

State of North Carolina Set to Execute Mentally Ill Vietnam Veteran Suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

George Franklin Page is scheduled to be executed February 27 for the 1995 shooting death of Winston-Salem police officer Stephen Levi Amos.

Page served 16 years in the military and is a Vietnam War Veteran with a long history of mental illness. For the last 20 years, he has been treated for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by hospitals, mental health professionals and the North Carolina Department of Correction.

On February 27, 1995 Page was suffering from a manic, flashback episode and began shooting out of the windows of his Winston-Salem apartment at other apartments, vehicles, and law enforcement officers who arrived on the scene, fatally wounding Officer Amos. Page told others at the time that he was surrounded by soldiers who were shooting at him.

Much of the evidence supporting Page's PTSD was never heard by the jury that sentenced him to death, including statements from family members who witnessed the episodes. Gaynell Lynch was married to Page from 1958 until 1976 and says in a sworn affidavit that Page changed dramatically after his service in Vietnam. Lynch says that many times she would find Page in the middle of the night sitting on the kitchen floor crying. Other times, he would disappear for days, and have no memory of it. No one from Page's defense team ever contacted Lynch about her experiences

Other family members also say Page suffered from his war experience, once becoming violent and yelling, "I got him, Charlie. I got him, Charlie." Another time Page shot a hole in the ceiling of his living room and appeared to be in a trance.

The State psychiatrist who examined Page after his arrest told the jury that Page did not have PTSD because his military records showed he was a truck mechanic in Vietnam and was not in combat. But those records actually show Page was stationed in Pleiku, Vietnam, the scene of numerous skirmishes and bombings in 1968. Dr. Richard Kulka, a decorated Vietnam War Veteran and recognized national expert on PTSD says well-documented research shows soldiers in various occupations can suffer from PTSD. Kulka says at the very least Page should be examined by mental health professionals with expertise in PTSD.

Page's history of mental illness is long and complex, yet the defense was denied the opportunity to hire a qualified mental health professional to fully evaluate Page before his trial. Dr. James Hilkey recently conducted such an evaluation and found that Page suffers from the symptoms of PTSD, bipolar disorder, and shows signs of neurological damage. Included in Page's documented mental health history are attempts at suicide, hospitalization for overdoses on rubbing alcohol and lighter fluid, and treatment for major depression.

Under close supervision and medication, Page's mental illness is not dangerous. In his almost eight years at Central Prison, Page has not been cited for a single infraction of prison rules.

The evidence is clear that George Page is a deeply disturbed and mentally ill man---suffering from PTSD, bipolar disorder, and debilitating alcoholism---who was suffering from a manic episode when he began shooting out his window nine years ago. The jury never heard the most compelling evidence of his mental illness.

The State of North Carolina should not execute a severely mentally ill man. The public agrees. In a 2002 Gallup Poll, 75 percent of those surveyed opposed the execution of the mentally ill. Governor Easley should grant clemency to George Page and commute his sentence to life without parole.