

Joe Chagra denies deal

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — El Paso lawyer Joe Chagra flatly denied he offered \$300,000 to convicted hitman Charles Harrelson to plead guilty to the death of Federal Judge John Wood and exonerate the Chagra family.

He also said Wednesday, the last of 40 days of testimony in the trial, he never asked Harrelson to kill anyone else and never asked Harrelson to get his brother, convicted drug kingpin Jimmy, out of the country when Jimmy jumped bond on a drug smuggling conviction.

Harrelson, 44, is accused of killing Wood May 29, 1979, for a \$250,000 payoff from Jimmy Chagra. At the time, Jimmy Chagra faced a drug smuggling trial in Wood's court and feared a life sentence from the judge.

Joe Chagra, who was representing Jimmy in the case, has said he encouraged Jimmy to have Wood killed. Joe Chagra is to be sentenced next week for his guilty plea to conspiracy in Wood's death, and his brother is to be tried for murder later.

Wednesday, the last of 130 witnesses placed Harrelson in San Antonio May 14, 1979 — a day he said he could not remember. Motel records showed Harrelson made a long distance call that day to the U.S. district clerk's office in Midland, Texas, where Wood was holding court.

Prosecutors contended Harrelson was tracking down Wood to kill him.

They also presented evidence of a Southwest Airlines flight that was scheduled to leave San Antonio 20 minutes after Wood died and was almost half an hour late in leaving. Southwest Airlines, however, has no records of who was on board the flight, an official testified.

When the government and each defendant rested their cases, presiding U.S. District Judge William Sessions told the jury to return at 1:30 p.m. Thursday for closing arguments. Sessions and the lawyers may need more time to prepare the judge's instructions for the jury, however.

The jury will be sequestered from the time closing arguments

begin until the verdict is in, and Sessions said he would give jurors the option of working through the weekend to speed the process.

The government's 22 rebuttal witnesses — like the majority of witnesses during the trial — concentrated on Harrelson rather than his wife Jo Ann or Elizabeth Chagra, who are accused with him in Wood's death.

Part of Joe Chagra's plea bargain was to testify against Harrelson. He spent a week on the witness stand early in November.

Wednesday, Joe Chagra suppressed an amused smile as he denied Harrelson's claims point by point.

—Chagra never offered to send \$300,000 to Harrelson's three sons if Harrelson pleaded guilty to Wood's death, he said. Harrelson did mention pleading guilty, Chagra said, in the hope he could carry out his sentences for unrelated offenses in federal instead of state prison.

—Joe Chagra never asked Harrelson to arrange to get Jimmy Chagra out of the country in

early 1980 while Jimmy was a fugitive, he said. Harrelson had said he rented an apartment for Jimmy in Rio Grande City, and had hired a pilot to take Jimmy to Mexico. But Joe Chagra said his brother, who did hope to leave the country, was trying to avoid Texas and "thought someone might try to kill him in Mexico."

—Harrelson never asked for money to have his wife Jo Ann killed because she knew where Harrelson had thrown the Wood murder weapon, Chagra said. Nor did Harrelson ask for money to have Pete Kay killed, he said.

—Chagra never asked Harrelson or his friend Pete Kay to kill Henry Wallace, who was the main witness against Jimmy Chagra at his drug smuggling trial, he said.

—Nor did Chagra ever ask Harrelson to kill U.S. Attorney Jamie Boyd of San Antonio, who first investigated Wood's death, he said. Harrelson had testified that Joe Chagra "hated Jamie Boyd for some reason."

Galveston ruled out as Brown trial site

United Press International
GALVESTON — A state district judge has ruled out Galveston county but recommended seven other counties as "first priority sites" in the trial of state prison inmate Eroy Brown, accused in the death of a Huntsville prison farm manager.

Judge Darrell Hester narrowed the field Wednesday to Brazoria, Fort Bend, Matagorda, Chambers, Liberty, Wharton and Harris counties, which includes Houston. He scheduled a conference call for Dec. 15 to make a decision.

Brown, 31, of Waco, currently is serving a 12-year sentence for aggravated robbery.

He was charged with shooting farm manager Billy Max Moore, 49, and Ellis Unit Warden Wallace Pack on April 4, 1981, on the prison grounds.

Claiming self-defense, Brown was acquitted last month in Galveston in the Pack death.

Prosecutor Frank Blazek contended in a hearing that he could not obtain an impartial jury in Galveston due to the publicity the Brown trial received.

Blazek, the Walker County District Attorney-elect, indicated for the first time that Brown might be tried in the Moore death — saying he will apply for funds from the governor's Criminal Justice Division.

Blazek has said Walker county could not pay for the trial. He maintains no decision has been made to conduct it.

"We're gonna take it one step at a time. The first step is to find out where the trial will be held," Blazek said.

Chief defense attorney Craig Washington, a state senator-elect from Houston, indicated he would defend Brown if there is another trial and seek to do it quickly, as it is being held, at the same time as the Texas legislative session.

"I'm not going to be the one person who stands in the way of Mr. Brown walking out of jail in March," Washington said.

Hester ordered Brown held in the Galveston County jail and that he not be returned to the Texas Department of Corrections prior to a new trial. Washington has said Brown would be harmed if he was returned to TDC.

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