

Beat: News

Missouri man executed for cold-blooded murder of gas station attendant

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USPA News - A Missouri man convicted of killing a worker at a suburban Kansas City gas station in 1994, which happened in front of the victim's young stepdaughter, was executed by lethal injection on Wednesday, state officials said. It raises the number of people executed in the United States this year to 33. Leon Taylor, 56, received a lethal injection just after midnight local time at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, a city in St. Francois County.

He was pronounced deceased at 12:22 a.m., said Mike O'Connell, a spokesman for the Missouri Department of Public Safety (DPS). Taylor conspired with his half brother and half sister to rob a gas station in the city of Independence on April 14, 1994. He murdered 53-year-old station manager Robert Newton in cold blood by shooting him in the head, even though he had already handed over the \$400 in the register and was pleading for his life. Taylor then tried to kill Newton's 8-year-old stepdaughter Sarah, but the gun jammed. In a final statement before his death, Taylor apologized to Newton's relatives, who witnessed the execution. "I am truly sorry that our lives had to entwine so tragically. I pray that the Lord will give you peace and continue to comfort you in His love," he wrote. "I am also sorry to have brought all of you to this point in my life to witness this and/or participate." Newton's half brother, Dennis Smith, described his brother as a kind, good-hearted man who was a devoted husband and nurturing dad. "We lost [Newton] one spring day while he worked his shift at a convenience store, when a coward came in to rob the store," Smith said. "My brother gave him the \$400 in the register before he and his 8-year-old daughter were forced to the backroom. Taylor shot Robert in the head, killing him, and then turned the gun on Sarah, Robert's daughter. Only because the gun jammed was her innocent life spared. She still suffers from nightmares." Smith also expressed his anger and frustration at the more than 20 years it took for Taylor's execution to be carried out. "As my brother's body lies in the cold ground, Taylor has gotten to lie in a warm prison bed, served three meals per day, access to a prison library and cable T.V. If my statement sounds bitter, you are right," he said. Smith added: "Maybe the Lord will have Robert there for Taylor's judgment as the single juror. Then this 'changed man' Leon Taylor will realize the hell like the hell on earth Robert's daughter and the rest of his family has been living through, knowing the man who killed him has lived 20, almost 21, additional years of his pathetic life."

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com