

# Police kill Iraq veteran who held up bank to demand VA disability payment

Eric London  
8 July 2017

Police in Marietta, Georgia shot and killed Brian Easley, a 33-year-old Iraq war veteran, Friday after he held up a Wells Fargo bank in an act of desperation.

Easley walked in to the bank at roughly 9:30 a.m. when the bank was empty. He took two bank employees hostage, both of whom said Easley was “kind” and “very respectful.”

Once inside, Easley then called a local ABC news affiliate to list his demand: “\$892.” The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had arbitrarily cut his disability payment, which he wanted back. He was about to become homeless and had run out of money.

Easley claimed he had explosives in his backpack, though police have not stated whether any explosives were found. A search of the hotel where Easley was staying turned up no explosives.

He spent an hour on the phone with an ABC news receptionist. He put both employees on the phone to confirm that they were unharmed. The conversation that ensued was recorded.

The young veteran had an eight-year-old daughter. He explained that he spent two tours in the Iraq war with the Marines, but that the VA had recently decided to cut his disability payments. He feared he could not care for his child.

“I have nothing,” he told the receptionist. “I’m homeless because I don’t have any money and I want my money back.”

After four years in the military, Easley explained that he moved back in with his parents in Georgia. “I went back to a warehouse job for a little while and I went to school for a bit. I even went back to film school for a bit.”

He was not able to make ends meet, but was careful to explain that he was not robbing the bank: “I just want my money back. I’m not a thief. I haven’t taken

anything from the bank.

“I have no criminal record,” he said. “I don’t know why, but they took my disability check and I have nothing and I’ll be out on the street and I won’t have any money for food or anything and I’m going to starve.”

He assured the police and WSB-TV that he would not hurt the two hostages: “These ladies are very nice and they have been very helpful and supportive. I don’t want them to get hurt.”

Easley added, “I just don’t want [the police] to shoot me.” But they did.

There are conflicting reports about how police carried out their pointless assassination. According to one report, a SWAT vehicle drove up to the bank’s front door and officers in military gear swept in, firing 10 gunshots at Easley. The hostages are fortunate to have escaped such a highly reckless police maneuver. In another version, the hostages left the building through an opening and police only shot Easley after the hostages had freed themselves or were released by Easley.

Easley indicated that this week had been particularly difficult for him. On Monday, he went to the Atlanta VA Medical Center building to request his benefits be restored. He was given an explanation that he did not understand, and when he grew agitated the VA called the police and escorted him off the property.

Easley’s desperate final act was likely part mental illness, part legitimate grievance. The VA systematically blocks veterans from receiving benefits and was recently embroiled in a scandal to kick veterans down a long waitlist in order to save money. Easley’s fear of homelessness is widespread. Tens of thousands of veterans are homeless on a given night.

Over 100,000 veterans have killed themselves since

2001, enough to populate a mid-sized American city.

The US government first threw Easley into the thick of the Iraq invasion when he was roughly 22 years old, then kicked him to the curb by denying his VA benefits, then killed him when he acted out in desperation. His clear hesitations, his peaceful intentions were not enough to save his life.

Easley's story is yet another tragic milestone in a society that is breaking down under the weight of permanent war and growing social inequality.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**