

Local

Early Aggie footballer reflects on rich past

By GAYE DENLEY
Battalion Staff
The Aggie yearbook was called *The Longhorn*. E. King Gill, the original Twelfth Man, was not old enough to shave, and Legett Hall, a new dormitory for the cadets at Texas A&M College, was still under construction.

It was 1911, and Clayton Wheat Williams, a Class of '15 electrical engineer and noted Texas historian, was carrying a 42-hour academic load while playing football for the Aggies.

In the seven decades since Williams, 86, first suited up for the Aggies, many characteristics of the Texas A&M he remembers have become chapters in the school's rich history. The yearbook staff abandoned *The Longhorn* when the University of Texas adopted the animal as its official mascot. Legett Hall, one of the oldest buildings on campus, is now a female civilian dormitory.

On the other hand, some things like trying to get a room — never change.

"I went there in 1911 — took an exam to get in and got in on a month's trial," the Fort Stockton native said. "I was barely 16 years old."

"I'd been sent down a little early by my father to get a good room," Williams said in an interview. "At that time, they were hard up for rooms, just building Milner and Legett Halls. When I did get a room, I got a tent."

The rigors of being a freshman in Company K and living in "Tent City" eventually forced Williams to drop most of his 42 hours as well as his position on the football team. But even hazing by the upperclassmen couldn't dampen the zest for a constant challenge, the theme that seems to characterize his entire life.

Over the last 70 years, Williams has instructed artillery units in World War I, played an important role in the development of the West Texas oil industry and served as a Pecos County commissioner for 18 years. Most recently, he has put together a comprehensive four-volume history of Texas entitled "Never Again."

As a full-time author, his works include a collection of his father's and other old-timers' animal stories, "Animal Tales of the West," and a history of the Fort Stockton area.

Since all of his work is handled by the Texas A&M University Press, Williams still visits College Station several times a year, but the coming and going, he said, is a lot faster than it was in 1911.

"The first time I went to A&M College, it took a day to get to the railroad in Monahans, another day to get to Dallas, and then you had to take one or two more trains and

change," he said. "It would take three or four days to get to A&M College."

As far back as 1911, one tradition had already taken root — upperclassmen in the then-mandatory Corps of Cadets did their best to make life miserable for the freshmen, Williams said.

"They had all kinds of tricks," he said. "They'd send you for a reveille horn, and you didn't know even what a reveille horn was, and

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there wasn't any such thing as a reveille horn. You couldn't be right any way you did it. And then you'd have to sing some more about 'how dry I am,' and they'd pour ice water on you."

A strike by the student body in 1912 over such hazing cost Texas A&M President Robert T. Milner his position and almost cost Williams his degree.

"The faculty had fired — kicked out of school — two or three sophomores and juniors who committed hazing," Williams said. "And they got up petitions, and a bunch of us walked out."

"I was fool enough to walk out, but I didn't go very far. I went to Bryan, and by the time my father got down here — he read about it and he didn't wait to get down here — I'd already read (a statement from Texas A&M that said) if you'd agree to abide by all the rules of the school, you could go back to school. And I signed that up pretty soon, even before my father got there."

"Poor old R.T. Milner was the president's name. The legislature kicked him out over this strike, and he didn't deserve it."

Despite the scare, Williams did obtain his degree from Texas A&M and still wears the ring, worn nearly smooth, that proves it.

Williams was born in Fort Stockton on April 5, 1895, in one of the old "Officers' Row" homes that are now historical landmarks. His father, Oscar W. Williams, a jack-of-all-trades, was a judge, surveyor and cotton farmer in Fort Stockton's early days.

The younger Williams finished the 10 grades offered by the Fort Stockton school system in 1911, but there was no graduating class that year and no commencement. Consequently, he had to pass an entrance exam to be admitted to Texas A&M.

Between his graduation in 1915 and the outbreak of World War I, Williams worked as an engineer in a copper mine in Hurley, New Mexico. During the war, he was stationed overseas as a coast artillery instructor.

"I volunteered to go into that — those were the big guns," Williams said. "I thought that would be farther away from the enemy and still get credit for volunteering."

Williams spent the next several years surveying, managing a movie theater, and engineering roads for the New Mexico highway department. Meanwhile, the West Texas oil boom was getting under way, and before long Williams was head engineer of Texon Oil and Land Co. He worked with the legendary oil magnate Frank Pickrell and was instrumental in the drilling of the first Ellenberger zone producer, for years the deepest well in the world.

While Williams was at Texon, a fellow employee introduced him to Chicora Graham, and they were married in San Angelo in 1928.

Three years later, their first child was born. Clayton Williams Jr., a 1954 Texas A&M graduate and well-known Midland oilman, was honored as a Distinguished Alumnus of the University at last spring's commencement.

The Depression brought a second child, Janet, and a new business for Williams. His oil money gone, he ran for Pecos County commissioner and served in that capacity for 18 years.

In the mid-1970's, he began the transition from engineer/politician to author/historian. All his works have enjoyed critical success and have earned him memberships in several state and local historical societies.

Ironically, his only previous writing experience was as athletic editor of *The Longhorn* his senior year.

This year's *Aggieland*, the modern counterpart of *The Longhorn*, will feature two more generations of Aggies from the Williams clan — son Clayton Jr., who will appear in a section on the Distinguished Alumni, and grandson Clay Pollard, a 1981 senior.

Student Y holding benefit to aid UNICEF campaign

Contributors to the United Nations Children's Fund could win prizes as well as benefit needy children in the Student Y Association's fund drive, which runs today through Friday.

A booth will be set up in the Memorial Student Center to collect donations, said Lisa Ablard, co-chairman of Student Y's community services division.

A fish bowl filled with candy will be displayed at the booth. Contributors will be eligible to

guess the amount of candy in the bowl for prizes.

Those who come closest to the correct amount will win prizes ranging from a free dinner for two at a local restaurant to a Texas A&M T-shirt, Ablard said.

"UNICEF donations assist the needs of children in underdeveloped countries," Ablard said. "It's amazing what (the) little money you give can do."

National UNICEF Day is Oct.

31, Camille Dalton, chairman of the drive, said, and the community service division will be collecting donations by trick-or-treating at campus residence halls.

All money collected by volunteers should be brought to the Student Programs Office, 216 MSC, Dalton said.

Last year the community service of the Student Y collected \$400, she said. Their goal this year is to reach \$1,000 or more.

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