



Rosenbergs go silently to electric chair

By JACK WOLISTON

SING SING PRISON, N.Y., June 20, 1953 (UP) -- The United States had exacted full payment today from Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for the atomic age betrayal of their country.

Their lips defiantly sealed to the end, the husband and wife spy team went to their death in Sing Sing's electric chair shortly before sundown ushered in the Jewish Sabbath last night.

The Government had hoped to the last that they would talk.

Executioner Joseph Francel sent the electrical charges through their bodies. Julius, the weaker, went first. He died with a grotesque smile on his lips. A wisp of smoke curled toward the ceiling as the current charged through Mrs. Rosenberg.

It took three shocks of 2,000 volts each to electrocute Mr. Rosenberg. Four jolts swept through Mrs. Rosenberg and still she was not dead. A fifth was ordered.

Thus was sealed the secrets of a Soviet spy ring which many experts fear may still be operating in this country. The Rosenbergs refused to the end to trade the secrets for their lives.

The husband and wife were executed against a backdrop of world-wide agitation unequaled since the Sacco-Vanzetti case of the 1920's. Fired by Communist propaganda, the demonstrations reached such fever pitch in Paris that a shooting broke out and one man was wounded. The White House in Washington was virtually besieged.

The Rosenbergs were the first American civilians to die for spying. They were accused of sending a rough sketch of the atomic bomb to Russia.

"Plain, deliberate, contemplated murder is dwarfed in magnitude by comparison with the crime you have committed," Judge Irving Kaufman said in sentencing them to death on April 5, 1951.

"Millions ... may pay the price of your treason," he said.

Three times the couple had been spared.

Relatives claimed the bodies of 35-year-old electrical engineer and his plump, 37-year-old wife and they were expected to leave here by hearse around mid-morning for a still unannounced burial ground.

Julius Rosenberg, a look of defiance on his face, his eyes staring straight ahead and displaying no emotion, was the first to die. He was placed in the chair at 8:04 p.m. and was pronounced dead at 8:06.

Ethel, attired in a dark green figure print dress, came calmly, stoically, into the death chamber only two minutes after her husband's body had been taken into an autopsy room less than 20 feet away.

She was strapped in the chair. The cathode element, soaked in a saline solution and resembling a football helmet, was fitted to her head.

Then Francel, and electrician whose sideline is acting as executioner in prisons in five states, threw the switch. That was at 8:11 1/4. Four and one half minutes and after four more shocks Ethel Rosenberg was dead.

Doctors H.W. Kipp and George McCracken applied their stethoscopes to her chest.

Kipp turned to the warden and said: "I pronounce this woman dead."

Prior to their death, their defense counsel, Emanuel Bloch had waged a bitter legal battle that went five times to the U.S. Supreme Court. Twice, Bloch asked the White House for presidential clemency.

Ten official witnesses, six prison guards and Francel were in 40 by 40-foot death chamber to see the Rosenbergs die. The group included three newspapermen, Relman Morin of the Associated Press, Bob Considine of International News Service, and this writer. The three, immediately after the executions briefed 35 other newspapermen in the prison's administration building.

The other official witnesses were U.S. Marshal William A. Carroll; Warden Wilfred L. Denno, Rabbi Irving Koslowe of Mamoroneck, N.Y., Thomas M. Farley, Carroll's deputy; Paul McGinnis, deputy commissioner of the State Bureau of Prisons, and Drs. Kipp and McCracken.

The official party reached the death house by prison van from the administration building at 8:01 p.m.

At 8:02, a guard opened a door on the right side and at the far end of the prison chamber. Rabbi Koslowe, dressed in the formal robes of a spiritual leader of his faith, walked through the door. He was reading the 23rd Psalm.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." the rabbi intoned as he walked slowly down Rosenberg's "last mile."

Behind the rabbi came Rosenberg- staring straight ahead. He was clean-shaven, he no longer had the mustache which he wore when he went to the death house. He wore a T-shirt, brown trousers with a tan pin-stripe and loafers.

For a brief moment a puzzled look appeared on his face when he took one quick glance at the four benches at the rear of the chamber where the official witnesses sat.

Otherwise, he gave no sign of emotion. While the guards strapped him in the chair, adjusted the straps and electrodes, he gazed calmly ahead. Once, the trace of a sardonic smile creased his lips.

Warden Denno signaled Francel that all was ready and the slim little executioner threw the switch. There was a buzzing for three seconds and Rosenberg lurched forward, his hands clenched.

Francel released the switch. The body of Rosenberg, half dead, relaxed. Then came the second charge -- for 57 seconds. Again the man tensed, and again relaxed as the buzzing halted. Then came the third charge.

The doctors stepped forward and applied their stethoscopes, "I pronounce this man dead," Dr. Kipp advised the warden. Quickly two guards bundled the lifeless body onto a hospital cart and wheeled it into the autopsy room.

Warden Denno stepped from his position along the wall to the right of the chair and advised the three newspapermen of the time of death.

Almost immediately after he resumed his position -- at 8:08 p.m. -- the door to the left of the chair opened and down the "last mile" came Ethel Rosenberg -- calm, unsmiling, her thin lips drawn to a narrow slit.

Rabbi Koslowe preceded her, reading aloud passages from the 15th and 31st Psalms. On her left was Mrs. Evans. Mrs. Many, who said she "filled in" from her regular job as telephone operator, was on her right. Two male guards followed.

Mrs. Rosenberg had reached the chair -- had one hand on it -- when suddenly she turned and grasped the hand of Mrs. Helen Evans, a prison matron who had been in constant attendance of Mrs. Rosenberg during her two years in the death house. Then she put her arm around the elderly woman and kissed her left cheek. She mumbled a few words, turned and sat down in the chair.

The condemned woman was dressed in an ill-fitting green figured print dress supplied by the state. She wore no stockings and on her feet were loafers similar to those worn by her husband.

She did not know as she sat there that her husband already was dead. Similarly, Julius, when he was strapped into the chair, did not know whether his wife had preceded him in death.

When the first electric shock was applied, a thick white stream of smoke curled upward from the football-type helmet on her head.

The juice went off and the burned body relaxed.

Then came the second shock... the third... the fourth. A prison guard stepped forward, released one strap and pulled down the round-necked dress.

Drs. Kipp and McCracken applied their stethoscopes, then conferred in low tones. Executioner Francel joined them.

"Want another?" he asked.

The doctors nodded and stepped back to their positions beside Denno, alongside the wall.

Francel again applied the switch.

When the doctors examined the body for a second time, they quickly pronounced her dead.

The Rosenbergs and others were doomed when Igor Gouzenko, a Russian cipher clerk in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa broke with Communists and fled one night in 1945 with his shirt crammed with spy documents.

Gouzenko now is living under an assumed name -- and police protection -- "somewhere in Canada." The information he gave put police on an international espionage trail.

Among those arrested and convicted were:

Klaus Fuchs, German-born British physicist; Dr. Alan Nunn May, a Britisher, and Americans Harry Gold, Alfred Dean Slack, David Greenglass, who is Mrs. Rosenberg's brother, and Morton Sobell, who was convicted with the Rosenbergs.