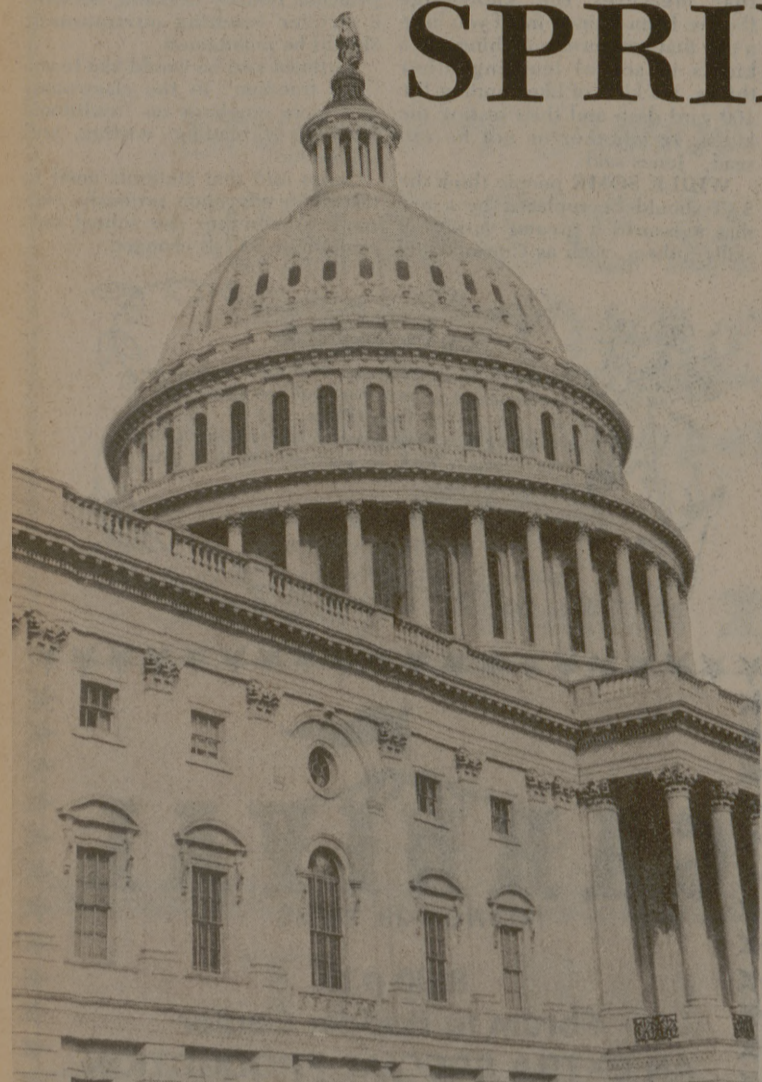


focus

SPRING BREAK . . . from the Potomac to the Rio Grande

Washington, D.C. . . . Aggies discover politics



Bleating goats on the Capitol steps. The "Big Vote" on the Panama Canal treaty. Security checks at the Israeli Embassy. Meeting Ted Kennedy, Muhammed Ali, Tip O'Neill.

By KIM TYSON Battalion Staff

Washington, D.C. — a unique place in itself. But what a time to be there.

While some Aggies spent their spring break basking in the sun — a group of 44 politically-interested Aggies jetted to Washington, D.C. to learn more about politics in the bustling nation's capitol.

The group was swept off the plane into the city of the internationals. Accents blended together. An old woman with a huge white fur hat and spiked heels strutted past, muttering something to her escort. Dressed in white, Soldiers of the Cross missionaries asked for money.

THE CITY TRIES to impress you. Massive federal buildings made of carved granite with marble columns fill entire city blocks. Even some gasoline stations look like mini-memorials. Brass water fountains replace the old stainless steel models.

The tour had a tight timetable. Rising early in the morning, we scurried to the subway — then off to a day's round of speakers. We saw famous congressmen, the not-so-famous, campaigners, non-campaigners and lobbyists.

The stories that appear on the front page of daily newspapers soon became very real. A trip to the Israeli embassy made the conflict in the Middle East immediate and personal.

Members of our group were called in alphabetically, three at a time, for security check. We were stripped of cameras and purses, but were allowed to keep pencils and paper.

"Do you carry weapons of any sort?" the guards asked. "Did anyone ask you to deliver something to the embassy?"

"By the time you've come in here, you've seen some of the realities of what we face day to day," the embassy's public relations officer told our group.

"They are recording everything — microphones and cameras," someone wrote on my pad. Everyone seemed a bit tense. When the heater vibrated the room, I wondered if it was a new search method. Slowly our group filtered in.

A cheer went up from the A&M group as the three Lebanese and one Costa Rican student made it through security.

It seemed more important when Israel invaded Lebanon later in the week.

STRIKING FARM WORKERS were everywhere in the city. Going up the elevator in the Washington Monument, one farmer laughed about the protest march, and goats that had been let loose on the Capitol steps.

Some of the A&M tourists added some humor by giving a "farmer's fight" yell near the Capitol.

In a cafeteria beneath the Capitol, bright yellow and orange bumper stickers saying, "I support the agriculture strike" were plastered on walls and mirrors.

THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY vote was hashed out in meetings with congressmen that week. We got Senate passes from a congressman, but I made it too late for the big vote. I heard from a

complaining secretary that the line to get into the gallery was two and a half hours long.

Television lights flooded a group of senators. Wives kissed their senator husbands as I was shuffled past by guards. The vote was obviously over. But after a week of talking to various authorities, its passage came as no surprise to us.

We were supposed to be one of the first groups to tour the CIA because of the agency's new "openness" promotion. After we watched a film tracing spying back to biblical times, a spokesman stood up to answer questions. But questions were limited — any delving ones were answered with "Sorry, I can't answer that."

The Pentagon is where I expected to see staid military officers. However, part of the bottom floor is a popular shopping mall. A former Aggie yell leader, now established in high levels of the military, even led the group in a yell.

TEXAS POLITICIANS left me wondering. Sen. John Tower sauntered in for a brief fifteen-minute lecture on his views. There was hardly time for questions. Rep. Bob Krueger was out of town campaigning. Our request to see Sen. Lloyd Bentsen was shuffled back and forth and never materialized. Rep. Bob Eckhart cancelled out.

It seemed strange that Sen. Don Riegle of Michigan had the time, however. And Rep. Lionel Van Deurlin of California found out that one of his constituents was in our group and he came to see her at a session.

Maybe I'm too harsh. Texas congressmen Bill Archer, James Mattox, Jim Wright and Brazos County's own Olin Teague all spoke with us and took a break to discuss issues and explain their views.

But even if it was being a typical tourist, I just had to see the sights — Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, White House, Smithsonian Institute. I saw Lindbergh's plane, the Hope diamond, dinosaur skeletons, a life-size blue whale model.

A \$500-PLATE Democratic fund-raising dinner was held one night on the bottom floor of our hotel. It soon became popular to see who had seen the most famous person. Texas A&M freshman Ben Po saw Kirk Douglas get out of his Cadillac Fleetwood, and another student swore to meeting Jimmy Carter as he came in. Erna Jefferson said Tip O'Neill kissed her on the cheek. Senior Tofie Balagia shook hands with Senator Edward Kennedy on the Capitol steps.



Bleating goats, clucking chickens and braying donkeys paraded on the Capitol's steps in Washington, D.C. last week as farmers asked for parity. Bumper stickers proclaiming "I support the agriculture strike" were plastered on walls and mirrors throughout the nation's capital.

My only luck came the next morning when I heard a rumor that Muhammed Ali was in the hotel. With pocket instamatics in hand, a group of us guarded the elevators. There he was.

Ali strutted toward the reception desk. One brave girl went up to meet him. He never said a word or smiled, but coldly shook her hand.

And A&M's own celebrity, President Jarvis Miller met us at the hotel. Miller was visiting New York that week.

But maybe it's the "metro" that makes the city like part of another world. Taking the steep escalators underground is like a trip to a futuristic "Logan's Run" movie. Inside, gray ice-cube cinderblocks form a huge dwarfing cave. As the subway approaches, flashing white lights form a line at the edge of the tracks.

"Capitol South, Dupont Circle, Farragut West, Foggy Bottom, Pentagon," said a sterile, almost electronic voice that announced the stops.

GEORGETOWN is one of the most famous sections of the area. As our bus driver said it is inhabited by hippies, bippies, zippies and "faggots and the rest of that crew."

"If you happen to recognize these characters from your hometown would you take them back, please," he announced the bus speaker. "We have over-abundance of them."

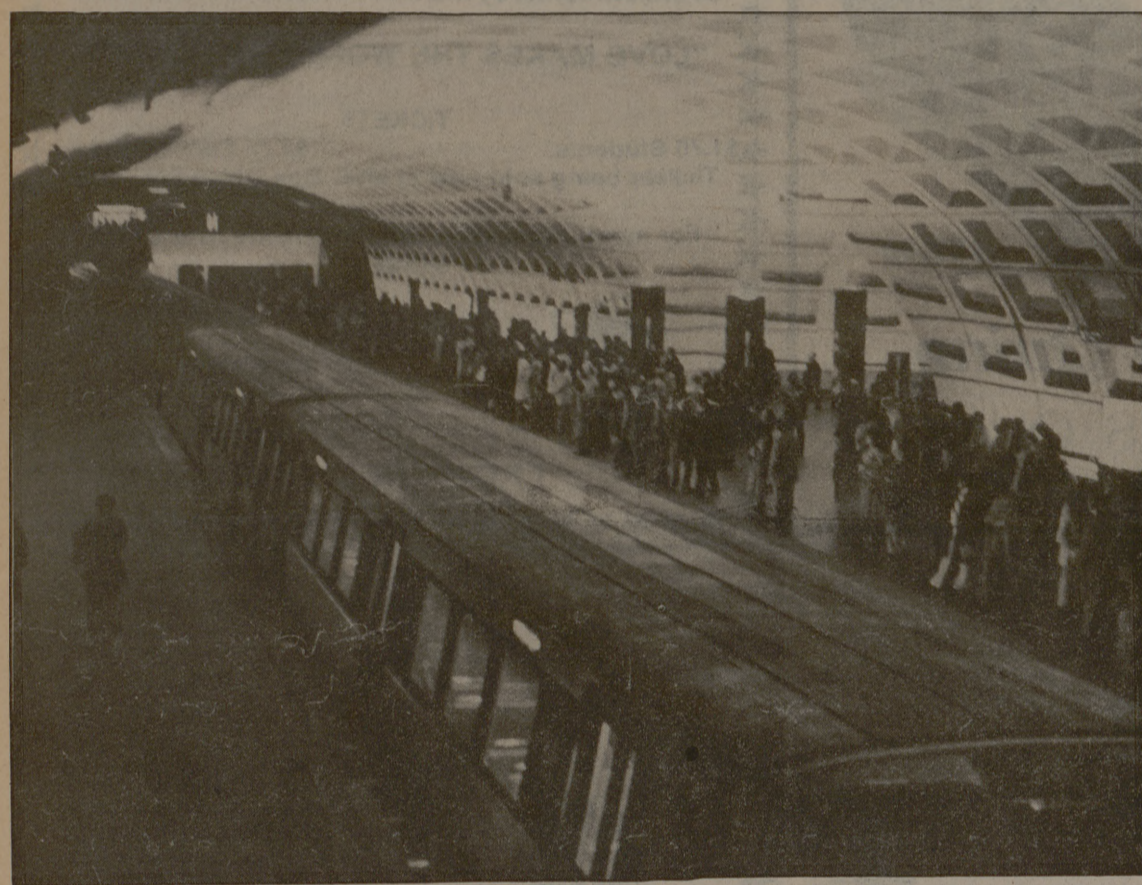
I never saw "one," but I dived who he was really related to.

Georgetown is also one of the places to see the other side of — the night life. It's expensive bar served beer for \$1.90, wine \$1.50, and mixed drinks for \$2.00. Gourmet restaurants also — like Rive Gauche and meals around \$20 a person. However, icatessens such as the People's helped some of our pocketbooks.

CELEBRATING St. Patrick's Day in the Yankee-fashion on the trip in grand style. Blowing taxis filled the streets, lines of people formed outside where green beer was sold.

A street vendor sold green cottons, shouting, "Take a chance romance." Drunken, laughing people walked down the street in arm.

When the plane left the morning amid shouts of "Gee Aggies," A&M didn't seem so away.



Battalion photo by Kim Tyson

The futuristic "metro" in Washington, D.C. links the city. Subway stops include "Pentagon," "Capitol South," "Smithsonian," and "Dupont Circle."

A 'greenhorn' takes to Big Bend

By MARY ALICE WOODHAMS Battalion Staff

After living in Texas for 18 years, I finally found out what those John Wayne movies were all about.

Big Bend. It's the Texas everyone else thinks you live in, complete with mountains and desert and horses and big Texas skies. And the park itself is the size of the state of Rhode Island.

Spring break provided weather that was just warm enough for day and just cool enough by night, and Rio Grande waters just barely deep enough for a raft trip.

Now, my kind of camper is commonly known as a novice, or "greenhorn" (I learned this the first day in Big Bend). Greenhorns are apt to be ornery when they have to rough it. But the MSC Outdoor Recreation Committee said their four-day rafting trip was "for beginners." So I signed up and paid my \$50.

The money, they told us, paid for rafts (\$5 per person per day), gas and food. Accommodations were whatever you brought in your duffel bag, and we were told bring items like heavy plastic trash bags, "all-purpose paper," plastic milk jugs and suntan lotion.

We were in luck, because Texas A&M was the only school celebrating spring during that week and Aggies seemed to have the park to themselves: all 708,221 acres of land, plus the river. But the startling part was traveling 800 miles from College Station only to encounter a guy from your 3:30 class. Escaping from school? Hardly.

Our merry group consisted of 25 rough-and-ready people with different degrees of camping expertise. We loaded rafts with canned stew, canned Chinese food, canned chili and canned meat spread. Marshmallows, popcorn that somehow disap-

peared and Kool-aid. But the piece de resistance was gorp, a substance made from granola, peanuts, raisins and the candy that doesn't melt in your hand. From this we derived our strength.

Being a greenhorn means bringing a toothbrush with serious intentions of using it, sleeping in six layers of clothing, daintily rinsing out eating utensils and being afraid to get wet. I tried to overcome all this, and getting mellowed out by the scenery sure helped.

There are some things I really noticed. It was dark the first night and a pickup truck pulled up near the river, cutting its motor. Soon, two Mexican men appeared on burros, crossing the river silently. They dismounted, climbed into the truck, and the animals returned the same way they came — to Mexico. That seemed like a good time to go to sleep.

SUNDAY: Rafting was serious business and my group's raft (the black raft) seemed to have more room than the others. For this reason, we carried more waterjugs as well as more people. The ballast was Dr. Pepper, Pepsi, beer and a bota bag filled with wine. Ah, wilderness.

The five sailors in the black raft all carried cameras, and every so often all would decide to take a picture at once. This hampered navigation to the point that the black raft would usually make a full circle in the water after approaching anything scenic.

Five miles down the river, it became apparent that "Conehead" would become our official dialect. And at sunset, we found our next camp — the entrance to Santa Elena Canyon.

MONDAY: The clouds that worried us during the night had disappeared. But a couple of news items surfaced: a skunk had visited the camp, and a new word was added to the group lingo. Someone, over-

come with emotion at the preceding night's campfire, had introduced "mellow" as an all-purpose word. It stuck.

Santa Elena Canyon has 1,500-foot high banks of rock with the cool waters of the river flowing between. We decided Mexico had the more interesting side. After all, the U.S. took so much of their land — it seemed fair enough.

Our route took us through some tight spots in the river, numerous rapids and dark passages between the high walls of rock. By nightfall we were grateful to settle in the park's Cottonwood campground and consumed mass quantities of spicy chili.

TUESDAY: Rest day.

WEDNESDAY: The last day of the trip. Our destination was Mariscal Canyon, which contained several

caves along its banks. Climbing rocks in wet tennis shoes was probably not the correct way to do it, but those who were brave enough visited crystal-ceilinged caves and others containing fossils. Fern Canyon offered springs of clear water and lush greenery growing between the rocks.

Working our way down Mariscal didn't seem as difficult as the Santa Elena trip. But in 1850 some scientists had troubles shooting the rapids in Mariscal, and one of their rubber boats capsized there. Maj. William "Bold" Emory lost provisions and felt "defeated" by the deep canyons of the Rio Grande.

His account of the voyage said the river was "imprisoned in narrow dungeons," and that "no description can give an idea of the grandeur of the scenery."

"Bold" was right.

Coming back to College Station meant driving all night after a long day of rafting, forcing conversation to keep drivers awake and watching the sun rise in the Hill Country.

I was beginning to feel like I'd risen from the ranks of the greenhorns. Almost. I later discovered that I left half my belongings in someone's truck and broken the casing to my sleeping bag.

But here's the worst part. After carrying my super-Canon camera down miles and miles of river, protected from water by two zip-lock Baggies, I found that I loaded the film wrong and none of it went through the camera.

Forget the touristy slide-show-of-my-trip. I guess I'll just keep on telling people about it.



Horses graze on the banks of the Rio Grande river while rafters travel down Santa Elena Canyon. Out-

door Recreation Committee's four-day raft trip included ventures down Santa Elena and Mariscal

Canyons in Big Bend National Park.

Battalion photo by Sunny