

Beltway Sniper Executed

John Allen Muhammad, the mastermind behind the sniper attacks that left 10 dead, was executed Tuesday night as relatives of the victims watched, reliving the killing spree that terrorized the Washington metro area for three weeks in October 2002.

Muhammad looked calm and stoic, but was twitching and blinking as the injections began, defiant to the end, refusing to utter any final words. Victims' families sat behind glass while watching the execution, separated from the rest of the 27 witnesses. "He died very peacefully, much more than most of his victims," said Prince William County prosecutor Paul Ebert, who witnessed Muhammad die by injection at 9:11 p.m. at Greensville Correctional Center, south of Richmond. Muhammad, dressed in a blue shirt, jeans and flip-flops, had no final statement. Muhammad was executed for killing Dean Harold Meyers, who was shot in the head at a Manassas gas station during the three-week spree across Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. Muhammad and his accomplice, Lee Boyd Malvo, also were suspected of fatal shootings in Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana and Washington state. 'I'm happy he's gone'

Nelson Rivera, whose wife, Lori Ann Lewis-Rivera, was gunned down as she vacuumed her van at a Maryland gas station said when he watched Muhammad's chest moving for the last time, he was glad. "I feel better. I think I can breathe better and I'm happy he's gone. Because he's not going to hurt anyone else," he said. Dean's brother, Bob Meyers, said watching the execution was a point of closure but that he was "overcome by the sadness that the whole situation generates in my heart." "Honestly it was surreal watching the life being sapped out of somebody intentionally was very different," he said on CNN's "Larry King Live." J. Wyndal Gordon, one of Muhammad's attorneys, described his client in his final hours as fearless and still insisting he was innocent. Muhammad's attorneys earlier had asked Kaine to commute his sentence to life in prison because they said he was severely mentally ill. "I think crimes that are this horrible, you just can't understand them, you can't explain them," said Kaine, a Democrat known for carefully considering death penalty cases. "They completely dwarf your ability to look into the life of a person who would do something like this and understand why." Muhammad was offered a choice for his last meal, which he accepted and requested that details not be released to the public, NBC News reported. Prosecutors chose to put Muhammad and Malvo on trial in Virginia first because of the state's willingness to execute killers. He and Malvo were also convicted of six other murders in Maryland and both were sentenced to six life terms. Death ruled out for Malvo

The death penalty was later ruled out for Malvo because the U.S. Supreme Court barred the execution of juveniles, who was 17 during the killing spree. The motive for the shootings in the nation's capital region remains murky. Malvo said Muhammad wanted to use the plot to extort \$10 million from the government to set up a camp in Canada where homeless children would be trained as terrorists. But Muhammad's ex-wife has said she believes the attacks were a smoke screen for his plan to kill her and regain custody of their three children. Muhammad had never testified or explained why he directed the attacks that terrorized the Washington region, with victims gunned down while doing everyday chores. People stayed indoors, and those who had to go outside weaved as they walked or bobbed their heads to make themselves less of a target. The terror ended Oct. 24, 2002, when police captured Muhammad and Malvo as they slept at a Maryland rest stop in a car they had outfitted so a shooter could hide in the trunk and fire through a hole in the body of the vehicle. Muhammad had been in and out of the military since he graduated from high school in Louisiana and entered the National Guard. A convert to Islam, John Allen Williams would later change his name to Muhammad. He joined the Army in 1985 and trained in Washington state as a combat engineer. He did not take special sniper training but earned an expert rating in the M-16 rifle — the military cousin of the .223-caliber Bushmaster rifle used in the sniper shootings.