THE FASCINATION WITH GUNS

Number of firearms in U.S. is growing

By Claudia Zavaleta
The Battalion

Guns. Some people hunt with them, some collect them and some have them for protection.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, in 1950, Americans owned 54 million guns. In households across America today, there are approximately 211 million guns, 71 million of them handguns. America's fascination with guns is definitely growing.

Chris Lee, a graduate student in veterinary physiology and a member of the National Rifle Association, owns seven guns: two shotguns, three rifles and two handguns. He said his love of guns was handed down to him by his father.

"I was raised around guns," Lee said, "and I've been shooting them since I was six. Guns are part of our heritage and they are passed down from generation to generation."

Not all gun owners are criminals, Lee said. Most gun owners are just private citizens who enjoy hunting and collecting various types.

"There are many law-abiding citizens who are avid gun collectors," Lee said. "I see it just like collecting cars. Different cars have different qualities and shooting a handgun is a lot different than shooting an automatic."

But for some, there is a deeper reason for wanting to own a gun.

Lee said having control over something that is dangerous and powerful excites some people.

"Guns are a powerful entity that you can control," he said. "It is like a piece of power in your hand, and that exhilarates a lot of people."

Kyle Gomez, a junior kinesiology major and a lance corporal in the Marine Corps, said shooting a gun is a power that most people don't have a chance to experience.

"It's a power trip," Gomez said. "With a gun in your hands, you have the ability to destruct. The first time I shot a gun I was apprehensive because I didn't know what to expect. It was scary, but then I learned how to control it and got it to do what I wanted."

Gomez said during his training he has used assault rifles, machine guns and pistols. He said the M-60 is his favorite because it has greater range and more power.

"People like guns because they like to be in a better position than others," he said. "Nothing can stand up to you when you have a gun. Like in the Old West, people had gun fights face to face because it was a show of power."

But a gun can easily end up in the wrong hands. Gun control advocates have successfully lobbied congress to enact laws that make it harder for people to attain handguns.

The Brady Bill (now a law), named after James S. Brady the former White House press secretary paralyzed by a gunshot wound during the 1981 assassination attempt of President Ronald Reagan, requires a five-day waiting period before someone can purchase a handgun.

For groups such as Handgun Control, Inc., the law is a victory against "senseless crime." Shawn Taylor Zelman, communications coordinator for

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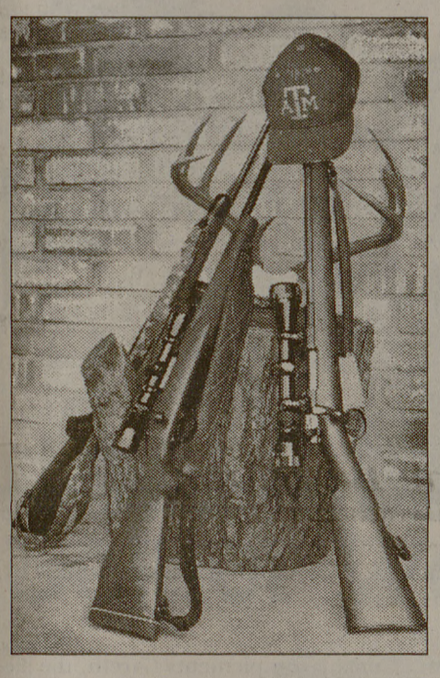

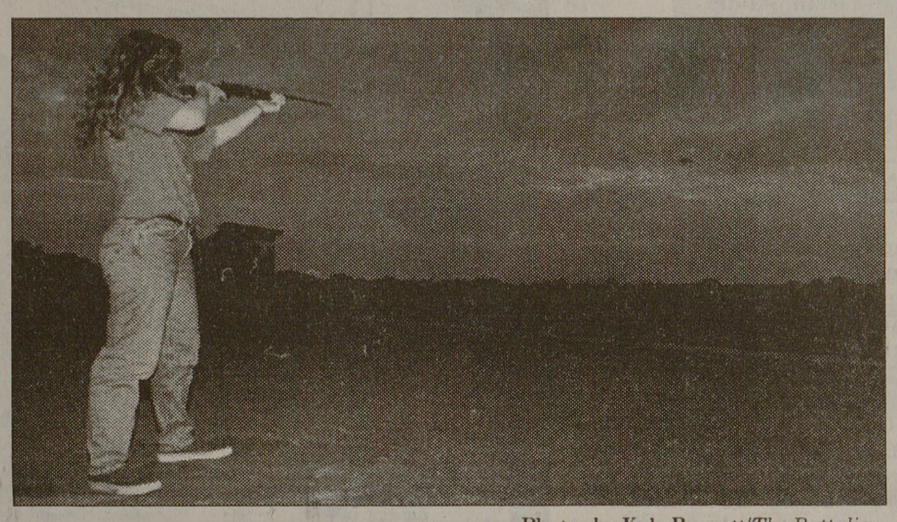

Photos by Kyle Burnett/*The Battalion*

(Left) Three rifles from left: A Remington .270-caliber, a Remington .2506-caliber and a Mauser 7.56 mm. (Above) **Farah Douglass** of College Station takes aim while shooting skeet at Arrowhead Gun Club. (Right) Looking down the barrel of a Smith and Wesson .357-caliber Magnum.

'Softly Call the Muster'

Former student's new book explores history of Aggie tradition

By Traci Travis
The Battalion

On April 21, 1903, Aggies gathered for a picnic on campus to celebrate San Jacinto Day.

John A. Adams Jr.'s new book "Softly Call the Muster" describes how this informal get-together grew into one of the greatest traditions in Aggieland.

Fifteen years ago, Smith wrote his first book "We are the Aggies." While gathering information for the book, he discovered the subject brought up most during conversations with Aggies was Muster.

Smith, Class of '73, said Muster is a tremendous focal point in the spring in which Aggies can reflect on A&M, their times here, their friendships and, of course, those who have passed away in the previous year.

"The one tradition that cuts across all lines — age groups, classes, Corps, non-regs, everything — is Aggie Muster," Smith said. "No other event by any other college or university has the magnitude of Aggie Muster."

Smith said the reason he wrote the book was to make an attempt to capture the essence of the tradition.

"I wanted to try to chronicle the evolution of Muster," he said. "I used the heavy footnoting in the back of the book to make sure there would be a kind of footprint of the years and key players."

"Softly Call the Muster" describes Muster from before 1900, looking at the roots of San Jacinto Day, to the present.

Smith said Muster was originally called San Jacinto Day. This was a key day in the history of Texas and was also a major holiday in which schools and banks closed, he said.

But the most significant event in the history of Muster was the 1942 Muster on Corregidor, Smith said. This was an event, he said, that shocked the world.

Aggies on the four-mile island were surrounded by 600 pounds of bombing a minute. In the middle of all of this disaster and shelling, the call went out for Aggies to gather, Smith said.

Because they were scattered all over the island in fox holes, the Aggies had no way to come together, he said. So instead, they had a roll call.

"Tom Dooley, who was a major there and a member of MacArthur's staff, said 'Muster is a roll call and a roll call is a Muster. So we have gathered,'" Smith said.

The Aggies literally had to smuggle the story through an Associated Press reporter who got it on the wire to the U.S., he said.

"It made the front page nationwide because it was the first glimmer of good news or defiance the U.S. had heard," Smith said.

Through the years, Smith has remained very involved in Muster.

But he said he hasn't been to a Muster on campus in 15 years because of speaking engagements throughout the U.S. One year, Smith spoke at three Musters in three different states. Muster 1994 marks his 25th Muster speech.

Smith said Muster has not changed much universally through the years.

"The meaning has definitely grown," he said. "The only significant change in the ceremony is with the candle-lighting which was added a few years ago."

But the organization, layout and format is basically the same as it was in 1943, he said. The magnitude of Muster attendance on campus is huge and today over 500 Musters are held worldwide, Smith said.

"No other university or college has as large an event in which more of their alumnae and friends reflect on their alma mater than Aggie Muster," he said.

The growth of Aggie Muster through the years

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Conan's comedic climb

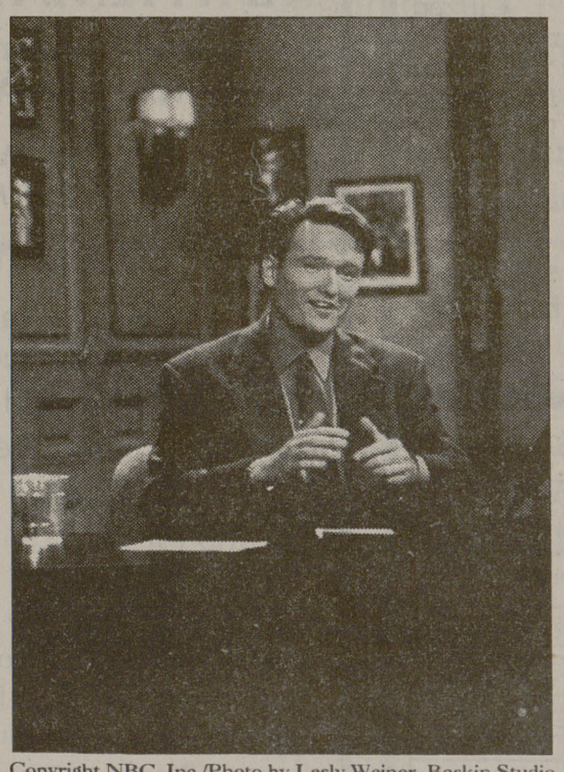
TV's newest late-night host carves own niche as Letterman's replacement

By Mark Smith
The Battalion

If someone told you that the new, wacky "Late Night" host, Conan O'Brien graduated from Harvard, would you believe him?

Well, it's true. Harvard. Class of '85. He graduated with a degree in American history and literature.

He comes from a town of stars — Brookline, Mass. John F. Kennedy, some of the guys from Aerosmith, Vera from "Alice." He was destined for greatness.



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Conan O'Brien (above) says his new role as "Late Night" host is much more satisfying than his behind-the-scenes work.

When he was chosen for the role of "Late Night," he was a relative unknown and was trying to fill the shoes of one of late-night's kings, David Letterman. It was tough coming in to replace Letterman, O'Brien said, but he said if he showed he was not a Letterman clone, people would come to accept him.

"I think what we're trying to do is to make it clear that we're not trying to do his thing," O'Brien said. "I always knew it would take time. People just have to kind of get to know you."

O'Brien also said Letterman's return to the show as a guest gave him some credibility.

"It was nice when David Letterman came on the show," he said. "He said, 'Well, you guys seem to be doing your own thing.' I appreciate that and it was good. It meant a lot to us."

But, with a name like Conan, how can you go wrong? Conan is his real name and not a reference to the sword-wielding comic book hero. His father is proudly Irish and got the name from old Gaelic, O'Brien said.

"My dad just wanted to give me an interesting name," O'Brien. "He didn't even know about the comic books.

"When I was a kid nobody knew what 'Conan' was. People really knew with the Schwarzenneger movies and those didn't come out until I was a senior in high school. My life's really been downhill since then."

It's been so downhill that he has written for such comedy shows as HBO's "Not Necessarily the News," NBC's "Saturday Night Live," (where he won an Emmy) and Fox's "The Simpsons." And now he hosts "Late Night."

Although he comes from a behind-the-scenes background in production and writing, O'Brien said he likes being in front of the camera more.

"I think it appeals to my nature more," he said. "I like it more and feel it is so much more satisfying."

O'Brien said he feels good about the direction the show is headed and thinks they have worked out the rough spots.

"Our ratings have been going up and I feel we've worked out a bunch of kinks," O'Brien said. "You can't do this show in a vacuum. You have to put it on the air and work stuff out."

Apparently whatever they changed worked. The show's ratings have improved, and more and more people are attending the tapings.

"We have a lot of young people come to the show and a lot of people stand up in back,"

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