

Collapse's cause has been found

Results to be released in May

STAFF AND WIRE

A probable cause for the 1999 Aggie bonfire collapse has been found, but investigators will not release their official findings until May.

Jon Zagrodsky, with McKinsey & Co., an international management consulting firm, said the reason for the collapse, which killed 12 Aggies on Nov. 18, 1999, would not be a surprise.

"Internally, I think we have an answer... and know what caused the problem," he said. "We've discussed it at very high levels and have a reasonably good conclusion about what caused it."

The commission will not release its findings until May to allow time for the theory to be tested by outside engineers.

"We have to make sure we're right," Zagrodsky said. Some theories listed in the *Austin American Statesman* on the cause of the collapse include:

- The centerpole cracked.
- A crane hit the bonfire stack's masties before the collapse, possibly knocking the centerpole.
- The bonfire stack was leaning days

before the collapse.

• The bonfire stack was 59 feet tall when it fell, before it reached the approximate completion height of 75 feet. University regulation states the stack should only be 55 feet tall.

• The ground the bonfire was built on was sloped.

• Bonfire workers took construction shortcuts and eliminated some safety measures.

• The wedding cake design of the bonfire was flawed.

• Lack of a specific blueprint or design.

• Students building the bonfire had been drinking.

The Special Commission is composed of four teams assigned to determine the cause of the collapse: Fay Engineering, Kroll Associates, Packer Engineering and Performance Improvement International.

McKinsey and Co. is overseeing the commission's work.

Leo Linbeck Jr., chairperson of the commission said he is unaware of the commission's theory.

The commission canceled the last planned March 14 meeting, citing a lack of justification for a formal session. The commission will not hold any further public meetings.

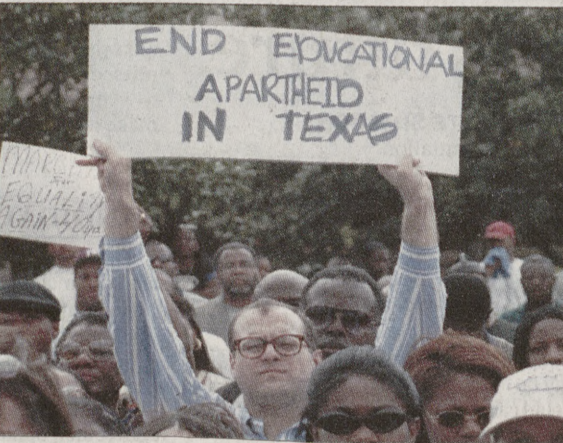
The commission recently requested an extended deadline and an additional \$1 million for its investigation. If the additional money is approved, it would bring the budget to \$2 million.

The A&M Board of Regents will determine if the additional \$1 million will be approved this week at their meeting March 23-24 in Temple.

The final report of the commission's findings will be presented at a public hearing the first week of May.

AGGIE 99 BONFIRE

Rally for change



Rev. Jesse Jackson and Houston's African-American community leaders advocated equal funding for Texas Southern and Prairie View Universities before an audience of 700 students at the University of Houston Friday.

CODY WAGES/THE BATTALION

A&M students sue police dept.

TEXARKANA (AP)—Two college students are seeking more than \$500,000 in damages from two undercover police officers, the city of Palestine and Anderson County after they were pulled over and arrested for making obscene gestures, causing them to miss their final exams.

Siblings Amanda and Bryan Prewitt, both of Texarkana, contend in a lawsuit filed last week in federal court in Texarkana that they were headed to College Station in December when Amanda Prewitt had to brake her car suddenly along U.S. Highway 79 in

Anderson County to avoid hitting a car with a man and a woman inside.

Amanda Prewitt made an obscene gesture at the car's occupants and continued driving, according to the suit. The Prewitts claim they didn't know the occupants were undercover Palestine police officers in an unmarked car.

While the Prewitts' car was stopped at an intersection, the officers, Shelby Green and Brenda Gray, allegedly began threatening the Prewitts and cursing at them. The lawsuit claims Green got out of the car, didn't identify himself as an officer and approached

the Prewitts' car in a threatening manner. The Prewitts drove away in an attempt to escape what they believed was a case of "road rage," court papers state. Brian Prewitt also made an obscene gesture during the confrontation, according to the suit.

When the two youths later pulled their car over for a Palestine police cruiser, they were handcuffed, arrested and taken to the Anderson County Jail, where Amanda Prewitt was strip searched.

Mike Meaders, assistant police chief in Palestine, recalled the incident but said he was not aware of the

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SBP candidates answer questions about platform issues

This is the first in a five part series. The four candidates for student body president were each asked five questions in separate interviews.

BY ROLANDO GARCIA
The Battalion

Beyond the elegant speeches about representing students and showing the Aggie spirit, each of the four candidates for student body president have outlined a handful of projects they pledge to pursue if elected.

Ranging from ambitious to practical, the projects which the candidates chose to address may carry many of the same themes, but promise different methods for implementation.

Senior international studies major Brandon Garrett said he wants to make it easier for students at Texas A&M to undertake a broad course of study, and not be imprisoned within the narrow confines of their degree plan.

"One of the largest problems that we have is that we're too focused in one area. You learn engineering, and that's it. Or you learn business, and that's it," Garrett said. "We're not affording students the opportunity to grow and to learn and develop, and that's what college is all about."

Garrett said the University should make it easier for students to get a minor or a double major from different colleges and departments.

Forrest Lane, a senior political science major, said one of his priorities is to cultivate leadership skills among students. To help accomplish that, he wants to create a sophomore leadership organization.

Also, Lane said he wants a student fee oversight committee that would attempt to set a timeline for the implementation of the oncoming fee hikes.

"I think if we create an annual dollar limit, then we're going to start prioritizing those fees and figure out, 'this one is important now — but maybe we can wait two or three years for this next one,' that way we're not just throwing these out arbitrarily," Lane said.

Jeff Schiefelbein, a senior marketing major, said the underlying reason he decided to run for student body president is to change the perception of student government and to make its officers more accessible to students.

"I've been in student government for four years, so I've gotten to see the decent people that really try to represent and try to serve," Schiefelbein said. "But then I also see the people that are driven by titles that make student government almost an elitist group — and in some form or fashion — try to intimidate."

To help combat the Student Senate's elitist image, Schiefelbein said he wants student senators to be more proactive in communicating with their constituents and to meet a certain quota in filling out forms from the students they represent.

"A lot of those people just sit at a desk and wait for people to come to them. I'd like to see them

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2000 STUDENT BODY ELECTIONS

Bonfire photograph featured in magazine

BY STUART HUTSON
The Battalion

While examining the pages of *Life's 1999: The Year in Pictures* at a local Barnes and Noble for tips on photojournalism, architecture graduate student J. P. Beato stumbled across a surprising picture.

Spanning two pages, the picture of Tim Kerlee trapped in the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse was not shocking because of its enormous size or because it revived memories of the tragic incident, but because the picture was taken by Beato, a photographer for *The Battalion*, the morning of the collapse.

"I didn't even know that it was going to be in there," Beato said. "I never thought when I was taking the photo that it would ever come to represent the tragedy of the collapse in a publication as prestigious as this."

Since its original two-by-three inch appearance in *The Battalion*, the

See BEATO on Page 2.



J. P. Beato, an architecture graduate student, has a photo featured in the *LIFE 1999: The Year in Pictures*.

Siege reenactment to provide insight

KILLEEN (AP)—Aircraft circled, tanks rumbled and combat-garbed shooters fired off rounds at a Central Texas military base Sunday in a high-stakes field test to resolve whether federal agents shot at the Branch Davidians in the waning moments of the 1993 Waco standoff.

Government officials have always insisted that their forces fired no shots that day, when the FBI launched a tear-gassing operation designed to end the 51-day siege.

But Branch Davidian plaintiffs suing the government for wrongful death insist Sunday's field test will confirm their experts' analysis: that rapid-fire bursts of light appearing on the FBI's 1993 aerial infrared surveillance footage represent gunfire from government positions into the Davidians' retreat.

"If we... show that there are flashes from gunfire, I am hopeful FBI leaders will acknowledge that guns were fired and the FBI will find out who fired and on what orders," the plaintiffs' lead counsel, Michael Caddell, said prior to the test, standing outside Fort Hood's gate. The Army outpost is located 50 miles southwest of Waco, site of the 1993 siege.

FBI officials have suggested that the flashes come from sunlight glinting off pools of water, metal or other debris strewn on the ground while the government's tanks pierced the compound's walls to insert tear gas.

Davidian leader David Koresh and some 80 followers perished during the fire that consumed their compound several hours into the

tear-gassing operation. The government contends their deaths, whether from fire or gunshot wounds, came by their own hand. The plaintiffs argue that government gunfire cut off the sect members' only avenue of escape as the inferno raged.

The field test, ordered by the federal judge presiding over the Davidians' lawsuit, was designed to determine whether the Forward Looking Infrared camera is capable of detecting people, debris heated by exhaust from tanks, sunlight reflections and, of course, gunfire.

The government's infrared experts, as well as those hired by the plaintiffs, will compare the test footage with the FBI's 1993 tape to determine whether muzzle blasts fired during the test have similar thermal signatures.

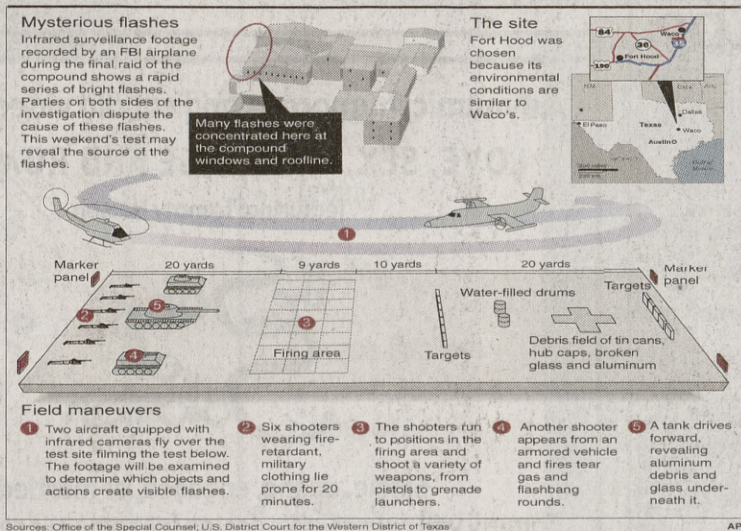
Preliminary results were expected as early as Sunday evening. Caddell has scheduled a news conference Monday in Houston to air portions of the test video and discuss findings.

U.S. Attorney Mike Bradford, one of the government's lead lawyers in the case, has acknowledged that infrared technology can detect gunfire — a statement Caddell has

described as a stunning reversal of the government's earlier position.

The critical issue, Bradford and other federal officials contend, is whether the cameras detect people on the ground. No people were visible on the 1993 infrared tape until after the fire erupted and FBI

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All about what went on at this year's festival. Page 3

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Batt Radio

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Batt Online

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