

Opinion

Band ignores non-reg talent for sake of tradition

OK, we made one giant leap forward by allowing women to participate in the Aggie Band. Now, how about making another giant leap forward by allowing non-regs to participate in the band?



Glenn Murtha

Back in 1979, Melanie Zentgraf, a female cadet, filed a lawsuit against Texas A&M after being denied the right to participate in the band solely on account of her sex. The University eventually lost the case and was required to encourage women to partake of band and other Corps activities under an agreement reached last year.

A lot of alumni and band members made a big deal about allowing women

in the band, claiming that women would destroy unity by requiring different uniforms, hairstyles, living arrangements and physical standards. They claimed the band should remain all-male for the sake of tradition. As a last-ditch effort they claimed it would weaken the nation's defenses. The same arguments could be used against non-regs. Just how convincing are they?

I didn't notice any difference in the band from last year to this. I searched through the band a countless number of times looking for the three female members. I never spotted one. The women in the band wear long pants like the men and keep their hair tucked under their hats. So much for harming unity through appearance.

What about non-regs? They could wear the standard military band uniform like everyone else. Males could wear their hair short but not shaved. No

one would see the difference. Unity would be preserved.

Only one of the original three women band members is still in the band and in the Corps. Apparently, two dropped out because of the rigorous physical requirements.

As far as I'm concerned, the band should be a separate entity from the Corps. Why are such strenuous physical requirements necessary for membership? Marching precision may necessitate being in good shape but the standard Corps requirements are primarily meant for instilling a sense of discipline solely for the sake of discipline. Maybe the two women and others who have dropped out recognized the sheer futility of enduring such strenuous physical exertion just for the right to participate in the band.

Is the price of participation too high? Keep the standards high for cadets. For

non-reg band members, drop all physical requirements not necessary for maintaining marching precision.

You may argue that non-regs can participate in the Symphonic Band. This is true, but the Symphonic Band is just not as visible as the Aggie Band. I've only seen the Symphonic Band a few times, each time because I was in the right place at the right time. The Symphonic Band is not the Aggie Band and does not have the recognition or the visibility. And even if it did, it is not an excuse for denying women or non-regs the right to participate in the Aggie Band.

The Aggie Band may eventually be forced to allow non-regs to participate. The Corps of Cadets continues to decline in membership. To maintain its numbers, the band admits candidates who have had little or no musical experience. The Aggie Band has members

who have never played an instrument, marched in a band before joining the Corps. The Corps continues to decline, the musical ability of the band inevitably will suffer. Allowing non-regs to participate would stop this deterioration.

The Aggie Band should represent the A&M of today, not the A&M of the gone era. Representing A&M as representing all students, not just members of the Corps of Cadets.

Tradition is great, but not when it excludes students from partaking of university activities. If students have a natural musical ability, they should be permitted to join the Aggie Band, regardless of whether they are in the Corps. No one should have to join the Corps to be able to participate in the Aggie Band.

Glenn Murtha is a senior political science major and a columnist for The Battalion.

One day not enough for welcoming spring

It's too bad that there's only one day designated to herald the arrival of spring. We passed it last week while everybody was on spring break. I know that technically it marks the vernal equinox or something, but come on, that's for the convenience of calendar makers. It just doesn't do justice to the season of capriciousness.

Especially this year, when the arrival of spring was so drawn out because she was playing freeze tag with the seasonal clock.

When we should have been sporting sweaters, we sported our winter-white legs in shorts instead. And then during the week of her official arrival, she dropped the temperatures just so she could chuckle at us. We stood at the beach and shivered in our shorts.

Spring's a part of the continuum of the seasons. Like watching the minute hand of a clock, we know she moves but we can't really tell until a little time has passed.

Spring creeps up on us like a mischievous kid and just by her nature, changes us emotionally enough to cause us to just slightly lose our minds.

Of all the seasons, spring is the most magical. There's an indescribable mystique about spring that, to this southern boy anyway, doesn't permeate any other season. Fall gets close but I can't say it ever made me want to go skinny-dipping.

The key to detecting the subtle movement of spring is moving around at night. Walks in the wee hours of morning are a great way to observe spring's signs. Spring does her best work at night. She's sneaky that way. She makes seeds sprout overnight and trees bud. In her earliest stages she embraces all living things only at night.

A night when her signs are everywhere reads like a Knut Hamsun novel. The vocabulary is not complicated, but there's an overwhelming evocation of emotion.

Ah, spring. It's as if your whole being has been waiting for months for the first signs. You just didn't realize it.

Tony Cornett
Guest Columnist

Late one night you might stroll down your street and notice that porch light bulbs are changing from white to anti-bug yellow. That's because people are getting tired of being buzzed by the crane flies that congregate about the white ones. You know, those insects that look like behemoth mosquitoes. Where'd those dang bugs come from?

You walk a little more and notice that for the first time in a while, the asphalt street is giving up heat that it absorbed earlier that day. The temperature during the day has inched up a bit.

You might notice that dew settles in and enhances the smells of fertile, anticipating soil.

For some reason, the train that sounded one way all winter takes on a new sound as it chugs its way through town. It's nothing really specific. It just sounds different.

On one of her showiest nights spring causes the jasmine and the honeysuckle to bloom. It's one of her surest ways to intoxicate the mortals. The fragrance hangs so thick it's almost visible. Mere man can't be held accountable for his subsequent foolishness.

When spring gets impatient, she'll cause a cool breeze on a humid, overcast night. Not a chilling breeze but one that moves fleeting low clouds that spell out her frustration.

She's through teasing. It's time for a full-fledged spring happy hour when all of a sudden the signs are everywhere — day and night.

Stands of trees take on a tender green watercolored appearance that will soon yield to the hard green of summer.

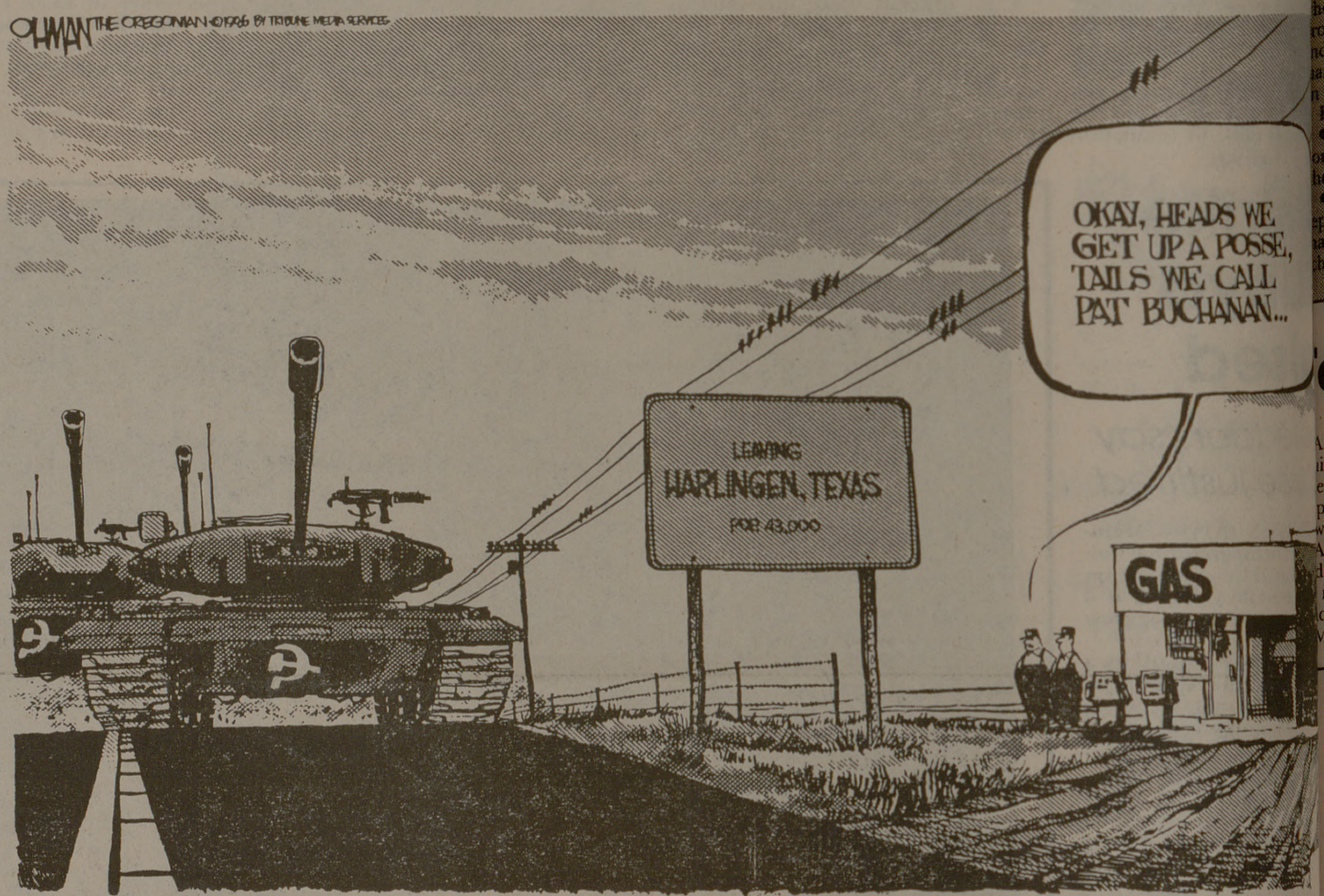
People, too, begin to show signs.

The surest outward indicator is the ponytail. When girls start wearing ponytails again, it's spring. Guys, in general, begin to pull out their loudest shorts.

And before you know it — between ponytails and plaid shorts, T-shirts and shades, and tank tops and flip-flops — she's here. Spring.

Let the games begin.

Tony Cornett is a senior journalism major.



A propagandist at his best, but a president at his worst

During Ronald Reagan's first presidential campaign, I used to read with dismay of his reputed ability to polarize. Often these reports came from California and, while Californians obviously knew the future president best, what they said lacked credence. Ronald Reagan, say what you will about him, seemed to be a sweetheart of a guy.



Richard Cohen

Not any more. The secret held by some Californians is now shared by the rest of us. There is a touch of the demagogue to Ronald Reagan, a willingness to brush past the truth and go straight for the gut. He can be careless with facts, sly in the way he misuses words, willing to repeat over and over again a falsehood or at least an unknown fact until it is buffed into a rhetorical fool's gold. This is the propagandist at his best. It is a president at his worst.

Nicaragua is the issue where it has all come out. Here we have Ronald Reagan on communism which, along with lower taxes and smaller government, is one of his core issues. Of course, communism is an important issue and Reagan is entitled to feel strongly about it. But he is also obligated to stick to the facts, to what he knows and to command the networks and the front pages of newspapers, if he must, but to do so with dignity. Nothing cheapens the presidency as much as cheap rhetoric.

The leaders of Brazil, for instance,

wonder what in the world the president was referring to when he said their "radicals" were receiving training in Nicaragua. Never mind. It made for a good story. Another good story is the suggestion that Nicaragua under the Sandinistas is an anti-Semitic state. That charge has been investigated by Jewish organizations, journalists, even the State Department, and found to be baseless. The Sandinista regime — anti-Israel for sure and not much enamored of religion of any kind — has never been linked to state-sponsored anti-Semitism.

Reagan charges that "top Nicaraguan officials are deeply involved in drug trafficking." But earlier this year a spokesman for the Drug Enforcement Administration said there was no evidence to substantiate that claim. Reagan characterizes the Sandinistas as beasts, abusers of human rights — thugs and druggies. Nicaragua is not exactly Switzerland, but when it comes to human-rights violations and the willingness to smuggle drugs, it's the Contras who are the champs of the region.

All these allegations are beside the point anyway. If drug smuggling is the issue, we should invade Columbia tomorrow. If state-sponsored anti-Semitism is the issue, then we should have attacked Argentina under the generals. If human rights is our concern, we ought to instantly put the cuffs on Ferdinand Marcos and not have anything more to do with South Africa. Would you care to compare Managua's human-rights record with Pretoria's?

Reagan does not pause to consider such matters. He'll do the analysis; what he wants from us is emotion. Which side

are you on — ours or theirs? But Patrick Buchanan, taking Joe McCarthy's old tar brush out of retirement, draws the line and Ronald Reagan smugly satisfied, praises Buchanan for getting everyone's attention — like lighting fire in a crowded theater. This is the fire is a cancer that's heading away; only the Contras can stop it.

But what if the Contras fail — the most likely will? What then? Will the next test of Americanism be the willingness to send more aid and then aid? Will it matter then that some Nicaraguans — but not the government — desecrated a synagogue? Will Buchanan roar yet again on the pages of the *Washington Post*, defining loyalty as the willingness to send troops. And will president produce another picture of a Nicaraguan official taking a crate out of a plane? For one crate, we aid the Contras; for two we go to war. Today the Contras. Manana Managua.

With his words, Reagan has obscured the issues. What should have been a foreign-policy debate has degenerated into a brawl about communism and war — not about what happens if, after billions of dollars are spent on the Contras, nothing is gained.

Questions about the future go beyond the passions of the present. Something may look back from a quagmire of Nicaragua and wonder, as we have seen, how we got bogged down. The answer will be simple. The president's story would be the judge — and he framed the issue so it was hard for us to do the same.

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