

The Muddraker

Volume 13, Number 4

Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, California.

Friday, April 4, 1986

VICTORY!

by Mike Stark
and Robert Gould

The Caltech cannon has been the focus of the ultimate engineering challenge for Harvey Mudd students for many years. Just before 10 on the morning of March 29, a group of eleven intrepid Mudd students proved that even this challenge was not too great. Amidst the cheers of many students and strains of Tchaikowsky's 1812 Overture, they drove up to West Dorm with the cannon on the back of a truck.

ASHMC president Dave Somers said that the idea to move the cannon was first suggested seriously on the previous Wednesday by Jeff Hong and Steve Olson. After surveying the Caltech campus under cover of night they determined that it would be difficult to move the cannon not only from the standpoint of not being caught, but also from an engineering standpoint. One of the students approached a Harvey Mudd alumnus in the construction business who suggested that they use a forklift and offered to help them get one. After a great deal more intensive planning they were ready to move the cannon.

The intrepid eleven arrived at CalTech just before 7 a.m. They had rented the forklift the night before and parked at a nearby construction site. Seven of the students were dressed as construction workers with the story that they were to move the cannon so that another crew could come in later in the day and fix a water main below it. They drove up with two trucks, one of which was large enough to hold the cannon, and a forklift. Three other students drove up in normal cars dressed like CalTech students and blocked the main access road to the campus under the pretense of returning from spring break. One other student came along as a photographer.

The crew began working on the cannon and, after about five minutes, a security officer arrived and asked them what they were doing. The leader of the group explained that they were with H.M. Salvage and that they were taking the cannon to be polished. After observing the workers for a while, the security officer drove off. One student explained that "for the next ten minutes we were really worried, but then it became clear that he wasn't



Curtain Call. Pranksters bask in the glory of a theft well done.

coming back."

According to several of the pranksters, a Caltech freshman and resident of Fleming House known only as Ralph called Campus Security. Ralph was told that C.S. was not told beforehand that the cannon was to be polished, but not to worry as their papers were in order and they seemed legitimate. Not easily convinced, Ralph went outside and talked to the workers. Once he was sure they were legitimate, he left them alone.

Campus Security and curious freshmen were not their only trouble. The forklift was in bad shape after lifting the cannon. Before they could get the cannon to the waiting truck, the lift became stuck in a pothole. The quick thinking crew then brought the truck onto the campus and set the cannon on it. Once on the Pasadena city streets, they cut the chain holding the cannon upright and drove it back to Mudd on

the freeway.

The three students who acted as decoys played an essential part in the heist. Many of the students attributed their success to the fact that Caltech students were reluctant to suspect anything wrong while other students were so clearly paying no mind to the workers. Many other students who didn't go along to get the cannon were involved in this twisted plot. Several students contributed ideas and some were waiting behind in case anything went wrong. A Harvey Mudd administrator had offered to bail the students out if they got in trouble with the law.

The fate of the cannon is, as yet, undetermined. The perpetrators of the daring deed, and most of the rest of the college, would like to see it stand at the end of the main quad until Caltech figures out a clever way of getting it back. President D. Kenneth Baker, however, initially said that since the

Mudd students had shown everybody that they could pull it off, they should now take it back. Not acknowledging the various arguments concerning school rivalry and healthy pranks, Baker wanted the cannon returned as soon as possible. Larry Hartwick, also on the scene shortly after the cannon's arrival, hoped that the matter could be dealt with between Caltech and Harvey Mudd students and that the administrations of the two colleges would not get involved. Eventually, it was decided informally by the two administrations to leave the matter to the students.

The Deputy Master of Student Housing at Caltech and Harvey Mudd alumnus, Bernard Santarsiero said that in spite of his mixed loyalties he saw the theft as a good thing. He was happy to see an inter-college relationship stirred up. He said that he remembers that "even in [his] day attempts were made to steal the cannon." His only concern was for the recent agreement made between the Caltech dorms that the cannon be off limits to pranks. This agreement was deemed necessary because the fragile cannon had been the subject of numerous pranks by Fleming House's rival dorms. Fleming House is the Caltech dorm that claims ownership of the cannon.

Student reaction to the arrival of the cannon on the Harvey Mudd campus was enthusiastic, if not joyous. While the cannon was being moved to its resting place between North and East dorms, the crowd of students watching were in a festive mood. Adding to their enjoyment was a crowd of about six Caltech students who were quite obviously not pleased. The looks on their faces were every bit as entertaining as the attempts to take the cannon off the truck with a forklift that was too small.

President of Fleming House, Ed Zanelli, said that he was amused to see that the Harvey Mudd students had actually pulled it off. He added that the residents of Fleming "thought it was a little lame when they took it," pointing out that Fleming House was on a ski trip at the time. He also said that plans are underway to return

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CANNON

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the cannon to Caltech, but that some of their clever schemes aren't panning out. He said that any action taken to return the cannon will be taken by Fleming House alone because a lot of the people in the other Houses "aren't sad to see it gone." Nonetheless, he is confident that they will have the cannon back soon.

Late on the evening of April 1, some of the cannon thieves decided that the cannon would be more secure from Fleming reclamation if it were fastened to the ground. With this in mind, they locked it too a steel pipe embedded in concrete. At the urging of Larry Hartwick and President Baker, the pipe and concrete were removed. Hartwick said that he was not interested in seeing the cannon become a permanent fixture of the campus. Shortly after the concrete was removed, a large contingency from Fleming House arrived allegedly to prevent the Mudders from securing the cannon to the ground. Campus Security and Claremont Police also arrived on the

scene to disperse the crowd of about a hundred Mudders and Techies that gathered around the cannon.

For those who doubt the morality of stealing a cannon, relax. According to a story told to *The Muddraker* staff by then-dean Gann, Caltech stole the cannon from the San Marino Military Academy in 1971. In doing so, they tore up the Academy's sprinkler system. Later, some Mudd students who were foiled in their attempt to steal the cannon from Caltech tried to steal another cannon from the Academy. The Academy, not about to lose another sprinkler system, sicked the dogs on them and arrested them.

Many students have been anxious to see the cannon on Mudd soil since a group of "Techies" stole the Red Dog Saloon sign in 1981. There have also been numerous attempts by Techies to steal Rusto. The last such attempt was in May, 1985.

Until Caltech can come up with a miracle the cannon will sit between East and North dorms where it has created a picturesque focus for the campus.