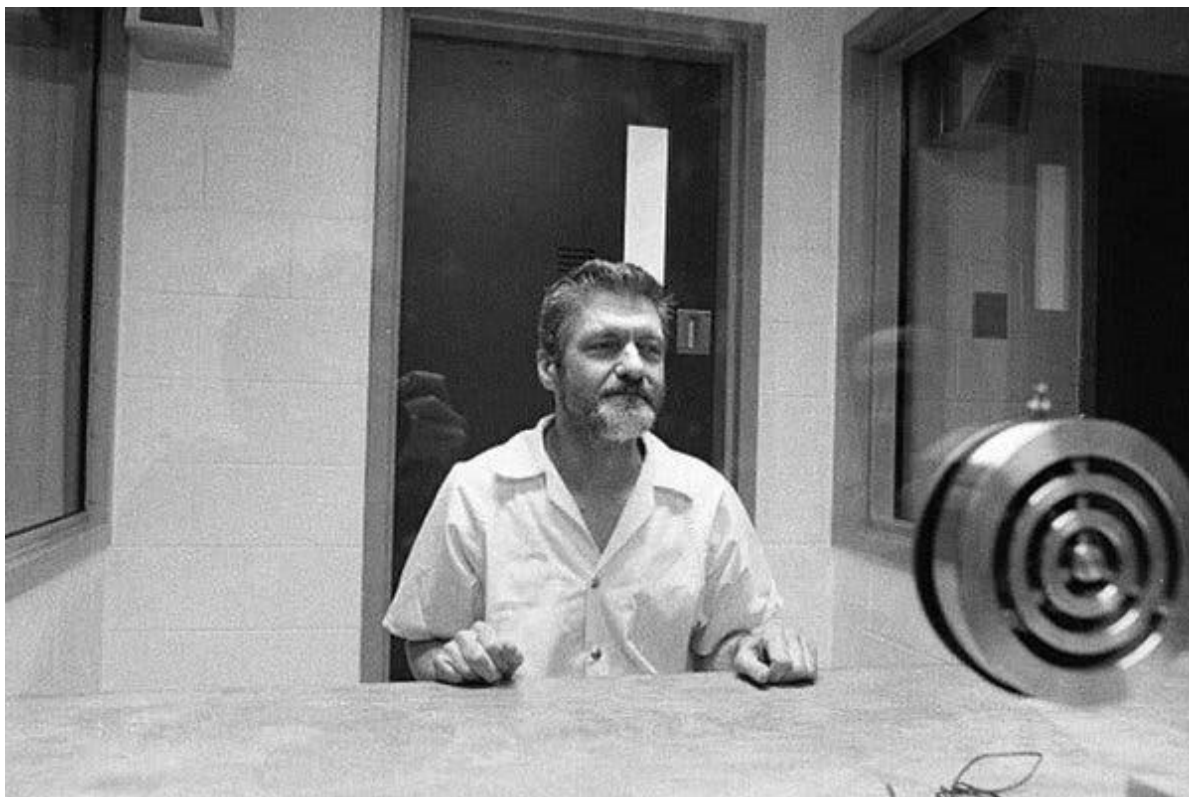


Kaczynski Is Said to Have Died by Suicide in Prison

The man known as the “Unabomber” had been transferred to a federal prison medical center in 2021 after more than 25 years at a maximum security facility.

Glenn Thrush

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Theodore J. Kaczynski at the supermax federal prison in Florence, Colo., where he served more than 25 years. Credit...via Internet Archive

Theodore J. Kaczynski, the “Unabomber,” who killed three people and injured 23 in a bombing spree stretching from 1978 to 1995, died by suicide at a federal prison medical center in North Carolina early Saturday, according to three people familiar with the situation.

Emergency workers were called to Mr. Kaczynski’s cell at 12:23 a.m. at the Federal Medical Center, Butner, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Attempts to revive him in the prison and in an ambulance were unsuccessful, and he was later pronounced dead at a nearby hospital, officials said. He was 81.

The F.B.I. was notified of his death. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in North Carolina confirmed in an email that it conducts autopsies of deaths at the federal medical center in Butner, but offered no timetable for when one might be completed for Mr. Kaczynski.

The circumstances of his suicide are unclear, and it is uncertain whether prison officials could have done more to ensure his safety. But the self-inflicted death of another high-profile inmate, four years after the accused sex offender Jeffrey Epstein hanged himself at a Manhattan federal detention center, is certain to raise fresh questions

about the quality of security, oversight and health care in the troubled, chronically understaffed federal prison system.

Mr. Epstein's death prompted a rash of unfounded speculation that he had been murdered, even after that theory was contradicted by Justice Department officials who ruled it a suicide. The death of Mr. Kaczynski, himself a conspiracy theorist who wrote a long manifesto in a secluded wilderness cabin, is almost certain to prompt similar speculation.

[Image] Jeffrey Epstein's death by suicide in a federal detention center prompted unfounded rumors of foul play that were rejected by the Justice Department. Credit...New York State Sex Offender Registry, via Associated Press

Investigators determined that neglect and lax patrol practices, rather than foul play, gave Mr. Epstein an opportunity to end his life before facing trial on sex trafficking charges. The union for the guards blamed staffing shortages for lapses that left Mr. Epstein unattended for three hours.

The Bureau of Prisons, which houses about 160,000 inmates around the country, has been struggling to retain and hire prison guards, along with medical and mental health professionals, who are often able to find lower-stress, higher-paying jobs elsewhere.

While the rate of suicide in federal facilities — between 300 and 400 per year — remains below that of local and state prisons, the bureau, like all other corrections systems, saw a major spike in suicides during the pandemic that has only begun to ease this year.

The Justice Department's inspector general's office, which has been investigating Mr. Epstein's death for the past two years, is wrapping up its work and is expected to produce in the next few months a report that documents staff, management and oversight failures in the Epstein case.

This year, the inspector general documented a remarkable chain of administrative errors, incompetence and health system failures inside the federal prison system that led to the bludgeoning death of the notorious Boston gangster James (Whitey) Bulger hours after he was transferred to a West Virginia prison in 2018.

[Image] James (Whitey) Bulger was killed hours after he was transferred to a West Virginia prison in 2018. Credit...U.S. Marshals Service, via Associated Press

The inspector general determined that officials in the Federal Bureau of Prisons approved the downgrading of Mr. Bulger's official medical status for the sole purpose of moving him out of a secure unit in a Florida prison to the Hazelton federal penitentiary. The move, taken after Mr. Bulger threatened a nurse, was approved even though officials knew he had a life-threatening cardiac condition.

Mr. Kaczynski, who has had health problems in recent years, was moved to the prison medical facility in North Carolina in late 2021, after serving more than 25 years at the supermax federal prison in Florence, Colo.

Mr. Kaczynski, a Harvard-educated mathematician, had declared that his goal was to bring about the collapse of the modern social order through targeted assassinations. He was arrested in 1996 at the tiny cabin in western Montana where he lived, without

water or electricity, and built many of the 16 homemade package bombs he mailed to targets. Mr. Kaczynski was captured after his brother contacted the authorities, suspecting he might be behind a wave of mysterious attacks that included planting a bomb that would have taken down an American Airlines flight had it not malfunctioned.

Merrick Garland, now the attorney general, was then a midlevel federal prosecutor who supervised the team that prosecuted Mr. Kaczynski.

Mr. Kaczynski rejected his attorney's recommendation that he mount an insanity defense, and pleaded guilty to the killings. He received eight consecutive life sentences.

He is not the first high-profile inmate to die at the federal prison hospital in Butner, N.C. In 2021, Bernard L. Madoff, who had run the largest and possibly most devastating Ponzi scheme in financial history, died there at age 82 after entering the final stages of kidney disease.

Remy Tumin contributed reporting.

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