

Opinion

The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)

Member of
Texas Press Association
Western Journalism Conference

The Battalion Editorial Board

Sondra Pickard, Editor
John Jarvis, Managing Editor
Sue Krenek, Opinion Page Editor
Rodney Rafter, City Editor
Robbyn Lister, News Editor
Lloyd Brumfield, Sports Editor
Tracy Staton, Photo Editor

Editorial Policy

The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in *The Battalion* are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents. The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods.

Mail subscriptions are \$17.44 per semester, \$34.62 per school year and \$36.44 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4111.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Battalion*, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.

Hot opinions

For the past several weeks, the *Battalion* newsroom has been strewn with bonfire letters.

The *Battalion* reported that two AggieLand photographers encountered harassment at bonfire. People got mad and wrote letters. We printed some. Then everyone got mad at the people who wrote those letters and wrote letters attacking them. We printed some. Then a columnist wrote about bonfire, and everyone got mad and wrote more letters. We printed some.

Now, weeks after the original incident, the letters keep coming. They concern bonfire itself, or they concern the views of other letter-writers. So in the interest of letting Aggies air their views once and for all — and providing a good ending point for debate — *The Battalion* is expanding today's Mail Call and printing as many of the letters as possible. Read and enjoy.

— The Battalion Editorial Board

Press must question reaction, if any, to 'character issue'

I attended Gov. Michael Dukakis' A&M-based appearance Friday, and it was pretty much what I expected: presidential candidate makes his pitch to potential voters.



Sue Krenek

Like any good speaker tailored his words to his audience. He lauded the power of youth in an eerily Kennedyesque way ("I hope that, much as John Kennedy inspired my generation, I can inspire yours.") and made reference to local culture ("I'm very intrigued by that large pile of logs out there. I hear it has something to do with a historic football rivalry.")

But this program had an edge on the standard "candidate gives a speech" presentation. It used a question-and-answer format. Unlike Ronald Reagan, who shies away from even the most perfunctory questioning about his policies, Dukakis was willing to be put on the spot — live — by college students from across the country.

And they did put him on the spot.

Student questions covered topics including health care, Contra aid, nuclear power, the shutdown of a General Motors plant in Massachusetts, U.S.-Soviet relations, disarmament, the stock market crash, the conflict between Greece and Turkey, the Persian Gulf, welfare, foreign investment, financial aid, acid rain, U.S.-NATO relations, South Africa, Mexico, taxes and Star Wars.

Whew.

And the questioners were hardly diplomatic — some of these guys could easily rival Sam Donaldson, like the guy who snidely asked, "Is this how you'd run the White House? Take credit for the good and run from the bad?"

But through it all, one question didn't get asked. Despite the withdrawal of Gary Hart and Joe Biden from the Democratic race. Despite the ethical missteps of Reagan-aunts Michael Deaver and Ed Meese. Despite Douglas Ginsburg's admission that he had smoked marijuana.

No one asked about the "character issue."

I have to admit that I was using the Dukakis program as sort of a litmus test. As an alleged working member of the media, I've received an inordinate amount of inquisition about why candidates and government officials are being subjected to such close scrutiny. More often, I've been told in no uncertain terms that the press is making up an issue to suit its own purposes.

After defending my fellow journalists to my parents, family, friends, professors, classmates, casual acquaintances, passers-by and random people at Dud-

ley's, I had come to a conclusion: The people who complain most loudly about media harassment of public figures are the same people who rush to read the accounts of their misbehavior. I found it amazing that those who claimed to deplore journalistic "invasion of privacy" somehow knew all the scandalous details reported in those "unethical" stories.

But the hypocrisy didn't really surprise me. We are living, after all, in a voyeuristic society, one where TV screens feature ever-steamerier scenes and sleazy romance novels top the best-seller lists.

And we're a little embarrassed by our fascination with the lurid, the glamorous, the sensationalistic. We read *USA Today* and *People*, not *U.S. News & World Report* or the *Christian Science Monitor*. We watch "Entertainment Tonight" and "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," not *MacNeil-Lehrer*. And we're not too willing to admit it.

But after you live on a steady diet of sensationalism, politicians and issues must seem, well, a little dull. It's hard to get excited about the trade deficit when the next page offers revelations from Donna Rice. And it's hard for a journalist to be optimistic about his audience when readership surveys show that more people look at the 96-color, three-dimensional weather map than read stories on the economy or foreign policy.

So I was surprised that no one asked Dukakis about character — his or that of the other candidates. I was surprised that no one asked about Ginsburg or drug abuse, especially after Kitty Dukakis' admission last summer that she had a long-term dependency on diet pills, one that required counseling to end. Her case, which drew little attention, seemed an ironic precursor to the Ginsburg fiasco.

Maybe some students wanted to ask about character. Maybe their calls didn't get through or they didn't make it to the microphone. But I was impressed with most of the questions that were asked. They concerned issues, the obscure as well as the obvious. If the students were curious about Dukakis' values or his past, they didn't show it.

I realize the audience at a university presentation is hardly typical of the nation at large, and as long as "Entertainment Tonight" is a ratings hit, I'll be skeptical about claims that only the media is interested in candidate gossip.

But the Dukakis presentation has made me take a closer look at the stories I read. And I'm realizing that although I think character can be important, some people find it meaningless.

I know the media didn't manufacture the character issue. But I know now that we also can't perpetuate it once it isn't relevant for anyone else.

Sue Krenek is a senior journalism major and opinion page editor for *The Battalion*.



... Meanwhile, further up field, the girls torched their own cookies NOT donated to the redpots AFTER all.

Mail Call

Thanks to the ladies

EDITOR:

To the ladies who work for bonfire: We are writing this letter to extend our thanks for what you have done for us at bonfire cut site. The steady supply of ice water, the lunches delivered, and the Cokes, candy, and tobacco that are made available are most sincerely appreciated. Cut site would be much less productive if it weren't for the help you give us. Considering some of the recent publicity concerning women at bonfire, we felt it necessary to show our gratitude.

Robert Hefner '88
bonfire officer, Company P-2
accompanied by 185 signatures

Out of the boys' locker room

EDITOR:

Girls, girls — can we talk? It seems that the fuss being raised about bonfire and the fact that women are not allowed to work inside the perimeter is, well, wrong. A&M is one of the last schools where chivalry may still be found.

The point is this: The men who build bonfire do much more than just stack logs. They smoke cigars, dip snuff, and — rumor has it — converse in normal, intelligible patterns of speech including common but profane words. Not that any of this is particularly admirable — it's not — but it does serve to promote a profound sense of camaraderie.

And I don't see anything wrong with that. The fact that they don't want us out there is not because we're incapable of wiring logs together, and they know that. It's because those boys don't feel comfortable being "bonfire-ish" around girls, and quite frankly, I don't mind letting them have their fun. It's not hurting me. Call it chauvinism; call it anything you like. But what goes on in the boys' locker room is none of our business. Let the boys be boys.

Nancy Haire '89
Kim Spessard '89

Women must earn respect

EDITOR:

Recently, the words "bonfire," "sexual harassment," and "sexual discrimination," used in the same sentence, well, I'm mad too, Eddie.

More than a month ago I began working on bonfire with OCA. I felt awkward at first, because there were only a few women, and I did not know anyone (I am a transfer student). Within no time at all, however, my anxiety was gone. I was working as a part of group, and not just as some unknown woman who came out to cut. To the guys I cut with, loaded with, yelled with, and carried logs with, I was just another worker, no different from anyone else. They respected me at cut not because I told them they must or else I'd scream discrimination; they respected me because I went out there expecting no respect until I proved to them I was worthy of it.

On Nov. 7, I went out to stack to work. At least three redpots told me to let them know if any of the guys gave me a rough time, but there was no problem. I was there for more than three hours, and in that time I carried logs from point A to point B, worked the tag line, wired logs on the ground, and wired logs up on stack. I worked on stack

because the pots out there have worked with me. I've earned their respect and their trust. If I hadn't worked for it, they would never have allowed me up on stack — and very rightfully so.

The CT's and the non-regs don't discriminate; they abuse and verbally harass everyone, regardless of who he or she is. They give me a rough time, but if they didn't then I would feel like an outsider, not part of the unit. I give them a rough time right back, too. Then we all laugh and continue working. We're not male and female, we're Ags. We work together, and there is unity. That's what bonfire is all about.

Laura Gilliland '89

Wanting to be included

EDITOR:

I disagree with Paul Schwarz's letter about women's role in the bonfire. I think that he is very selfish and doesn't understand the true meaning of the tradition of bonfire. In essence, his letter says that women are not physically capable of contributing and therefore should be excluded from building the bonfire.

I thought that bonfire was a tradition meant to promote school spirit and unity among the student body. I also thought that women were now fully part of the student body and allowed to participate in all A&M traditions. According to Mr. Schwarz, bonfire, at least, should be reserved only for the physically superior male.

Mr. Schwarz may be a member of a "superior group" (I doubt it), but does that mean that women cannot "love and defend the spirit and tradition of bonfire" also? I hope not. Can you blame us for wanting to help?

Joanne L. McBride
grad student

I'm a chauvinist, too

EDITOR:

In response to the letter by Mr. Schwarz, let me say this: I, too, am a bonfire chauvinist. I do not, however, follow your ideals. I agree that not everyone should work on stack, although I also believe that everyone should be given the opportunity to do so. It should be up to the individual to decide whether he or she is physically and mentally prepared to handle that work.

Many students may not be able to handle the work — not because of their sex, but because of their size, build or stamina. Therefore, please do not stereotype. I have known several women whose stature and work experience would definitely allow them to do such work, and just as many men who for the same basic reasons could not.

About two years ago, I earned the right to work on stack. To achieve that, I cut, carried and loaded logs. Those were some of the best times I have had, and you could feel bonfire spirit everywhere. I had worked on bonfire for four years, and in 1985 I became an OCA log crew chief. I am still proud of the fact that I was given that "nod of approval" by the redpots although I did not have the chance to work on stack because of my studies.

To me it was and still is special because I am probably not what you would expect: I am 5'6", 105 pounds and female.

Barbara Peterson Dowling '86

BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed

