

Texas A&M

The Battalion

December 15, 1982 / Page 1B

Harrelson, wife, Liz Chagra all found guilty

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — Contract killer Charles V. Harrelson, his wife Jo Ann, and Elizabeth Chagra were found guilty Tuesday in the slaying of U.S. District Judge "Maximum" John Wood in a vendetta allegedly paid for by El Paso narcotics kingpin Jimmy Chagra.

Harrelson was found guilty of shooting Wood, 63, for a \$250,000 payoff from Chagra. Mrs. Harrelson and Mrs. Chagra were found guilty of lesser offenses, conspiracy to murder and obstruction of justice.

Mrs. Chagra, now a born-again Christian who emotionally

admitted delivering the payoff to Harrelson's family, had been given the best chance of an innocent verdict. However, the nine-woman, three-man jury dismissed her claim to being an ignorant dupe of her highrolling, tyrannical husband.

While the jury was being polled, both female defendants blinked back tears and dabbed their eyes. Harrelson had a smirk on his face. Eight of the female jurors and one male juror cried as the verdicts were read.

There were audible gasps when Mrs. Chagra was found guilty. Stunned by the verdict,

she sucked in her breath and weaved at the defense table, supported by her attorney.

The panel deliberated 20 hours over four days before returning its verdict at 9:55 a.m. CST in the 9-week trial — ending part one of an investigation that took three and a half years, thousands of FBI hours and \$5 million to bring to court.

Despite the lengthy investigation, the government's case ultimately hinged on testimony by Joe Chagra, who turned state's evidence against the Harrelsons and his sister-in-law, Elizabeth, 28, in exchange for a chance to plead guilty to a lesser charge and a promise he would not have to testify against his older brother.

The trial of Jimmy Chagra himself has not been scheduled. Harrelson, 44, was found guilty of shooting Wood, 63, in the back as the judge walked out of his north San Antonio townhome May 29, 1979.

Sentencing for all three has been set for March 8. Federal

Judge William Sessions explained he wanted to wait until possible other trials involving some of the same principles are completed.

A conviction on the federal charge of murder carries a mandatory life sentence. Harrelson also was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder — for which he also could be sentenced to life in prison.

There is no death penalty in federal law, but the Bexar County District Attorneys office has indicated it may try Harrelson on Texas capital murder charges — which carry a possible sentence of death by injection.

Jo Ann Harrelson, 41, who previously had been found guilty of using a false name to buy the high-powered rifle used in the slaying, was found guilty of obstruction of justice. She could face five years in prison. Mrs. Harrelson also is under charges of perjury before a grand jury.

Mrs. Chagra was charged with conspiracy to commit murder and obstruction of justice,

and still faces charges of income tax evasion in the case.

Prosecutors argued that Wood, nick-named "maximum" by convicts because of the stiff sentences he handed down, was ordered killed by Jimmy Chagra, because Chagra faced a drug smuggling charge scheduled to be tried in Wood's court. Chagra, 39, is currently in federal prison in Bastrop having been found guilty on those charges.

Wood and the Chagra family crossed paths several times the year before the judge was shot to death. In August 1978 Wood presided over a drug trial that sent Chagra brother-in-law Rick De La Torre to prison. El Paso criminal attorneys Joe and Lee Chagra (who was shot to death in a robbery in December 1978) had several of their other clients imprisoned for lengthy stays at Wood's direction, including entertainer Joe Renteria four months before Wood was killed.

After the verdict was read, Sessions thanked the jury and said they had been "splendid."

"None of these defendants agree with your verdict at all," Sessions said. "Yet each of them has believed in a system where a trial by jury is a very precious right."

After court was dismissed, Harrelson — who has paraded his hatred of law enforcement officers and cynical view of life, told reporters: "It's a necessary step in the progression of things. It was expected."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ray Jahn called 83 witnesses and introduced more than 100 exhibits in the case. The witnesses placed Harrelson at the scene of the crime as little as 50 minutes before the shooting — but no one could positively say Harrelson pulled the trigger.

Defense attorneys produced another 50 exhibits and several witnesses placing Harrelson in Dallas a short time after Wood was killed at 8:40 a.m. Prosecutors contend those witnesses either lied, had faulty memories or that Harrelson took a fast plane trip to Dallas with the in-

tention of being seen in his hometown.

On the witness stand for seven days, Harrelson conceded he had met Chagra shortly before Wood died and was in the cities where Wood held court in his final days. But he said he was set up by his gambling friend Pete Kay of Huntsville who collected \$200,000 from Chagra by claiming Harrelson had killed the judge.

Jahn, however, reminded jurors Harrelson had once bragged to a friend, "Killing people and getting away with it is my long suit."

Jahn said Harrelson failed in earlier attempts to kill Wood because other people were nearby and Harrelson did not want to harm them, Jahn said.

"Charles Harrelson, for all his faults, is not a mad dog killer," Jahn said. "He's cold, he's cunning, he's heartless. But he kills people — in his own words — because they deserve it or because he gets paid for it."

Wood killing 3rd on Harrelson list

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — With his conviction for shooting federal judge John Wood in the back, contract killer Charles V. Harrelson has established himself as a multi-time loser who has finally dug a hole so deep, he is unlikely to ever escape.

After Harrelson's conviction Tuesday of taking a \$250,000 payment to kill Wood, a crime that carries a mandatory sentence of life in prison, the Bexar County District Attorney's office says it now wants to try Harrelson on Texas capital murder charges — which carry the death sentence.

Wood was the third man Harrelson has been charged with killing.

In 1968 he was charged and acquitted — despite eye witness testimony — of killing a carpet salesman. In 1973 he was convicted of killing a Hearne grain dealer.

Although he was sentenced to 15 years in prison in that crime, Harrelson was paroled in 1978 — about eight months before shooting Wood to death.

Harrelson, 44, already was serving another jail sentence when the jury returned the guilty verdict in the Wood case. He had been found guilty on cocaine and weapons charges and sentenced to a total of 40 years.

During the Wood trial Harrelson showed he could be both

a charming man out of place in a murder conspiracy trial and a vicious ill-tempered convict when caught in circumstances he could not explain — such as testimony placing him at the scene of Wood's death about an hour prior to the shooting.

Harrelson likes to brag he has spent more time in courtrooms than some attorneys. For seven of the last nine years he has either been in jail or on his way there.

He also likes to brag about his success with women.

Although currently married to Jo Ann Harrelson, during secretly tape recorded visits at his jail he promised three other women he loved them and was anxious to be with them.

One of the most sensational parts of the trial came when Jo Ann Harrelson's daughter, Theresa Starr, testified she had an affair with her stepfather for several months behind her mother's back.

Harrelson is the son of a Texas prison guard and shows little respect for authority.

"The Gestapo is alive and well and highly refined and doing business as usual in Washington D.C.," he once said. "First they pick on the ones that are easy to deal with like me, but before long they'll be herding all you poor bastards into boxcars that don't go anywhere and showers without any water."

Reagan reveals MX compromise

United Press International
WASHINGTON — President Reagan announced Tuesday a bipartisan agreement with Congress that would ensure production funding for the MX missile, but delay any actual outlays until Congress approves a basing system.

Reagan appeared before reporters in the White House press room after meeting with Republican and Democratic negotiators in an effort to save the MX after House rejection last week of \$988 million in production funds.

"I'm pleased to announce that we've reached a bipartisan agreement that we hope will preserve funding for the the missile and enable us to continue the restoration of America's defense capabilities," Reagan said.

Flanked by members of the House and Senate GOP leadership, Reagan said it has "become apparent" that many members

of Congress support the missile itself, but have qualms about the "dense pack" basing mode he recommended Nov. 2.

"The agreement we've reached...is a reasonable balancing of those interests," he said.

Under terms of the compromise, outlined by Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Tower, R-Texas, Congress would approve the \$988 million Reagan has requested, but tie its actual use to approval of a basing mode.

The president would be required to resubmit his certification of a basing mode — not necessarily dense pack — as well as information on alternative schemes. Congress would have 45 days to approve Reagan's recommendations or an alternative plan.

The deployment plan would have to be approved by the House and Senate.

Dallas facing fight over ozone pollution

United Press International
DALLAS — The Environmental Protection Agency could slap the city with sanctions for failing to comply with the Clean Air Act, and those penalties could include a ban on industrial expansion.

Dallas is not the only city struggling against pollution and the EPA. About 200 other cities and counties are facing the same Dec. 31, deadline without bright prospects. Among them are five other Texas cities: Houston, Fort Worth, El Paso, Corpus Christi and San Benito.

The EPA said Dallas among other cities has failed to clean up its air since the passage of the act in 1970. The Dallas problem is ozone, a gas found naturally in the outer atmosphere, but also produced by hydrocarbons bel-

ched by car emission systems and industry smoke stacks.

Dallas has exceeded the federal ozone standard by 10 times in the past year.

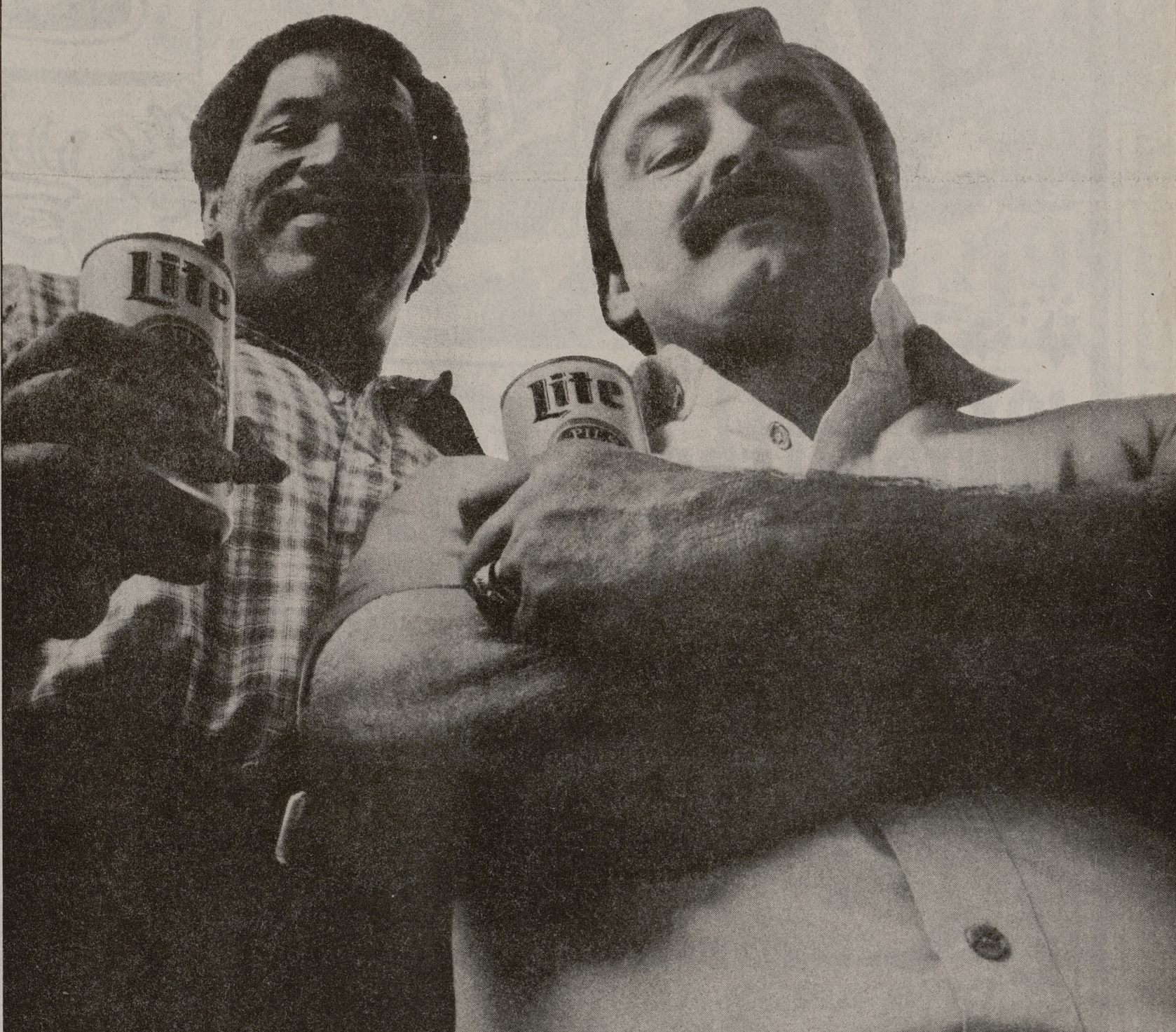
The city and state joined forces three years ago to reduce the level of ozone in the city's air, but Dallas air is no cleaner now than it was then, and the city is sure to miss its Dec. 31, clean-up deadline.

When that happens, the EPA has promised to act. Officials said they would probably impose sanctions such as a ban on industrial growth and the loss of federal highway funds and money for sewage treatment and pollution control programs.

It could also force the city to implement an expensive and controversial inspection program to monitor car emissions.

**LITE BEER IS LIKE A QUARTERBACK.
WE CAN'T WAIT TO KNOCK ONE DOWN.**

Bubba Smith and Dick Butkus



**EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED
IN A BEER. AND LESS.**