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# Rodeo clown has more 'guts than

by Carolyn Tiller

Battalion Reporter

Ben Hancock took a dip of Copenhagen, ordered a friend to get him a beer and set down a scrapbook on the table at the Texas Moon Tavern. The scrapbook held photographs of his rodeo career — as bull rider and barebacker, and more recently, rodeo clown.

Hancock, a 20-year-old Texas A&M student, flipped through his collection as he sang along with the country western music he knew so well from the nights he had been a bartender at "the Moon."

He pulled out a clown photo.

"I got my ribs cracked a month ago because I trusted a bull," he said, pointing to the photo showing his stout frame being tossed into the air by one.

Hancock said the bull was not one who usually fought, but when Hancock turned his back on him to help a hurt cowboy, the bull flipped him in the air.

"I did a double back-flip and landed on my face in a mudhole," he said.

"Never again, I don't care how long I fight 'em, how long I'll be around 'em, I'll never turn my back on another one again," he said. "He broke me from trusting bulls; all of 'em are nasty."

He smiled and his eyes sparkled.

"About like women; you can't afford to trust 'em — they're unpredictable."

Hancock said getting hurt is part of the job.

"I'm out there to do a job — to keep cowboys from getting hurt," he said. "If you get hooked, you get hooked."

Hancock said that in a Nacogdoches rodeo, a bull gored him in the leg.

"Me and the kid (the rider) both got beat up pretty good," he said.

Despite the injury, Hancock clowned the next morning and the following night.

"The show must go on," he said.

Hancock acknowledged that clowning is sometimes frightening.

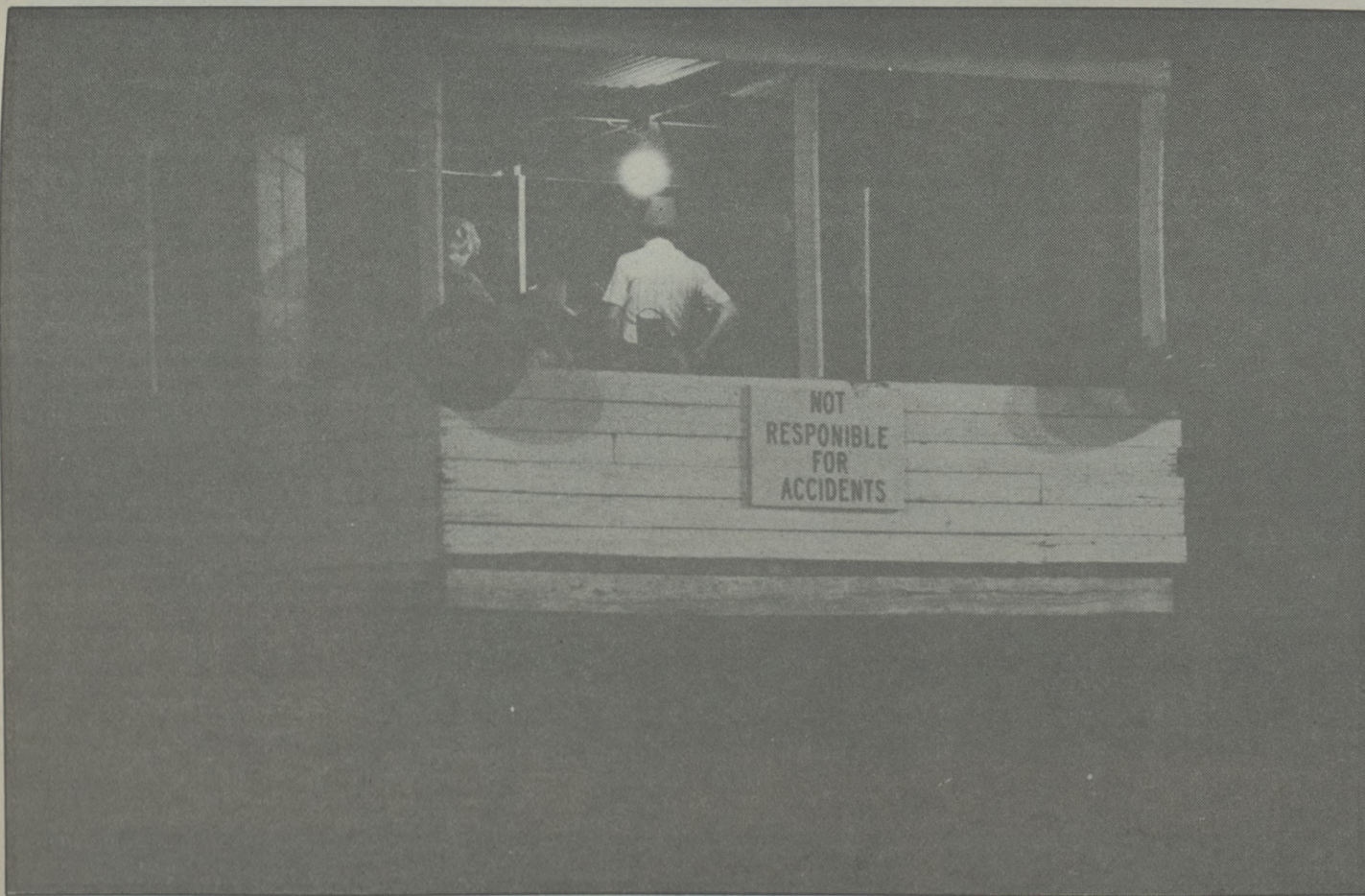
"The first time I clowned I was scared to death," he said.

That was three years ago, as a replacement for a friend who had been hurt. He had no formal training, just the basics of clowning which a friend had taught him.

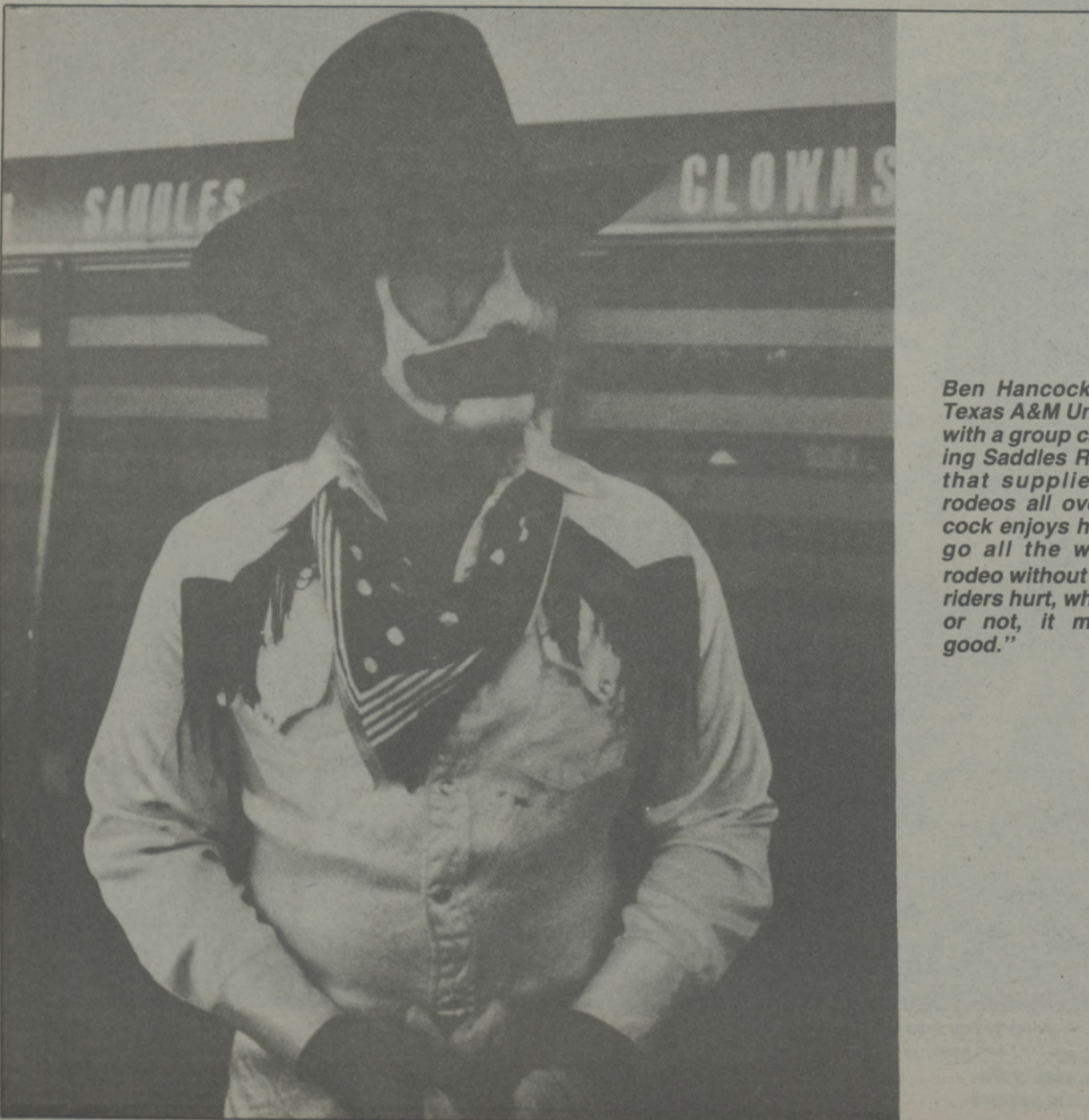
"If you've got good hand-eye coordination and you're quick on your feet," he said, "you've got basically what it takes. ... And you've got to have more guts than brains."

When a bull is coming straight for him, Hancock said, the first thing he tries to do is get his hand on the bull's head to keep distance between himself and the bull.

"It's an instant, natural reaction," he said.



As the sign says, the rodeo does not take the responsibility for accidents. Part of Hancock's job as a rodeo clown includes protecting the bull riders from possible injury.



Ben Hancock, a student at Texas A&M University, works with a group called the "Blazing Saddles Rodeo Clowns," that supplies clowns for rodeos all over Texas. Hancock enjoys his job. "When I go all the way through a rodeo without gettin' any bull riders hurt, whether I get hurt or not, it makes me feel good."

Photos  
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