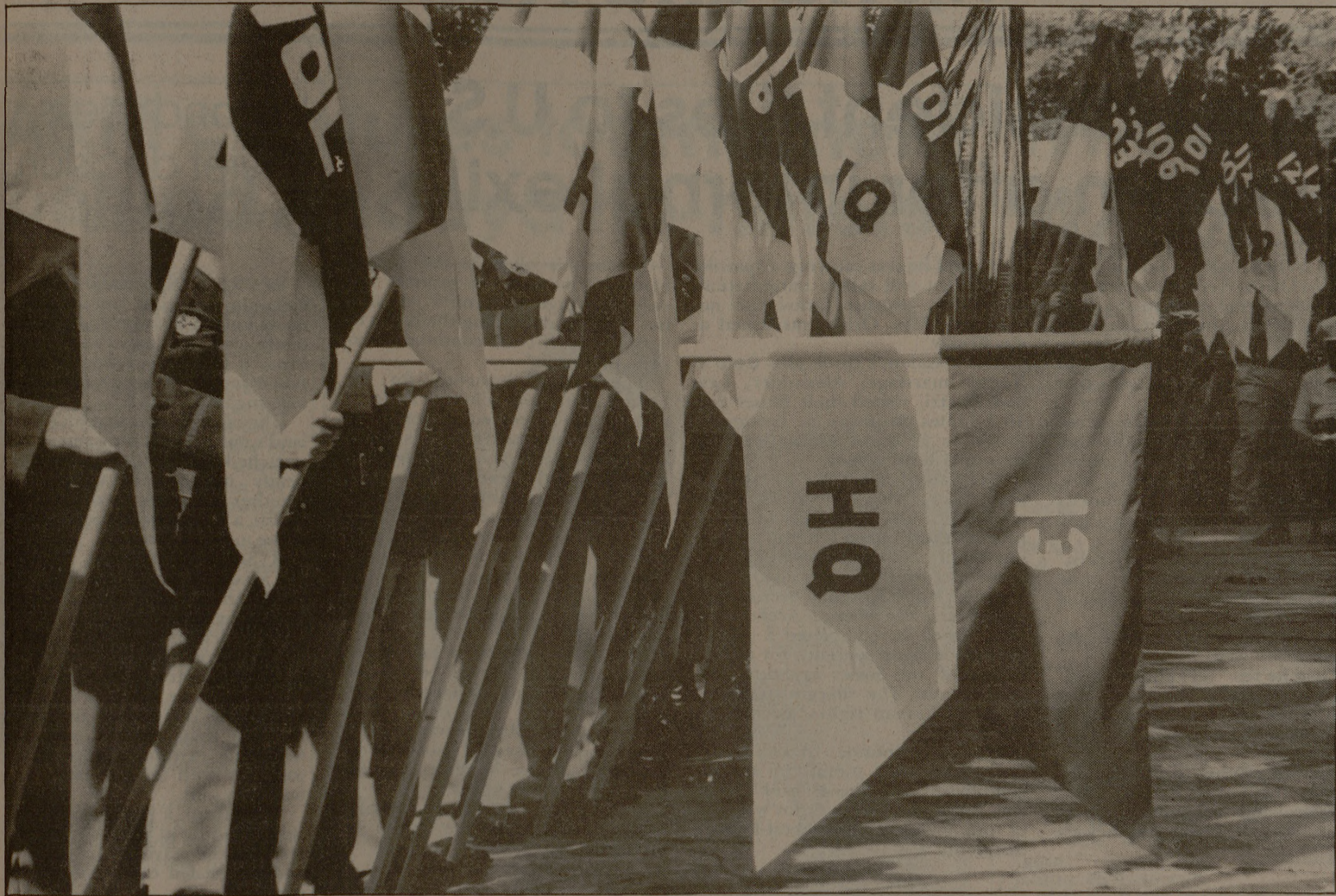


A&M's Cavalry in San Antonio



Texas A&M's Parson's Mounted Cavalry participates in the Fiddlers' Green ceremony, honoring cavalymen who have died. Photo by Tom Ownbey

A&M mounted cavalry one of two performers at horsemen's meeting

By Tom Ownbey
Reporter

Almost all the mounted cavalries are gone now, forced more than 30 years ago to give up their horses for tanks and helicopters. But some small units refuse to give up their horses and are determined not to let the cavalry heritage die.

Texas A&M's Parson's Mounted Cavalry is one of them. The unit, one of only two in the nation that still mounts up and blows the bugle, performed Saturday at the U.S. Mounted Cavalry Association's annual meeting in San Antonio. Also performing was the other unit, Fort Hood's First Cavalry Division Horse Platoon.

Each of the modern cavalry units performed a 30-minute show showcasing its specialties, giving about 750 ex-cavalymen and spectators a glimpse at the versatility of the cavalry rider.

Parson's Mounted Cavalry specializes in intricate, close-formation riding drills. One of the most striking is a spiral that doubles back on itself with only split-second timing keeping the horses from colliding.

The First Cavalry Division demonstrates the rider's versatility on the battlefield. Unit members perform attacks on dummy targets — shooting and slashing their way across the parade grounds and dicing up a watermelon as a finale.

Both units also participated in the Fiddlers' Green ceremony, a memorial service for cavalymen who have died during the past year. Tradition says that "cav jocks" — short for cavalry jockeys — go to Fiddlers' Green, somewhere between heaven and purgatory, when they die.

The spit and polish the audience sees at cavalry performances is the result of hours of practice. Hours before their performance Saturday, cavalry members were going through their paces in one final practice session.

But more hours are spent at the stables than in the saddle.

"We spend much more time working out of the saddle than in it," says Richard Valigura. The riders' first responsibility is the care of their

horses. Valigura, the cavalry's veterinary officer, looks after more than 30 horses at the stables. He is trained to look after first aid but relies on A&M's large animal clinic to handle major problems.

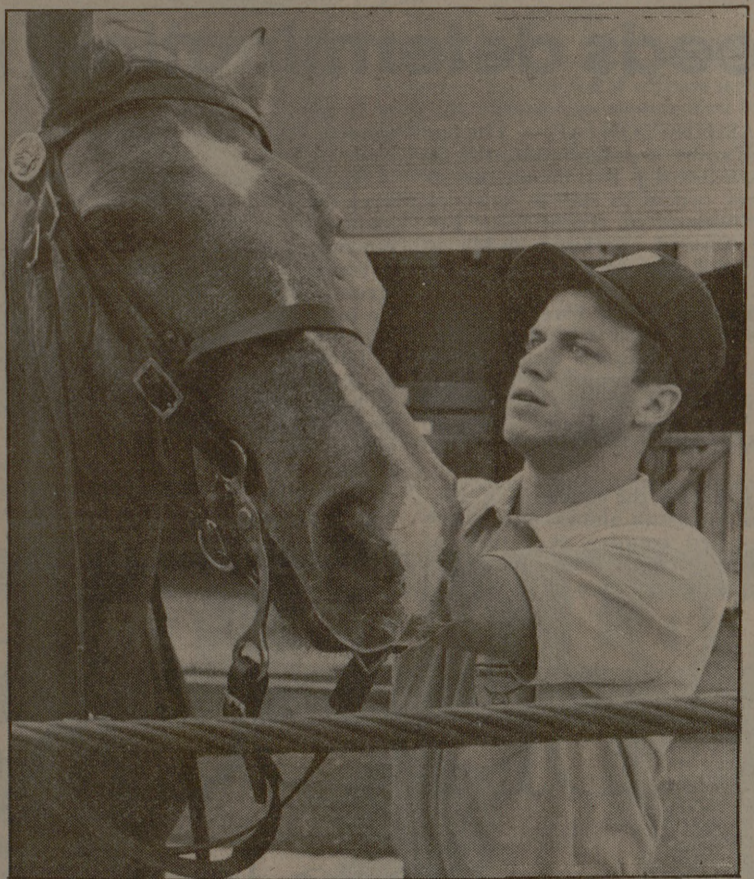
All the work at the stables is done by cavalry members. When a fence needs mending or a gate is in need of repair, the jocks must find time to do it themselves. And since all of them are also in the Corps of Cadets, time is a premium.

Money is also a premium: Although the cavalry is partially funded by the University, riders must cover many of their own expenses.

But the cavalry members don't mind the expense.

"The Cav's a 'go,'" says one cavalry trooper, trying to describe the group. "It's all the things A&M tries to stand for."

Richard Valigura, a senior in the cavalry, says, "A&M talks about the traditions, but the cav lives the traditions. We're the closest thing to Old Army there is."



Richard Valigura, senior veterinary officer for the cavalry, adjusts his horse's bridle before a practice ride Saturday morning. Photo by Tom Ownbey




Cavalry members practice Saturday to work out the kinks in their routine before performance. Photo by Tom Ownbey

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