

The MOB: they don't get no respect, don't give it either

by GLENNA WHITLEY
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The Fightin' Texas Aggie Band, the Rice Marching Owl Band: One struts in a military cadence, the other saunters onto the field. One is dead serious. The other laughs at itself, and everyone else. One wears khaki, spit and polish. The other wears denim uniforms that make the members look like San Francisco cab drivers. That is, when they wear their uniforms.

More often than not, the Marching Owl Band (MOB for short) dons outlandish costumes, and capers around the field, drawing laughs and sometimes ire from the opposing team's camp.

It is what is typically raised at Rice-A&M half-times. Four years ago the MOB's antics so angered some Aggies that a near-brawl replaced half-time activities.

"The freshmen this year don't seem to understand that we're in danger of losing our lives," says a MOB member with relish. He was one of those who had to run for cover four years ago.

"I got an official call from A&M, and if you do anything gross or offensive, you're responsible for the consequences," hollers Bert Roth through a megaphone at a MOB practice last week. Roth is the gentle-looking mentor of this band of crazies.

"Well, if they do anything gross or offensive, they're responsible," shouts a band member.

Everyone laughs. But the atmosphere is amiable. There is puzzlement and bewilderment about Aggie sensitivity.

"Most Rice persons feel everyone should be able to laugh at themselves," says John Barnett, a junior trumpet player. "We do our shows to please the crowd."

Everyone contributes ideas for the script, and it often is revised minutes before half-time. Sometimes, even MOBsters are surprised by the announcer's comments and jokes.

"We try to rely on the creativity of the individual members," says Carter David, the drum major.

Everyone is anxious to hear the script read at practice Friday. "Read the script, read the script, read the script," starts a chant in the trumpet and baritone section.

After playing a song that will be used at the A&M game, the chant

starts up again. "Rumbles concerning the script, rumbles concerning the script..."

Finally the keepers of the script arrive. Randy Woefel, a technical salesman for a chemical company, and Bob Hord, a stockbroker, are the official script writers. Both formerly attended Rice and marched with the MOB.

Hord reluctantly reads this week's jokes and narrative. There are a few laughs, but more groans.

"Burn the script, burn the script..." starts the chant. "I wrote the show in 1973 and we caught a lot of shit for it," Hord said. "It consumed a lot of the semester writing apologies."

He said the year after that game, the MOB had to submit its scripts to the administration for approval. "It hurt the spontaneity."

"The administration has now trusted us with having the maturity to

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know what's offensive and what's not," Hord said.

The Rice band used to have fewer than 60 persons in it. Players were recruited from area high schools to fill in the gaps. Since changing marching formats, however, membership has tripled.

"Three-fourths of the people in (the MOB) now wouldn't be in the band if we didn't do the kind of things we do," Woefel said.

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Some Rice students have nothing but praise for the Aggie band. "There's no better military band around," Woefel said. "We can't compete with them marching."

Hord said the Rice band "evolved to satire for survival's sake." They make fun of traditions, current events and infamous personalities. Farrah Fawcett-Majors was a target at the Rice-U.T. game several weeks ago.

"Some targets of satire do not take it well. We poke fun at Spiro Agnew and got comments from lots of local republicans," Hord said. The MOBsters were very careful when writing the script for the Rice-A&M game. Aggie traditions and anything remotely military were avoided.

Instead, they focused on a popular obsession: Star Wars, Star Trek and the space age.

To the swell of the theme from Star Trek, Princesses Leia, Luke Skywalker, robots, martians, Wonder Woman and various unidentified marching objects paraded out on the artificial turf of Rice Stadium.

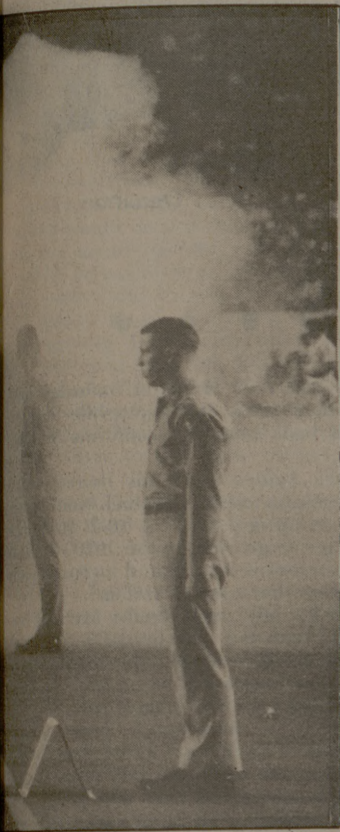
Like a crazy, futuristic circus, the band wandered into its formations.

After the band formed a television set, the dread Darth Vader explained that though many in the galaxy knew his face, they didn't know his name. So he always had two things with him: the Force and his American Express Card.

Though the jokes improved, the dominantly Aggie crowd wasn't amused. A smoke bomb thrown onto the field during the A&M half-time show might have affected the mood. Some Aggies said they believed the MOB was responsible for the bomb.

"It was absolutely not anyone from the MOB," Woefel said.

Band leader Roth said "I think it's (throwing the bomb) lousy. But we'll catch all the hell for it."



Cadets at the sidelines of the A&M-Rice game (above) were powerless to keep a smoke bomb from intermingling with a half-time activities.

The bomb was thrown from the crowd and apparently was not the result of fervent prayer for "a miracle" by "Owl bowing" Rice students.



A university's band is a likely place to find spirit-motivated students. The Texas band members (above) were motivated to their "Hook 'em, Horns" and "Number One" gestures after the Longhorns took over first place in the national polls. Rice band members (below) compete with their football team for laughs.



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