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VIC FEAZELL wasn't a difficult man to arrest. About a dozen law officers were waiting for him when he arrived in the parking lot in front of the McLennan County, Texas, Courthouse last Sept. 17.

The only hitch in the operation was that he kept stopping — or trying to — to answer questions yelled at him by reporters who had converged on the scene. He raised his handcuffed wrist, gave a defiant thumbs-up sign for the television cameras and joked, "I'm being traded for Daniloff" — referring to the American journalist who was being held in the Soviet Union on espionage charges.

The performance was vintage Feazell. At the age of 34, after only four years as district attorney of a medium-sized county 100 miles south of Dallas, Victor F. Feazell has managed to become one of the most prominent — or notorious, in some circles — attorneys in the state of Texas.

Supporters call him incorruptible. Detractors describe him as a colossal egotist. He characterizes himself as "an honest Huey Long." The federal government simply says he's a crook.

Mr. Feazell was named in September in a 12-count federal indictment charging him with racketeering and mail fraud. The indictment alleges that he accepted 14 bribes totaling \$19,360 to dismiss, reduce or influence criminal charges against several defendants, and that he used campaign contributions for personal purposes. Conviction on all 12 counts would carry a maximum penalty of 90 years in prison and fines totaling \$560,000. *U.S. v. Feazell*, A-86-CR-94 (W.D. Texas).

Although officials in the U.S. attorney's office and Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) won't divulge what prompted them to open their investigation about a year ago, Mr. Feazell says he knows exactly what spawned the inquiry. "The government is out to get Vic Feazell," he says. "They want me to be an object lesson that you don't go up against law enforcement and make them look bad."

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In June 1983, a one-eyed drifter named Henry Lee Lucas was arrested on a weapons charge in rural north central Texas. By the end of the month, he had confessed to more than 100 murders.

DPS director Col. James B. "Jim" Adams ordered the Texas Rangers — the investigative elite of the DPS — to form a task force to coordinate requests for information from what was fast developing into the Lucas confession machine. By the time he was finished, Mr. Lucas had confessed to as many as 600 murders in 26 states.

In those first heady months after he was arrested, Henry Lee Lucas was the best thing to have happened to ballistic tests. He was convicted of 10 murders — and sentenced to death for one of them — and faces prosecution in about 20 others. In early 1985, Colonel Adams said 189 murders had been explained by Mr. Lucas' confessions.

By that time, however, Mr. Lucas was singing a different tune. He recanted all but one of his confessions, claiming that he had been fed information by law officers eager to clear unsolved murders. A Dallas newspaper published a startling expose featuring indisputable proof that hundreds of Mr. Lucas' confessions were bogus.

And the Texas Rangers, who only a year earlier had been lauded for uncovering the worst serial murderer in American history, suddenly were being assailed for what were perceived as slipshod investigations. By the end of 1985, even "60 Minutes" had run a segment on the scandal.

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Mr. Feazell entered the fray in late 1984 because Mr. Lucas had confessed to three McLennan County murders. "I figured I'd just let him sit because he had so much else against him," he says, "but the press kept hounding me: 'When are you going to do something?'"

When he did begin to do something, Mr. Feazell

says he found no evidence corroborating Mr. Lucas' confessions, either to the McLennan County cases or murders elsewhere. "Here was a one-eyed derelict who had taken on the sins of the world," he says. "If you've got an unsolved murder, give it to Henry."

In April 1985, a McLennan County grand jury began investigating the case. The scope of the inquiry soon widened from the McLennan County murders to embrace the entire Henry Lee Lucas road show. By the time the grand jury completed its probe three months later, it had exonerated Mr. Lucas and chastised homicide investigators for improperly eliciting confessions.

The findings were a slap in the face of Colonel Adams. Although Mr. Feazell acknowledges his dislike of Colonel Adams, he denies that he pursued the grand jury investigation to embarrass the DPS chief. "I did it to right a wrong, and that's the only reason," he says. "I realized a grave injustice had been done, not only in McLennan County but across the country."

While Mr. Feazell was investigating Colonel Ad-

Another sore point with some attorneys is his flamboyant conduct in the courtroom. He tends toward emotionally charged oratory and is fond of melodramatic gestures. During a 1985 capital murder trial, for instance, he symbolically jabbed his arm with a pen — a veiled reference to death by injection. (The jury apparently understood, and awarded the death penalty.) "I've been criticized for the way I try cases because I get real emotional," he says. "Some people say I'm theatrical."

Evangelical, actually, would be a better description. The son of a Southern Baptist preacher, Mr. Feazell is himself an ordained minister who worked his way through college as a pastor and still preaches occasionally in local churches.

Biblical allusions are a staple of his conversation. He often casts himself as Daniel in the lion's den when discussing the federal charges against him. In his race for re-election last year, he portrayed himself as David against the Goliath of the federal government. Referring to the timing of the indictment and subsequent revelations only weeks before the



BEING TRADED: As he was being arrested, McLennan County, Texas, District Attorney Vic Feazell jok-

ingly told reporters he was being traded to the Soviets for an American journalist being held on spy charges.

Self-Styled 'Daniel' Faces the Lions

ams' team, Colonel Adams' staff was investigating Mr. Feazell. Mr. Feazell says the DPS probe into allegations of corruption in his office was in retaliation for his work on the Lucas case. "They set out to find anything," he says. "I've found out you don't go against the power and majesty of Colonel Jim Adams without paying dearly."

"That's absolutely false," Colonel Adams replies. "We had received information [about Feazell's office] prior to receiving information that he was looking into Lucas." (Actually, both men cite conflicting dates for the start of their respective investigations.)

Colonel Adams seems not as much perturbed as bemused by Mr. Feazell's penchant for characterizing the indictment as Colonel Adams' personal handiwork. "It's just a smoke screen which is designed to obscure the real facts of the case," he says. "The U.S. attorney's office is separate from the FBI, and the FBI is separate from the Department of Public Safety, and there's absolutely no way I could orchestrate a federal investigation into him that wasn't warranted."

Colonel Adams says he can't discuss details of the case. Mr. Feazell, though, is as talkative as the DPS chief is reticent. He attributes the charges against him to the perjured testimony of "a couple of old lawyers who got caught with tax problems and who are willing to sell their souls for federal immunity."

Mr. Feazell's attorney, Gary Richardson of Tulsa, Okla.'s Gary Richardson and Associates, offers a different explanation: "It's a bunch of hearsay stuff from a bunch of disgruntled ex-employees that he fired."

Says Colonel Adams: "If you make enough allegations — and enough major allegations — you're going to find some people who believe you."

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Mr. Feazell is not an altogether popular man in McLennan County legal circles. Soon after becoming district attorney in 1983, he severely limited access to his office, which prompted irritated defense attorneys to derisively dub it "Fort Feazell."

election, he says, "They did everything they could to beat me. It was a miracle that I won."

By most other accounts, Mr. Feazell's opponent — Paul E. Gartner Jr. of Waco, Texas' Khoury and Gartner — was the underdog. Mr. Gartner had been swamped by Mr. Feazell by a 2-1 count in the 1982 election, and he was a Republican candidate in a Democratic stronghold.

But despite his unenviable position, Mr. Gartner resisted the temptation to dwell on the federal indictment. Mr. Feazell did not. "He made it a campaign issue more than I did," Mr. Gartner says. "He had bumper stickers that showed a pair of handcuffs and he had television commercials that showed him in handcuffs."

Mr. Feazell polled 53 percent of the vote — enough to be re-elected, but less than any Democrat seeking countywide office. Nevertheless, he interprets the results as proof that he was the candidate of the common man. "I've got the support of the regular folks — the ranchers, the farmers, the blue-collar workers, people who know what it's like to be kicked in the teeth."

More evidence of what he considers vindication came in December, when a state district judge first suppressed a Henry Lee Lucas murder confession to an El Paso, Texas, slaying and later dismissed the murder case against him. "History will prove I'm right," he says.

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Mr. Feazell's own case is set for trial on Feb. 2 in U.S. District Court in Austin, Texas. Mr. Feazell says he's confident that the trial will prove his innocence, and he hopes it will also provide a forum for him to expose what he considers the machinations of the federal government against him.

But whatever happens in the courtroom, Colonel Adams suggests that the verdict won't close the Vic Feazell saga. "If he's acquitted," he says, "he'll say we have a good judicial system here in the United States. And if he's convicted, he'll claim he was persecuted."

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