

Litteral and Bell Die In Gas Room

(Continued from Monday)

The attendants left the chamber. Almost immediately the thin, grey cloud of cyanide gas rose slowly from beneath Litteral's chair, and he breathed it first and gasped. Bell apparently

held his breath for a minute. He released Litteral's hand and curved his fingers around the wooden armrest. Then he, too, gasped, and soon his left fist doubled rigidly, and there was a slight spasm in the muscles of his left thigh.

Both Gasp Slightly

The two men gasped slightly at intervals of about one minute. Behind the plate-glass window, next to the control panel, two

men in white held the ends of the stethoscopes to their ears and made notes on large sheets of paper, never looking up at the dying men. Witnesses could see their heartbeats against the stethoscopes strapped on their chests.

"It cost the county \$15,000 to try those men," one witness remarked.

But mostly the witnesses were quiet.

Both men showed no signs of life at 10:10. First one, then the other of the physicians made a final entry, then lifted their heads and removed their stethoscopes. Litteral's heart had stopped beating in 12 minutes, Bell's in 18. The men sat rather stiff and in their white shorts.

Bodies Carried Away

Long, black hearses carried the bodies away from the prison—Bell's to a North Wilkesboro funeral home. Litteral's to Winston-Salem, where his brain will be removed for study by specialists at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine. He had willed his brain to the school, his eyes to any blind person who could benefit from them. But his eyes went unused—they must be removed within five minutes of death, and it takes longer than that to clear the chamber of gas.

The two men were followed

into the bright clinically clean chamber by Willie Little, Wake County Negro convicted of raping a white woman. He trembled and prayed as he entered. He was dead in nine minutes.

Bell—24 years of age, five feet, eight and one-half inches tall, 155 pounds in weight—was born in Wilkes County. Before he was arrested for rape in August, 1946, he had served two terms in a Federal prison for liquor violations, and 22 months for violating the terms of a parole.

Litteral 11 Years Older

Litteral was 11 years older than Bell and a native of High Point. His record sheet at Central Prison contained 19 entries, dating back to 1933 and including two larceny cases and a number involving liquor. When he was arrested on the rape charge, he was serving a two-month term for drunkenness and violating the prohibition laws.

Both men were visited Thursday by members of their families.

Prison officials said that Bell had been a model prisoner, his spirit good, his attitude humble since he and Litteral were committed to death row last January. He was baptized last June by Chaplain Jackson, and it was he who led the religious services on death row on the eve of his execution.

Litteral, they said, had given no trouble, but his attitude was best described as terrible—"He seemed to be against everybody and to think everybody was against him," as one prison official said.

Litteral's Attitude Changes

But both he and Bell remained calm when they were informed late Thursday afternoon that they had lost their last chance, and Litteral's attitude took an almost immediate change. He became reconciled to death, and Chaplain Jackson baptized him on death row Thursday night. "Come back early tomorrow, chaplain," Litteral said as Mr. Jackson was leaving, "so we can have a service."

Litteral spent most of the night praying and writing final letters to his family, and all three of the condemned men—two white, one Negro—spoke at the religious services yesterday morning. "Tell my friends and loved ones," Litteral said, "to accept God and serve Him before it's too late because that's the only way, I just wish I had done it myself in time."

All three of the men ate hearty breakfasts of ham and eggs and coffee.

The Chief Executive had the word of four psychiatrists on his side—they said that while Litteral was perhaps insane, he knew right from wrong. Six other psychiatrists said he was definitely insane and definitely incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong.

There is, of course, no definite solution to the insanity-and-crime problem. The only course under the law is to judge each case on its merits—which is what Governor Cherry did when he pondered Litteral's record and the conflicting reports of the specialists.

The victim of the crime was Peggy Ruth Shore, whom the men raped repeatedly during their wild ride on August 23, 1946.

Among the witnesses at the execution were State Highway Patrolman S. M. Carter of North Wilkesboro, who assisted in Bell's arrest; E. R. Lowe, Wilkes County deputy, who tended the jury in the case; Thomas R. Bryan Jr., a Wake Forest College student and son of the man who prosecuted the case, and his cousin, Tommy S. Bryan, a University of North Carolina student; Bryan Osborn, steward at the North Wilkesboro prison camp; M. J. Brown, superintendent of the Yadkinville camp; J. F. Bennett of Wilkes county, who knew Litteral before his arrest; the Rev. Clay Childers of High Point, who arrived too late to talk to the condemned men; T. M. Bell of High Point; J. L. Bryan, of Moncure; State High-

way Patrolmen C. R. Shook and T. G. Roberts of North Wilkesboro; Police Officers J. R. Harrison and R. A. Satterfield of Winston-Salem; and R. L. Spencer, former Wilkes County deputy, who knew Bell.

Funeral for Bell, son of Mr. and Mrs. Claude Bell, of Roaring River, was held Sunday afternoon at Antioch church with Rev. R. R. Crater in charge of the service, which was attended by a throng of people from many communities.

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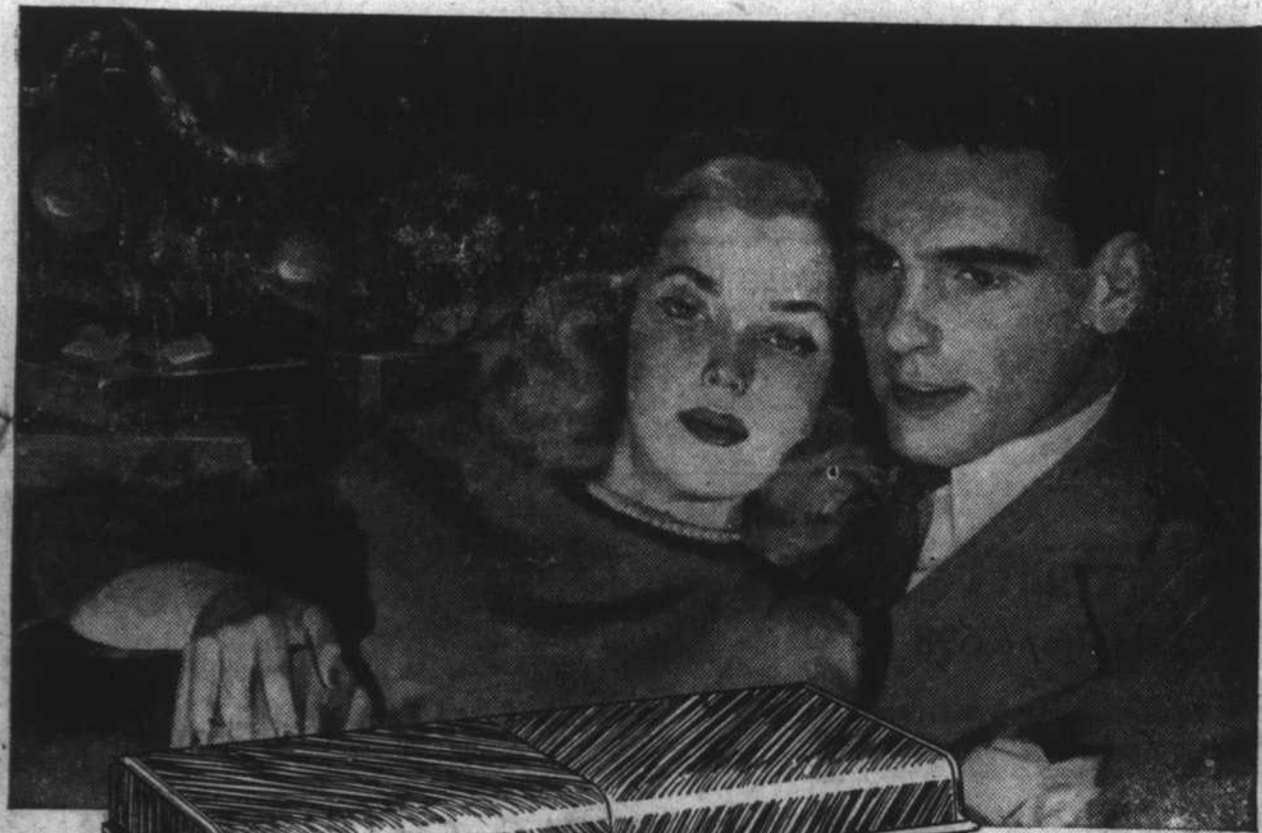


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