

# Jurors Begin to Hear Grim Tale of Alleged Night Stalker Crimes

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## Jurors Begin to Hear Grim Tale of Alleged **Night Stalker** Crimes

By EDWIN CHEN, *Times Staff Writer*

Amid heavy security and after three years of legal preliminaries, the **Night Stalker** trial opened Monday with prosecutors alleging that suspect Richard Ramirez committed a series of murders, sadistic beatings and sex assaults during nighttime burglaries throughout Los Angeles County.

In gruesome detail that caused muted gasps from spectators, Los Angeles Deputy Dist. Atty. Phil Halpin recounted the 13 murders and 30 other felony charges filed against the 28-year-old drifter, who faces the death penalty if convicted.

### Weight of Evidence

In his matter-of-fact recitation, which took about two hours, Halpin also revealed new details about the crimes with which Ramirez is charged, such as the case of alleged victims Christopher and Virginia Petersen of Northridge, who are still carrying bullets in their heads because they cannot be removed.

Halpin also disclosed how law enforcement officials gradually came to realize that they had a serial killer on the loose.

Ramirez appeared in court with his feet shackled, wearing his customary sunglasses and a dark coat and tie. He sat quietly during Halpin's opening statement, closely following the prosecutor's account on a chart that Halpin had prepared. Occasionally, Ramirez appeared



RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

Richard Ramirez at opening of his trial.

to be reading news clippings about the case, which he pulled out of an accordion folder.

Reporters and spectators had to pass through a metal detector before entering the courtroom.

When the jury, along with 12 alternates, entered the crowded courtroom, they were issued notebooks and pencils. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Michael A. Tynan told them that the prosecution intends to introduce 400 or more exhibits as evidence.

It took Tynan almost half an hour to recite the 43 felony charges against Ramirez.

Halpin then indicated that the evidence against Ramirez will include fingerprints and witness identifications. Halpin said he and co-prosecutor Alan Yochelson will take about four months to present their case.

### First Witness Heard

After Halpin's opening statement ended in mid-afternoon, Jack Vincow, now of Brooklyn, N.Y., took the stand as the first witness. It is the prosecution's contention that his mother, Jennie Vincow of Glassell Park, became the **Night Stalker's** first murder victim in late June, 1984.

Defense attorney Daniel V. Hernandez chose not to make an opening statement on Monday, reserving his right to do so at the start of the defense case.

Ramirez was caught by residents in East Los Angeles on Aug. 31, 1985, and he has been held in County Jail since.

According to Halpin's account, many of the alleged **Night Stalker** victims, their homes

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ransacked, were discovered by neighbors or relatives.

A Glendale victim's throat had been so severely slashed that he was nearly decapitated, Halpin said. A Whittier woman had her eyes gouged out, in addition to being shot twice in the cheek and neck, he said.

Some of the victims also had been severely beaten with blunt objects, Halpin said. A 63-year-old Monterey Park woman, who survived and is expected to testify, was raped and sodomized while her hands were bound behind her back, according to the prosecutor.

Halpin said many of the alleged **Night Stalker** crimes had similar characteristics, such as a distinc-

tive shoe print left at some of the scenes, the handcuffs Ramirez allegedly used to restrain victims, the nearly identical language he allegedly used during the crimes, and the many "distinctive" knife wounds inflicted on the victims.

It became apparent from Halpin's opening statement that Los Angeles-area police officials began to suspect the existence of a serial killer after noticing a distinctive shoe print at some crime scenes.

The first such prints appeared in a flower bed outside a Whittier home in which Vincent and Maxine Zazzara were found shot to death on March 28, 1985. Between then and July 20, the unusual shoe prints also turned up at half a dozen other crime scenes, Halpin said.

In Monterey Park, police found one such shoe print on the face of Joyce Nelson, who had been strangled and severely beaten by "a minimum of 12 blows" with a blunt object, Halpin said.

The distinctive shoe prints were made by a brand of aerobics shoes manufactured by Avia, according to Halpin.

He said much of the stolen items, including televisions, stereos and jewelry, were recovered from a person who said he had obtained the goods from Ramirez.

"The essence of this case," Halpin said in characteristic understatement, "is burglaries and murders committed during the burglaries."