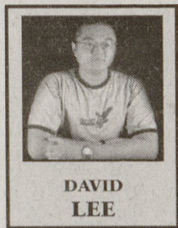


Through Unity, Strength

Proposed off-campus "wildcat" bonfire should not be supported



DAVID LEE

Let me make something very clear — I am as pro-bonfire as anyone else on this campus. Considering my current position, this assertion may be a little hard to swallow.

However, it must be stated that these words are not coming from some pessimistic "two-percenter."

Off-campus bonfire Special Series Part 1 of 2

I have had the fortune of donning my robes, boots, pot and gloves at all hours of the day in previous fall semesters. As much as I would like to deny it, I have always taken to heart the ideals of "unity" and "tradition" that are espoused in an endless mantra at Texas A&M University.

Considering all of this, it is natural that I am concerned with the possibility of an unofficial "wildcat" bonfire being held off campus. The driving force behind this bonfire is the student organization Keep the Fire Burning (KTFB). Formed soon after the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse, KTFB was a grassroots effort to save our sacred Bonfire. Petitions were compiled, unified T-shirts were distributed — their effort was extremely commendable. If anything, KTFB existed as a watchdog that influenced Texas A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen's eventual decision not to end Bonfire. Based on that outcome, it is undeniable that we owe this organization and its members a debt of gratitude.

However, these are the facts: Bowen's official decision mandates that Bonfire will continue in the fall of 2002, at the earliest. Any future Bonfire construction on campus will be on the shortest of leashes.

with professional engineers overseeing the work of students. Safety restrictions including the elimination of "cut" and the drastic redesign of "stack" will be imposed.

Common sense dictates that, for KTFB, its primary mission is accomplished. Despite whatever changes the University has made, the fire will keep burning — the tradition has been saved.

Bowen's decision may not be good enough for KTFB. Too long, too little, essentially. Plans for the "wildcat" bonfire this fall are proceeding under a cloud of secrecy. Possible locations are being scouted out and a long line of former students has lined up to foot the bill. KTFB has made it very clear that its bonfire will not occur unless the student body supports it and improvements over safety and security can be made.

It is at this turning point that all support for KTFB's efforts must stop. I do respect their gumption, attention to detail and "can-do" spirit. My respect pales in comparison to my level of anxiety and outrage.

By not agreeing with the University's position, KTFB and its supporters are making three major mistakes.

First, they are essentially absolving the student body from any blame in the deaths of our 12 fellow Aggies. It would be saying that the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire was incorrect — that Aggie culture does not need to be more flexible, that we do not need time to flush out the upperclassmen and start anew.

I cannot accept that logic. Whether we like to face it or not, our inability to listen to constructive criticism in Bonfires past contributed to the tragedy of last year — no matter how safe and error-free previous Bonfires were. The blood is on our hands.

Second, an indication of disunity and infighting between the student body and the University will invite the scrutiny of the national news media yet again. Al-

though they will return regardless to cover any memorial services and remembrances, it would be foolish for us to give them something negative to cover.

My stomach turns at the thought of more news trucks and reporters than necessary roaming our campus.

Third, a poor example is being set for the Class of 2004. Along with the Class of 2003, these are the Aggies entrusted with resurrecting Bonfire. Upperclassmen — we cannot argue among ourselves while the fish class is hung out to dry. We must invite them into a united student body that will prepare them for the return of the legitimate Bonfire.

It is ironic that the Aggie ideals KTFB originally set out to preserve are now the very things they are obliviously set on un-

dermining. Think about it — Bonfire is a tradition rooted in unity and the preservation of the Aggie Spirit. By initially fighting to preserve Bonfire itself, KTFB was fighting the good fight.

But it must be understood that Bonfire is not an end within itself — it is one of many vehicles that convey those ideals we hold dear. By organizing an unofficial bonfire that conflicts with the University's position, KTFB is inviting chaos. Students will be forced to choose sides — destroying any shred of unity among the student body.

We need to think long and hard about the choice before us — I certainly have.

Every fiber of my being tells me that the "wildcat" bonfire is wrong.

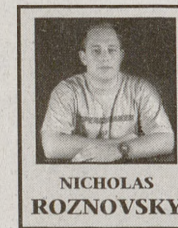
— David Lee is a senior economics and journalism major.



ADRIAN CALCANEO/THE BATTALION

Reminder of the bad old days

Russian handling of submarine tragedy reminiscent of USSR



NICHOLAS ROZNOVSKY

The desperate attempt to save the 118 men trapped aboard the Russian submarine Kursk is now over. As a nation mourns the young men who died on the floor of the Barents Sea, many Russians are angry and have begun to publicly wonder whether the Russian government made a real attempt to rescue the trapped seamen.

Since the disaster was first reported on Aug. 12, the Russian government appeared, at first indifferent, and later inept in dealing with the catastrophe. Now, as the Russian people mourn their loved ones and Russian President Vladimir Putin consoles the families of the deceased, it is becoming clear to the grieving families and the world at large that the "new" Russian government is really just the same Soviet bureaucracy under a different flag.

Throughout the crisis, the Russian government reacted just like its Soviet predecessor customarily did — slowly, guardedly and often contradictorily. Faced with the prospect of losing face and admitting weakness to the world, the Russian leaders chose to hold their cards close to their chests. In the end, they gambled away the lives of

118 young sailors. The Russian need for an immediate coverup quickly led to a number of conflicting reports.

First, the submarine had been rammed by another Russian boat while conducting exercises. Then it had been hit by a Western submarine spying in the area. Finally, the Russians were able to admit the possibility existed that a massive internal explosion caused the ship to sink. Now, according to reports from the BBC, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev still believes that a foreign submarine was involved in the sinking of the Kursk, although no firm evidence has surfaced to support such a claim.

As details about the incident slowly emerge, many media outlets are concerned that a number of "facts" about the incident initially provided by the Russian government are questionable at best, such as the exact time of the incident and the reports of crewmen banging on the hull of the ship up to two days afterward.

It now appears that the vast majority of the crew was killed in the initial explosion and subsequent influx of seawater into the hull. The amount of misinformation coming from the Russian government is confounding both the families of the dead seamen and journalists trying to uncover the truth surrounding the incident. The frustration felt around the world was perhaps summed up best in the daily Russian

newspaper Ivestia when it asked, "What if they had not lied to us? ... Now it is too late."

Perhaps the most vexing question surrounding the tragedy concerns the Russian refusal of outside help with the rescue efforts. Although Putin now claims that the West's offers were accepted "immediately," the stark truth remains that the United States and Britain publicly offered assistance two days before Russians begrudgingly acquiesced to Western help.

By the time the Russians swallowed their pride and admitted they could not undertake the rescue effort alone, the sailors on board the Kursk had probably all died. Many Russians are now wondering how many young sailors could have been saved if their government had put its people before its pride.

A number of the victims' families are expressing anger toward President Putin, a man known for his "hands-on" approach to governing, yet conspicuously detached from the Kursk affair. Instead of overseeing the rescue efforts personally, Putin left the job to his subordinates. In fact, he did not even feel the need to interrupt his own vacation. As he now visits the families of the dead, Putin is facing their indignation and frustration with his government.

Although Putin and his administration claim to be guiding the Russian people into a new era of governance, the tragedy of the

Kursk shows that the old habits of Soviet rule die hard. While the "new" Russians can hold out their hands for billions of dollars in economic aid, they still cannot bring themselves to ask the West for help when they need it the most.

By devoting its energies to covering up the Kursk incident, Russia has shown the same disregard for human life that the Soviet Union displayed while covering its own tracks after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

In the end, it was not a lack of training or inferior maintenance work that killed the crew of the Kursk. Mother Russia consigned those men to their deaths.

As the Russian government scrambles to assign blame for the tragedy and exonerate itself of any wrongdoing, it is doubtful that anyone will re-evaluate the decisions that ultimately doomed the sailors on board the Kursk.

The government will undoubtedly make a very visible effort to assure its people that such an incident will never happen again. The Russian people will add the loss of the Kursk as another sad chapter to their long and calamitous history. And since nothing will really change, the same Kremlin mind-set that killed the men aboard the Kursk will continue to cost innocent Russians their lives.

Nicholas Roznovsky is a senior political science major.

Bull Board

Good Bull — From the Freshman Welcome Day volunteers to the cadre of Corps of Cadets upperclassmen, hearty pats on the back are due for a surprisingly smooth on-campus move-in week.

The mobs of lost freshmen, with mom and pop in tow, were minimized thanks to the volunteers' hard work.

Believe it or not, Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services (PTTS) deserves some of the credit, too.

The usual standstill traffic alongside the Commons and the Quadrangle was sped up to a tortoise's crawl under PTTS' watchful eye. If only it were as effective the rest of the year.

Bad Bull — "I can't believe the fat, naked gay dude won the million dollars!"

This was the collective yell of frustration heard across the nation Wednesday evening as the season finale of the reality television show "Survivor" aired.

Why the letdown? Because "Rich" — the victorious corporate trainer from Rhode Island — connived and schemed his way to the prize.

Granted, he recognized the game's theme of self-preservation and did everything in his power to turn his castmates against each other.

However, the "villain-esque" outcome allows everyone to lose a little more faith in the concept of fairness.

— David Lee



BRANDON HENDERSON/THE BATTALION

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:
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