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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: November 30, 2023
Re: Clay Arthur Harris
Convicted killer denied parole

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Jeff Laugero announced today that Clay Arthur Harris, age 51, of Modesto was found unsuitable for parole during a November 15, 2023, hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings held at San Quentin State Prison. Deputy District Attorney Amy Elliott Neumann appeared at the hearing to represent the interests of the People of Stanislaus County.

On June 14, 1992, Harris and co-defendant Daniel Utter kidnapped an elderly victim who had parked his motor home near McHenry Avenue to watch cars cruising up and down the street during Graffiti night. They tied up the victim inside his RV, bound his mouth with duct tape, and then drove the vehicle around Modesto selling off his possessions to buy rock cocaine. After several hours, they ran off leaving the victim to free himself and contact police. They took several knives from the elderly victim, including a fish fillet knife.

Four days later, on June 18th, the pair attacked two transients sleeping in a dumpster in Modesto. Harris devised a plan to hold down one victim while they robbed the other victim. Harris held a knife to one victim's throat while Utter smashed the other victim in the head with a piece of concrete and then stabbed him in the chest, killing him. In the struggle with the only surviving victim, he also suffered non-fatal stab wounds. Both victims were robbed.

On June 24, 1992, Harris and Utter were both arrested. Harris was subsequently convicted by a Stanislaus County jury of kidnapping and robbery in the first incident and first-degree murder, robbery, attempted robbery and assault with a deadly weapon in the second. On December 28, 1992, he was sentenced to serve a total of 40 years-to-life in state prison for his role in those crimes.

Prosecutor Neumann attended the November 15th hearing and argued against Harris being released on parole noting that Harris committed numerous prison rules violations. Neumann also pointed out that Harris lacked any appreciable insight into what motivated him to commit the crimes and failed to take advantage of any self-help or self-improvement programs to address his substance abuse issues, antisocial attitude, and behavioral problems. Despite the "great weight" given to "youthful offender" criteria, the Board of Parole Hearings agreed and denied Harris parole for seven years. This was his third parole hearing.

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