



Mike Davis, Battalion staff

Elephant hunters open fire

Juniors symbolically shoot graduating seniors, affectionately known as dead elephants, during Elephant Walk Tuesday. Dead

elephants wander aimlessly around campus to symbolize the fact that they will soon be of no use to the Twelfth Man.

Prof's poetry reflects beliefs

by Tracie L. Holub

Battalion Staff
Dr. Paul Christensen, associate professor of English, is a champion of mixed cultures. His poetry and short stories try to express his belief that people are equal.
"There is no cult of purity in the whatsoever," Christensen says. "Most of what I write is about mixed cultures, the merging of races, merging of identities all forming some sort of highly diversified whole community made up of all the different extremes of all who want to participate."
"It's not a melting pot. I don't believe in a melting pot. I want everyone to somehow keep their identity, but at the same time build up a tremendous mutual-ty of experience."
Christensen, whose father was in the foreign service, spent most of his childhood traveling. His family moved to Beirut, Lebanon, when he was 12 years old.
Christensen said that growing up in Beirut caused him to mature quickly.
"The culture was so very complex in Beirut," he said. "There were Arabs, there were French, English, Italians, Americans, there were Jews and they were all swarming around in this huge metropolis. The process was so accelerated that I felt as if I was a Roman candle being shot out of my life and being thrown into this all at once."
Christensen said he began writing when he was in Beirut to help him convey some of his emotions.
"Some of what I wrote about when I was having my certainty as a child removed from me one step by another," he said. "Becoming an American abroad was

a very serious juncture in my life and so a number of my poems then were about leaving the certainties of my childhood here and being thrown like an asteroid into a crazy orbit. So many were about cultural disorientation."

Christensen said that when he came back to the United States after living in Beirut he felt as if he was a stranger.

"When I came back to the United States, I thought I would plug right in and be everything

*I saw the nation
in the waters
below Mexico
at the bottom of
the dish of the sea
it glowed
in the merging of
its content
— Dr. Paul Christensen*

that everyone abroad admired about Americans," Christensen said. "I got here, though, and found that everything was so placid and structured in class lines, I lost that marvelous sense of a bouquet of people that Beirut had been. So when my father said we were going to Asia, I didn't complain at all and was ready to do so."

Christensen later lived in Saigon and the Philippines.

He earned his bachelor's degree at the College of William and Mary, his master's degree at University of Cincinnati and his doctorate at University of Pennsylvania.

Christensen said many of his

writings now have to do with Americans being expelled from a foreign country either emotionally or circumstantially.

"For some reason, writing about this has become somewhat of a parable to me," Christensen said. "I tend to do a lot of writing about the American who tries to sink his roots in some other medium than his own country and what happens to him as a result."

"I also write about Americans who have never left the country and who are facing middle class adulthood. Many are only waking up to the depth of the reality they have always taken for granted."

Christensen said teaching literature at Texas A&M has helped him to develop as a writer.

"I think that a writer in a classroom is like a scientist in his laboratory," Christensen said. "This is where you know if your ideas will work or not. They will draw a laugh or a frown or some type of feedback that will tell you if your idea was a good one."

Christensen said that although his poems may deal with many subjects, they all center around one main theme.

"The one main theme which is in all my work is the sense that identity can not be circumscribed by employment, marriage and possessions," Christensen said. "Identity is like a leaf floating in outer space."

"I love to have my characters realize they are on a perch, have lost their footing and are falling through all that is themselves. It all has to do with waking up to this immense, eminent identity that exists within you if you just

Researchers develop train rail stress test

by Cathy Smith
Battalion Reporter

Within eight days, two fatal train accidents occurred in Texas. To help prevent further mishaps, Texas A&M researchers are working on a method of testing track rails.

Dr. Don Bray, a researcher with the department of mechanical engineering, said Monday two main elements are involved in train accidents — material factors and manpower.

Material factors include the condition of the train, the wheels and axles, and the track. A breakdown in manpower means human error — like not leaving enough room for the train to stop.

Texas A&M researchers are working on a testing method to decrease potential material failures in railroad tracks. Students and researchers have been working in the Texas A&M research annex on Highway 21, about five miles west of Bryan, to perfect the P-wave ultrasonic stress measurement system. The group has been using a system set up in a hangar at the annex to test stress levels of different types of rail.

During testing, ultrasonic waves are sent down the length of the rail. The time it takes for the waves to run between two receivers is used to measure the level of stress currently in the rail.

A shorter travel time indicates compressive stresses while a longer time indicates a pull, or tensile stress. Researchers can use those measures to determine the

stress allowance needed when installing new track.

A stress allowance is needed to accommodate the track's contraction in the winter and expansion in the summer. When the weather is cold and the track contracts, it can break apart at the welding. In the summer, the track can expand and buckle, resulting in "sun kinks."

Currently, Bray said, track is installed according to experience. The amount of stress allowance used is based on someone's judgement as to the expected temperature variations.

The stress measurement system is designed primarily for testing rail before it is installed,

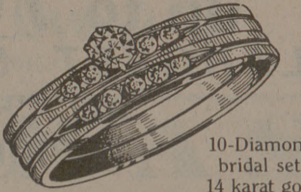
Bray said. A measurement is used instead of an educated guess. After the rail is installed, the system can be used to test the track periodically, he said. Safer tracks would be the result. The system could be perfected and ready for widespread use in about a year.

Bray also said a trend in unit train operations could make trains safer. The coal burning and utility industries have started to run the same rail cars along the same routes, he said. This way, companies always know where their trains are, and the cars can get regular maintenance and can be inspected more easily, he said.

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