

# Texas A&M The Battalion

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## Battalion history: from the beginning to today

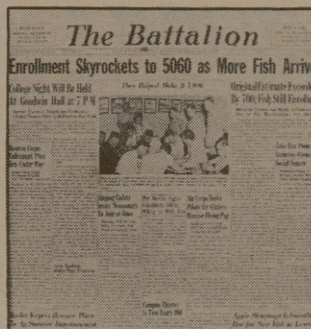
by Carol Smith

Battalion Staff

*"The year was 1893. Lawrence Sullivan Ross, president of Texas A & M College, was at his desk in the twin-towered Old Main Building. A cadet clad in Confederate grey stepped into the room and saluted. 'Sir, I wish to present you with a copy of our new student publication. We call it The Battalion, sir.'"*

With that issue, The Battalion began a long and somewhat harried history that has spanned two world wars and a few wars of its own.

At first, The Battalion was published monthly from October 1893 to June 1904 and resembled a magazine more than a



newspaper. It was published by two "literary societies," the Stephen F. Austin and Calliopean — debating and discussion societies which in that day were the most important organizations on campus.

Because there was no Texas A&M press at that time, the magazine was printed in Bryan, first by the Brazos Weekly Pilot and later by the Bryan Daily Eagle.

The Battalion — at least under that name — was not the first Texas A&M student publication. In 1878, two years after the college opened its doors, the Austin and Calliopean societies published the first issue of The Collegian. This was later renamed The College Journal and was issued under that name from 1889 to 1893. After the January issue in 1893, The Journal suspended publication but was revived in the fall of that year as The Battalion.

The College Journal had a lavishly-ornamented cover page, a style favored by magazines in those Victorian days. It was pocket-size — slightly larger than Reader's Digest and was

published in that size until 1904.

The editorial comments of early Battalions ranged from a call for better campus drainage and street lighting to complaints about high prices at the campus store to an 1894 Battalion editorial which stated that "Football at A. & M. C. is surely the coming game. Two years ago comparatively no interest was manifested in the scrappy game at all."

William Bledsoe Philpott, a professor of English and an Aggie graduate, was deeply involved in the publication of the Journal and the early Battalion. He would show up on the mastheads of either The Journal or The Battalion as supervising editor or alumni editor. Because Philpott was both a teacher and a practicing journalist, he was able to guide The Battalion with a firm hand.

In the 1890s The Battalion was the equivalent of most of today's student publications rolled into one. The Battalion newspaper, The Longhorn (now the AggieLand) and The Texas Aggie all claim the Old Battalion as their predecessor.

Alumni editors used part of The Battalion space to keep graduates in touch with one another until the Alumni Quarterly was founded in 1915. The Quarterly became The Texas Aggie in 1921.

Instead of a college annual,



Aggies received a June commencement issue of The Battalion which contained many pictures and articles usually found in annuals. In 1903, the senior class published the Long Horn

and there hasn't been a break in the continuity since, except when the 1945 annual came out late in 1946.

The Battalion became a weekly paper in 1904 when the prestige of the literary societies declined.

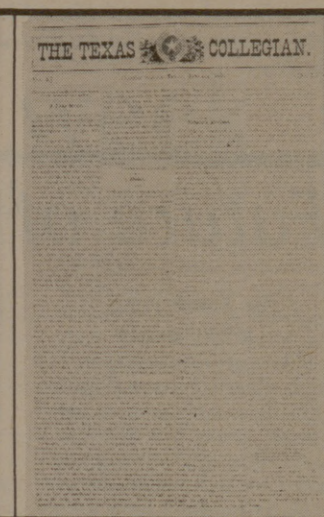
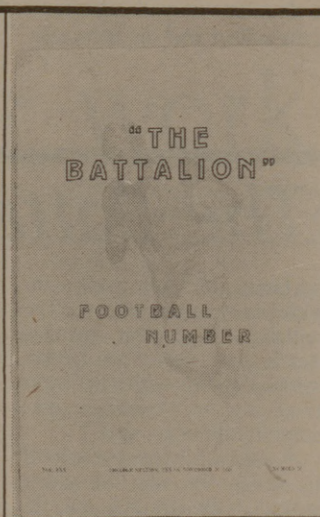
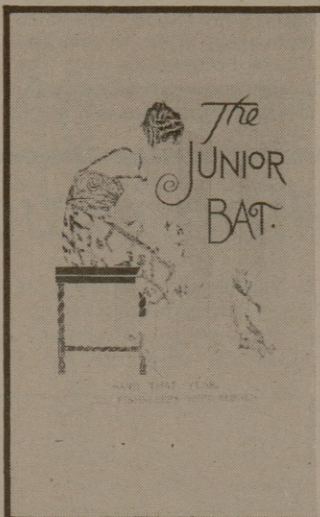
In 1908 seven juniors from The Battalion staff were suspended from school as a result of an editorial criticizing Presi-

during the school year 1939-40. At this time the Battalion was named official publication for the college and the City of College Station.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States entered the war, the editors and managers of student publications came and went at a dizzy pace. Under the accelerated scholastic program, The

was fired by Texas A&M President Earl Rudder when controversy over "letters to the editor," administrative censorship, and student authority led to a student-administration tug-of-war for newspaper control.

In 1973, editor Mike Rice resigned after several of his staff presented a list of grievances concerning the operational procedures of The Battalion. The list



dent Harrington. The head of the English department was ordered to censor future Battalions in accordance with a rule long in effect but seldom enforced.

The weekly paper served the college adequately for some years, but when World War I broke out, The Battalion was not able to supply news fast enough. A faculty-sponsored daily appeared, known as the Daily Bulletin, and was named as the official publication of the College. In 1926 the Daily Bulletin ceased publishing. A Student Activities Committee took over the publication of The Battalion and, once again, the newspaper was pulled out of hard times.

A Faculty Publications Committee was established in 1929 but did not have power of censorship. Since that time editors have been held liable after publication of actionable material, but publications are not faculty-reviewed in advance.

After 36 years as a weekly, The Battalion received a boost to three-times-a-week publication

Battalion became a year-round paper with no distinction between regular and summer issues.

By 1945, when V-E and V-J Days came, The Battalion had been forced to return to once-a-week printing because of paper shortage, printer shortage and student shortage.

The summer of 1947 saw the beginning plans for daily publication. When Aggies returned from their summer vacations, a daily Battalion was waiting for them in Battalion boxes in the dormitory halls.

The daily became a well-organized and smoothly-run operation in the 1948-1949 school year. That year's Battalion carried such headlines as, "Fall Term enrollment reaches 8,023," "Chancellor Gibb Gilchrist Signs Contract for Memorial Student Center," and "Exes Grant \$25,000 For Golf Course."

The paper has come a long way since its birth in 1878 and has seen its way through some controversy. In 1966 Thomas DeFrank, now a Washington bureau chief for Newsweek,

included such grievances as a lack of communication with his staff, staff disintegration, non-support of his staff and use of pay as a weapon for negative reinforcement.

A question of prior restraint was raised in 1974 when the editor of The Battalion was told that pictures of streakers could not be run unless stars were placed over strategic areas. The pictures ran.

In 1975, the journalism classes began writing for The Battalion as part of their classroom exercises and in 1976 Student Publications began using the current computer system to produce the newspaper.

Today, 23,000 copies of The Battalion are printed Monday through Friday. Video display terminals have replaced linotypes and offset presses have done away with the old-fashioned sheet-fed press.

Much has changed since that cadet handed Lawrence Sullivan Ross the first copy of The Battalion, but then, so has The Battalion.