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Bundy Electrocuted After Night of Weeping, Praying : 500 Cheer Death of Murderer

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STARKE, Fla. — Ted Bundy, the notorious serial killer, died today in the electric chair after a night of weeping and praying, just as the sun rose over the north Florida plains.

Gone was the storied cockiness. He was ashen as two guards led him into the death chamber to be executed for the 1978 rape and murder of a 12-year-old girl. They strapped his chest and arms and legs to the shiny wooden chair.

Bundy's eyes searched for familiar faces behind the glass. He nodded to some of the 42 witnesses, including the men who had prosecuted him. His lips moved in a faint mumble.

Then his head bowed. The shaved skull glistened where an ointment had been applied. It would enhance the work of the electrodes.

His Last Words

Supt. Tom Barton asked Bundy if he had any last words. The killer hesitated. His voice quavered. "Jim and Fred, I'd like you to give my love to my family and friends," he said.

Jim Coleman, one of his lawyers, nodded. So did Fred Lawrence of Gainesville, Fla., the Methodist minister who had spent the night with Bundy in prayer.

With that, it was time. A last thick strap was pulled across Bundy's mouth and chin. The metal skullcap was bolted in place, its heavy black veil falling in front of the condemned man's face.

Barton gave the go-ahead. An anonymous executioner pushed the button. Two thousand volts surged through the wires. Bundy's body tensed and his hands tightened into a clench. A tiny puff of smoke lifted from his right leg.

Vital Signs Tested

A minute later, the machine was turned off, and Bundy went limp. A paramedic opened the blue shirt and listened for a heartbeat. A second doctor aimed a light into his eyes.

At 7:16 a.m., Theodore Robert Bundy—one of the most active killers of all time—was pronounced dead.

A witnessing newsman raised his hands in signal as he left the Q Wing of Florida State Prison.

Across the street, along the dewy grass of a cow pasture, word spread among the 500 or so who had come to be near—almost all to cheer—the execution.

Some began chanting, "Burn, Bundy, burn!" And others sang or hugged or banged on the frying pans they had brought along.

Lack of Sympathy

"I wish I could have been the one flipping the switch," said David Hoar, a policeman from St. Augustine, Fla.

In a few moments, the witnesses began strolling the field. They were a somber bunch, and a few were shocked at the celebration that filled the chilly morning air.

"Regardless of what Bundy did, he was still a human being," said Jim Sewell, police chief of Gulfport, Fla.

But even Sewell, leaden with the sight of an electrocution, said he felt a great relief that Bundy was dead.

Religious broadcaster James Dobson, who interviewed Bundy the night before his death, said the prisoner "talked at considerable length about the process of desensitization" he underwent during his series of sex slayings of women across the country.

Dobson also said that Bundy had problems with pornography as an adolescent. He said Bundy described a thirst for more violent pornography that increased until "there was nothing more that would give him that high."

Claimed to Be Remorseful

Dobson said, "He wept several times while talking to me. He expressed great regret, remorse for what he had done, for the families that were hurting."

Bundy, 42, placed two last calls to his mother in Tacoma, Wash., to say farewell.

At the conclusion of the second, Bundy's mother told him, "You'll always be my precious son," according to today's Tacoma News Tribune.

Bundy was convicted of three Florida murders, but he was blamed for dozens more in Washington, Oregon, Colorado and Utah.

Technically, he died for the 1978 murder of 12-year-old Kimberly Leach of Lake City, whom he left dead under a collapsed hog shed.

George Robert Dekle prosecuted that case--and witnessed Bundy's death:

"The thing that kept going through my mind was the awful crime scene I saw 11 years ago. I kept saying to myself that is where it started and this is where it ends."

Better Off Than Victims

Florida State Trooper Ken Robinson, another witness, said: "I felt no compassion for Bundy whatsoever. He had an easier death than any of his victims."

Bundy was still awaiting fulfillment of a separate death sentence for what is known here as the Chi Omega murders, a bloody rampage through the bedrooms of a sorority house at Florida State University.

The two bludgeoning deaths there--and the murder of the Leach girl three weeks later--were Bundy's final killings.

He was caught by a patrolman in Pensacola, Fla. who thought he looked suspicious. Bundy tried to run, but he slipped and fell in some sand.