

(SMITH)

### Defendant 'relished' brutality

## Man is given 4 death terms for 4 killings

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Moments after Richard Kenneth Djerf was ordered four times to "suffer the penalty of death" for the vengeance slayings of four members of a west Phoenix family, he scoffed at the sentence.

"They can only kill me once," he said, smirking.

For more than 30 minutes, Judge Michael Ryan of Maricopa County Superior Court, in explaining the reason for the death sentences, detailed the brutality, anguish, pain and torture suffered by the Albert Luna family.

Ryan said Djerf "relished" the



Russell Cave/Staff photographer  
**Richard Djerf** // Says of his death terms: "They can only kill me once"

seven-hour frenzy of violence in which he experimented with methods of killing his victims, including electrocution and injection. Djerf finally

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# 4 death terms given for 4 killings

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resorted to shooting and stabbing his victims to death, but not before he had put them through severe mental anguish, Ryan said.

There was nothing in Djerf's childhood, mental development, medical condition or actions since the murders to offset the aggravating factors that called for the ultimate punishment, Ryan said.

Djerf smiled during the proceeding.

Ryan repeatedly cited the senselessness of the slayings that Djerf committed to get even with his former friend, Albert Luna Jr., who had burglarized Djerf's apartment several months before the murders were committed.

Luna, 23, the only surviving member of his family, sat stoically in the front row, occasionally leaning forward and resting his chin in his cupped hand, glancing at Djerf, 26.

Luna has attended many of the court hearings that were held over more than two years and was present when Djerf pleaded guilty nine months ago to the Sept. 14, 1993, murders. Djerf admitted killing Luna's parents, Albert Sr., 46, Patricia, 40, and their other two children, 17-year-old Rochelle and 5-year-old Damien.

Albert Jr. and other family members and friends left court without talking to reporters.

Michael Vaughn, one of two lawyers appointed to advise Djerf, who represented himself, said the death sentences were not unexpected. When Djerf pleaded guilty to the crimes, Vaughn tried to convince him to instead take his case to trial.

As he left court after the sentencing, Vaughn, who opposes the death penalty, rejected prosecutors' claims that Djerf deserves to be executed.

William Culbertson, one of the two

deputy county attorneys who prosecuted the case earlier, said, "Richard Djerf committed crimes the likes of which the people of Arizona will not soon forget. He committed a mass murder... he ravaged and shattered countless lives."

He said the death sentences were appropriate for the crimes that were committed.

Maricopa County Attorney Rick Romley, who visited the crime scene shortly after the bodies were discovered, said he'll forever remember the 5-year-old tied to a kitchen chair slumped in death after being executed with a gunshot to the back of the head.

"It was an absolutely savage murder," Romley said. "The death penalty was well-deserved in this case."

Djerf's sentences, like all death penalty sentences, will automatically be appealed.