A&M's Corps complex organization

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"You must always be aware that you represent not only the Corps of today, but also the thousands of Aggies who have gone before you. You have become a part of a tradition — a tradition of dedication, pride and loyalty. You must carry on this tradition, never forgetting that you are privileged to be one of that unusual breed of people known as the FIGHTING AGGIES OF TEXAS A&M." — from the preface of the Standard, a guidebook for the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M University.

B.Q.s, C.T.s, RVs, Waggies. Cadets are known by many names and have weathered many changes in the last 105 years. Over a century ago, every student at A&M was a member of the Corps of Cadets. They're 1,977 members strong this year — about five percent of the student population.

In 1876, the Agricultural & Mechanical College of Texas officially opened for registration with the intent of being a technical college which specialized in the studies of mechanics, agriculture and military tactics.

A&M has grown up a lot in the last century, losing and gaining in the process. The Corps today carries on the tradition of the Corps before them, often facing controversy and answering for the actions of a few. Despite the controversy, Corps enrollment is holding its own.

Corps Commandant Donald Burton keeps a small brown notebook of Corps demographics neatly placed on the corner of his desk for easy reference.

"Our enrollment this year is just slightly lower than last year," Burton says, "and that's a reflection on the fact that fewer freshmen came to A&M this year."

He says there are 456 seniors, 426 juniors, 463 sophomores and 632 freshmen in the Corps this year. About 250 seniors have taken military contracts. Last year, 11 percent of the Corps were minority students (predominantly hispanic) and 19 percent were out-of-state students, with at least 46 states represented every year.

The Office of the Commandant, as well as all supply rooms, rifle ranges, equipment pools and classrooms, are located in the Military Sciences Building, better known as the Trigon.

Speaking succinctly as he sits behind his uncluttered desk in the Trigon, Burton says freshmen in the Corps have had high Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, an average of 1040, for the last two years. Last year's freshman class had an overall 1051 SAT score.

Last year, the collective freshman grade-point ratio of the Corps was 2.39 while the freshman civilian GPR was 2.31.

"There is a definite study discipline in the Corps," Burton says. "The cadets have call to quarters five nights a week where a scholastic officer monitors study hours. The scholastic sergeants are also making sure they're studying. They fix it so that there's nothing else to do but study."

About 50 percent of the Corps last year were engineering majors. More than 15 percent were general studies majors, 12 percent were business administration majors and eight percent had majors in the College of Science, Burton says.

He says it's hard to label an outfit as being characteristically premedicine, engineering, liberal arts, etc. because students change their major frequently.

"Sixty percent of the students change their major," Burton says. "The average senior has had 2.5 majors upon graduation and we understand this. We encourage the undecided student to choose an outfit in a service they like and go general studies, investigating majors for a year or so. Generally, students in the Corps stay with the outfits they started with."

And there's plenty of these outfits to chose from. A freshman who joins the Corps decides on an outfit in the Army Brigade, Navy Marine Regiment, Air Force Wing or the Texas Aggie Band.

- The Army Brigade, with its own staff of officers, is composed of the 1st, 2nd and 4th battalions. The companies in the 1st Battalion are A-1, E-1, I-1, V-I and W-1. Company E-1 in an outfit of student athletes, Company W-1 is one of two outfits for women (the other one is Squadron 14) and Company V-1 is a coed outfit made up of day students.

  The companies in the 2nd Battalion are B-1, F-1, K-1 and M-1.

  The companies in the 4th Battalion are B-2, D-2, F-2 and L-2.
- The Navy Marine Regiment has its own staff and includes the 5th and 6th battalions, each with their own staff. The 5th Battalion is composed of companies A-2, C-2, D-1 and P-2. The 6th Battalion is companies E-2, G-2, K-2 and S-2.
- The Air Force Wing is divided into four groups. 1st Group is made up of squadrons 1, 2, 3 and 4. Squadrons 5, 6, 8 and 9 are in 2nd Group. Squadrons 10, 11, 12 and 13 comprise 3rd Group. Squadrons 14, 15, 16 and 17 are 4th Group.
- The Texas Aggie Band has a combined band staff headed by a drum major, a senior cadet; and a drum and bugle Corps sergeant major, a junior cadet. The Band is divided into the Artillery, A Battery and B Battery Bands; and the Infantry, A Company and B Company Bands.

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Each unit has its own staff composed of juniors and seniors who hold officer positions from commanding officer on down the line. Some of these positions are scholastic officer, inspector general, operations sergeant and supply sergeant.

Corps staff governs over all outfits and is headed by the Corps commander, Curt Van De Walle. Officers in the Corps staff include seniors who serve as deputy Corps commander, Corps adjutant, inspector general, judge advocate general, scholastic officer, public relations officer, personnel officer, supply officer, operations officer and Corps chaplain.

So what about the freshmen and the sophomores?

The freshmen have an organization all their own called the Fish Drill Team — an expert drill team led by its own elected officers. Rick Davis, a fifth-year senior with an Army reserve contract, was on the Fish Drill Team as a freshman and then served as an officer for the Drill Team during his sophomore and junior years.

"There are no politics at all in the Fish Drill Team," Davis says. "Your sweat moves you to higher positions."

Davis, who opted to attend A&M after rejecting an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy, says he was expecting more discipline and less freedom in the Corps of Cadets during his freshman year.

Some freshmen are candid about their first few weeks in the Corps.

"The seniors are cool, the juniors are cool, but the sophomores can be a pain in the butt," one freshman flatly says.

Claire Borne, a freshman cadet, says she's happy with her decision to come to A&M and join the Corps.

"I joined the Corps for the experience, the discipline and the *esprit de corps*," Borne says. "It's a lot of work ... the other day we all had to scrub brass piping because someone in our class did something wrong. It's all worth it, though."

Greg Bailey, a senior in the Corps, reflects on his freshman year.

"I thought the Corps would be a little more professional, a little less structured than it was," Bailey says. "But, changes in the Corps brought about a more professional attitude."

After making it through their first year in the Corps, they become sophomores in charge of new fish in their outfit.

Each sophomore is an assistant squadron leader, directly responsible for the freshmen in his outfit. In each outfit, a sophomore is chosen as the guidon bearer, responsible for carrying the outfit flag during runs, marches, home football games, etc. A sophomore in each outfit is also chosen as the company clerk and is responsible for the paperwork of the outfit.

A cadet begins as a cadet private first class, whose insignia is one chevron, and can work his way up to cadet colonel of the Corps, whose insignia is four diamond lozenges.

A cadet can be eligible for membership in several organizations:

- Parsons' Mounted Cavalry is a cavalry unit of juniors and seniors designed to participate in Corps activities and represent A&M at agricultural and equestrian events across the state.
- Rudders Rangers Company is a voluntary group of Army ROTC cadets who train (in "Ranger" or "Adventure-type" training) to prepare for Ranger School, Airborne School and summer camp while under the leadership of senior cadets.
- The RECON Company is volunteer members of the Naval ROTC Unit who participate in adventure training like rappelling, orienteering, rubber boat trips and tactical field exercises.
- The Wings and Sabres Society is composed of ROTC scholarship recipients who meet monthly to learn about the military service as a career.
- The Ross Volunteers was organized in 1887 with the purpose of banding together the most proficient cadets as an organization of military distinction and example. Originally, membership was restricted to forty cadets chosen from among the junior and senior classes.

Tom Williams is a senior cadet and a member of the Ross Volunteers this year.

"My father went to A&M," Williams says. "I knew I wanted to come here, but it was a hard decision for me to join the Corps. I knew it was a special corps and I wanted to make sure joining the Corps wouldn't restrict my involvement in extracurricular activities. But being in the Corps has added to my extracurricular life."

Williams was scholastic corporal for his outfit his sophomore year, 1st Battalion sergeant major his junior year and he's now a commanding officer in the 1st Brigade.

"When you're a freshman, you do the best job you can because you're watched by your upperclassmen to see if you can handle responsibilities they give you," Williams says. "I wanted to be an RV (Ross Volunteer). I worked hard and I prayed about it a lot. You just have to keep going and have faith.

"I think the thing that people in the Corps want the most is respect from students at A&M. Nonregs need to remember this when they see us in uniform." □