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Aggie seniors, otherwise known as 'zips', make the trek of dying elephants across campus at A&M's Elephant Walk held each fall. The walk traditionally begins at the statue of Gen. Lawrence Sullivan Ross and ends at the bonfire site.

Seniors bid farewell to 'Aggieland' in messy, spirited trek across A&M

By Kelly S. Brown

Of The Battalion Staff

Each year, one day is set aside for graduating seniors at Texas A&M to wander in links and lines around campus, getting wet, wild and muddy, and the result is always the same — they end up dead at Kyle Field.

The death toll last year was nearly 2,000.

Elephant Walk is a tradition that marks the "death" of the senior class.

In its infancy, the tradition was a somewhat solemn ceremony where seniors would walk around campus as a class remembering the days spent at A&M — sad that they were leaving the University yet glad they were going on with their lives and careers.

In 1975 a new flavor was added to the event that since has caused controversy.

A lone junior stood from the window in his dorm and acted as though he was killing the seniors (dying elephants) with a gun.

This action by one Corps of Cadets member started a hysteria that grew for 12 years.

Seniors still traipsed aimlessly around the campus, but a different meaning was added to the walk as many students from the junior class would "stalk" the elephants. The juniors would wrestle in mud with the seniors, spray shaving cream and pull one another into fountains.

Ax handles, squirt guns, eggs and other weapons also were used to speed the zips (seniors) to their death. The elephants would fight back, chasing the juniors down.

In Fall '87, councils for the Classes of '88 and '89 strongly discouraged juniors from wrestling with the dying zips "for the preservation of Elephant Walk." The warning came after some students claimed Elephant Walk was harmful. In the past, students have broken and twisted ankles, arms and legs during the walk.

Dillard Stone, a former editor of *The Battalion*, wrote in a 1980 editorial that there is a time where tradition must yield to prudence and common sense.

"It's all fun and games until someone gets hurt," Stone said. "Injury in the middle of a carnival atmosphere produces one of the most somber atmospheres imaginable, because no one is supposed to get hurt."

"But there's a point where dressing up and playing army for a day goes too far. That's when someone gets hurt."

"The injury of one shouldn't sound the death knell for tradition. It should, however, serve as warning for future participants."

Seven years later the same issue was tossed around on the editorial pages, but this time the warning given years before was taken into consideration. What transpired was the warning from the class council — a warning that didn't sit well with the entire student body.

Doug Hall, Class of '87, said in a guest column in a November 1987 issue of *The Battalion*, "The Class of '89 is a bunch of wimps for not wanting to participate in this year's Elephant Walk. Come on! This is Texas A&M where men are men and ladies are ladies, not a patsy university like we're always calling those Austinites."

Hall said people got hurt during the "wild and wooly procession, but people are always getting hurt. And without knowing for sure, I dare say

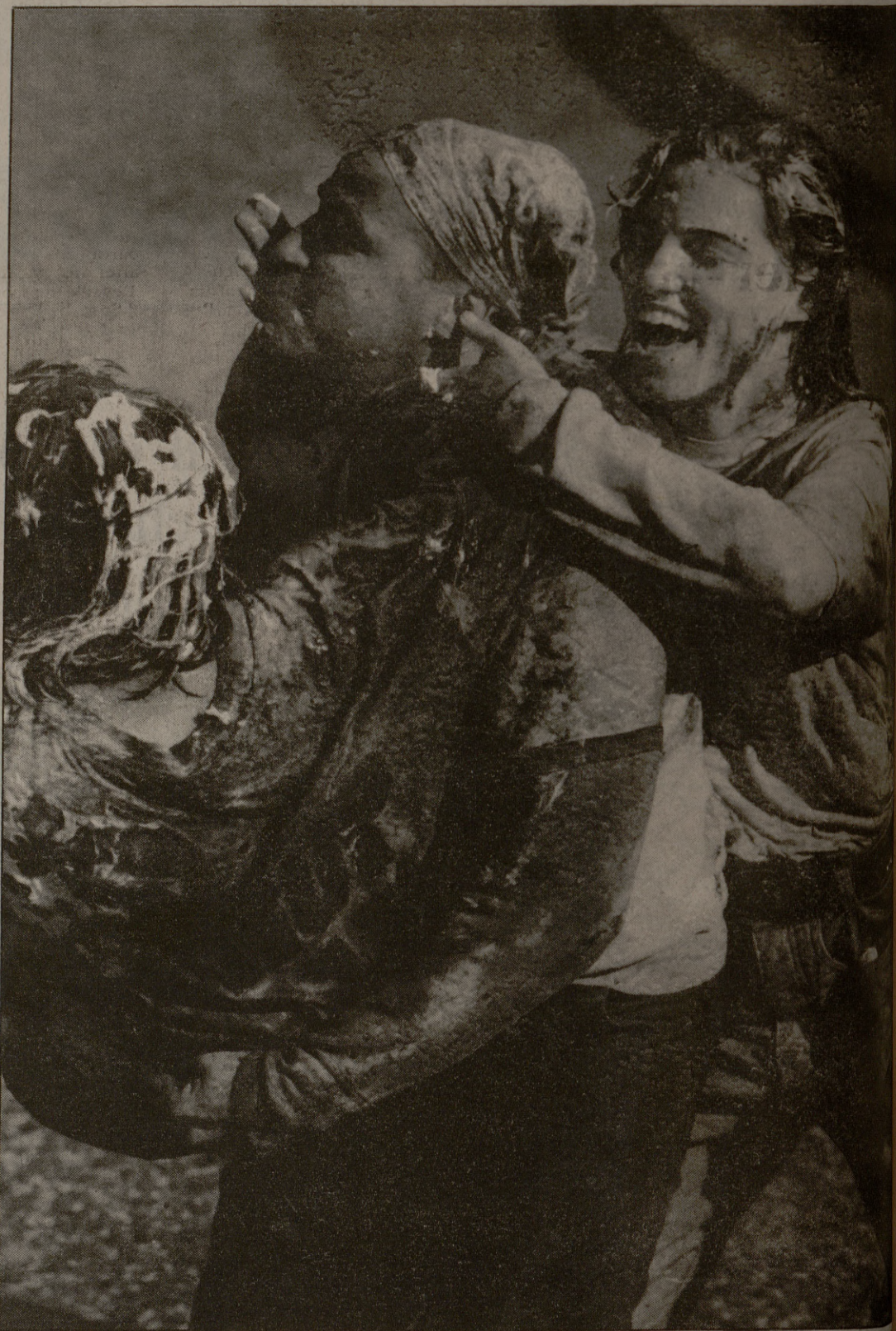


Photo by Phelan M. Eason

Nancy Newberry, a junior marketing major comes to the aid of a friend who was about to be thrown by a senior into the fountain in front of the old Chemistry Building during Elephant

Walk 1988. During the walk, in which juniors traditionally 'stalk' the dying 'elephants,' seniors trudge through water fountains and attempt to dodge shaving cream attacks.

that anyone who wasn't looking for trouble was someone that eventually got hurt."

The possibility of an individual getting hurt is not the only reason many people don't want juniors participating.

Paul Tisch, a senior industrial distribution major, said he thinks it should be a time for seniors.

"It's our last chance for our class as a whole to reflect and think about the last four years," Tisch said. "It is a solemn time — by this I don't mean sad. I just think in the past the mean-

ing of elephant walk was diverted with the junior involvement, but it's getting back on track."

The path of the walk varies from year to year, but it traditionally begins at the statue of Gen. Lawrence Sullivan Ross in front of the Academic Building and ends at the site of bonfire.

Stops are usually made at the Chemistry Building fountain, Fish Pond and Kyle Field.

The path is decided each year by "Redpots," members of the Corps of Cadets in charge of building bonfire.

The walk is led by the Redpots the yell leaders.

Dress for Elephant Walk is entirely casual; participants can go on getting rather messy. The walk is through two fountains, dodging water hoses and shaving cream, plunging into one of many holes at the bonfire site would be a good fit the traditional definition of "good, clean fun."

But the smiles that shine through the mud give the definite impression that the whole, filthy ordeal is more than worth it.