

Most Beautiful Tradition Chills Editor

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Battalion Editor '63-'64

How many times have I gone through this same experience? I really don't remember. Back down the line somewhere I lost count. I believe it might have been in the spring of '62 that I stopped counting. That was a bad one, that Aggie's date also died in that wreck.

But, unfortunately it's time to observe one of Texas A&M University's most beautiful traditions again. The one tradition that everyone wishes was never necessary. It's 10:20 p.m. and time for Aggie Silver Taps — this time for two students, both victims of the automobile.

I'd better double check and make sure that all the lights are off in the office. It's really going to be dark out there tonight, with all the lights turned off and no moon. Well the lights are off and all the boys are out in the hall waiting. At least I guess they are. Funny how a bunch of newspaper people who were chattering and rushing to get a paper put together can suddenly become so solemn, so sober, so aware of the loss of a fellow Aggie at 10:20 — Silver Taps time. Of course three of those fellows had the job for talking with police, hospital officials, the victim's friends and, most unforgettable, his family while they pulled the story together about the accidents.

The clickety-click of the Associated Press wire machine is only temporarily interrupted by, what is in the basement of the silent YMCA Building, a deafening clunk of the lock of the office that has such a final sound to it as The Battalion staff moves out for Silver Taps. The

shuffling of softened steps can be heard outside even before I reach the door and the steps which take me to the sidewalk.

One can almost hear the cutting north wind whisper a warning to all Aggies that are about to take to the highways for the Christmas Holidays. There is a deathly silence on the campus. As never in the past, Aggies are observing the tradition of not speaking during Silver Taps or while going to and coming from the ceremony.

The soft music being played over the Memorial Student Center public address system is broken only by a cough, just ahead of me. I wonder was it a cough, or a buddy of one of the dead Aggies choking off tears.

I'm on the lawn in front of the Academic Building. The crunching, no it's more a munching sound, of wet leaves can be heard under my fellow students' feet after I assume my position and become involuntarily rigid and attempt to stop the sound of my own breathing. There's the sound of that strange cough again.

I can hear the scraping, clicking sound of the taps on the boots of the Ross Volunteer firing squad members as they march into position for their part in the ceremony. Silence shouts once again when the squad halts. Soft inaudible commands are followed by staccato striking of rifle butts against concrete as the Aggies position themselves and prepare to point their rifles to the heavens and fire.

I feel my self growing even more rigid than I've been before this moment. I know what to expect. Then it comes—a row of short, brilliant flames jump toward the

heavens and then a sharp crack of rifle fire pierces ears with such impact after the prolonged silence there is a tingling throughout my entire body. Immediately behind the first, come two more loud cracks. Rifles have fired all totaled — seven at a time.

The deadly silence drops on the campus again. From on the upper chambers of the gray-looking Academic Building comes the slow, mournful tone of taps — Silver Taps. Three times through.

I can't help it, my mind begins to shout over and over again, Why? Why? Why? Why did these boys have to die, Their lives were ahead of them. There's much they still had to accomplish. Before I have time to find an answer to the age old question, I find myself clearing my throat along with several thousand other Aggies. I'm reluctant to turn away. There must be an answer. But, I know there isn't, so I turn slowly and attempt to drift back to the office. I wonder, does everyone else feel as I do at that moment.

I'm half way back to The Battalion office before I really aware that I'm moving.

Another question has started to roll over in my mind as I watch the movements of the Aggie ahead, What will be the next one, me or him? Or will it be you?



SILVER TAPS
... 'chilling moment'

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