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Killer of 2 Police Officers Executed in Florida

STARKE, Fla., May 4 (AP) — A man convicted of the murder of two police officers 14 years ago was put to death today in the Florida electric chair.

The condemned man, Jessie Joseph Tafero, 43 years old, likened himself and Sonya Jacobs, his girlfriend and co-defendant, to a "modern-day Bonnie and Clyde." They were denied permission to marry after both were condemned to die for the murders of a Highway Patrol trooper, Phillip Black, and a visiting Canadian constable, Donald Irwin.

Mr. Tafero was the 22d person put to death in Florida and the 124th nationally since the United States Supreme

Court restored states' rights to execute prisoners in 1976. Today's execution was Florida's first in exactly a year.

Because of a malfunction, it was necessary to administer three jolts of electricity to carry out the execution. Mr. Tafero was pronounced dead at 7:13 A.M., six minutes after the first jolt.

In a final statement, Mr. Tafero complained that last-minute motions filed on his behalf with a Federal judge and a state Circuit Court judge were apparently ignored.

"I'd like to say that the death penalty as applied by the states is very arbitrary and capricious," he said.

Outside the prison, four supporters of

capital punishment peered through heavy fog, watching from a pasture across the road for a signal that the condemned man was dead.

About a dozen opponents of the death penalty conducted a silent candlelight vigil. A protest march, which organizers expect to draw about 400 people, is to begin outside the prison Saturday and continue until May 19 in Atlanta.

The officers killed by Mr. Tafero were shot to death when they checked a parked car at an Interstate 95 rest stop near Fort Lauderdale on Feb. 20, 1976.

Mr. Tafero, Ms. Jacobs, her two children and a traveling companion, Walter Rhodes Jr., were sleeping when the

officers approached. Shots were fired when Mr. Tafero struggled outside the car with the officers.

Trooper Black, 39, died from gunshot wounds to the head and neck; Constable Irwin, 39, of Kitchener, Ontario, received fatal wounds to his right eye and shoulder.

Mr. Tafero, Ms. Jacobs and Mr. Rhodes were convicted of first-degree murder. Mr. Rhodes testified for the prosecution and received three concurrent life terms. Ms. Jacobs's death sentence was commuted to life in prison in 1981.

Early Friday, Mr. Tafero met with his mother, Kathleen Tafero of Miami, and a Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Robert Baker, celebrated Mass for the condemned inmate. Mr. Tafero then placed a telephone call to Ms. Jacobs, the mother of their daughter, Christina.

FLORIDA EXECUTION IS CALLED TORTURE

Appeal for Condemned Killer Cites Complications With a May 4 Electrocution

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., May 31 (AP) — Lawyers for a condemned murderer argue in an appeal that the last man Florida sent to the electric chair was tortured in a botched execution that the state is not investigating properly.

“An inmate about to be executed in Florida will likely be burned and tortured during that execution, will be conscious during the event, and will suffer pain,” says the appeal, filed on behalf of William Michael Squires.

Fire, smoke and sparks flew from the head of the last man executed in Florida, Jessie Joseph Tafero, who was put to death on May 4.

“Jessie Joseph Tafero was burned alive in Florida’s electric chair,” the appeal said. “There is no assurance that William Michael Squires will also not be burned alive.”

Accompanied by Photographs

Color photographs of the bodies of 10 executed men accompanied the motion filed Wednesday by state-paid lawyers for Mr. Squires.

The motion argues that Mr. Tafero’s execution for the fatal shootings of two law-enforcement officers 14 years ago showed that executing Mr. Squires would violate the constitutional guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment.

Mr. Squires, 48 years old, has been condemned for the fatal shooting in 1980 of a service station attendant.

Witnesses to Mr. Tafero’s execution said he appeared to breathe and move after the first and second jolts.

Gov. Bob Martinez ordered an investigation into the execution. The state Department of Corrections concluded that Mr. Tafero’s death was instant but that the mistaken replacement of a natural sponge with a synthetic sponge had caused the burns on his head.

Toaster Test Is Criticized

Mr. Squires’s lawyers criticized the corrections department for testing the flammability of the sponge used in Mr. Tafero’s execution by using a household toaster. “Scientific testing is not done with a toaster,” the attorneys wrote.

The lawyers, from the state agency that represents indigent death row inmates, said corrections officials were not competent to carry out executions without unnecessary pain.

Spokesmen for Mr. Martinez and Corrections Secretary Richard Dugger said Wednesday that the state stood by its investigation. Mr. Dugger issued a statement calling the allegations absurd, frivolous and “designed to distort Eighth Amendment issues with a smokescreen of technical and procedural fault-finding.”