

'Aggies' author respects Corps tradition, discipline

by Elaine Engstrom

Battalion Staff
Will van Overbeek is quick to point out that his new book, "Aggies: Life in the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M," is quite different from the January 1981 Texas Monthly article on the Corps.

"They (Texas Monthly) made a joke of the magazine story," Overbeek said. "The book is not a joke. The book is a true story." Overbeek took the pictures for the article which poked fun at the Corps. His book — which contains some of the same pictures as the article — is a collection of 80 black and white photos accumulated during three years of photographing the Corps.

"When you shoot for a magazine, you do what they tell you. With the book, I had control," he said.

Overbeek, 27, graduated from the University of Texas in 1978 and began work as a freelance photographer for magazines and advertising agencies. He said the book is his first major artistic project.

"The book is an attempt to tell what it's like to be a cadet," Overbeek said. "Cadets symbolize A&M."

But Overbeek said he was unsure about doing the book after the magazine article.

"After the magazine article, I thought I wouldn't be welcomed back. But Aggies have a great sense of humor. They can laugh at themselves, unlike most people," he said.

Overbeek also said his work with the Corps has given him a great deal of respect for the cadets and their dedication and perseverance.

"When I was in college, I was like any other student. I got up late and just generally messed around until I graduated," he said.

But, he said, students in the Corps are different.

"The fish get up early, work hard, learn discipline and learn to operate under pressure. I learned to admire what the Corps was doing," he said.

Overbeek — the son of a for-

mer Texas A&M faculty member — said cadets make wonderful subjects.

"They get so intense about what they're doing; they don't worry about the camera," he said. "They didn't constantly mug for the camera."

"I got to be a fly on the wall, people got so used to my being there."

Overbeek concentrated his photographic efforts on Squadron 2 and documented their participation in various Corps activities. He lived in Austin and travelled back and forth to cover the events.

"Taking the pictures was an honor," he said. "I got to witness very important and private events in their lives."

Overbeek said that even with the pictures of crap-outs and quadding, he thinks the Corps will love the book.

"I think they (Corps members) will love the book. They're proud to be Aggies in the Corps," he said.

"There's a tendency in College Station not to tolerate any discouraging words; it's a defensive attitude. But, the Corps isn't all pretty. I've always wanted to make pictures that move people and I think these do. I wanted to get at the gut feeling."

Pictures of female cadets also are included in the book and Overbeek said he learned a lot about them.

"Publicly, most male cadets disapproved of Waggies, but privately even the most ardent Waggie-haters admired them for what they put up with."

Would Overbeek have liked to be in the Corps? Definitely not, he said.

"I wouldn't want to be in the Corps. I couldn't handle the discipline."

But what does the Corps think of the book?

Kevin Smith, commander of Squadron 2, said that if they had it to do over again, more consideration would be given to any request to take pictures.

"He's a nice guy and it's not a terrible book," Smith said. "I just don't think it told the whole story."

The book, a photographic essay, does not include much text or written material.

"There's deep meaning behind what the Corps does," Smith said. "We're building leaders. A book explaining the Corps would need to be three or four times longer and include more text. We thought it would be a book with some pictures in it."

"From a personal viewpoint, it's neat to be the subject of a book," he said. "From a public relations standpoint, it lacks something in telling what the Corps is about."

Smith said he thinks the book may result in unnecessary publicity about the Corps.

"The Corps has some big secrets, like the traditions surrounding dropping handles with the freshmen," Smith said. "For a fish, half the excitement is doing something for the first time. We don't want them to know about it beforehand."

"All outsiders need to know about the Corps is the number

of officers we graduate each year. They don't need to know the day-to-day activities. All they need to know is that the system is working."

Texas Monthly Press, the book's publishers, offered squadron members the chance to sell the book at the University, but they declined.

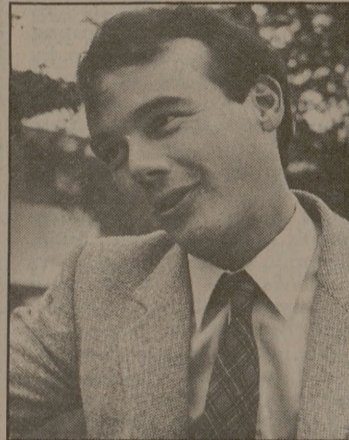
Gene L. Munn, the 1st Wing Commander and a past member of Squadron 2, said they didn't sell the books because they didn't care to have their name associated with them.

Smith said that while movies like "Taps" and "An Officer and A Gentleman" may have increased public interest in the military, the Corps isn't interested in being made public.

"We'll keep it (knowledge about the military) to the movies and fiction," Smith said. "We're already under constant scrutiny."

Assistant commandant, Lt. Col. Donald J. Johnson, said no one in the commandant's office had seen the book yet.

AGGIES



Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M by Will van Overbeek

staff photo by David Fisher

Author Will van Overbeek discusses his recent pictorial book, "Aggies: Life in the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M."

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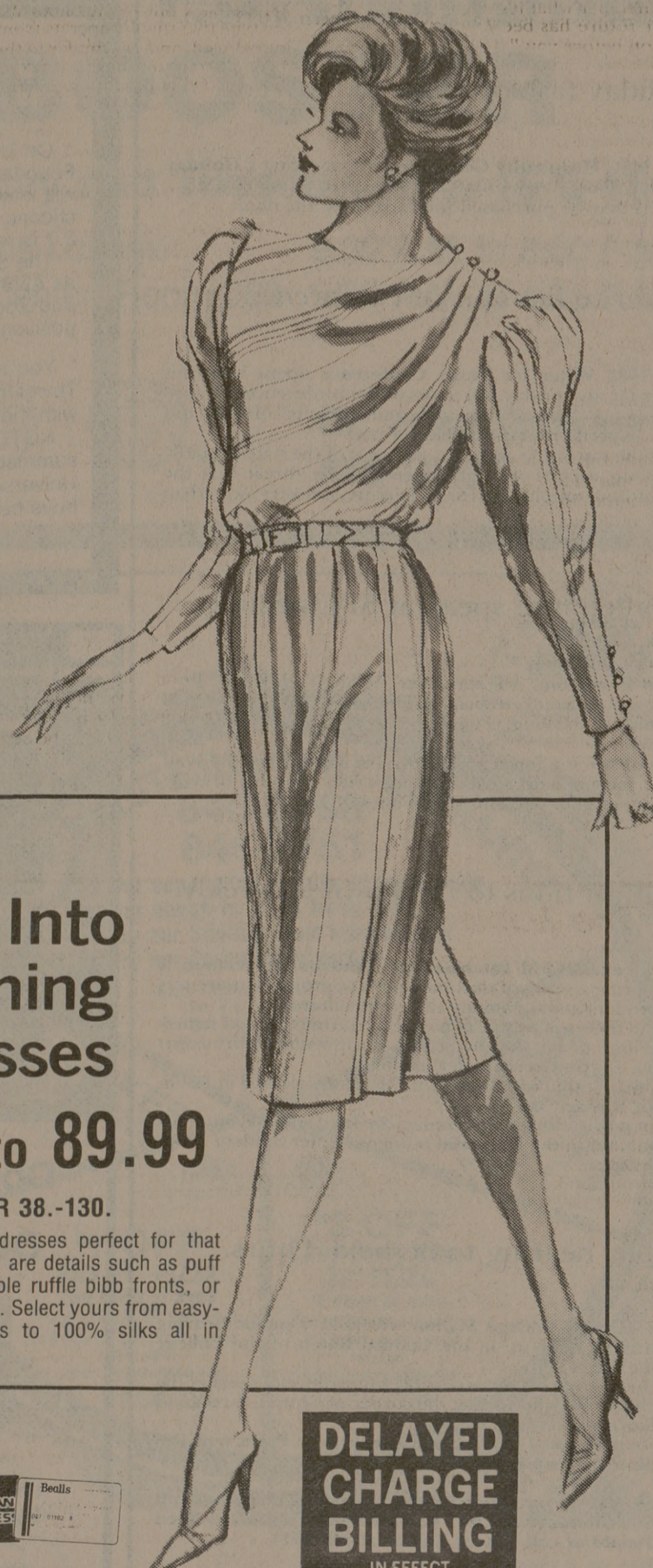


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