases; data visualizations; educational curricula; and podcast series, 12:01: The Death Penalty in Context, which explores diverse viewpoints and experiences related to capital punishment.