

Viewpoint

The Battalion
Texas A&M University

Tuesday
August 30, 1977

New hands at the tiller

The ship is fitted out, with full crew, able captain and experienced officers, ready for the long sail ahead.

That ship is Texas A&M University and it's preparing for the long journey ahead which will determine its future as an institution of learning.

The last two decades have seen Texas A&M rise from the small college it was founded to be, to the thriving, growing university it has become. But will Texas A&M continue that climb, to become a nationally-known "great institution of learning" for all time? Or will it settle into the mediocrity of many "up-and-coming" schools who fizzled after a short burst of growth?

Over the last three months Texas A&M's board of regents has changed the positions or titles of almost a dozen University administrators. Those changes establish a chancellorship system overseeing Texas A&M and the University system,

while rejuvenating the University administration weakened by vacancies.

So now the ship has a crew full of strength, U under Captain (President) Jarvis Miller and Admiral (Chancellor) Jack Williams. But the waters the Aggie ship must cover will be anything but smooth, with plenty of hidden obstacles. And lest the able captain, admiral and crew be caught unprepared, we'll point out some of those hazards.

Growth at Texas A&M has over-crowded every classroom, office and dormitory. More buildings take time, money and planning — all geared to maximum effective use. Ornate, expensive buildings shouldn't come at the expense of offices or classrooms.

Deciding how the University campus will expand and develop goes hand in hand with constructing those buildings. Already the campus is being divided into main and western parts straddling Wellborn Rd. Commuting between

the two campuses and finding parking space anywhere near the main campuses have become major problems that won't be easy to solve.

The tight-money attitude that predominated the last session of the State Legislature threatens to strangle the University with its purse-strings. Expanding programs need funds the Legislature is becoming more and more reluctant to provide.

Quality has been the motto at Texas A&M most of its lifetime. But that quality is being crowded by funds spread among more programs and people.

And there is such a thing as growing too fast. If that growth isn't kept in check, it will literally "wear out" Texas A&M before its time.

These are big problems, with no easy answers. But if the new crew keeps a steady hand at the ship's tiller to steer her clear of those rocky hazards, the future should hold nothing but smooth sailing. L.R.L.

Readin' ain't what it used to be

By DAVID S. BRODER
WASHINGTON — "School days, school days. Bloody bunch of fool days. Reading and writing and arithmetic. Taught as it is, it can hardly stick."

That wretched rhyme pretty well summarizes the way more and more parents feel about the schooling their kids are getting these days. Just as almost all college alumni believe their alma mater hit her peak the year they graduated and has been going downhill ever since, so most of us doddering ancients believe the public schools don't teach good like they used to should.

A prime piece of evidence for us malcontents has been the steady 14-year decline in the average scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the 2½-hour monster taken annually by 1.5 million college-bound high school juniors and seniors.

Since 1963, the average score on verbal skills has dropped from 478 points to 429; mathematical skills have declined in the same period from 502 to 470.

Since the tests are designed to function as continuing predictors of college performance, and seem to be verified in practice, there has been great concern that they are measuring a real decline in the skills and capacity of the younger generation.

In response, the College Entrance Examination Board chartered an advisory commission, headed by former Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz, to examine the causes of this decline. Their report was released last week and will fuel a great deal of debate about what's happening in public education.

As the parent of three boys who have clambered their way through the public school system and a fourth who is struggling manfully to follow in their footsteps; and as the spouse of a woman who has, for

whatever masochistic reasons, just signed on for a second four-year term on our local school board, I naturally consider myself as much an expert on education as the next person.

Yet there are findings in the report which affront my prejudices as much as they may yours.

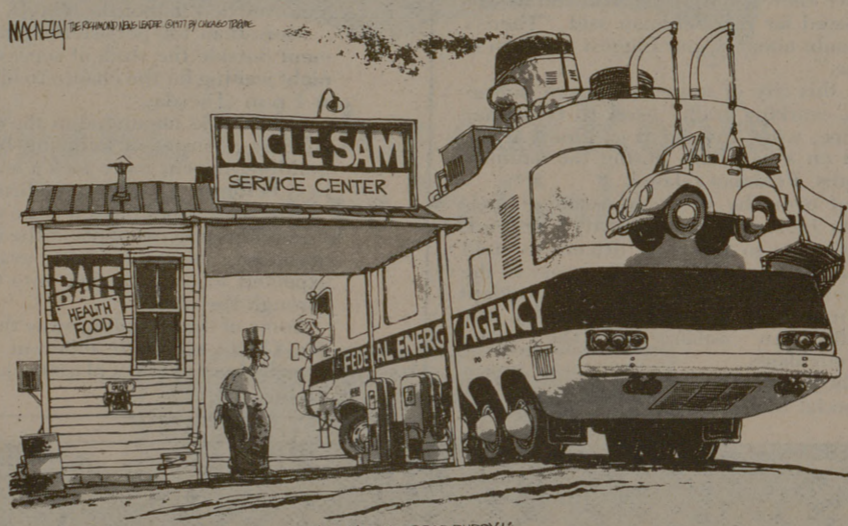
It says the decline in test scores measures a real decline in skills, not just a stiffening of the test, which I can believe. It also says that much of this decline, particularly in the 1960s, can be attributed to the rapid increase and diversification of young people graduating from high school and going on to college. The American education system did not prepare them all equally well for the opportunities opened to them, and the averages suffered.

But in the 1970s, as the mix and proportions of the college-bound have stabilized, the decline in test scores has continued. And here the study group finds several forces to blame, ranging from the breakdown of family stability to the traumas of this period of American history and the pervasiveness of television.

I am skeptical of that last claim. The commission admits its indictment of television is "essentially subjective," because the research relating television-watching and test scores "is in fact entirely inconclusive."

Their main point seems to be that the 10,000 to 15,000 hours the average teenager has spent before a television set had to be stolen from something, and that something could be the development of intellectual skills.

That conclusion does a gross injustice to the capacity of youths to waste time, with or without the magic screen. My eldest son, who was six years old before we could afford a television set, frittered away as much time as any of his television-nurtured younger brothers. He emerged



at least as academically indolent as those of his siblings who had Howdy Doodly available from the moment they first peered out of their cribs.

As for traumas, national and personal, my kids, like yours, have had their share. But it seems a bit pat to me to blame their shortcomings on Vietnam, Watergate or even the frequent absences from home of their gypsy journalist father.

Closer to the heart of the matter, my prejudices tell me, is the finding that academic standards are declining in the teaching of English.

"Our firmest conclusion," says the panel, "is that the critical factors in the relationship between curricular change and the SAT scores are that less thoughtful and critical reading is now being demanded and done and that careful writing has apparently about gone out of style."

We suspect strongly that expressing something clearly and correctly — especially in writing — is thinking's sternest discipline. A recent study by the National Association of Educational Progress of the numbers of writing assignments given a group of 11th-grade students shows that in a six-week period, more than half of them were asked to write three or fewer papers. . . 13 per cent, none."

Our strong conviction is that concern about declining SAT verbal scores can profitably be concentrated on seeing to it that young people do more reading that enhances vocabulary and enlarges knowledge and experience, and more writing that makes fledgling ideas test and strengthen their wings."

Right on. That's the message this parent will carry to the next PTA meeting. (c) 1977, The Washington Post Company

Wine-loving French paying the price

By FRANCOIS DUPUIS
International Writers Service

PARIS — The French like to claim in justifying their drinking habits that "we may always be slightly inebriated, but we're never really drunk." There are serious flaws, however, in that argument.

It is true that blind reeling drunkenness is far less visible here than it is in the Soviet Union or in parts of the United States. Nevertheless, the French lead the world in alcohol intake, consuming roughly twice as much per head as Americans.

Moreover, France has the world's highest mortality rate for cirrhosis of the liver and the highest rate of hospital admissions for delirium tremens. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that this is a country with an alcohol problem. And it is a problem being largely ignored by the government.

Back in the mid-1950s, when he was prime minister, Pierre Mendes-France tried to alter attitudes himself by sipping milk rather than wine with his meals.

He also created a commission that recommended, after much study, that sedentary workers drink no more than a pint of wine daily and that manual laborers limit their consumption to a pint and a half.

But the Mendes-France campaign against alcohol, which was largely treated as a joke, lasted only a short time. The French continue to drink to such an extent that liquor stores in France outnumber bakeries three to one.

This is partly because wine and alcohol production here constitutes a major industry that not only accounts for the livelihood of some 3.5 million people but also furnishes the government with important tax revenues. The export of wines and brandies is also a key element in the French trade picture.

So the French are inclined to regard the defense of the alcohol business as a national duty. In their view, actions that curb wine consumption are construed as a form of economic treason.

Add to this the mythology that has grown up about wine over the years. The celebrated battle of Verdun during World War I would have been lost, it is said, had not French troops been amply provided with red wine. There is also the notion that water is impure, and of course, the French have been raised on the adage that "a meal without wine is like a day without the sun."

It is worth emphasizing that many of the French attitudes toward drinking are a

holdover from the days when France was an agricultural society. In those days, peasants who worked in the fields from dawn until dusk could consume three or four bottles of wine daily without showing ill effects. That habit hardly suits urban employees, but they continue to drink heavily.

The new clientele for alcohol are young people, who appear to be turning more and more to drink as a substitute for drugs. These young people are not apprentice laborers who toss back their glasses of wine at cafe counters to impress their friends. They are middle-class boys and

girls who make drinking the object of their evening.

The attraction of drinking, as one student explained it is that alcohol is available and legal, and kids can get their "kicks" without fear of being busted by the police, who take a severe view of narcotics.

None of this suggests that the French consider themselves in the midst of an alcoholic crisis. They are merely in the midst of a permanent alcoholic haze that has become part of their life.

(Dupuis writes on social issues for the *Nouvel Observateur*, the French weekly.)

Slouch by Jim Earle

WELCOME TO TEXAS A&M CLASS OF '81



EARLE AUG 30-77

Letter to the editor

Don't forget Taiwan

Editor:

The attached letter is a copy of correspondence sent to 16 members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington, D.C.

Senator Frank Church: We are deeply troubled by the Carter Administration's present efforts to establish formal diplomatic ties with the repressive communist regime in Red China. Our reasons are as follows:

1) The 16 million free Chinese in Taiwan have been our steady allies for over 30 years. We have a treaty to protect them in the event of armed aggression. If we abrogate the treaty with Taiwan, how can we hope to maintain our credibility with respect to other treaties which we maintain in the Pacific and Europe?

2) This venture by President Carter is openly contradictory to his stand on human rights. How do we further the cause of freedom if we withdraw active

support for one of the few stable, democratic nations in Asia?

3) If increased trade is our motive, this is an illusion. (See the attached article from *Forbes* magazine, March 1, 1977.) In this article the point is made that the Red Chinese desperately want U.S. know-how, but have little to sell in return. Neither will they borrow to finance deficit purchases. It seems that this game which is euphemistically called "normalization" is a one-way street.

We call for a pragmatic foreign policy based upon strengthening our ties with our allies as we are beginning to do in South America, and supporting the rights and freedoms of oppressed people as we are doing in Africa. Please clarify your stand on this issue, and represent our views before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

—Mark Krautmamm
Jolly Krautmamm

Top of the News

Campus

Student aide positions open

Thirty positions for Student Government executive assistants are now open. For information and applications phone 845-3051 or come by the Student Government office, 216C MSC. Interviews will be held Aug. 29-Sept. 2 by appointment only.

Police learning to live with job

Police officers from Texas and the Southwest check in today for the 20th Police-Community Relations Institute at Texas A&M University. Stress reduction workshops will be held, as well as sessions on stress awareness and stress reduction techniques. "The program is designed to provide the police officer with training and tools to help them live comfortably with their roles," Chief Ira E. Scott said. Scott heads the Law Enforcement and Security Training Division of the Texas Engineering Extension Service, which co-sponsors the program.

State

Hill gets tough on nursing homes

Attorney General John Hill said Monday his office will investigate any further alleged patient abuse at nursing homes and warned private operators to voluntarily comply with state nursing care standards. Hill was referring to action his office took against a Dallas nursing home, which became the first home in Texas to be placed into state receivership due to charges of abuse and mistreatment of patients.

Nation

Terrorists bomb power station

Terrorist bombs and fire at a Pacific Gas and Electric Co. substation knocked out power to 6,016 homes early Monday in Sausalito, Calif., police said. A spokesman for the electric company said explosive devices were placed on transformers, causing an explosion and fire to break out inside the station. The fire was extinguished quickly and PG&E crews restored service to most of the homes within about three hours.

Walkers rally for support of ERA

Comedienne Lily Tomlin and actress Jean Stapleton led about 250 persons on a 12-mile walk Saturday to show support for the Equal Rights Amendment. The walk from Venice, Calif. to Santa Monica and back was to raise money for the drive to get ERA passed. Only 35 states have ratified the amendment, which needs to be passed by 38 states.

Elvis autograph brings high price

A Texas home builder who admired Elvis Presley has traded a parcel of land for a Presley signature "just to get the autograph off the market." The autograph was offered at auction Saturday by Paul Gunther, 33, who placed it on the block to spruce up a weekend garage sale. The only bid came by telegram from Dan Murphy, 35, of Amarillo, Tex., who later telephoned to confirm his offer of a lot on LBJ Lake near Austin or a piece of land north of Dallas. "I did it just to get the autograph off the market," Murphy said. "It's sad that a person's autograph would go on the market, and of all people, Elvis Presley's."

World

Last chance for African peace?

U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young and Britain's foreign secretary briefed South African Prime Minister John Vorster Monday on a proposal said to be Rhodesia's last chance for peace. Young and British Foreign Secretary David Owen were seeking Vorster's crucial endorsement of the Anglo-American plan for a peaceful shift to black majority rule in Rhodesia. South African Foreign Minister Roelof Botha also attended the meeting which was held in Pretoria, South Africa.

Mideast peace talks underway

Egyptian and Libyan officials met for three hours Sunday in talks aimed at easing tensions raised by a six-day conflict last month on the desert border between the two countries, government sources said. The sources described the meeting as "preliminary" and said it was "mainly to discuss matters related to the situation between the two countries." Both sides reportedly agreed the contacts should continue.

Earthquake kills two

An earthquake killed two persons on Atauro Island, East Timor, Saturday and left five others seriously injured, the Antara news agency reported Monday. The Jakarta Geophysical Service said the quake registered 6.7 on the Richter Scale and caused several buildings to crack. The tremors were felt in Dili, capital of East Timor, but there were no reports of damage or casualties.

The Battalion

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Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words and are subject to being cut to that length or less if longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit such letters and does not guarantee to publish any letter. Each letter must be signed, show the address of the writer and list a telephone number for verification.

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