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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: May 24, 2022
Re: Ronald Ray Anderson
Governor Reversed Parole Decision for
Double Murder Inmate

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Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Governor Gavin Newsom reversed the decision of the Board of Parole Hearings to release Ronald Ray Anderson, age 61, of Modesto. Governor Newsom determined that Anderson poses a current unreasonable danger to the public if he is released from prison. The Governor was concerned by Anderson’s lack of insight as evidenced by his efforts to minimize his role in the crime, his shifting narrative and reporting inconsistent facts of the crime. These persistent deficits in Anderson’s insight are relevant to his current risk of dangerousness. Governor Newsom found that Anderson must develop deeper insight, coping skills and understanding of his triggers before he can be released.

Our office, community leaders, members of the Ranzo family, a surviving victim and many members of our community wrote letters and sent emails asking the Governor to reverse the parole decision. Our voices were heard.

On June 25, 1979, Phillip and Kathryn Ranzo were brutally murdered in their Modesto home. Anderson and his three crime partners Marty Spears (aka Marty Jackson), Jeffrey Maria and Darren Lee planned a robbery of the Ranzo home because they believed large amounts of cash were kept inside the home. In preparation for the robbery, Anderson drove by the Ranzo home as many as five times. The plan was for Anderson to stay in the car while his crime partners knocked on the door of the residence and pretended to be out of gas and ask to use the telephone. While Anderson acted as a lookout, his crime partners left the car armed with weapons and rope to tie up the Ranzos, and spoke of an intent to kill the Ranzos.

Approximately 20 minutes later, Lee and Maria returned to the car in a hurry with envelopes full of cash and jewelry. Anderson admitted at a previous parole hearing that he believed that Lee and Maria saw Mr. Ranzo get murdered. Without seeking aid for the Ranzos, Anderson drove Lee and Maria to safety and returned to the Ranzo home to get Spears. Despite inconsistencies in his story, some trial testimony indicating he saw what happened inside the Ranzo home and an unexplained gap in time of over 60 minutes, Anderson maintains that he never went into the Ranzo home.

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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 suffered a fatal stab wound to the neck. Kathryn Ranzo was found in the 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 grandparents' house.

Twenty-three hours before the Ranzo murders, Anderson and his 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 beat him on the head with a revolver. The group proceeded to ransack the home, stealing multiple guns and weapons which Anderson and his crime partners used while at the Ranzo home. In previous parole hearings, Anderson had admitted it was his idea to hogtie Mr. Luna, but denied it at the most recent hearing.

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.

This was the second time a grant of parole for Anderson has been reversed by a Governor. Anderson was granted parole in December 2017, but the decision was reversed by Governor Jerry Brown in 2018. In 2021, Anderson's challenge to his murder convictions under newly-created Penal Code §1170.95 was denied. Alameda County Superior Court Judge Morris Jacobson determined that Anderson was a major participant in the murders, as well as an aider and abettor who shared the same intent to kill as his co-defendants. This decision was affirmed by the Court of Appeal. Anderson's next parole hearing will be scheduled by the Board of Parole Hearings before September 2023.

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