

John T. Groce

Groce did more than criticize

By BECKY SWANSON
Battalion Staff

John T. Groce could have stayed in the stands and complained about the performance of the Aggie football team, but that's not his style.

Instead, the fifth-year senior made up his mind he wasn't going to be one of the sideline quarterbacks grumbling that "I could do better" — and he went out for the team.

"You can stand on that sideline and think you understand football by watching it every Saturday, but until you experience it you don't understand anything," Groce said.

The 6-foot-1-inch, 158-pound former regiment chaplain in the Corps of Cadets has been practicing with the Aggie team since its loss to Rice on Oct. 25.

Groce said he decided to try out for the team after standing through "the Houston midnight supper game," the "Baylor monsoon" and the Aggies' loss to Rice, though his previous football experience consisted of only a short stint on his junior high school team.

"It was a conscious decision of 'Well, am I going to sit on the sidelines and complain, and say I'm an Aggie and I'm a 12th Man-er, or am I going to decide that I can do a little

bit more for my team and my school?" he said.

After thinking it over, Groce said, he made up his mind to see Head Coach Tom Wilson the following Monday.

"John wanted to be a part of the football team — he wanted to be out there," Wilson said Thursday. "It was obvious that he's not a great athlete — he's not a good football player — but his attitude was so strong when he came in here, that 'Coach, I just want to be around the players and do what I can,' and that impressed me to the point that I said, 'Yes, John, you're welcome to come out and do what you can.'

"John struck me as the kind of guy that just — well, I think he really believes in the 12th Man tradition... and I felt like if somebody felt that strongly about it, then he ought to be able to come out."

Wilson said Groce is being put in positions at practice where he would have little chance of getting hurt and will not suit out for any of the remaining games, but will be on the sideline with the team Saturday.

Wilson said Groce "typifies the attitude" of the team's more than 40 walk-ons who just want to help the football program.



'New 12th Man' story difficult, but rewarding

By BECKY SWANSON
Battalion Staff

Writing a story about John T. Groce, the 5th-year senior who went out for the football team to show his concern and support for the Aggies was difficult at best.

First, I'm not a sports writer. I never dreamed of going to a football workout to take pictures, interviewing the head football coach of a major university or getting closer to the football players than the second deck of Kyle field.

I felt totally lost and out of my element.

Politics, student organizations, civic clubs, University administration — even disasters — are all within the realm of a city editor, but even thinking about writing anything related to sports scared me because of my ignorance of the subject.

But I wanted to do the story anyway because it touched something inside me — I guess it was the essence of "the reincarnation of E. King Gill," who came out of the stands in the 1921 AMC-Centre College game and stood on the sidelines in case his team needed him. It's romantic.

Romantic, yes, but I soon found out that it isn't all that out of the ordinary. I started out with the mistaken notion that this kind of thing

rarely happens, but was corrected by Coach Tom Wilson when I spoke with him Thursday.

I had gotten a hint that I might be a little off track at practice Wednesday when I went to shoot pictures of John working out with the team.

First, few of the trainers or coaches seemed to know who John was when I asked where I could find him.

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"He's just another walk-on," one of them told me.

Talking to John for even a few minutes, however, convinced me that he isn't "just another" anything. And over the course of almost two hours of talking Wednesday night, I was convinced that John is, indeed, a unique human being.

I don't mean to down-play the other walk-ons or players — perhaps they deserve more praise because they have gone through spring training and grueling two-a-days for little more than the appreciation of their teammates — I watched them give it their best at practice.

John, a philosophy and political science major, believes in experiences, and that people shouldn't

make judgements about things they have never experienced. He said he couldn't criticize the team until he had put himself in the same position.

John has a strong belief in God (as a chaplain in the Corps, he was known as "Father John"), a strong belief in himself and a strong belief in the 12th Man.



"I believe in what the 12th Man stands for," John told me. "And what it stands for is supporting your team through thick and thin, and giving whatever it takes for them to win. And when I say 'win,' it doesn't mean by points, it means by giving 110 percent — by giving the best of your ability."


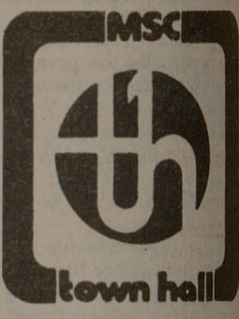
John didn't go out for the football team to get publicity. He did his best to keep it a secret for a while, but word finally got out when he switched to morning class sections so he could go to evening practice.

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