

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

May 30, 2017

The Longest Serving Wisconsin Prisoner Has Died

Garold Rheinschmidt has died in prison after serving 55 years, 4 months. He entered the prison system on January 13, 1960 and died on May 1, 2015. I don't know much about this man, what his crime was or what he did in prison for the last 55 years. I only know that he was 19 years old when he came in and was sent to minimum security in 1993 for an unknown length of time. He was not in minimum when he died.

The second longest serving prisoner is Michael Herrington who came to prison on July 8, 1967 at age 24. He is now 74 years old and to the best of my knowledge has never been to minimum security. He will have to live another 5 years to match Rheinschmidt's record.

There are 4 other prisoners who came to prison in the 1960s (1968 or 1969) who are also still in prison.

In the most recent data on lifers I have obtained, of those who were released or died without ever being released on parole, here are the numbers. Between January 1, 2009 and January 1, 2017, 64 lifers were released on parole and 47 died in prison. Based on these numbers, lifers have a 58% chance of release on parole versus a 42 % chance of dying in prison.

A couple of other interesting facts: In 1980, there were only 2 prisoners who had served more than 20 years in prison and none with over 30 years served. Now there are hundreds. The first time a lifer spent more than 30 years in prison was in 1990. Now there are 146 lifers with 30 or more years served in prison. The first time a lifer spent more than 40 years in prison was in 2000. Now there are 24 lifers with more than 40 years served.

Some of these guys are unsuitable to ever be released but many of them are simply being warehoused for political reasons. Unfortunately, the parole commission cannot be trusted to make rational decisions. They are just as likely to release a dangerous person as to retain one who poses no risk to anyone.

I hope to be able to write a follow up blog containing more lifer release statistics and possibly some graphs so everyone can see what is occurring in the Wisconsin prison system.