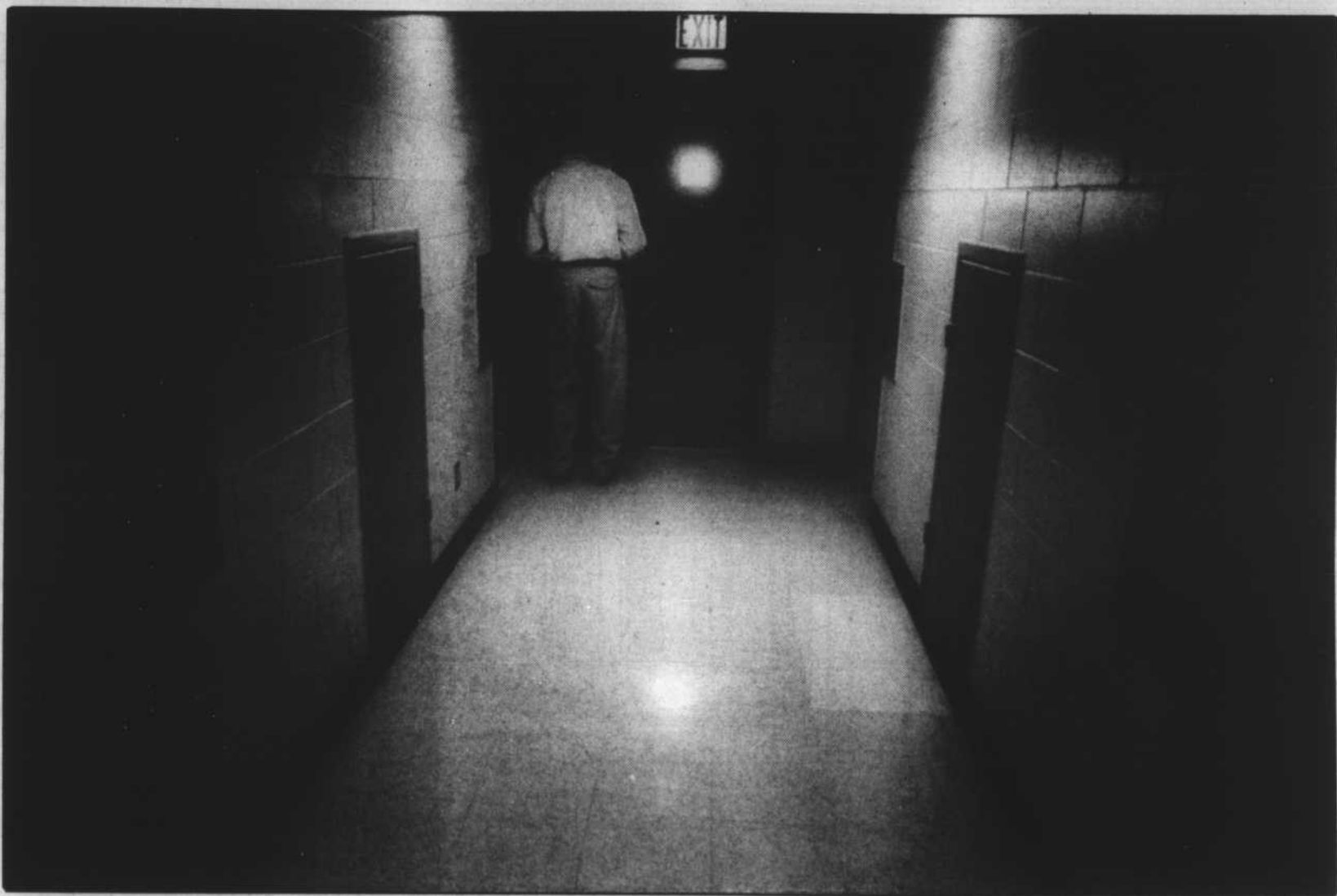


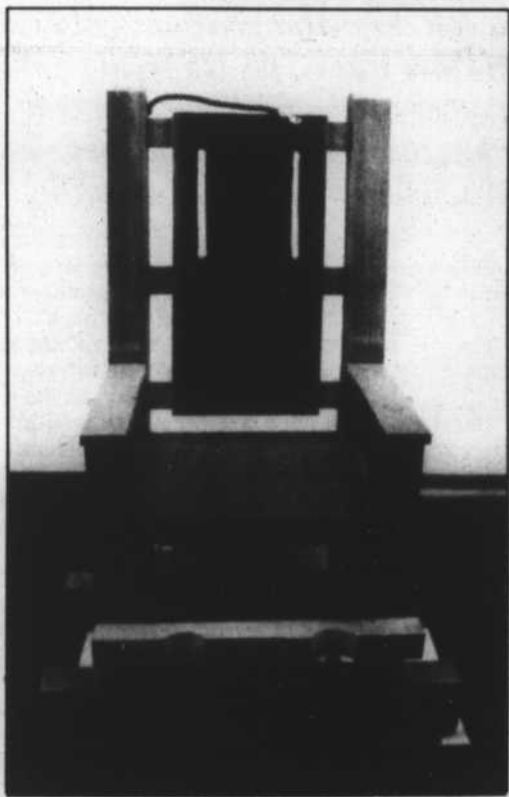
INSIGHT

Wednesday, August 31, 1994

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A prison worker delivers mail to a death row inmate last April. Nine inmates, including Harold Lamont Otey, are sitting on Nebraska's death row.



The electric chair at the Nebraska State Penitentiary has not been used since the 1959 execution of Charles Starkweather.



Harold Lamont Otey runs laps in a prison yard reserved for death row inmates.

Photos by Travis Heying

Life routine on death row

Calmness may end as Otey execution date approaches

By Jeff Zeleny
Editor

Concrete floors and green walls line the long, cold corridor in the "D" gallery of the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

Gallery "D" looks like the other three galleries in the penitentiary in south Lincoln, but it is distinctly different.

"D" stands for death.

Nine men live on Nebraska's death row. Their daily schedules are planned down to the minute.

Breakfast — 7:15 a.m.

Lunch — 11:30 a.m.

Dinner — 5 p.m.

The men sit on wooden benches attached to round tables and are allowed 30 minutes for each meal.

Their precise schedules continue throughout the day. For one hour and 51 minutes, inmates are allowed to get fresh air and exercise outside gallery "D" in an area enclosed by a barbed-wire fence.

Prisoners play full-court basketball, lift free weights and jog inside the perimeter of the fence. A guard casually stands watch among the inmates.

In addition to exercising outside, inmates spend their time in the death row lounge. Basic cable is shown on a television screen in one corner of the room. A 35-cent token can buy a can of Squirt, RC Cola, Kick, Dr. Pepper and

7-Up. Inmates can check out fantasy, science fiction, love, war, adventure and horror books from the library in the death row lounge.

Inmates time in the lounge also is limited. Every day is routine on death row.

"We're big on typical," says Charles Hohenstein, administrative assistant to the prison warden.

That typical atmosphere could be interrupted this week. Harold Lamont Otey is scheduled to be executed at 12:01 a.m. Friday.

This week Nebraskans struggle with the idea of the death penalty, and the court considers Otey's final appeal, but prison officials go about business as usual.

"We just carry that order out of the court," Hohenstein says. "We assume he's guilty or he wouldn't be here."

Death Row

Harold Lamont Otey is one of nine men on Nebraska's death row. Others on death row:

▶ Robert E. Williams, 57, sentenced June 30, 1978, for killing two Lincoln women and raping one in August 1977.

He has filed and lost on four state appeals. On one federal appeal, the state was ordered to resentence with regard to one of the victims. That matter is pending. Execution scheduled for Nov. 16.

▶ Peter Lynn Hochstein, 40, and C. Michael Anderson, 42, sentenced Aug. 24, 1978, for the murder of Omaha reater Ron Abboud in October 1975. First federal appeal pending in U.S. District Court for both men.

▶ Charles Jess Palmer, 56, first sentenced to death Aug. 7, 1980, in murder of Eugene Zimmerman of Grand Island. Execution scheduled for Sept. 16.

▶ Randolph Reeves, 38, sentenced Sept. 11, 1981, for killing near Lincoln one woman before raping her and fatally stabbing a second, who was pregnant, to try to conceal his identity in March 1980. He was resented to death while the federal case is still pending.

▶ John J. Joubert, 31, sentenced Oct. 9, 1984, for the 1983 murders of Danny Joe Eberle, 13, and Christopher Paul Walden, 12, both of Sarpy County. He has filed three state appeals, all of which were denied. His first federal appeal is still pending in U.S. District Court.

▶ Michael Ryan, 46, sentenced Oct. 16, 1986, for the killing of fellow cult member James Thimm during torture at a farm near Rulo in 1985. He has lost two state lower court appeals and has one pending before state Supreme Court. Has filed no federal appeals yet.

Source: AP