Beat: News

Cleveland kidnapper Ariel Castro found hanged in cell

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USPA News - Ariel Castro, sentenced to life in prison for the kidnapping and sexual abuse of three Ohio women he held captive for up to 11 years, was found hanged in his cell late on Tuesday, authorities said on Wednesday, just a month after he begun serving his sentence. Castro, 53, was found hanged in his cell at 9:20 p.m. local time on Tuesday at the Correctional Reception Center in Orient, a community about 13 miles (20.9 kilometers) southwest of Columbus in central Ohio.

He was pronounced dead about 90 minutes later after being transported to Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center (OSUMC). "Upon finding inmate Castro, prison medical staff began performing life saving measures," said JoEllen Smith, a spokeswoman for the state`s Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC). "Shortly after, he was transported to OSUMC where he was pronounced dead at 10:52 p.m." The former school bus driver had been housed in protective custody, which means he was in a cell by himself with guards making rounds every 30 minutes at staggered intervals. "A thorough review of this incident is underway and more information can be provided as it becomes available pending the status of the investigation," Smith said. Castro was convicted of abducting three young women - Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight - from Cleveland streets between 2002 and 2004. They were freed on May 6 of this year after Berry escaped through an unlocked door and screamed for help while Castro was out of the house. Investigators say he abused his victims physically, emotionally, and sexually on a daily basis. Castro pleaded guilty on July 26 to 937 criminal counts of rape, kidnapping, and aggravated murder as part of a plea bargain that allowed him to escape the death penalty. He was sentenced last month to life in prison without the chance of parole, plus 1,.000 years. Prior to being sentenced on August 1, Castro apologized to his victims but then later went on to blame the women, claiming "nearly all the sex that went on" was consensual and arguing their efforts to recover showed they were not tortured. "I`m not a monster. I`m sick," he said, referring to his struggles with sex and pornography addiction. "I know what I did was wrong, but I`m not a violent person. I simply kept them there so they couldn`t leave." According to court documents, Knight was abducted in August 2002 after Castro offered her a ride to get to an appointment regarding her son. He lured her inside his house on 2207 Seymour Avenue with the promise of a puppy for her son, but he restrained the 21-year-old woman once inside and subjected her to numerous physical and sexual assaults over the next 11 years. Berry, 16 years old at the time, was abducted in April 2003 after Castro spotted her walking home from work and offered her a ride. DeJesus, the youngest victim as she was only 14 years old, was abducted in April 2004 when she was walking home from school and was offered a ride by Castro. "For years, the movements of the victims were absolutely controlled by the Defendant and his physical restraints. They were kept in locked rooms with physical restraints on their bodies," prosecutors wrote in court documents. "Very little movement was allowed throughout the house. Every aspect of the victims` physical freedom was dictated by the Defendant." During their captivity, Berry became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl without any medical assistance. The baby was not breathing when she was born, and Castro threatened to kill Knight if she failed to save the baby`s life. In an effort to save the baby`s life, Knight breathed into the girl`s mouth and the baby miraculously survived, but was held alongside the other victims until their rescue in May. During the same period, roughly between November 2006 and February 2007, Castro repeatedly raped and eventually impregnated Knight. In order to terminate the pregnancy, he kicked her in the stomach, jumped on her stomach, and starved her for days to kill the unborn baby, resulting in the aggravated murder charge at trial. The victims were able to mark the passage of time through the maintenance of diaries, which describe their experiences and dreams. The entries describe the sexual abuse, talk of being locked in a dark room and anticipating the next session of abuse, of dreams of someday escaping and being reunited with their families, and of being treated like an animal while being threatened to be killed. The case was one of the most disturbing crimes in recent U.S. history and dominated the headlines for weeks as more details were released. But it echoed other infamous kidnappings, such as the case of 11-year-old Jaycee Lee Dugard who was kidnapped in California in 1991 and was held captive by convicted sex offender Phillip Craig Garrido and his wife for more than 18 years.

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