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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: December 9, 2021
Re: John Arthur Free
Convicted Murderer granted parole

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Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that John Arthur Free, age 69, of Modesto, was found suitable for parole during a December 7, 2021 hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings held at Folsom State Prison. Deputy District Attorney Amy Elliott Neumann appeared at the hearing on behalf of the People and argued before the Board against Free’s release.

On Thursday, October 18, 1979, Free went to Don’s Club, a local bar in Modesto. When he got there, he got into an argument with victim Luther Fear, age 41, of Jamestown. Free learned that the victim might be armed, so Free left to arm himself with a handgun. When he returned, Free got into a fight with the unarmed victim. At some point, Free’s brother, Joe, who was also present, stabbed the victim causing six non-fatal wounds. Free then pulled a .45 caliber pistol from his waistband and fired two shots into the victim’s chest from close range, killing him in front of his wife. Free and his brother then fled out the back door and drove away. Authorities found and arrested Free in Berkeley, California two months later.

In May of 1980, a Stanislaus County Superior Court jury convicted Free of Second-Degree Murder with an enhancement for using of a firearm. He was sentenced to serve a total of 18 years to life in state prison.

Before the murder, Free’s prior criminal history included several juvenile commitments as well as time spent at the California Youth Authority (CYA) for burglary in 1967. After his release from CYA, Free continued to commit crimes and was sent to prison for possessing stolen property and assault with a deadly weapon in 1972. Upon his release from prison, he violated parole on several occasions for brandishing a knife, assaulting a police officer and drunk driving.

At the parole hearing on December 7, Deputy District Attorney Neumann argued to the Board that Free should not be released. She argued that he needed additional self-help programming in anger management in order to be suitable for parole and not pose an unreasonable risk to public safety. The Board disagreed and granted parole.

This was John Free’s 12th parole board hearing. He had previously been denied parole in 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2019.

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