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Ex-Klansman Chambliss guilty of murder

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Former Klansman Robert Edward Chambliss, 73, was convicted Friday of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison for the death of one of four girls killed in a church bombing 14 years ago that embittered the civil rights movement of the time.

State attorney general Bill Baxley, who prosecuted the case, told reporters after the verdict that Chambliss was the ringleader of a group involved in the bombing, and more indictments are likely now.

Chambliss showed no emotion when the verdict was read or when sentence was handed down. His attorney, Art Hanes Jr., filed immediate notice of appeal, but Chambliss was taken to jail immediately after the sentencing. There is no appeal bond in Alabama on prison terms longer than 20 years.

"What a shame to put that whole thing on a 73-year-old man," Hanes said. "I hope the verdict was reached for the right reasons. People wanted to believe there was a new case. They wanted and hoped it would be solved."

The bombing took place on a Sunday morning, Sept. 15, 1963, after several months in which the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church had been used by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as headquarters for civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham. King was not there that day.

The girls, all of them black, were in a

basement area changing into choir robes when dynamite — officials said it could have been up to 15 sticks — exploded in a nearby outside stairwell. Circuit Judge Wallace C. Gibson sentenced Chambliss after he was found guilty of murdering 11-year-old Carol

Denise McNair. Chambliss still faces charges in the deaths of the other three girls — Addie Mae Collins, Carol Robertson and Cynthia Wesley, all 14. "God knows, your honor, sir, I never in my life bombed anything in my life.

And I was not down at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church," Chambliss replied when asked if he had any comment before sentencing.

During the four-day trial, Chambliss' 37-year-old niece, the Rev. Elizabeth Cobbs, pastor of a Methodist church here, testified that her uncle once said, "If (the bomb) wasn't meant to hurt anybody, it didn't go off when it was supposed to."

At the trial, William Jackson, a barber, told the jury that in 1963 he wanted to join the Ku Klux Klan and was referred to Chambliss.

Jackson said that Chambliss, then a Klan member, felt the leadership was dragging its feet on the integration issue and that Chambliss was anxious to start a new 25-member klavern, a meeting place for the Klan, that would not include Robert Shelton, long-time imperial wizard of the United Klans of America.

Another prosecution witness, Kirthus Glenn of Detroit, identified a photograph of Chambliss as one of several men she saw in a car parked near the church several hours before the explosion.