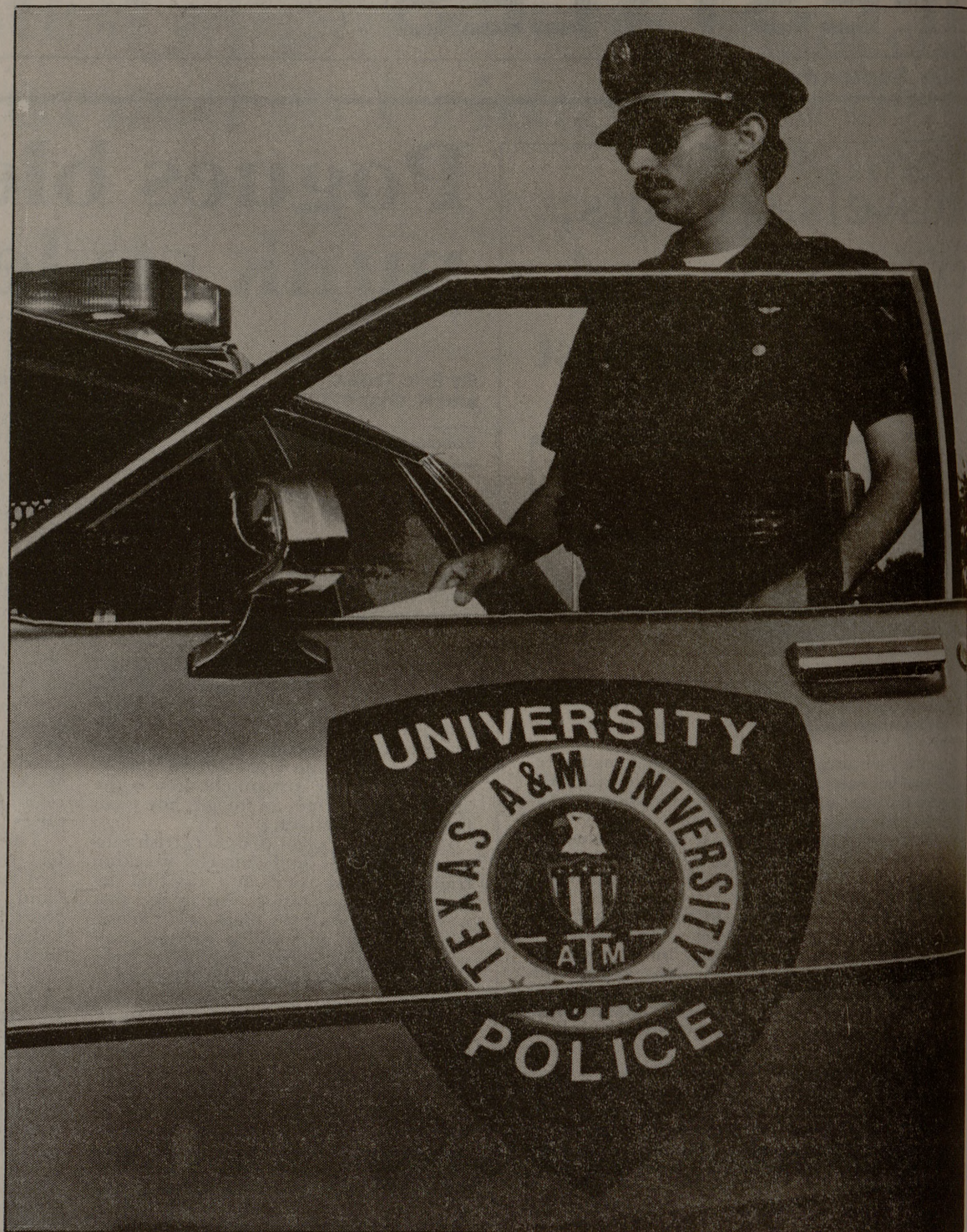




Villarreal talks with a student during a morning foot patrol. Patrols such as this are intended to make police officers more visible on campus.



Villarreal enters his car and prepares to patrol the Texas A&M campus. He says he enjoys his job because he is able to help others.

Protecting Aggieland

Developing students' trust is key to difficult job

Story By Don Kopf
Photos By Frederick D. Joe
Of The Battalion Staff

Almost everybody has a stereotyped image of police officers. With television constantly bombarding us with images of brutal, steel-chinned police, our images tend to be distorted. Any day of the week we can see the boys in blue busting everybody from drug lords to terrorists.

Well, sorry to spoil your image, but Sgt. David

"That is when everything is tied together: your training, your experience, your own intelligence, your own physical abilities, outwitting the bad guy and being able to catch him."

— David Villarreal
Police officer

Villarreal of the Texas A&M University Police Department isn't Robocop. He isn't an uncaring, cold, brutal, law-enforcement machine out to save mankind from the forces of darkness. He is a real, live, flesh-and-blood person trying to do his part to help his fellow man. That's one of the reasons he likes his job at the University police force so much.

Whether he is breaking up a fight, helping a drunk person get home safely or returning a stolen bicycle, he enjoys his job because he is helping others.

Originally, Villarreal fulfilled his lifelong desire to help others by working with the Texas A&M Emergency Medical Team and studying premed so that he could become a doctor. However, he tired of his studies and started looking for other ways to serve the public. That's when some police friends began to entice him into joining the A&M police force.

"I started hearing some exciting stories about

being a police officer," the A&M graduate said.

The more he looked at it, the more he realized that having a job on the force would allow him to do what he liked doing best.

Before judging Villarreal as a softheart who shouldn't be a licensed peace officer, stories from his four years on the A&M force should be considered. He has been in a 120-mile-an-hour car chase during which one wrong move meant instant death. He's broken up his share of fist fights and has had to confront more unpleasant situations than he cares to remember.

Although Villarreal smiles a lot when he talks about his job, his smile fades as he speaks about something that upsets him. He feels that sometimes there is a lack of appreciation from the people he is trying to serve. Many people have had an encounter with an officer and have developed an attitude toward other police based on that encounter.

"There are attitudes, but they vary depending on the person's background," he said.

Instead of trying to change public attitudes directly, Villarreal said police are being trained to be more approachable. They want people to feel more comfortable about working with and talking with police officers. He hopes that this will help to change student attitudes toward police so that police aren't prejudged. Part of this training is teaching campus police to be more patient and tolerant while still getting the job done.

"I've heard it said from both College Station and Bryan police that they could not put up with the static that we put up with from students and faculty," Villarreal said.

One of the main differences between regular city police and campus police is that campus police are more patient than regular city police and try to work with the campus population, he said.

"We try and be a little more sympathetic toward the public," he said. "We understand that somebody doesn't like to be detained because they match the description of a suspicious person in the area."

He said another difference between working

on the Texas A&M campus rather than in Bryan or College Station is that the overall population is more educated on campus. The criminal elements on campus tend to be more crafty than their city counterparts, Villarreal said.

Like any job, working on the police force does have its humorous moments.

"There's always the classic when you ask anybody who has been drinking how much beer they have had, you will always get the answer of one or two beers," he said.

Villarreal gave an example of a situation when he was helping a "happy" drunken individual who had consumed only "one or two beers" and kept volunteering to do a cartwheel to prove his sobriety. Although encouraged strongly not to, the man performed a perfect cartwheel. Villarreal said they let him go home with a friend.

Villarreal enjoys his job, and although adventure and public service originally enticed him to

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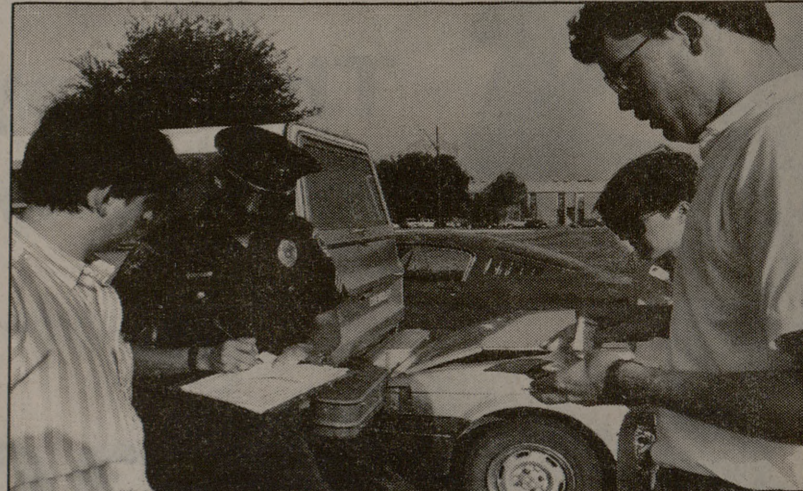
join, they aren't what keep him on the job. The pride he takes in his job is one reason he stays and the thrill he gets from actually catching criminals is another.

In fact, catching crooks is something from which he derives a great deal of satisfaction. It's the high point of being an officer, he said.

"That is when everything is tied together: your training, your experience, your own intelligence, your own physical abilities, outwitting the bad guy and being able to catch him."



Officers often keep watch for outdated inspection stickers and, as in this case, license plates that are incorrectly displayed.



Above: Villarreal assists motorist after they were involved in a minor auto accident near Zachry Engineering Center. Left: Before each shift, police officers attend a 15-minute briefing to discuss the day's upcoming activities.