

Utah Judge Sets Firing Squad for Dementia Inmate

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After nearly four decades on death row, Ralph Leroy Menzies, 67, is now scheduled to be executed by firing squad on September 5. The Utah man was convicted in 1988 for the brutal murder of 26-year-old Maurine Hunsaker, a mother of three, whom he abducted from a convenience store in Kearns before killing her in Big Cottonwood Canyon.

Menzies, who has been on death row for 37 years, is now in severely declining health. His attorneys argue he suffers from advanced dementia, relies on a wheelchair and oxygen, and no longer understands the legal case against him. Despite these concerns, Judge Matthew

Bates ruled in June 2025 that Menzies “consistently and rationally” understands why he is being executed, and proceeded to sign the death warrant on July 3.

The execution, if it proceeds, will make Menzies only the sixth person in the United States to die by firing squad since 1977. Utah is one of four states, alongside Idaho, Mississippi, and Oklahoma, that allow this method. Menzies had chosen the firing squad decades ago, when Utah inmates were given a choice between that and lethal injection.

While his legal team is pursuing a new petition challenging his mental competency, Judge Bates stated that the pending appeal was not enough to delay setting the execution date. However, he scheduled a hearing for July 23 to assess the new evidence.

“We remain hopeful that the courts or the clemency board will recognize the profound inhumanity of executing a man who is experiencing steep cognitive decline and significant memory loss,” said Lindsey Layer, one of Menzies’ attorneys.

For Maurine Hunsaker’s family, the wait for justice has been long and painful. Her son, Matt, who was only 10 when his mother was murdered, told the court that after nearly four decades, the decision to finally set a date means something. “You issue the warrant today, you start a process for our family... and we still don’t have justice served,” he said.

Menzies is among 10 inmates scheduled to be executed in the United States before the end of 2025. His case continues to stir national attention, especially as the debate grows over the ethics of executing people with severe mental illnesses.

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