

DEATH ROW SYMBOL GETS HIS WISH

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Tried and convicted in four separate trials since the 1970s, William Duane Elledge had been on Florida's **Death** Row for decades and had become a symbol of what's wrong with the **death penalty** for those opposed to capital punishment.

But last month, with no public notice, Elledge, a feeble old man of 57 years, died of natural causes, according to Florida Department of Corrections on Friday.

He had been housed in the Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, Florida, for the past 33 years.

From the beginning of his winding odyssey through Florida's legal system, Elledge had confessed to the heinous crime: murdering three people, including a Hollywood woman who spurned his sexual advances, in the summer of 1974.

But, in the decades that followed, Elledge argued that prosecutorial misconduct, a bad defense attorney and one of the longest stays on **Death Row** in state history robbed him of justice and that he merited a new sentence -- life in prison.

In the end, he got what he wanted.

He was the second-longest living **Death Row** inmate in Florida history, according to prison records. He appealed his **death** sentence three times -- in 1977, 1987, and 1999 -- and lost each time.

NO VISITORS

Convicted murderer and fellow Union Correctional Institute **Death Row** inmate, Gary Alvord, who was sentenced a week earlier than Elledge, is the longest living **Death Row** inmate, according to corrections officials.

Prison records show that no family member or friend ever visited Elledge since his incarceration in 1976 in the Raiford prison. He was divorced and had three children.

Efforts to locate his family were unsuccessful.

He was hardly a model prisoner. He had 25 disciplinary reports since 1976, mostly for "disrespect of officials, disobeying orders, possession of contraband, and spoken threats," according to corrections officials.

For his part, Elledge maintained that he was "an American political prisoner and a victim

of a cruel and unusual inhuman criminal justice system" -- in reference to his three-decade stint on **death** row, but also acknowledged his crime.

His remarks appeared on a website maintained by a Canadian human rights group opposed to the **death penalty** .

"The fact that I was under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of my crimes does not absolve me of my guilt and the truth is that I plead guilty to my crimes," Elledge wrote on the Web page.

GUILTY PLEA

A carnival worker and drifter from Toledo, Ohio, Elledge pleaded guilty to first-degree murder for raping and strangling waitress Margaret Ann Strack, 20, in a Hollywood beach motel room on Aug. 24, 1974.

Elledge, then 24, told police he killed Strack after she teased him but refused to have sex with him. He dumped her partially clothed body in a Dania church parking lot, then killed two more people during a 36-hour spree in Hollywood and Jacksonville.

Elledge later confessed to police and pleaded guilty to the murders. Elledge originally was sentenced to die in March 1975, but state and federal appeals courts reversed the **death** sentence on technical errors.

Even though the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal in 1998, Justice Stephen Breyer issued a dissent at the time, saying his imprisonment "for nearly a generation" was due to "the state's own faulty procedures and not because of frivolous appeals on his own part."

In an interview with The Miami Herald in 2005, Elledge's Fort Lauderdale lawyer, Hilliard Moldof, echoed Breyer's sentiment:

"Elledge is the poster boy for why we shouldn't be spending all this money and time trying to execute people in this country.

"This is not the same 24-year-old guy who killed. This is a different person now. He's a feeble 55-year-old man with asthma."