



Nick Rodnicki / THE BATTALION

Mark Woodings, president of the A&M Skydiving Club, navigates through the sky above Coulter Field.

CONQUERORS OF THE SKY

Skydiving Club takes the fall for breathtaking adventures

By Margaret Claughton
THE BATTALION

The airplane circled overhead several times. Its small shape pierced holes in the low lying clouds while the buzzing engine's noise reverberated off the surrounding hangers.

Suddenly there was nothing to hear but the wind and some faraway traffic. The plane glided by again, this time, without a sound. Instantly the azure sky was dotted with colorful figures, falling gracefully but swiftly toward the green pasture below.

The three descending bodies stiffened and seemed to fall more rapidly until each one landed at a run on the muddy grass.

Mark Woodings, president of the A&M Skydiving Club, seeming unfazed by the 4,000-foot fall he had just experienced. He quickly brushed the mud from his feet and began walking back toward the airport.

With sweat sprinkled faces and slightly cocky grins, he and his two companions, Mormon Hughes and Tiffany Keller, entered the headquarters of the skydiving club, housed in an unused hanger at Coulter field airport.

The three took off their gear and put it away.

Woodings plopped down on the loveseat looking tired and dirty, yet refreshed.

The whole experience is a rush, he explained, with many different phases.

"The plane ride is pretty boring," he said. "But the cold air up there is 40 to 50 degrees. That gets you invigorated."

He said the crew dives from heights between 2,000 and 15,000 feet. After people jump from the plane, they free-fall at a rate of one thousand feet per 5 to 6 seconds before pulling the parachute cord.

Woodings said the free fall is one of the most intense parts of jumping.

"Once you get out, there is a period where you're accelerating," he said. "It feels like you've stuck your head out of a car going 120 miles per hour."

Woodings said the dive itself cannot be compared to any other experience.

"It's like nothing you've done before," he said. "Kind of like the first time you touched water as a kid. It's weird because you can't hold on to it."

Dave Parkerson, vice president of the club, said the dive is a tranquil, independent experience.

"The most intense part is seeing what no one else sees," he said. "Like passing by clouds that look close enough to touch."

Parkerson said the air where they dive is the most quiet, peaceful place he's ever been.

"When you're under the canopy, flying, it's so peaceful," he said. "Most people think it's just a fall but you actually do fly your body."

Parkerson said skydiving gives the feeling of invincibility.

"You are the only person that's going to react," he said. "It's like getting to know yourself and knowing what you're capable of. You can see the earth and everything you've ever known beneath you. You're in complete control of your life."

Although the experience of skydiving is tranquil and peaceful, it can be competitive.

The A&M Skydiving Club is gearing up to compete in the Collegiate Skydiving Championship to be held in Arizona. Last year, A&M placed second in the two-way team event and third in the nation in canopy relative work.

Currently, the club has 25 members. Parkerson said the membership is extremely diverse. "It's a bunch of people that are so different," he said. "They're from all walks of life who come together with one thing in common and that's that they love skydiving."

According to Ernie Kirkham, faculty adviser for the skydivers, the club was formed in the '60s but dissolved in the early '70s from lack of participation and funds. It was reformed in the early '80s by Ryszard Zadow, Jan Walker and Steve



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Woodings gathers his parachute after a jump.

Haskett.

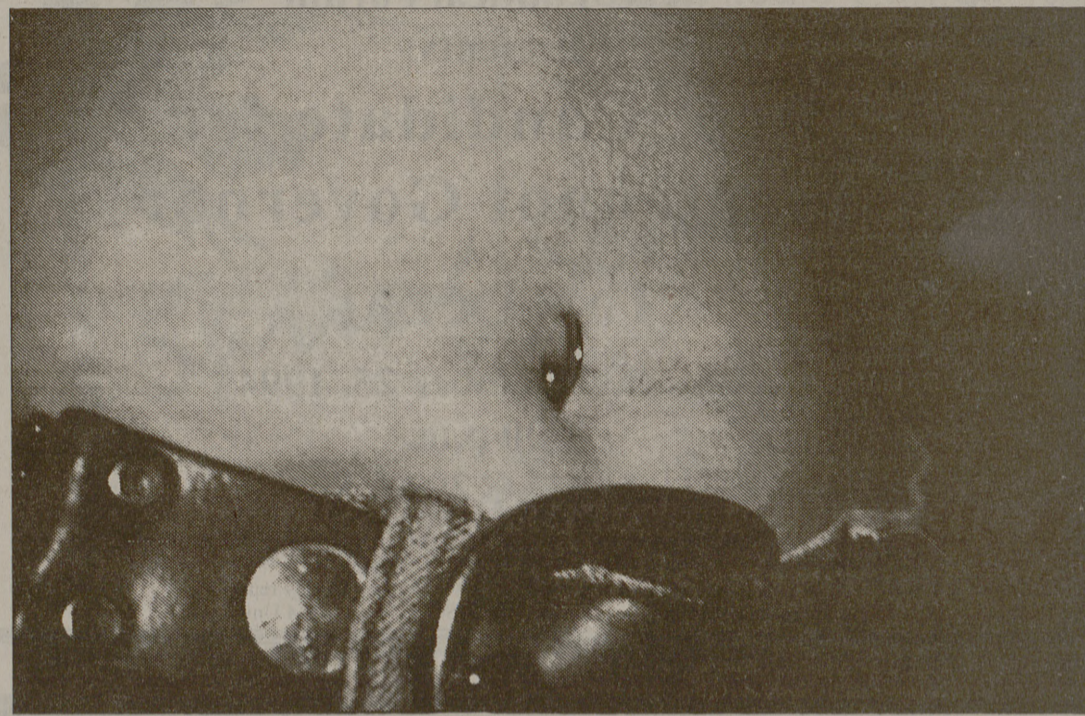
Haskett now owns Aggies Over Texas, an independent skydiving school which furnishes airplane rides for the skydiving club.

Both the club and Aggies Over Texas work to promote skydiving to people on campus and in the community.

Kirkham encourages people to visit Aggies over Texas and take a dive.

"It's something everyone should experience," he said. "It's amazing."

WHEN PIERCED EARS AREN'T ENOUGH



Stew Milne / THE BATTALION

Body piercing is becoming increasingly popular.

No pain, no gain for navel piercing experience

By Constance Parten
THE BATTALION

Body piercing has become extremely popular over the last few years. People are piercing everything from their noses and eyebrows to their nipples and genitalia. The reasons for piercing are varied, but most people who pierce their bodies agree it has become a very trendy thing to do.

I finally fell prey to the idea of body piercing last week after a few of my friends who had gone through the process said it wasn't that bad.

It all started at Double Dave's a few weeks ago. Several people were talking about the woman in the movie "Pulp Fiction" who pierced 18 parts of her body. That's when one of my friends told us she had pierced her navel almost a month before.

As she told us all about the pain, the cost and the needle, I became more and more intrigued. I started talking about the possibility of piercing my navel.

After reassuring myself that it would only hurt for a while, I resolved to do it. So, last Thursday afternoon, entourage in tow, I made the trek to the piercing mecca of Bryan.

I was calm and poised as we crossed the street. But when we entered the shop I lost all composure.

"I want a tatt. . . umm, a. . . I want to get my belly button pierced," I stammered nervously as the bearded, tattooed man looked at me.

"Follow me," he said as he grabbed a needle, a little silver ring with a ball on it, and a pair of pliers.

"Pliers? What does he need pliers for?" I asked my friends as they pushed me into the little back room. "What does he need pliers for?"

I wanted out, but my friends wouldn't let me.

Drumming my fingers nervously, I watched as the man wiped down my stomach with alcohol and prepared the needle. I chose not to look at the needle.

"Oh my God," one of my friends said as the bearded man poked the needle into my flesh. Lying on the inclined table, I looked down and saw a three-inch needle about the width of one-quarter inch drill bit sticking through the top of my navel.

"I can't watch," another friend said as she ran from the room.

"Does it hurt?" they asked. I gritted my teeth.

"Not too bad," I said. "It feels like someone is pinching my stomach really hard, but it isn't too bad."

He quickly pushed the needle through and replaced it with the silver ring. With the ring in place, he screwed the ends together with a little silver ball. It was over.

After paying the man \$46 for his services, we left. That was it. No life changing revelations. Nothing. Just a hole in my stomach that I have to pour hydrogen peroxide on, and I have to sleep on my back for a week. But nothing else.

As for the pain — well, it was bearable. Sitting down presented a problem for a few days afterward, but other than that I've had no problems. In fact, I really like it.

Despite old material, Pumpkins' 'Pisces Iscariot' pulls through

By Rob Clark
THE BATTALION

Smashing Pumpkins
"Pisces Iscariot"
Virgin Records
*** 1/2 (out of five)

It's easy to get excited about a new release from Smashing Pumpkins. After all, they are one of the most innovative and creative rock groups around.

But it's hard to get excited about an album that basically says, "These are the songs that weren't good enough to make our albums."

Because, you see, "Pisces Iscariot" is an album made up of old B-sides, demos and unreleased material. And considering the excellence of their first two albums, "Gish" and "Siamese Dream," it's no surprise that these songs didn't quite make the cut.

But Billy Corgan and company manage to pull it off anyway.

The album starts off unlike the Pumpkins' past efforts, with a timid ballad called "Soothe." Corgan's soft vocals are accompanied only by an acoustic guitar on the song. And while it's not a bad song, it puts you to sleep, instead of waking you up like "Siamese Dream's" lead track "Cherub Rock."

"Plume" is a slow grinder of a song with uncharacteristically carefree lyrics, compared to Corgan's seemingly eternal moodiness. "Oh yay, another day, gotta play . . . I just want to have some little fun," Corgan sings. Perhaps this is a sign of the band trying to stop taking themselves so serious-

ly. Maybe Corgan and bass guitarist D'Arcy will learn to laugh, rather than their notorious whining, when a shoe is so intelligently thrown on stage during their performances.

And the sound of their live performances come through in "Hello Kitty Kat." With its heavy metal rumble and unintelligible lyrics, one can easily imagine Corgan onstage attacking his guitar. A definite far cry from "Soothe" and "Disarm."

With the paradox of slow and fast songs, Corgan delicately dances along the border of tenderness and madness. It is that balance that keeps Smashing Pumpkins interesting.

And even though "Pisces Iscariot" contains old material, Corgan's brilliance makes it worthwhile.



Smashing Pumpkins