

# Vets tag Marine as liar

## Man sentenced for false Purple Heart claim



**By Steve Fry**  
*The Capital-Journal*

Published Wednesday, November 14, 2007

A Marine who falsely claimed he received the Purple Heart for service in Iraq faced a verbal barrage in court Tuesday from combat-wounded veterans.

Over and over, the veterans stood to blast Timothy Allen DeBusk for his lies and for staining the military award reserved for those wounded by the enemy or killed in action.



Mike Burley / The Capital-Journal

Timothy Allen DeBusk, right, and defense attorney Don Hoffman listen Tuesday at the Shawnee County Courthouse as DeBusk is sentenced for fraudulently trying to obtain a Purple Heart license plate for his car. DeBusk is a Marine veteran but wasn't wounded.

#### MEDAL

- The Purple Heart is awarded to those in the military who are wounded or killed in battle.
- The Purple Heart license tag in Kansas is obtained when a veteran shows proof he or she was wounded.

DeBusk, 27, who wasn't wounded while serving in Iraq, pleaded guilty Sept. 7 to dealing in false identification documents and making false information. The felony convictions are tied to making a forged document saying he had been wounded during the Iraq War to obtain a Purple Heart license tag for his car. DeBusk was a sergeant when he was an active-duty Marine.

Shawnee County District Court Chief Judge Nancy Parrish sentenced DeBusk to two consecutive eight-month jail terms, ordered him to undergo a mental health evaluation and said he must perform 200 hours of community service.

Assistant District Attorney Kim Knoll said DeBusk shouldn't be assigned to perform community service at a veterans hospital.

"It has been requested that he not be placed with the Veterans Administration because of the nature and the emotions connected to this case," Knoll said.

By law, Parrish had to suspend the jail terms and place DeBusk on 18 months of probation.

"You very much violated the honor that (these combat-wounded veterans) have received and the honor that others wounded in combat have received," Parrish said.

DeBusk, who appeared in court with his wife, apologized.

"I am very sorry for what I did," DeBusk said.

Upon his return from Iraq, DeBusk thought he was a deep disappointment to his father, who he said was a Purple Heart recipient.

"I didn't have the Lord at the time," DeBusk said, adding he did now.

Veterans noted DeBusk's sentencing occurred on the 25th birthday of The Wall, the Vietnam Memorial, and two days after Veterans Day and three days after the 232nd birthday of the Marine Corps.

George McKnight, who was a master sergeant who suffered burns and shrapnel wounds when two rocket-propelled grenades struck his tank during fighting in Vietnam during the 1968 Tet offensive, was terse and pointed.

"You are a despicable person," McKnight said, then sat down. McKnight retired in 1985 after serving 21 years in the Army.

Russ Estes opened and closed his hand on his own Purple Heart as he spoke on behalf of the more than 58,000 American service members killed in Vietnam.

Estes noted many Purple Heart recipients suffer guilt, asking themselves why they survived when their buddies were killed.

"Mr. DeBusk, I am embarrassed for you that you would cheapen the symbol of veterans who have earned the Purple Heart from a grateful nation for the giving of their blood or their lives," Estes said.

Another veteran, Jim Freel, was a 19-year-old Marine corporal when he was wounded on the first day during the battle of Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945.

His brother, Pfc. Billy Bob Freel, was killed May 7, 1945, in fighting in the battle of Okinawa.

"I personally feel the actions of this young man are an insult to the Corps and to those of us who have earned the right and the honor to wear the Purple Heart," Freel said.

Another veteran was Harry Bryant, who served in the Vietnam War and was hospitalized for two years while recovering from gunshot wounds.

Bryant, a machine gunner, was shot in the left arm, left foot and twice in the right hand.

Bryant, a retired Marine sergeant, spoke of another Purple Heart recipient, Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Bienvenido Geniza Dona, more commonly known as "Doc."

After Bryant was shot on March 23, 1966, Dona was treating his arm wound when a sniper shot Bryant in the hand and fatally wounded Dona.

"No one remembers HM3 Dona, our corpsman, who died at my feet as he was giving me

medical attention that life-changing evening," Bryant said. "Yet, there are some who want to steal his glory. These people should be held accountable for their charades."

*Steve Fry can be reached at (785) 295-1206 or [steve.fry@cjonline.com](mailto:steve.fry@cjonline.com).*

Copyright 2007 The Topeka Capital-Journal