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Two MS-13 Gang Members Convicted of Murder in Stabbing at Lake Forest Hot Tub Left Victim Nearly Decapitated, Girlfriend Injured

SANTA ANA, Calif. – Two MS-13 gang members were convicted Tuesday of ambushing a 25-year-old man while he sat in a Lake Forest hot tub with his girlfriend, stabbing the man to death and nearly decapitating him as he tried to defend himself with a patio chair. The gang members chased a severely injured Marcos Morales from the pool area to a stairwell in the apartment complex where they continued the attack and left him to die.

One of the gang members' girlfriends also stabbed Morales' girlfriend while Morales was being stabbed to death in the early morning hours of October 1, 2018.

Jose Rafael Andrademembreno, 29, of Mission Viejo, and Edwin Diaz, 25, of Mission Viejo, were convicted by a jury Tuesday of one felony count of first-degree murder with the special circumstance of lying in wait, one felony count of conspiracy to commit murder, and one felony enhancement of personal use of a deadly weapon. Andrademembreno was 22 and Diaz was 18 at the time of the murder. They face a maximum sentence under current law of life without the possibility of parole when they are scheduled to be sentenced January 23, 2026.

A third defendant, Xiomara Berrios, has been charged with one felony count of murder with the special circumstance of lying in wait, one felony count of conspiracy to commit murder and one felony count of assault with a deadly weapon other than a firearm. Berrios, who is Diaz' sister and was 18 at the time of the murder, has agreed to plead guilty to second-degree murder in exchange for testifying in the trial.

On October 1, 2018, Berrios saw Morales and his 18-year-old girlfriend at the pool area of the apartment complex where they all lived. Berrios is accused of letting her boyfriend know that Morales was there and cell phone messages between the couple show an agreement to kill Morales.

At approximately 3 a.m., Andrademembreno and Diaz showed up at the pool complex with two machete-style knives and ambushed Morales while he tried to defend himself with a patio chair. As they stabbed Morales, they shouted allegiance to MS-13. Morales, who was bleeding heavily, managed to escape from the pool area and ran screaming for help while Andrademembreno and Diaz chased after him with their machetes through the apartment complex.

Andrademembreno and Diaz eventually caught up with Morales in front of a stranger's apartment, inflicting

more than 18 stab wounds, nearly cutting off his arm, partially decapitating his head, and stabbing him thorough his skull and into his brain. Morales' body was discovered by a neighbor hours later.

Berrios is accused of running after Morales' girlfriend and stabbing her with a pocketknife. Witnesses to the attack testified at trial that Andrademembreno and Diaz were both laughing as they ran back from the final attack and jumped into a car to leave the crime scene.

Despite interviewing more than 50 neighbors in the apartment complex, no one admitted they witnessed anything of the attack that spanned the complex in the early morning hours while the murderers were screaming their allegiance to MS-13. Morales was not a gang member.

Orange County Sheriff's investigators arrested Andrademembreno and Berrios at the apartment complex later that day. A pair of Andrademembreno's jeans and a pair of Berrios' shoes had Morales' blood on them. Diaz was arrested three days later at a laundromat where he was putting bloody clothes in a washing machine just after reading an article about his sister and her boyfriend being arrested.

"The most terrifying monster is not the one under our beds but the human being who finds joy in inflicting violence on others," said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. "The callousness and calculation involved in this murder was designed to brutalize their victim until his very last breath while striking fear in everyone who witnessed it. And these are exactly the kinds of criminals – murderers who kill before they turn 26 - that the California Legislature wants to allow to be eligible for parole and released back into our communities. Some crimes are so heinous that you must be removed from society, and the ruthless murder of Marcos Morales is one of those crimes."

Senior Deputy District Attorneys Richard Majchrzak and James Applegate of the Gang Unit prosecuted this case.

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