

Now for something completely different

By SCOT K. MEYER

Battalion Staff

Question: Were you told to hold back at all, in order to avoid offending the Aggie audience?

Well, they did tell us not to do any goose-stepping ...

The buses were late. The itinerary called for the MOB to be rolling into the parking lot of Luby's by 11:30, and it was already 12:30.

It was a pretty day for a football game, and presumably also for half-time activities. But the Rice band was still not in town.

The Rice band had not been in town in a number of years, of course, so it is conceivable that it got lost somewhere along the way. Or maybe they got waylaid ...

Relations between the Texas A&M University student body and the Marching Owl Band, or MOB, have not been excellent. As everyone knows, in 1973 the MOB was attacked by indignant Aggies after making fun of our sacred traditions. That was in Rice stadium, so coming up to College Station the next year might have seemed near suicidal. The MOB stayed home.

But past is past, and this year the MOB was coming up.

Two patrol cars cruised shark-like into the parking lot. One was light blue — College Station police — while the other was University-police white. They circled the parking lot once, and then the four little yellow school buses arrived, carrying the MOB.

The police cars hovered around the buses like mother hens. Rice Band Director Ken Dye said the police escort was not for security purposes, although he admitted that "they did seem to be on their toes."

But Dye said he did not expect any trouble. "Both athletic departments would like to see better relations between the universities," Dye said. He said the athletic departments worked to make the trip work out as smoothly as possible.

Dye said this was his first year as band director, and that he had decided to "try it" with a Texas A&M band trip. "The main reason we're going there is so we can support our team," he said. "One of the main reasons we haven't been going the last couple of years is that we haven't had the money. This year we got the money for the trip."

After the program, Drum major David Zumwalt said the program went very well. "We wanted to do a show that was entertaining to both A&M and Rice, and I think we succeeded," Zumwalt said.

The show was not tailored especially to please the Texas A&M crowd, Zumwalt said, although it was tailored a little to fit the stadium.

"Kyle field is a taller stadium, so we could do more spell-outs than we might do somewhere else. The PA system at Kyle is also pretty good, so we could rely more on the script for humor," Zumwalt said.

Kevin Lind, the personnel manager — "sort of a fancy title for a den mother" — for the band, said he thought the show went very well. "The whole trip was a success," he said. "It really brought the band together."

Lind, a senior with a double major in physics and mathematics, is responsible for taking role at rehearsals.

Although the idea of rehearsals might seem contrary to the very spirit of chaos which seemed to be the MOB ideal, Lind said they have been effective in improving the band's sound.

The band is still casual, Lind said, but it is reversing the trend of the last few years toward total disorder. "It's not our style to be organized," he said, "but chaos is not a lot of fun either."

But performing in the MOB still has its surprises. For example, the members of the band do not hear the script until the day of the game.

Dye said the script is kept secret because "at a small school like Rice, if the band members know the jokes, everyone will."

So how does the band rehearse?

"We practice the music, and we get in formation," one band member said. "Then we just kind of stand around until the whistle blows. When the whistle blows we do something else."

Zumwalt said he and Dye write the script, and they often make last minute revisions. He agreed that it is better to keep the final script secret until the last minute, in order to keep the jokes from getting stale.

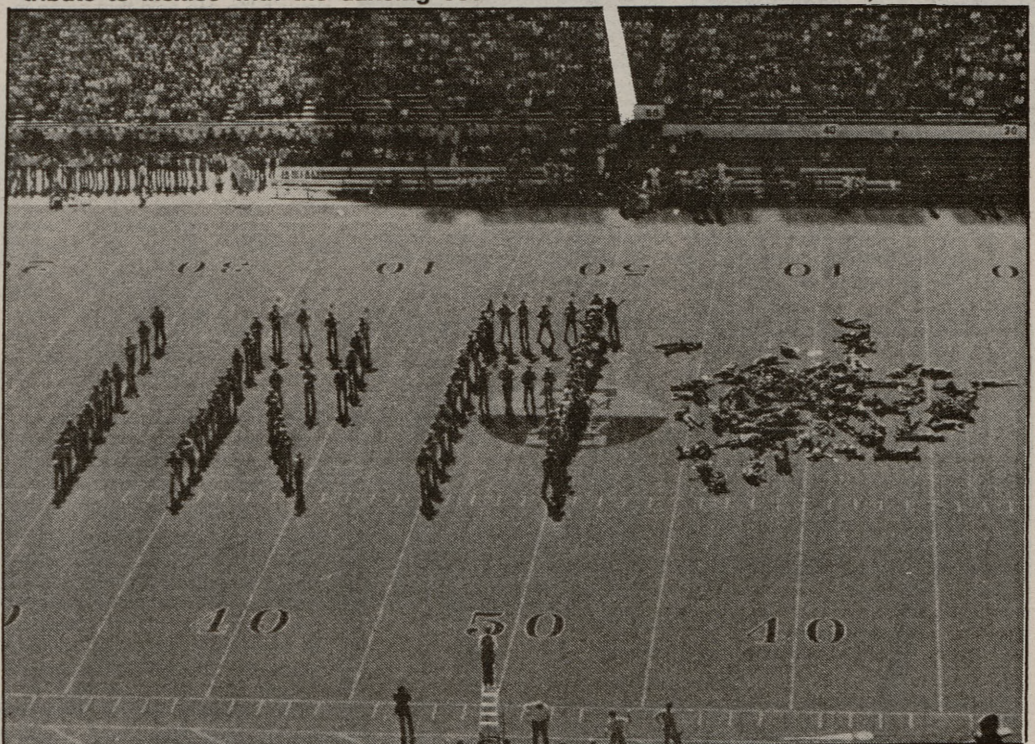
"The people in the MOB get more out of the show if they think it is funnier or more provocative," he said.

Although the band is becoming less chaotic, it's basic orientation will remain towards thought-provoking material and satire.



The Marching Owl Band performs its 'international show.' Above, the band gives tribute to Mexico with the dancing coc-

roach. Recognizing that the world is not festive all over, the MOB gives its impersonation of Mideast tension, below.



Photos by Jeff Kerber

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