

Judge rules out videotapes aimed at discrediting witness

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An attempt to discredit a witness testifying against the Church of Scientology in a fraud trial hit a snag Thursday when a Portland judge called surreptitiously made videotapes an "amateurish performance" and refused to let them be shown to the jury.

"I think they are devastating, devastating against the church," Multnomah Circuit Judge Donald H. Londer said out of the presence of the jury after viewing 108 minutes of tape recorded in a Los Angeles park last November.

The tapes involved conversations with Gerald D. Armstrong, a former Scientologist who testified against the church that statements about the biographical background of church founder L. Ron Hubbard in frequently published statements contained several "inaccuracies and lies."

Earle C. Cooley, a Boston attorney representing the Church of Scientology of California, indicated to jurors earlier Thursday that the videotapes contained statements showing that Armstrong wanted to plant phony documents in church records and to "frame" high church officials.

After questioning Armstrong about any covert activities in which Armstrong had been involved against the church, Cooley asked to play the tapes to show Armstrong's bias against the church and to challenge the credibility of his testimony.

After viewing the tapes, Londer told attorneys he thought it was "very questionable" whether the concealed recordings were made under legal authority in California by a private investigator. He also said the method used in the tapes "bor-

ders more on entrapment than anything else."

Armstrong, who left the church in December 1981, said he was contacted by an unidentified man named "Joey" in 1984 after Armstrong had won a civil trial in California in which the church had accused him of stealing church documents.

Armstrong said "Joey" told him that he and others wanted to reform the church and wanted Armstrong's help. Armstrong said he met with "Joey" and another unidentified man on several occasions.

"I was probably duped," he testified Thursday after realizing that Cooley was questioning him from a transcript of the park meeting.

Armstrong was called as a witness on behalf of Julie Christofferson Titchbourne, a Portland woman seeking return of \$3,000 plus punitive damages against Hubbard and the church arising from a nine-month involvement with Scientology ending in 1976.

Armstrong said he started working early in 1980 with Hubbard's permission collecting materials for a biography of Hubbard. He said his research uncovered several inaccuracies about Hubbard's education, military service, financial income and healing powers.

On cross-examination, Cooley has shown that Armstrong has been involved in several pending lawsuits by former Scientologists against Hubbard and the church. The suits were filed by Boston attorney Michael Flynn.

During his testimony Thursday, Armstrong claimed the church had private investigators following him and called the church a "terrorist organization."