



News-Times photo by Joseph Kugelsky

Looking back

Richard Baker of New Milford, a student at Western Connecticut State College, Danbury, operates a television camera near the scene of the 1970 downtown bombings that

coincided with a crime spree by the Pardue brothers. Wesconn students are preparing a TV documentary on the Danbury case, one of the FBI's biggest.

Students' TV cameras revive Danbury's explosive holdup

By Ruth Lockwood
News-Times staff

DANBURY — Western Connecticut State College students are recreating one of the FBI's biggest cases, a crime spree of murders and robberies by the Pardue brothers.

Since September students of Dr. David W. Detzer's "Crime and Punishment" class have interviewed 153 persons and corresponded with 21 more; traveled 4,000 miles on land and 173 by air; logged over 3,099 man-hours and spent \$400 out of their own pockets for equipment.

The 17 students are recreating the Friday, Feb. 13th, 1970, bombings that rocked Danbury after James and John Pardue planted three bombs in an attempt to divert attention from a bank robbery. In a single stroke the blasts destroyed the police station communication

system, damaged a bank and destroyed a car. And before the smoke cleared the brothers disappeared with more than \$24,000.

Several weeks later, after one of the most intensive investigations in its history, the FBI arrested the Pardue brothers. A year later John Pardue was shot and killed in an abortive escape attempt. Meanwhile James, whose behavior had become increasingly erratic, according to researchers, was judged insane and released.

He has since been arrested on a variety of charges including kidnaping and rape and is awaiting disposition of those charges in Colorado and Missouri.

The Wesconn students, after researching for six months, are now producing a television documentary entitled "Madmen, Murderers, or Masterminds: An Unsolved Case." It is scheduled to be finished next month and will be shown on local cable television.

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Attorney General's office bans Pardue film showing

By Tao Woolfe
News-Times staff

DANBURY — A half-hour video tape made by Western Connecticut State



News-Times photo by Stephen Szurlej

'Here in my hand . . .'

Wesconn professor David Detzer, holding a video cassette of the film his class made on the life of James and John Pardue, discusses the work with students at a private screening last night. The state attorney general's office has banned the public from seeing the film because of possible publicity which could be prejudicial to James' upcoming trial.

College students is such a "hot potato" that state Assistant Attorney General Bernard McGovern decided yesterday the general public may not see it.

Before his announcement that it was "safe" enough for a closed screening last night, two dozen students on the production crew were unsure if even they could view it.

The film, a documentary-style saga of alleged bank robbers James and John Pardue met with legal and academic objections. James' lawyers feared the film's release could prejudice their client's upcoming trial and college administrators feared a law suit.

James, the surviving Pardue brother, is facing charges of bank robbery, rape and kidnaping in Colorado and Missouri. The film includes these and a string of other alleged crimes of which he was accused but never convicted.

These previous crimes, his lawyers argue, are not known to the jury he will be facing. To prevent the possibility of pre-trial publicity, the attorneys sent written warnings to Western Connecticut State College.

Faced with potential suits, college officials called the attorney general's office for advice.

In a one-day decision, McGovern ruled it was safe for the student filmmakers but not the general public, pending further investigation.

McGovern will view a private screening of the production within the next two weeks.

A few members of the general public, however, tried to get in to the private screening last night. Among them was a former cellmate of John's.

The professor in charge of the project, Dr. David Detzer, briefed members of his class on the latest developments in James' case and the now-controversial film.

He announced that James, who had been undergoing psychological tests for competency to stand trial, had been

found "sane" by a Missouri psychiatric unit and is expected to go to trial in the near future.

Detzer also told students he had been summoned to a morning meeting with college administrators to discuss problems surrounding the film.

College officials at the meeting were President Robert Bersi, Vice President Gertrude Braun and Academic Dean John Butler.

Following the meeting, Butler described the film "a real hot potato" and said he was the one who called McGovern and urged a speedy ruling.

He added that McGovern and the college administration are in agreement that "a libel or slander suit is improbable but not impossible" and it is best to "keep the specifics of the film in abeyance for the moment."

At a celebration dinner following the premiere, class members went to discuss their reactions:

"It was sort of anticlimactic after the big build-up," said one student. "By the time it can be released, we can charge a huge admission fee."

Detzer said since the copyright belongs to the college and since they are a non-profit production company, admittance fees are not possible.

"But," he said "we can ask for donations from viewers for a scholarship fund."

Aside from legal problems, the class has copyright problems. The Danbury Public Library helped edit the film and the library's equipment was used in the production. Library staffers Paul Morton and Paul Liebowitz claim they have a legal right to a copy of the video tape.

"They say they want the copy for their archives," Detzer explained, but added he is worried about the possibility of wider release.

Class members quipped that nobody would want to make donations to the "Pardue fund."

Heather Stilson, a class member who filmed a segment from an airplane was critical of the videotape: "I think it needs a lot more editing — it is still a little rough and a little too melodramatic," she said.

Detzer said if it were "tightened up;; before release to the public, it could be in the running for a college film award. He added, however, he probably would be in Cuba by that time. Detzer is planning to take a sabbatical to Cuba next year to research a book on Fidel Castro and former President John Kennedy.

One student summed up the general feeling about the production; "I'm just glad the work is over. Now we can just sit back and watch the feathers fly."

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Legal threats keeping lid on Pardue film

By Tao Woolfe
News-Times staff

DANBURY — Like its subject James Pardue, a film made by Western Connecticut State College students continues to be prevented from release by threatened legal actions.

A Bridgeport attorney, Elaine Amendola, accompanied by three men whom she called "colleagues," emerged from a closed-door showing of the film at Wesconn this week and dubbed the work "pure allegation." The lawyer added, "I don't think it should be let out" of the college for public viewing.

Faced with the threat of lawsuits by Pardue's attorneys here and in Missouri, Wesconn and the state attorney general's office have clamped a lid on the film, allowing only the class that made it and Pardue's legal representatives to see it.

But David Detzer, the professor whose class made the film, and Joseph Becker, a student film maker, claim Ms. Amendola "may have pulled a fast one."

Detzer said Ms. Amendola called him last week and "implied" Pardue "wanted to do a show about himself and that some important producers were interested" as well. She also said, according to Detzer, that these "interested and important" movie people might accompany her to the screening at Wesconn.

But Ms. Amendola denied Pardue's alleged theatrical interest.

"Jimmy is concerned with getting out of the mess he is in right now and he doesn't want anything to hurt his chances," she said. They lawyer added the three men with her were "friends — lawyers that I went to school with." Later in the afternoon she said the men were "colleagues" whom she "happened to be having lunch

with" and who "wanted to take a drive with me to Danbury on a beautiful day."

Though Ms. Amendola said she had "been in touch with Jimmy," she did not know if a trial date had been set for him. "I do not even know what charges he's facing," she asserted.

Ms. Amendola said she wanted to see the film to determine whether it was libelous or potentially damaging to her client's upcoming trial. Pardue faces charges of rape, sodomy, and kidnaping in Missouri, and bank robbery in Colorado — his trial could begin this summer. He is in jail in Colorado.

The documentary-style film covers these charges and a series of past alleged crimes which James and his brother John were reportedly involved in. Neither has ever been convicted.

The pair allegedly masterminded the bombing of the

police station and Union Savings Bank in Danbury in 1970. After their arrest, John was fatally wounded in an escape attempt in Bridgeport.

Before he died, John gave a "deathbed confession" to an FBI Agent admitting his and his brother's involvement in the Danbury robbery and a number of alleged other crimes ranging from robbery to murder.

James never stood trial and was eventually released because he was found incompetent to stand trial.

Pardue's attorneys learned the Wesconn class intended to show the film and threatened the college with "hints of law suits," one student said.

After seeing the film, Ms. Amendola would not say whether she feels it is libelous. "Libel and slander are complicated issues," she said.

Ms. Amendola is a partner in the Bridgeport based firm of Zeldes, Needle and Cooper.

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