



photo by Dean Saito

A car-top picnic

Picnic tables aren't needed by these Aggie fans as they gather family and friends for a pre-game picnic — on the car's hood.

Do seconds count?

by **Connie Hutterer**
Battalion reporter

The average student in the stands probably didn't notice that the kickoff at the University of Houston game was several seconds late.

And if anyone in the stands did notice, he probably didn't think it was important.

But those few seconds were important to Alan Jones, Texas A&M's assistant athletic director for operations. His job is to coordinate pre-game and half-time activities for Aggie home games, and for him the 30 minutes before kickoff are filled with tension.

"It may look smooth from up in the stands," Jones says, "but it's not smooth down on the field when you're sweating trying to fit it all in."

For Jones, football is a year-round activity: even in the spring, he says he is "very aware it's coming." He starts thinking about game activities in April, when he sells advertisements for the program and when organizations first make requests for pre-game and halftime appearances. So far, he has had no problem fitting in all the requests, he says.

Final planning begins about two weeks before each game, he says.

The game against the University of Houston was typically hectic. First came the traditional Corps of Cadets march-in, then 40 minutes of pre-game practice for the teams, the invocation, the national and state anthems,

the Houston Cougar alma mater, a plaque presentation by the Aggie Club, the teams' run onto the field, the coin toss, the "Spirit of Aggieland" and, finally, the kickoff.

Jones organized all this into a strict schedule which was given to the Corps commander, the coaches, the band directors and the public address announcer the week before the game.

Saturday, the schedule became action.

It is 12:20 p.m.. The football team, pre-game tension making them the quietest group of young men you will ever see outside of a final exam, walks over to the stadium as planned. The players are motivated by the welcoming yells of a group of cadets and by the Aggie band, as planned.

Meanwhile, danger threatens: ominous clouds cover the skies. From the sidelines, Jones phones Easterwood Airport for a weather update, then relays the good news to the press box and the locker room: the rain will blow past, temperatures will be in the low 80s.

While the players dress, the Corps marches in, on schedule. Jones makes sure that the cameraman doing this year's recruiting film gets a good shot of the Parson's Mounted Cavalry and the cannon.

But then — SURPRISE! — the Houston Cougar marching band is marching in, too, all the way around the field. The tractor removing the reviewing stand makes a quick U-turn and cuts across part of the field to avoid

the musical onslaught. When the crowd has passed, managers and trainers continue setting up equipment, and the team runs on for their warm-up.

During the warm-up, Jones hustles around the sidelines, greeting guests, organizing the Aggie Club for their plaque presentation, wishing good luck to stone-faced coaches who probably never hear him or feel his pat on the back. Jones calls the coaches' expressions — eyes dead ahead, stiff smile, clenched jaw — "game faces." Jones, too, is part of the action, and he feels that same tension.

While the teams practice, a KAMU camera crew sets up and Home Sports Entertainment, a cable network, films a "half-time" interview with a player's father. Jones is the one who has arranged the filming. He also is responsible for the after-game coaches radio show and the radio play-by-play.

Jones' assistant, graduate student Milt Pruitt, will ask players to appear for after-game interviews. Pruitt has an advantage with the players because he is a resident assistant at Cain Hall, and his friendship may win over players reluctant to talk about a bad game.

The teams are scheduled to clear the field at 1:40 p.m. to begin the 20 minutes of pre-game activities. Jones has the scoreboard clock set for a 30-minute countdown, so the teams will have a 10-minute warning that it is time to vacate the field.

At 1:41, the Aggies leave the field. See **PREGAME**, page 6

Ticket takers go unnoticed

by **Cathy Smith**
Battalion reporter

Aggie moms and dads clad in maroon and white, students wearing mums and walking with their dates, children wearing miniature Aggie t-shirts, fans sporting the opposing team's colors....

All are reveling in the pre-game atmosphere. A road trip to College Station, a tailgate party, and a quick check for tickets and stadium seats before that walk to the stadium for the big game.

In the midst of the pre-game preparation and anticipation stand 65 workers. They usually will get no more than a second glance from the Aggie and visiting team fans, but they wait with a ready smile and a friendly welcome for all. These are the gatemen for Kyle Field. These are the ticket-takers and ticket-tearers, the greeters and direction-givers, the "enjoy-the-game"-ers and the "hope-it-doesn't-rain"-ers for everyone who enters Kyle Field.

"I always tell my gatemen to be friendly and cordial to the fans," head gateman James Fickey says. "This may be a visitor's first impression of Texas A&M."

Fickey sees the gatemen's main responsibility as getting the spectators into the game as quickly and with as little hassle as possible.

Characterizing himself as a "rabid football fan with maroon blood," Fickey has been a gateman for 15 years and has been head gateman for the last five.

As head gateman, he is in charge of the assistant head gateman, 11 supervisors and 52 gate workers. Fickey says that most of the gatemen work because they enjoy football.

Two hours before the game, as the fans are picnicking, parking and preparing, Fickey briefs the gatemen on the orders of the day. He points out the first-aid stations, makes sure wheelchair

ramps are not blocked and shows the workers any unusual tickets that might be used for the upcoming game.

The workers take tickets and check student's I.D. cards. The supervisors stand at the gates to smooth problems that may arise and give explanations to those who question the ticket-taking procedure. No one is allowed in without a ticket and students are not allowed in without their student I.D. cards. Few exceptions will be made, Fickey says.

The gatemen stay at the gates until five or ten minutes after kickoff, he says. Then they are free to watch the game. The gate supervisors stay at the gates until after the third quarter to help the latecomers and watch for gatecrashers, he says.

Fickey says that most fans are cooperative and agreeable. They won't argue when a gateman tells them why they can't bring in an ice chest or why they must have a student I.D. card to get in. There are, however, some people who aren't so agreeable. He says about 2 percent of the crowd got up on the wrong side of the bed.

"For some reason we tore their ticket wrong," he says.

Fickey says that University of Houston fans are the noisiest and most vocal overall. He attributes this distinction to Houston's proximity to College Station, the rivalry between Texas A&M and University of Houston and the feelings the Aggies have toward them (as "Cougar High").

Frank Kocman, a gateman for 32 years, agrees that Houston fans are the most uncooperative. His reasons for the fan's attitudes are similar to Fickey's, but Kocman includes the availability of liquor between here and Houston as a factor contributing to the outspokenness of the Houston fans.

One red-shirted fan at the See **GATEMEN**, page 13

Editor's note

These articles were written after the University of Houston vs. Texas A&M football game by some enterprising journalism students. But people and events in the articles are a regular part of football weekends at Texas A&M.

Every home game, gatemen and ticket takers diligently take up about 50,000 tickets. Alan Jones coordinates pre-game and halftime activities. Air traffic controllers help Col-

lege Station-bound Aggie fans land safely at Easterwood Airport. Emergency medical technicians ensure the safety of fans at the stadium.

It's easy to be rude to a ticket taker who asks for your ID, or to overlook the people who help make the game enjoyable and safe. This week we've taken time out to recognize some of these behind-the-scenes folks at Texas A&M.