

Supreme Court lets California hold execution

SAN QUENTIN, Calif. — Double murderer Robert Alton Harris was put to death in the gas chamber Tuesday after the U.S. Supreme Court lifted a dramatic last-minute stay that had blocked California's first execution in 25 years.

"You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everybody dances with the Grim Reaper," Harris said in a final statement, released after he was executed for the 1978 murders of two San Diego 16-year-old boys.

Harris, 39, died quietly at dawn after an extraordinary night of cross-country judicial duels between the U.S. Supreme Court and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Following the filing of four stays by the 9th Circuit on Monday, frustrated justices in Washington voted 7-2 to order the appeals court not to issue any more stays without permission.

The dissenters — Justices John Paul Stevens and Harry A. Blackmun — focused on the issue of the gas chamber as cruel and unusual punishment.

The last stay came after Harris was strapped to the death seat.

Witnesses spent an uncomfortable 12 minutes watching Harris as he waited to die, smiling and nodding in

the brightly lit green chamber.

A telephone rang with a reprieve about a minute before the execution was to start, said prison spokesman Lt. Vernell Crittendon.

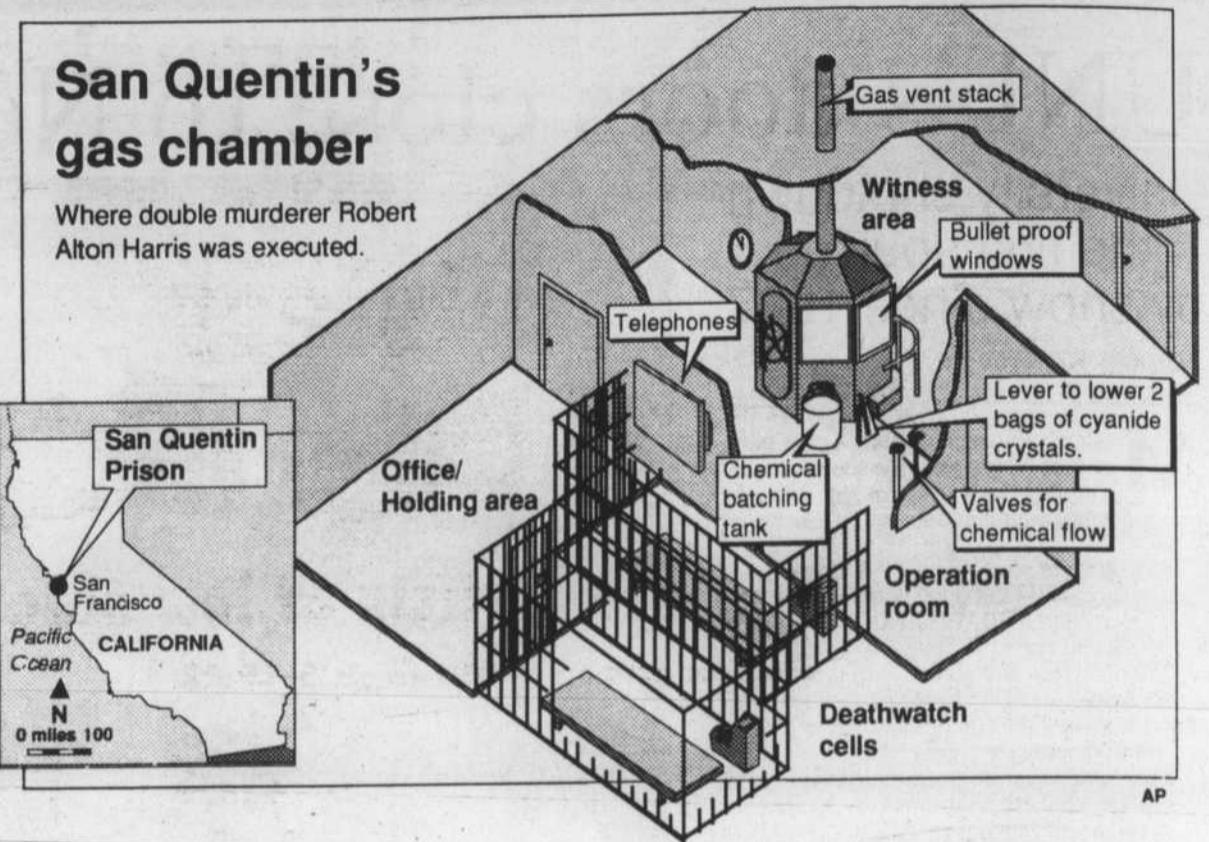
About two hours later, Harris was back in the metal chair. At one point, he looked at San Diego Police Det. Steven Baker, father of victim Michael Baker.

"He mouthed the words 'I'm sorry,'" Baker said later. On the day of the killings, it was Baker who arrested Harris for bank robbery without knowing his son was dead and Harris the killer. Outside San Quentin's gates Tuesday, Baker said he nodded back to Harris.

"He was probably sorry at the time, but that's 14 years too late," Baker said.

The gas was released at about 6:05 a.m., and shortly afterward Harris' head jerked from left to right before falling slowly to his chest. He appeared to be unconscious about 6:12 a.m. and was pronounced dead at 6:21 a.m.

In the witness chamber, Baker and his ex-wife, Sharron Mankins, showed little emotion as they watched their son's killer die. Those watching on Harris' behalf hugged each other as he went into his death throes.



Perot leads all others in Texas

WASHINGTON — It's a long drive to Election Day, but in an April show of strength, not-yet-candidate Ross Perot sits atop the latest presidential poll in his home state of Texas.

It's dangerous to put too much stock in polls a full six months before the election.

The survey results are a slap at adopted Texan George Bush and another sign that Democrat Bill Clinton is having trouble attracting the independent voters who swing presidential elections.

The survey also provides fresh evidence of the potent protest vote lurking in the electorate and a striking show of strength for Perot in the state with the third-most electoral votes.

The Texas Poll, released Tuesday, showed Perot supported by 35 percent, Bush by 30 percent, with 20 percent for Texas neighbor Clinton, the Arkansas governor and likely Democratic nominee.

"He better get ready for criticism," said White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, who predicted Bush "will do very well in Texas... we expect to

win."

Clinton campaign manager David Wilhelm said of a Perot candidacy, "It's not something we've given a whole lot of thought to at this point although we're certainly going to begin to give it more as it looks more like he is going to be in the contest."

Perot, asked about the poll results on CBS-TV's "This Morning" show, said, "I'm honored the people of Texas feel that way. It gives me a great sense of responsibility."

GOP pollster Bill McInturff called the new Texas survey "an attention grabber." The telephone poll of 674 registered voters was conducted April 9-18, an unusually long sampling period that coincided with a wave or largely favorable media attention for Perot, particularly in Texas.

Democratic pollster Claiborne Darden said, "Perot is rising to his peak right now. He still has that new car smell."

Democratic pollster Natalie Davis said that unless Bush or Clinton can tap the attention of the angriest voters, Perot may gain a constituency that wouldn't desert him as his record gets dissected.

In recent national polls, Perot has



H. Ross Perot

Brian Shelton/DN

trailed the major party candidates. In last week's Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll he was third with 26 percent support nationally, compared to 38 percent for Bush and 30 percent for Clinton.

If Perot were to continue to draw that level of support nationally, even a losing Perot candidacy could be a pivotal factor in the fall competition for electoral votes.

Polls show Perot drawing at least as much support from Clinton as from Bush.

FBI averts lawsuit on racial bias claims

WASHINGTON — The FBI and lawyers for more than 300 black agents said Tuesday they have reached a tentative agreement to settle the agents' claims of racial bias.

Six black agents will be promoted to supervisory positions and will receive back pay under the agreement, and another 67 black agents will be given new positions or special training.

The settlement would head off a potential class-action lawsuit by the black agents. The FBI agreed that "disparities" in treatment between black and white agents existed in some areas of its personnel system, but it did not admit to racial discrimination.

"We certainly wouldn't acknowledge either intentional discrimination or discrimination as a result of adverse impact," Joe Davis, the

FBI's general counsel, told a news conference. "... We do see disparities."

The agreement caps a year of negotiations between the lawyers and the FBI. Blacks and Hispanics have complained for several years of job discrimination at the agency.

"This is a far-reaching settlement that will result in changes" in the FBI's personnel practices, David Shaffer, an attorney for the black agents, said at a separate news conference earlier in the day. "It should be a major step in giving (black Americans) more confidence in the FBI, or at least in its director."

FBI Director William S. Sessions became personally involved in the issue a year ago, when he held unprecedented face-to-face meetings with unhappy black agents and agreed to open agency records in an effort to avert a lawsuit.

Chinese officials run peasants off farms

BEIJING — Small, bloody land wars are breaking out in the Chinese countryside as local officials looking for quick profits push peasants off their land and sell it.

After the government split up Mao Tse-tung's communes in the early 1980s, it assigned small plots of land to each rural family for at least 20 years.

But as the rural economy develops, businessmen are shopping for land for stores, factories and other commercial ventures.

Technically, they can't buy land — in socialist China, it belongs "to

the whole people." But they are buying "land use rights" and evicting peasants who know no other life but farming and have no way to obtain new land or jobs.

Peasants from across China are traveling to Beijing to appeal to central authorities. Several peasants interviewed by The Associated Press reported being beaten or arrested by rural police. They told of mass brawls between peasants and police resulting in serious injuries.

Occasional articles in the official media confirm their stories and hint

that the problem is becoming a major one.

The stories illustrate the absolute power local officials wield over peasants and the lack of a legal process.

They also undermine the common assumption that social instability is limited to China's cities and that the government need not worry about rural discontent.

"Deng Xiaoping doesn't care about us," one dispossessed peasant said after appealing in vain to authorities in Beijing. Like all those interviewed, he spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of punishment.

Judge allows dump payment

By the Associated Press

A five-state commission can decide whether to spend an additional \$16.9 million on a nuclear waste dump it wants to build in Boyd County, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

U.S. District Judge Warren Urbom rejected efforts by the Boyd County Local Monitoring Committee to stop the commission's scheduled Wednesday telephone conference meeting on the payment.

The citizens committee monitoring plans for the five-state dump said it needs more information about what the money is for and why it's needed.

Urbom earlier this month had temporarily prevented the Central

Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Compact Commission from taking action but indicated during a hearing Monday he would allow the commission to act.

Monitoring committee attorney Pat Knapp had argued that the commission had not provided all the information the local group needed to ask intelligent questions about the licensing process for the proposed warehouse near Butte.

The additional \$16.9 million would go to U.S. Ecology, the site developer.

The judge "made it clear that he feels the compact has complied with his earlier order," monitoring committee chairman Jim Selle said.

Manson's bid for parole rejected — again

CORCORAN, Calif. — Charles Manson, mastermind of one of the nation's most infamous mass murders, was denied parole for the eighth time on Tuesday, the day of California's first execution in a quarter century.

During a two-hour hearing, Manson was both cooperative and confrontational, stating his case with clear statements and with rantings.

Manson argued before the three-member state Board of Prison Terms

that he had been in prison longer than the law allows because he wasn't present at the killings.

"I am right with God and I am right with myself," he said. "I didn't break God's law and I didn't break man's law."

The board unanimously denied parole.

Manson originally was sentenced to die in the state's gas chamber for the grisly 1969 slayings of pregnant actress Sharon Tate and eight others

in Los Angeles.

The state Supreme Court threw out the death penalty law in effect then, leaving Manson with the only alternative, life in prison with possible parole.

The execution Tuesday of Robert Alton Harris, convicted under a subsequent death-penalty law of murdering two teen-agers in San Diego, was the first in California since 1967.

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Editor **Jana Pedersen** 472-1766
Managing Editor **Kara Wells**
Photo Chief **Michelle Paulman**

Publications Board Chairman **Bill Vobejda** 472-2588
Professional Adviser **Don Walton**, 473-7301

FAX NUMBER 472-1761

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