

Women in Texas A&M's Corps of Cadets have come a long way since the days when Reveille was the only female in the Corps.

Membership in the Corps was mandatory for the first 90 years of the University's history, but a study on the future success of A&M prompted officials to make Corps participation optional in 1965 — just two years after the University opened its doors to women.

The fall of 1963 attracted 183 women among the total enrollment of 8,122 students.

Within a decade of the repeal of the mandatory Corps participation rule, the Corps enrollment dropped to represent less than one-fourth of the total enrollment at A&M.

The controversial move that loyal cadets of the past had stood so firmly against came in 1974 when women were admitted into the near 100-year-old, all-male organization. A total of 51 unsuspecting women

entered the Corps of Cadets, most not even realizing they were doing something controversial. The admission of women into the Corps was a hard pill to swallow for many die-hard Aggie alumni who remembered A&M as an all-male bastion.

Corps Commander Garland Wilkinson explained the situation based on the philosophy of former Corps Commandant Col. Donald C. Burton: "If military services are going to have women officers, then they might as well be Aggie officers."

The 1987 Corps makes up about 4 percent of Texas A&M's 36,000-plus enrollment. Of the 1,700 cadets this year, only about 70 are women. The Corps now has three units to serve women — W-1, Squadron 14 and V-1 (the off-campus unit).

Today women are wearing boots and boot pants, marching in the band, participating in the Ross Volunteers and even serving in top staff positions in the Corps. Although it may seem like women have fully established themselves at

A&M, problems still exist. The cloud of Melanie Zentgraf's 1979 discrimination suit against A&M and the Corps of Cadets has long passed. Names like Amanda Schubert, Nancy Hedgecock and Andrea Abat have been included on the all-male rosters of the Corps staff, Ross Volunteers and Aggie Band.

Recent incidents like Simone Weaver's bonfire assault in Fall 1986 and the not-so-publicized boot-pants issue have surfaced during the past two semesters with more examples of what a few claim to be inequality — others say these are simply isolated personality problems.

Although no women will be on Corps staff next year, Wilkinson says opportunities for qualified women are increasing every year.

"Opportunities for women to have leadership roles in the Corps are increasing and very promising in the future," he says. "Women are now accepted in the Corps and they have proven themselves; it is obvious

that women can be capable leaders in the Corps."

Amanda Schubert, deputy Corps commander, has attained the highest rank of any female cadet in the 13-year history of women in the Corps.

Not only has she broken into the male-dominated ranks of the Corps staff, but in Fall '85 she became one of the first women to be admitted into the Ross Volunteers. The other was Nancy Hedgecock, Squadron 14 commander.

Schubert related the women-issue to a comment made by a former student at a Muster in Alexandria, La., in which she was a guest speaker: "The guy said, 'You know, I was wrong. I was one of the biggest holler-ers when they were going to let females into the University. I said it was going to ruin everything. A lot of us were wrong.'"

The "old Ag" finished his confession by commenting on how narrow-minded most of the men at A&M were back then, she says.

Schubert admitted that part of her success as deputy commander is directly related to the support she has received from the other men on the staff.

"(The support) was real necessary because if they (male staff members) wouldn't have supported me, other people sure wouldn't have," she says.

Having women in leadership positions in the Corps will have a positive long-term effect, Schubert says.

"When those freshmen come in and see a female on staff or on the Fish Drill Team — in a leadership role — then they automatically think that's normal," she says. "So, of course, when you have people in more visible positions, all that does is help incoming freshmen to realize that it is normal."

Schubert attributes her selection as deputy commander — and administrative sergeant in 1985-86 — to timing and qualifications. She says it was time for the selection of women to high staff positions and she happened to have the right qualifications at the right time. Schubert also says the Corps staff at that time was comprised of open-minded cadets who were willing to work with her.

A quick glance at the history books show that Schubert's first appointment to Corps staff came in the midst of the Melanie Zentgraf sex-discrimination suit.

"Of course, everybody says the Zentgraf decree had just come out and I was probably a token female," she recalls. "They (fellow staff members) all told me I wasn't, but who's to say."

There will always be a few people who disagree with women in the Corps, the fourth-year cadet says. "There is still a small handful, but

each year that handful is getting smaller and smaller and things are getting better and better. That's the key to it all."

But as long as factions of the Corps have dissenting opinions, some problems will arise. The 1986 bonfire made the headlines when six freshmen cadets were accused of assaulting a women cadet on Nov. 18 — the group was later found guilty of assault and sentenced to perform community service.

This wasn't the first male-female conflict at a bonfire. The 1978 bonfire — just a semester before the Zentgraf suit — was the site of a protest from about 20 women cadets. It seems the men on the stack refused to include a log cut by the women to represent their unit. The log was finally put on the stack when a different group of men started working, but not before the women were verbally abused and told to go home.

In a Nov. 21 *Battalion* article, Simone Weaver, the woman assaulted at the 1986 bonfire site, says she heard "whoops" from men working on the stack as the group carried her outside the bonfire perimeter.

Weaver, described by other cadets as an overzealous female, is one of three women who are venturing into uncharted territory — and causing a great deal of controversy.

Several women are wearing boot pants instead of the boot skirts normally worn by women with their senior boots. The Corps uniform standard has listed the pants as an option for women since they were first allowed to wear boots in 1979, but the women have only worn the pants infrequently since then and most have opted for the skirts, saying they were more flattering.

Many male cadets don't like the boot pants. Doug Hall, a senior cadet, says women wearing boot pants just isn't right and the idea of some women using the pants to push a point is worse. He added he knows a lot of men who feel the same way but just quietly accept it.

Most male cadets accept the women until they start pushing their point — like with bonfire or boot pants, he says, and that's when the men start giving those certain women a hard time.

Weaver, who describes herself as not being overzealous but just having an outgoing personality, says, "Women have been wearing pants since the turn of the century, it's not something new. When women first got boots, they didn't wear boot skirts — they wore boot pants. It's just that nobody has done it in a while."

"We have earned the right to wear boot pants like any other senior cadet."

Women cadets have been wearing senior boots since 1979.

Carolyn Crider, another boot-wearing women cadet, says she isn't

trying to make a point, she wears boot pants for a reason men may never fully understand.

"The pants are more comfortable than the boot skirts. The pants don't have to be ironed nearly as much, and they're more attractive," Crider says. "I think the problem was the men were under the impression that females weren't allowed to wear pants, and that's totally wrong."

Crider described the men's reaction as silly. She says one cadet told her he was opposed to women wearing boot pants because it was the last thing the men in the Corps had.

Schubert says the present problems in the Corps are isolated and don't always represent the belief of the other cadets.

"I don't see it as a male-female conflict, I think it's a more an individualistic conflict," she says.

Interim Corps Commandant Malon Southerland says male-female interaction in the Corps has been facilitated with a new dorm arrangement.

"This year will likely go down as a year in which they (women) had a lot of progress, for simply one reason — they moved into resident halls with their male counterparts in the Corps," Southerland says. "That caused both parts — male and female — to have the feeling that they were truly part of the Corps of Cadets to a degree greater than when the women lived in separate resident halls with other civilian women students."

In the near future, the Corps plans to move each female unit into dorms with the other male units in their respective major groups. Southerland says this move could be interpreted as further progress toward the full, active participation of women in the Corps.

Dawn Simmons, commander of W-1, says the new dorm arrangement has improved the communication problems between the male and female units, and it has improved male-female relations in the Corps.

"When we were living in Dorm 5 we were our own little Corps; we had never been close enough to the men in their own environment to be part of the Corps," she says. "We were in our own little world and we did our things the way we thought were right, but we didn't know. Now that we're living here, we see how it should be done."

The problems between men and women in the Corps stem from the fact that they don't know each other well, she says, not because the men hate the women.

"When we moved into First Battalion, they had a cow," Simmons recalls. "They didn't want us over here; they didn't want us in their battalion. And now that we're here, they can't complain because we're the best unit in the battalion. A lot of them know us better now; they're our best friends."

BOOTS and BRASS

WOMEN ON THE MOVE IN THE AGGIE CORPS

Stories by Daniel A. La Bry

Women in the Corps find first support in '53 resolution

Texas Senator William T. Moore, Class of '40, introduced a resolution that would drastically

change the future of Texas A&M on March 3, 1953. He suggested that A&M allow women to enroll.

History books say Moore's argument was that A&M enrollment had leveled out since World War II and was experiencing a decline, partially because of the refusal to become coeducational. With little deliberation, the Senate adopted the resolution by a voice vote.

Henry C. Dethloff, author of "A Pictorial History of Texas A&M University, 1876-1976," wrote, "Aggie reaction was characterized by a deluge of phone calls, telegrams and letters, and caused the surprised Senate to reconsider the vote and rescind the resolution."

The next move toward allowing women to enroll in A&M came in January 1958 when John M. Barron, Class of '35, announced he would file a suit in behalf of two women for admission to A&M. Two months later, Judge William T. McDonald ruled in favor of the two women to enroll. A&M appealed the ruling and the Circuit Court of Appeals in Waco reversed the decision. The State Supreme Court refused to review an appeal by the plaintiffs.

The fight continued in September of 1959 when three Bryan residents applied for

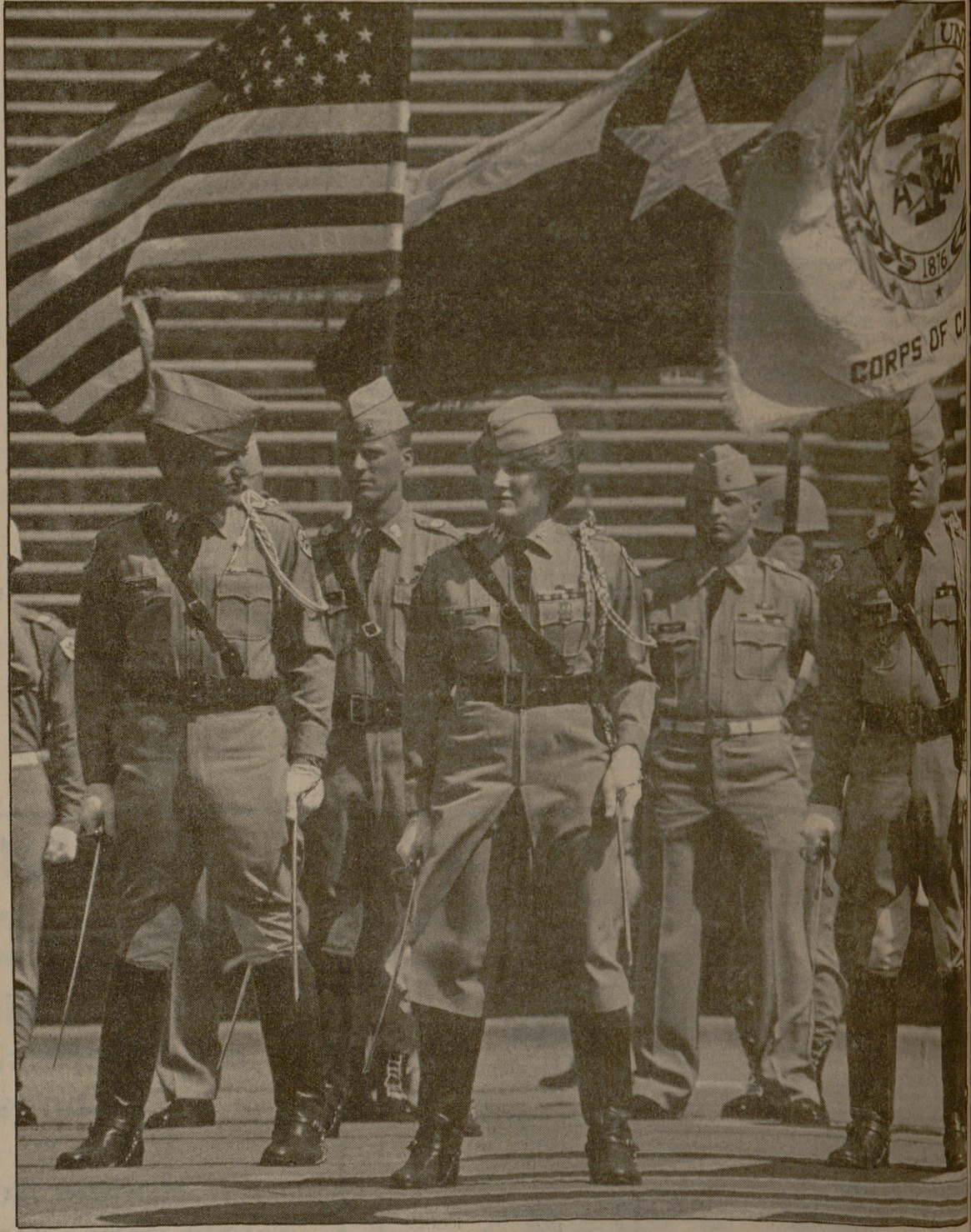
admission and were turned down. Barron again filed suit in Judge McDonald's court. McDonald, ruling on the basis of the higher court's decision in 1958, ruled against admission of women.

These court cases made women enrollment a public issue and attracted media attention. During the 1959 court case, the editor of *The Battalion* was "busted" in rank because of an editorial supporting the admission of women.

The turmoil caused the Board of Directors (now the Board of Regents) to initiate a long-range study of the College. Within a year after its completion, two major changes occurred at the College: enrollment was open to women on a limited basis and Texas A&M College was renamed Texas A&M University. Women no longer had to meet the "normal requirements" for admission, which stated that a female student had to be the wife or daughter of an enrolled student, faculty member or staff member.

In his book, Dethloff says President James Earl Rudder was greeted with boos and hisses after calling a meeting of the Corps of Cadets.

Dethloff says by September 1963, 150 women were enrolled at A&M, but for the most part, they weren't welcome. Few buildings had restrooms for women, and women's dormitories weren't open until the fall of 1972.



At right: Amanda Schubert has broken into the highest ranks of the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets. The senior marketing major is deputy commander of the 1700-member organization.

Photo by Bill Hight