

## Details In The Execution Of John Middleton

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### **Details In The Execution Of John Middleton** **News**

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BONNE TERRE, Mo. (AP) - Convicted killer John Middleton was executed by lethal injection at 6:58 p.m. Wednesday following the failure of various appeals on his behalf in the courts. He was pronounced dead at 7:06 p.m.



The U.S. Supreme Court had been asked to halt the execution Wednesday after a federal appeals court ruled the lethal injection could move forward.

Middleton was originally scheduled to die one minute after midnight Wednesday for killing three people in rural northern Missouri in 1995. But less than two hours earlier, a federal judge ruled there was enough evidence of mental illness that a new hearing should take place.

A three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled at midday Wednesday that the execution could proceed, but Middleton's attorneys appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and the Missouri Supreme Court.

Attorney General Chris Koster made the following statement after the execution:

â"Twenty years ago, John Middleton murdered three people out of fear they would expose him as the drug dealer he was. He received the death penalty for each of his three murders. This evening, Mr. Middleton paid the ultimate price for his choices.â"

Missouri law allows a 24-hour window for executions. That means if Middleton had not been executed by midnight, the Missouri Supreme Court would have needed to set a new execution date.

A flurry of appeals and court cases has sought to spare Middleton's life. U.S. District Judge Catherine Perry first granted a stay early Tuesday, but that was overturned by the appeals court. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ruling and declined to halt the execution on several other grounds, including the contention by Middleton's attorneys that he was innocent of the crimes.

Middleton's attorneys then went back to Perry, who again granted a stay late Tuesday night.

Middleton, 54, was the sixth man put to death in Missouri this year. Only Florida and Texas have performed more executions in 2014 with seven each.

Middleton was convicted of killing Randy "Happy" Hamilton, Stacey Hodge and Alfred Pinegar out of concern that they would tell police about his methamphetamine dealing. Middleton's girlfriend, Maggie Hodges, is serving life in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree murder in all three cases.

Middleton's attorneys contend that the wrong man was arrested, citing new evidence that included a witness who came forward in February.

"We're looking at a situation where if (Middleton) had zealous representation at trial he likely would

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have been acquitted," attorney Joseph Perkovich said.

Attorney General Koster disagreed.

"The time for enforcement of Missouri's criminal judgment against John Middleton is long overdue," Koster wrote in a court response on Tuesday.

Middleton was a meth dealer in sparsely populated northern Missouri in the mid-1990s. After several drug suspects were arrested on June 10, 1995, he allegedly told a friend: "The snitches around here are going to start going down."

A day later, according to court records, Middleton and his girlfriend met Hamilton and Hodge on a gravel road. Prosecutors said Middleton shot and killed them both and hid the bodies in the trunk of Hamilton's car.

Pinegar, another meth dealer, was shot in the face on June 23, 1995. His body was found in a field near Bethany.

Middleton allegedly told acquaintances about his exploits. He was charged in all three killings and convicted in 1997.

But in February, a man whose name has not been disclosed because he fears retribution signed an affidavit saying that two rival meth dealers drove him to a rural area soon after Pinegar's death and accused him of being a snitch. He said the men showed him Pinegar's body and told him: "There's already been three people killed. You want to be number four?"

The new witness said the dealers then beat him unconscious with a baseball bat and raped his girlfriend.

Harrison County Sheriff Josh Eckerson agreed to take a new look at the case, but said his investigation found no evidence to back up the new assertions. He is convinced that Middleton is the real killer.

John Middleton left a final written statement: "You are killing an innocent man."