

# **\* NEWS RELEASE \***

## **SOLEDAD MAN FOUND GUILTY OF AGGRAVATED ASSAULT ON A PEACE OFFICER WITH GANG AND GREAT BODILY INJURY ENHANCEMENTS**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that a Monterey County jury has found Armando Garza Canchola, age 27 of Soledad, guilty of Assault on a Peace Officer with Force Likely to Cause Great Bodily Injury. The jury also found that the crime was committed for the benefit of the Norteño criminal street gang and that the victim suffered great bodily injury. Because of two strike priors, both for homicide, the defendant faces a sentence of 40 years to life on the case. He is already serving a 42 year prison sentence for the two homicide convictions.

The current charges stem from a May 24, 2014, attack upon a Monterey County deputy sheriff working at the county jail. Four deputies were preparing inmates housed in the J-Pod for their exercise yard time. J-Pod is a high risk pod which houses Norteño gang members charged with serious crimes. Of the 14 inmates who deputies escorted to the yard, 11 were charged with murder or attempted murder.

As deputies searched inmates for yard release, inmate Giovanni Pacheco, who was subsequently convicted of three murders and is now serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole, began to resist. Deputies handcuffed him, but before escorting him to a holding cell, Pacheco kicked a deputy. The Norteño shot caller for J-Pod, Alberto Cortez, then ordered the other Norteños present to attack the deputy. At least five other Norteño inmates, including Canchola, then attacked the deputy.

The inmates kicked the deputy in the head and punched him dozens of times. The victim ultimately suffered a concussion, and has still not returned to work due to lingering brain and nerve damage. The victim along with the other deputies used batons and Tasers to subdue the attack. In addition to Canchola, the following inmates were charged and convicted in this attack: Alberto Cortez, Elijah Hernandez, Francisco Miranda, Mark Raso, and Marcos Zamora.

The defendant committed this violent crime while pending sentencing for two homicides. On July 2, 2008, Canchola shot Cesar Vasquez multiple times at close range as he sat in the front passenger seat of a Honda Accord near the intersection of North Street and Soledad Street in Soledad. Vasquez died almost immediately. The driver of the vehicle identified Canchola as the murderer. The defendant killed Vasquez because was a gang dropout. There was a two year delay in the prosecution of Canchola after the eyewitness fled in fear to Mexico, making the case unprovable.

On October 6, 2010, Canchola approached a van stopped at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Palm in Soledad. Canchola shot the passenger, Victor Martinez, in the head and upper spine, immediately killing him. Canchola's motive for the shooting was likely because Martinez was a Norteno drop out. During the investigation of the second shooting, investigators developed additional evidence linking Canchola to the 2008 shooting. Canchola was arrested and charged with two murders, but the jury could not reach a verdict.

The defendant subsequently pled guilty for a 42 year term for the two homicides. He must serve a minimum of 85 percent of those 42 years. He will then have to begin serving the 40 year to life sentence expected for the jail beating. The defendant will be at least 97 years old when he gets his first opportunity for parole.

Sentencing is scheduled on October 20, 2016, before Judge Carrie Panetta. MCSO Deputy Jesse Pinon investigated the case and testified to the gang motivations for the crime.

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