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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: February 8, 2011
Re: Killer of Ranzo family denied parole
(Marty Spears, aka Jackson)

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Marty Don Spears, 49, formerly of Modesto, was found unsuitable for parole after a hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings conducted at California Men's Colony Prison in San Luis Obispo. Deputy District Attorney Elizabeth Owen appeared at the hearing and argued for continued confinement based on the heinous nature of the crime and the risk of violent recidivism. The Board of Prison Hearings agreed and denied parole for seven (7) years.

On June 25, 1979 Marty Spears (age 17 at the time), along with 3 crime partners, planned a home invasion of Philip and Kathryn Ranzo's Modesto home. Under the guise of being out of gas, Spears asked to use the telephone. The telephone was out of order, but Philip Ranzo offered to give them a can of gas. He went to the garage to get the gasoline, the subjects followed him and at that point a revolver was drawn. Spears ordered his accomplices to tie up Mr. Ranzo; Spears then beat Mr. Ranzo over the head with a baseball bat and an axe. Spears then entered the house where Kathryn Ranzo was in the living room. Spears, at gunpoint, ordered her to go upstairs. Spears took her into an upstairs bedroom and proceeded to rape and murder her by beating Mrs. Ranzo over the head with an axe and stabbing her in the throat. Spears then made his way back to the garage and stabbed Mr. Ranzo multiple times in the face and neck inflicting fatal injuries. The Ranzos' death orphaned their only child. The Ranzos' 10-year-old son, Mark, had been staying the night at his grandmother's house that night along with a visiting 11-year-old cousin, Mike Naranjo.

Twenty-three hours before the Ranzo murders, Spears and his three accomplices robbed and assaulted the caretaker of a home in Newman. They told the caretaker, Leonard Luna, that they had run out of gas. Once inside the house, Spears "hog-tied" Luna, beat him in the head with a revolver, cut his scalp and knocked him unconscious. They then ransacked the home and stole multiple guns and weapons which were later used in the murder of the Ranzos.

Deputy District Attorney Owen argued to the Board that continued confinement was necessary to keep the public safe. Phillip's sister, Sandy Ranzo-Howell, testified, arguing for the maximum

parole denial period of 15 years. She added that her brother and sister-in-law were beautiful people, not just a “case file.” She added that Phillip was a local pharmacist who loved to help people and Kathryn owned her own beauty shop and worked diligently to reach her own dreams.

Mike Naranjo was present at the hearing, as well, to support his family in opposing parole.

Most impactful, however, was when the Ranzos’ surviving son, Mark, addressed the Board. Mark Ranzo stated that he would be okay with Spears’s release, but only if his Mom and Dad could leave the hearing that day with Mark. He further stated his childhood had been destroyed.

Spears was convicted of two counts of Murder in the first degree, three counts of Robbery, one count of Rape with force, one count of Burglary in the first degree and one count of Assault with a deadly weapon. The case was moved to Sacramento County in 1980 after a change of venue motion was granted. Originally, Spears was sentenced to life without parole (LWOP). His sentence was changed based on the argument that such a sentence was “cruel and unusual punishment” for a minor. Spears is serving two consecutive 25-years-to-life prison sentences. He has served 31 years in prison, thus far.

Spears will be scheduled for another hearing in 2018. The family has requested that the community submit letters opposing his release once he will be up for parole again in 2018. Those letters can be submitted via the District Attorney’s Office, attention Elizabeth Owen.

Spears’s crime partners have all previously been denied parole, but will continue to have parole hearings to assess whether they should at some point be granted parole into the community. The crime partners are: Ronald Anderson (CDC #C-17565), Darren Lee (CDC #C-16213) and Jeffrey Maria (CDC# C-17317)

Additionally, in the hallway of the Modesto Bee building, a photograph of significant historical importance captivates the impact this case had on our community. The photo captures the SWAT arrest of Marty Spears days after he brutally killed the Ranzos and destroyed Mark Ranzo’s childhood. Also, the Bee, 16 years ago, did a front page cover story on how Mark Ranzo had progressed since the brutal killing of his parents.

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