



# Office of the District Attorney Stanislaus County

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## PRESS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

Date: May 18, 2021  
Re: People v. Ronald Ray Anderson

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Ronald Ray Anderson's 1979 murder convictions were upheld on April 30, 2021 following a recent legal challenge filed to overturn the convictions under newly created Penal Code §1170.95. Deputy District Attorney Erin Schwartz and Special Prosecutor Amy Neumann represented the People.

On June 25, 1979, Anderson and his three crime partners, Marty Jackson (aka Marty Spears), Jeffrey Maria and Darren Lee, planned a robbery of the home belonging to Phillip and Kathryn Ranzo because they believed large amounts of cash were being kept inside the home. Anderson drove by the Ranzo home as many as five times before parking and letting the others out to execute their scheme. The plan was for the trio to claim to be out of gas and ask to use the telephone. Anderson acted as a "lookout" and the other three left the car armed with weapons and rope to overpower and tie up the victims.

Approximately twenty minutes later, Lee and Maria returned to the car in a hurry with envelopes full of cash and jewelry. Anderson admitted at a parole hearing that he believed that both Lee and Maria saw the Ranzos be murdered. Without seeking any aid for the victims, Anderson first drove Lee and Maria to safety before returning to the Ranzo home to pick up Jackson.

On June 26, 1979, the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Ranzo were found in their home. Both had been hogtied. Phillip Ranzo was found dead on the floor of the garage. He had been beaten over the head with a blunt instrument at least six times and had suffered a fatal stab wound to the neck. Kathryn Ranzo was found in a bathroom of the house. She had been struck multiple times in the head with an axe. There were signs she had been tortured with multiple cuts to her eyes and face. She had been sexually assaulted and suffered a fatal stab wound to the throat. The house had been ransacked, with cash, jewelry and a gun missing. The murders orphaned their 10-year-old child, Mark, who happened to have spent that night at his grandparent's house.

Twenty-three hours before the Ranzo murders, Anderson and his three crime partners robbed and assaulted a caretaker of a home in Newman. Anderson and his crime partners told the caretaker, Leonard Luna, that they had run out of gas. Once inside the house, they hogtied Mr. Luna and

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beat him in the head with a revolver. They then proceeded to ransack the home, stealing multiple guns and weapons, which Anderson and his crime partners used while at the Ranzo home.

Pre-trial publicity caused the trial to be moved to Alameda County on a change of venue. In 1979, an Alameda County Superior Court jury convicted Anderson of the murders and he was sentenced to serve life in prison.

In 2018, the California Legislature passed Senate Bill 1437, which was signed into law by then-Governor Jerry Brown. Senate Bill 1437, codified in Penal Code §§188, 189 and 1170.95, dramatically changed the law regarding felony murder in California and narrowed the scope of who can, and cannot, be convicted of murder where multiple participants are involved. Under §1170.95, murder convictions are now restricted to 1) those who are the actual killers, 2) major participants in the underlying felonies who act with reckless indifference to human life, or 3) direct aiders and abettors who share an intent to kill.

Anderson filed a petition under the new law in the Alameda County Superior Court to have his murder convictions overturned. The People, represented by Deputy District Attorney Erin Schwartz and Special Prosecutor Amy Elliott Neumann, opposed Anderson's petition in court filings and at hearings on the motion before Judge Morris Jacobson.

Before making his decision, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Jacobson reviewed transcripts of the entire trial testimony, Anderson's statements at nine parole hearings as well as the written briefs and oral arguments by the prosecution and defense before denying Anderson's petition on April 30, 2021. Jacobson found that Anderson's story that he never went into the home was not credible. A witness testified during the trial that Anderson told her that the murder scene was gross, that it would have made her sick and that he almost threw up when he saw it. This testimony, along with the time gap, persuaded the judge that Anderson went into the house. "Anderson has declined to account for [a] period of 60 to 90 minutes, during which time he went into the house and viewed the murder scene before he and Jackson left the Ranzo residence."

In denying the petition to have the murder convictions vacated, Judge Jacobson found that the People had proved beyond a reasonable doubt that Anderson was a major participant in the murder of the Ranzos as well as an aider and abettor who shared the intent to kill with his co-defendants as listed in Penal Code §1170.95.

Anderson continues to serve his life prison sentence. He has the right to appeal this decision to a higher court. He will also continue to appear before parole boards for consideration of release on parole.

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