

DeFrank

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Also in late September, a story that had been critical of alleged slowness in forming a campus political forum had been disapproved for publication in The Battalion, DeFrank said in a Battalion article on Oct. 7, 1966.

These conflicts led to decisive action by the A&M Publications Board when they officially removed DeFrank and two of his assistants from their positions on the newspaper on Sept. 30, 1966.

Jim Lindsey, chairman of the board, said in a Oct. 7, 1966 Battalion article he felt the action was necessary because continued policy

disagreement could only result in further harm to The Battalion.

DeFrank said the stated cause for the dismissal was the unsigned letter that appeared in "Sound Off."

"The point is it was an innocuous letter," DeFrank said. "They claimed we were irresponsible because we published it without a source. That was just an excuse they used. They were determined to get rid of me and my staff."

Rudder stood behind the Student Publications Board's decision to remove DeFrank.

DeFrank said he ran into Rudder two years later at Dulles Airport in Washington, D.C.

"We exchanged pleasantries," DeFrank said. "At one point, he

said, 'I would have thrown you out of school if your grades weren't so damn good.' I'd like to think there was a grudging respect on his behalf, but I suspect he was supremely annoyed with me. But I repeat, he was a great man and a great president of the University."

After his dismissal from The Battalion, DeFrank stayed at school and worked at The Bryan Daily Eagle. However, other avenues soon opened up for him.

In the spring of 1966 during his junior year, DeFrank was sitting in the basement of the YMCA Building where The Battalion offices were located. He was reading the Moderator magazine.

He saw an ad that read, "College students should subscribe to

Newsweek because Newsweek is the only magazine with college correspondents."

DeFrank wrote Newsweek a letter to tell them they did not have a correspondent on the A&M campus. He did not receive a reply from them.

However, six months later he received a call from the Houston Bureau Chief for Newsweek. They had received his letter in New York and wanted him to work for them.

In the spring of 1967, DeFrank became a campus correspondent for Newsweek. It was the beginning of an association that was to continue for more than 25 years.

After graduation from A&M in 1967 with a bachelor's in journalism, DeFrank pursued his master's at the University of Minnesota. He also continued as a campus correspondent for Newsweek there.

DeFrank was offered a summer internship at Newsweek's Houston Bureau after his graduation from the University of Minnesota. Three weeks before DeFrank left for Houston, Newsweek called him with an opening in their Washington Bureau. DeFrank jumped at the offer.

In October 1968, he went into the Army and worked for two years at the Pentagon as an Army Public Affairs Officer. On the weekends, he worked for Newsweek. In October 1970, he went to work for Newsweek full time.

DeFrank began working as a general assignments reporter and covered Congress and the Pentagon. He began covering the White House in 1974 and has covered every president since Nixon.

DeFrank has traveled all over the world with the presidents. He has traveled to 45 countries and all 50 states.

He considers the year he spent covering Vice President Ford as one of the highlights of his career.

For seven months, DeFrank traveled on a twin engine airplane getting to know the man who was going to be the next president of the United States.

"It was exhilarating and exciting," he said. "We all knew that he was going to be president. We just didn't know when."

DeFrank said Ford knew he was going to be president sooner or later, but he also knew it was going to be devastating to the Republican Party.

"He spent most of 1974 traveling all over the country, trying his best to hold the Republican Party together as Watergate got worse and worse," DeFrank said. "There was more and more tension on Air Force Two. Through it all, Jerry Ford was unfailingly polite and decent to those of us who traveled with him. It was a wonderful time and insight into history in the making."

However, changes were on the way for both Ford and DeFrank.

Newsweek's White House correspondent quit in June 1974. DeFrank was sent to cover the White House.

"I hated it," DeFrank said. "The White House was a snake pit of tension and mutual hostility. I thought Nixon might survive for another six months. I was miserable."

DeFrank persuaded his boss to let him go on one more trip with

Ford. So the next week, DeFrank flew to California with Ford and stayed there to cover Nixon on the trip.

Before Ford left, DeFrank wrote him a note thanking him for being so generous. The last line of the note read: "Just consider me your advance man at the White House."

DeFrank later learned that Ford read the note aloud to everyone on Air Force Two on the way home. DeFrank said the last line embarrassed Ford because it basically said "You're going to be president and we both know it."

Two months later Nixon resigned and Ford became president.

"One week later, the new president had a state dinner for King Hussein of Jordan," DeFrank said. "He invited as his guests every reporter who had traveled with him on Air Force Two. I went through the receiving line. He shook hands and said to King Hussein, 'Your Majesty, this is Tom DeFrank. He's one of my advance men.'"

While DeFrank considers the resignation of Nixon his greatest story, he considers the most dramatic and emotional story of his career to be the return of the POWs from Vietnam in 1973.

Of the presidents he has covered, he said Clinton is the smartest of the bunch while Reagan was the most effective, and Nixon was the most difficult to cover.

"One of the wonderful things about covering the White House for almost 25 years is I have dozens of great stories just like that," he said. "I'm going to do an oral history myself before I forget them all."

DeFrank has started working as a collaborator on former Secretary of State James Baker's memoirs which should be published in early 1995. However, DeFrank said he doesn't have the vanity to write a book about himself.

"After all, I am one of the few reporters who knows his place," he said. "I'm a reporter. A reporter should cover the news, not make the news."

As for his experiences at The Battalion, DeFrank said, "I suppose that if I thought about it, and if I had an ego, I suppose I would say I've had the last laugh on anyone who thought I was a no-good irresponsible, smart aleck kid. On the other hand, you learn from your scar tissue, and I've certainly learned from mine, beginning at The Battalion."

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