

The Ross Volunteers: A & M's Elite

By GERRY BROWN

If someone were to ask the question, "What is the oldest student organization on the campus?", the answer would be the Ross Volunteers. This military organization was founded in 1887, which also makes it one of the oldest student organizations in the state.

The original company was called the Scott Volunteers in honor of Col. T. M. Scott, who was business manager of the college at that time. The Volunteers described the purpose of their organization as to band together the most military men in the school into a crack drill company.

In 1891, when ex-Governor Lawrence Sullivan Ross became president of the college, the name of the company was changed to Ross Volunteers in his honor. Following the death of Ross in 1898, the name was changed to Foster Guards, again honoring the new president of the college, L. L. Foster, who had succeeded Ross. The company marched under the name of the Houston Rifles during President Houston's administration. The plan of the organization was to change its name in honor of each succeeding president of the college.

In 1902, H. H. Harrington, son-in-law of Gov. Ross, became president of the college. When the name of Harrington Rifles was proposed, Harrington requested that the company again assume the name of Ross Volunteers. It was then decided to make the name of Ross Volunteers permanent, which it has remained.

At the time of organization the membership was restricted to forty cadets chosen from the junior and senior classes. New members were accepted into the company by an election held early each scholastic year. The basis of acceptance is military ability and popularity. After the World War I some non-military students were elected, but in 1923 the company decided to make non-military students and those not making a "B" in Military Science ineligible.

At present, to be eligible for membership, one must be taking the advanced Military Science or Air Science course at the time of his appointment, must have a 2.0 overall grade point ratio in his Military or Air Science course and at no time have failed a Military or Air Science course. An overall scholastic grade point average of 1.25 was required for membership at the initial reactivation after World War II. Beginning in September, 1948, however, a scholastic grade point average of 1.5 was required. The scholastic requirement may be waived in special cases however.

Also at this time, membership became limited to 133 members at a ratio of two juniors to one senior. This ratio insures a constant flow of candidates for special training and development in the company and for qualified potential leaders of the highest caliber.

The first uniform for the company was of white duck with gold ornaments. The headgear was a tin helmet which has long since been discarded in favor of the lighter white military caps. For the most part the Ross Volunteer uniform has been of white duck with the high stiff collar of former military fashion, throughout its history with one exception.

In 1907 the group adopted a blue and gray uniform. Gray breeches and blue shirts were worn with black boots and a large Stetson hat to honor the late Teddy Roosevelt's famed Rough Riders. This uniform was short-lived however, and was discarded in favor of the original white duck uniforms. Today the Ross Volunteer officers wear long red silk cummerbund sashes for official and formal occasions.

The Ross Volunteers represent the college at distinctive functions such as acting as escort and honor guard at the inauguration of the Governors of the State of Texas, meeting and escorting distinguished guests of the college, participating in parades and ceremonies in and out of the state and performing as a drill team and honor escort company on various occasions throughout the state.

The company suffered a period of inactivity during World War II when the advanced Reserve Officers Training Corps was disrupted. In September, 1948, however, the Volunteers were reactivated. Following is the preamble to the Constitution of the Ross Volunteer Company which was adopted at the time of the reactivation and which has remained the same:

The Ross Volunteers Company of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, as hereunder constituted, is a voluntary military organization for the purpose of representing to the Staff,

Faculty, and Corps of Cadets of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, and to the citizens of the State of Texas, an organization of military distinction and example, made up of a membership of men selected from the Cadet Corps who will best accomplish the purpose and ideals of the organization.

"In its social functions, as sponsored by the School of Military Sciences of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, it is intended that the Ross Volunteers make tangible contributions to the general social and cultural life of the Corps of Cadets of the college; that social distinction be combined with social enjoyment; and that the dress, general bearing, and conduct of the membership and their activities reflect credit upon the college at all times."

Each fall there is an initiation ceremony with an appropriate ritual and administering of the oath of membership to new members. Each spring the traditional ball and banquet are held. At this oc-

casional in 1956 the only honorary membership which has ever been bestowed was presented to Dr. Francis Marion Law, a member of the Class of 1895, a former member of the Board of Directors of the college and a distinguished citizen of the state.

Through the years emphasis on membership and functions of the company has varied. Originally, membership was based solely on outstanding military performance. At one time emphasis was on social qualifications, and dues and elaborate uniform costs seriously limited participation in the group. For many years the Ross Volunteer Banquet and Ball were the outstanding social events of the school year. They were held during the spring recess and were accompanied by a Queen's Ball and Corp dance. Invitations to these affairs were coveted far and wide.

Since the Ross Volunteer Company of today is intended to exemplify the spirit and inherent principles and nature of the largest military college in the nation, emphasis for membership is placed

on character traits, academic and military standing, military bearing, energy and interest in extra-curricular activities and disciplinary records and social graces. Applicants are carefully screened by senior members of the organization and the commandant.

This year the company has four sponsors. Two of these were appointed from the Office of the Commandant, one from the Department of Military Science and Tactics and one from the Department of Air Science.

A history of the Ross Volunteers could not be written without telling of their most recent accomplishments. So far this year they have fulfilled two of their most well known traditions in acting as the honor guard for the inauguration of the Governor of Texas and marching as the official escort of "King Rex" at the Mardi Gras.

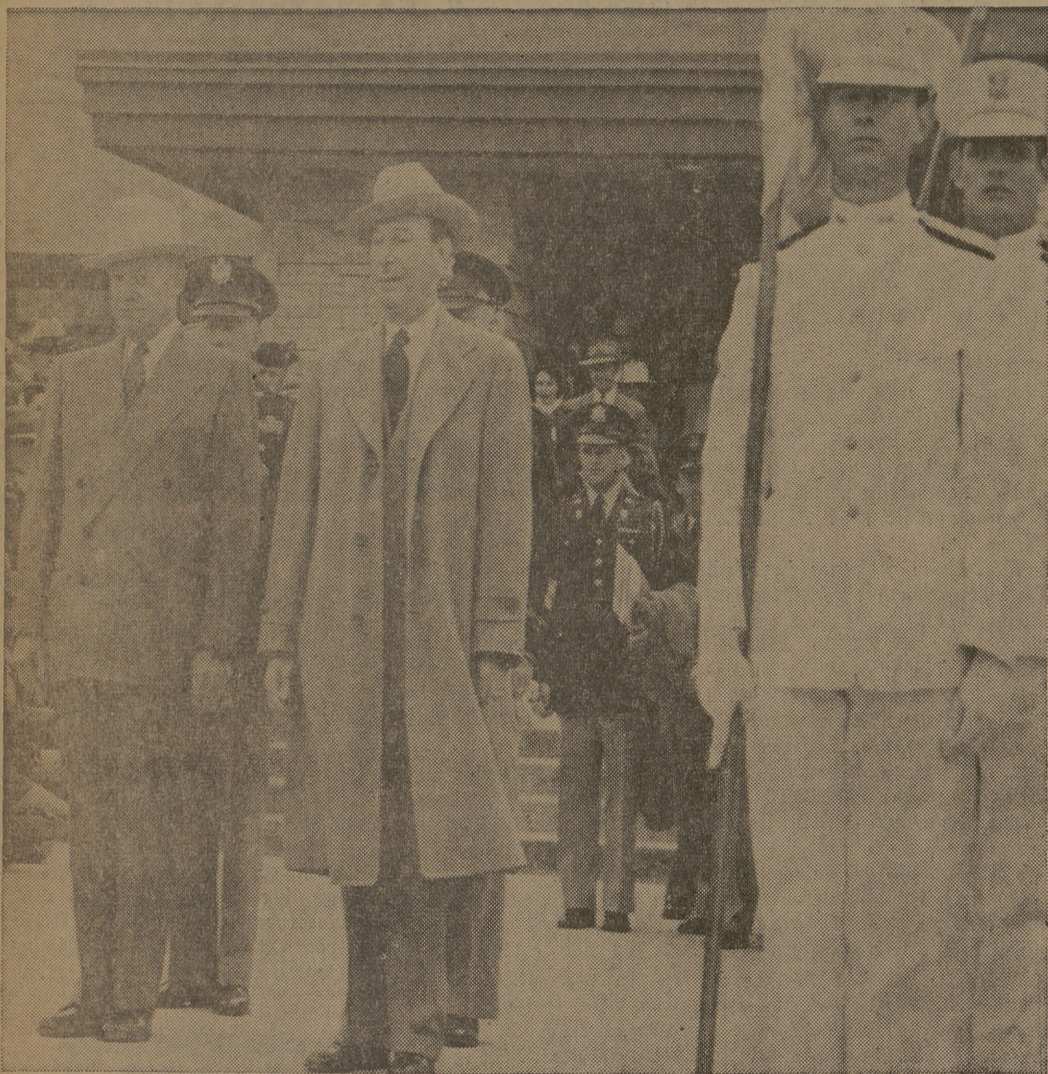
Actually Governor Price Daniel did not have an official inauguration this year but he requested that a group of RVs be present at the informal ceremony. As a re-

sult a contingent of 30 volunteers attended Governor Daniel's reinstallation to office on Jan. 17.

More recently, 115 Ross Volunteers commanded by Cadet Lt. Col. Glenn Jones and accompanied by Col. Joe E. Davis, Commandant, traveled to New Orleans for the Mardi Gras parade and celebration. While guests of the New Orleans A&M Club, Col. Davis and Jones were presented keys to the city of New Orleans by a representative of the mayor. In addition each R.V. was made an honorary member of the New Orleans A&M Club by the president of the Club.

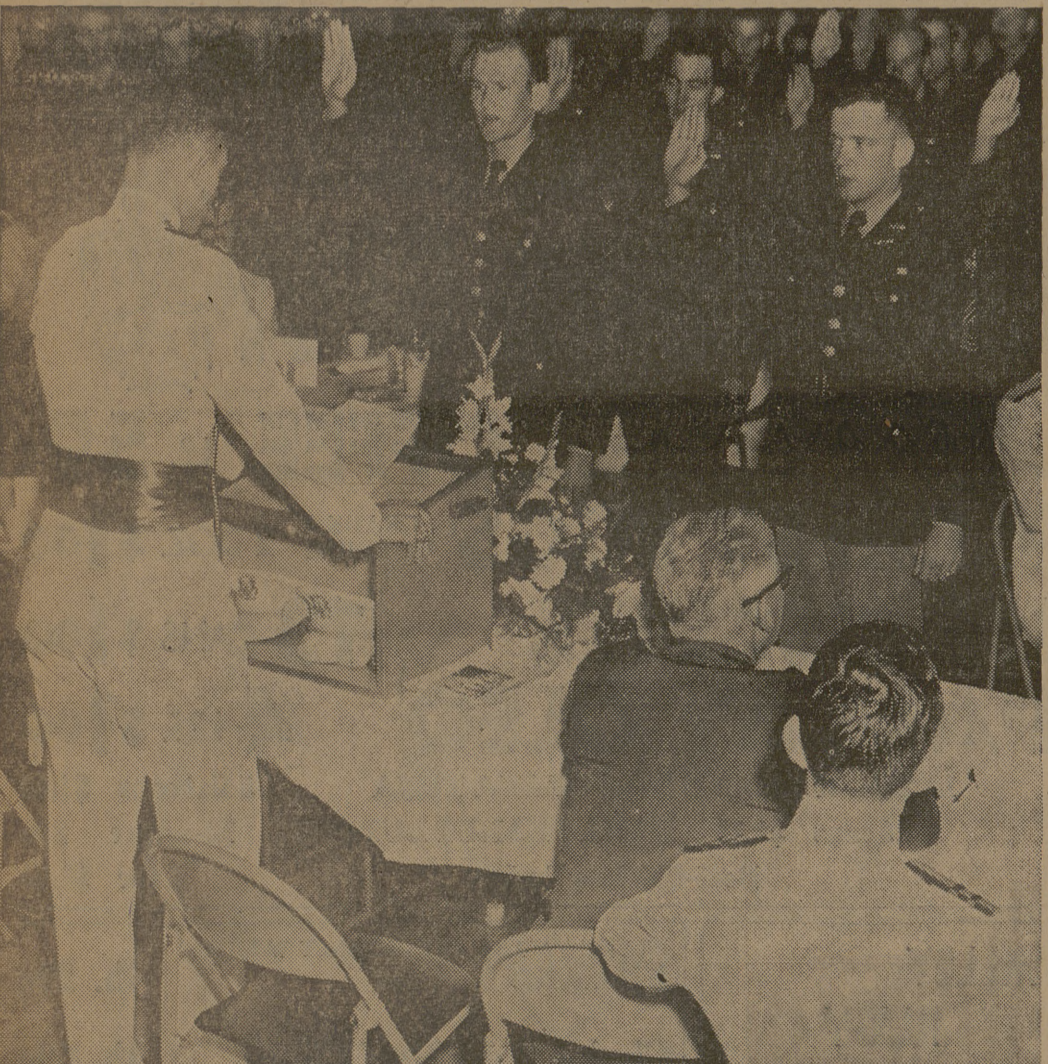
The continuous wave of applause that greeted the volunteers during the three hour Mardi Gras parade and the favorable comments heard all along the route of the parade echoed of the esteem with which the Ross Volunteers are held in the New Orleans area.

The volunteers also go to the Buccaneer Days in Corpus Christi, or the Holiday In Dixie celebration in Shreveport, La. or both, each year.



Dr. Harrington With Ross Volunteers ... greet Eisenhower on Post-War visit

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New Ross Volunteers Initiated Each Year ... administering oath of membership

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The Ross Volunteers' Annual Banquet ... an evening of color



The Ross Volunteers On Parade ... at San Antonio's Rose Festival

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Ross Volunteers In Austin ... escort Gov. Price Daniel



Ross Volunteers Visitor ... Secretary of Air Force Sharp