



James Kopp was escorted from court by sheriff's deputies in Buffalo, N.Y., yesterday. Kopp, who still faces a federal trial in the 1998 slaying, had fled the country and wasn't captured until 2001.

## Man who killed abortion doctor gets 25 years to life in prison

By CAROLYN THOMPSON  
Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — James Kopp, the sniper who gunned down an abortion doctor in his home five years ago, refused to apologize yesterday as he was sentenced to the maximum sentence of 25 years to life in prison.

Kopp, 48, faced at least 15 years behind bars for second-degree murder in the 1998 death of Dr. Barnett Slepian, 52, an obstetrician/gynecologist and father of four.

Kopp said he didn't intend to kill Slepian, but said he would do it again.

"Why should the safety of Dr. Slepian be put over the safety of unborn children?" he asked. "I wish I could do 10 life sentences or 10 death penalties to save them."

Erie County Court Judge Michael D'Amico said the slaying was premeditated and chastised Kopp, who fled the country after the slaying and wasn't captured until 2001.

"You made an attempt to avoid responsibility for the act," the judge said.

"What may appear righteous to you is immoral to someone else."

The sentencing was attended by members of abortion-rights organizations who urged the judge to impose the maximum sentence.

"As a society we cannot allow people to take the law into their own hands in order to advance their own personal, political agendas," National Abortion Federation president Vicki Saporta said in a pre-sentencing letter.

Kopp still faces a federal trial in the slaying. He is also a suspect in the non-fatal shootings of four other abortion providers in Canada and Rochester between 1994 and 1997.

Kopp was lying in wait behind Slepian's suburban Amherst home on Oct. 23, 1998, and fired once through a rear kitchen window after the doctor returned from a memorial service for his father. Slepian's wife and four sons were home at the time.

Kopp became one of the FBI's most-wanted fugitives after the shooting. Authorities said he was driven to Mexico by a friend who believed he was inno-

cent. From there, he traveled to Ireland and then France, where he was captured in a Dinan post office as he tried to retrieve money sent by a New York City couple who admitted helping him.

The married couple, Loretta Marra and Dennis Malvasi, each face up to five years in prison after pleading guilty last month to conspiracy charges.

Defense attorneys argued that Kopp meant only to wound the doctor. But prosecutors countered that his choice of weapon — a Russian-made, scope-equipped rifle — and the use of aliases in buying it pointed to an intent to kill.

Kopp was convicted following an unusual one-day, nonjury trial. At Kopp's request, the judge was presented with a 35-page list of facts agreed to by both sides — including an admission by Kopp that he fired the shot that struck Slepian.

Kopp is charged in federal court with interfering with the right to an abortion. The charge carries a maximum life sentence. A scheduling conference in that case is set for Wednesday.

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