

Abroad at Pointe du Hoc and back home at A&M, James Earl Rudder built a legacy of courage and vision

RUDDER'S BIG BATTLES

STORY BY ROLANDO GARCIA PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AGGIELAND



Far left: James Earl Rudder played a pivotal role in the D-Day invasion at Pointe du Hoc, making him one of A&M's most heralded war heroes.

Left: Rudder speaks to Malcolm Hall, student body president, in 1962. Back at Texas A&M, Rudder stood strong by his vision to admit women to the University and to make the Corps non-compulsory.

When James Earl Rudder took the helm of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in 1959, it was an all-male military school with an enrollment of 7,000 students, most of whom were in the Corps of Cadets.

When Rudder died 10 years later, the small, agrarian school had become Texas A&M University, a coed institution of more than 15,000 students — only a fifth of whom were cadets — well on its way to becoming a world-class university offering an array of academic and research programs.

The transformation A&M underwent during the 1960s was not an accident but the result of Rudder's vision of a great university anchored in its traditions and his courage to implement unpopular reforms, said John Adams Jr., Class of 1973. Adams has written three books on A&M's history, including Keepers of the Spirit which documents the 125-year history of the Corps of Cadets.

"He played the leading role, and he was the only person who could do this," Adams said. "He was an Aggie

and a war hero, and he understood that A&M had to change."

When Rudder arrived in College Station in 1958 to become A&M's vice president, he had little experience in higher education but an impressive background. Rudder played center on the A&M football team and graduated in 1932.

Rudder, an officer in the Army Reserve, was called to active duty in 1941 and organized the Second Ranger Battalion in 1943 and commanded a pre-invasion D-Day mission at Omaha Beach to silence the German guns at the top of the hundred-foot cliffs at Normandy's Pointe du Hoc. One of the most heralded war heroes in A&M's history, Rudder received the Distinguished Service Cross, Legion of Merit, Silver Star, two Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart.

At the beginning of a turbulent decade that would bring about many far-reaching reforms, A&M was facing sagging enrollment numbers, low retention rates and a conflict of visions,

Adams said, between those determined to keep A&M a small, all-male, agrarian school and those who believed A&M was on the fast-track to irrelevance unless it grew and expanded its scope beyond the Corps.

The two most controversial reforms were admitting women and making membership in the Corps voluntary, both of which strongly were opposed by Aggie traditionalists.

"He (Rudder) had very vocal opposition from alumni, the Board of Directors and A&M Mothers Clubs. All of these groups were extremely conservative and traditionalist and were resistant to change," Adams said. "They told him that he was ruining the school and that 'old Army had gone to hell.'"

Rudder was loudly booed at a meeting of all cadets as he attempted to explain the impact of allowing women into A&M. But despite intense opposition, the Board voted in 1963 to open enrollment to women after Board chairman Sterling C. Evans hastily convened a meeting,

when he knew key opponents would not be able to attend, Adams said.

However, women did not begin to enroll in large numbers or become a part of campus life until 1972, when female dorms opened, Adams said.

Opening the school to women and making the Corps non-compulsory were just part of Rudder's far-reaching reforms that included a building construction frenzy that would transform the campus, expansion of graduate and research programs and a greater emphasis on academics.

"It wasn't just about letting girls in, that just happened to be the lightning rod," Adams said. "They (opponents) were afraid that all these changes would destroy the bedrock traditions and culture that made A&M different from other schools."

Rudder's greatest legacy, Adams

said, is being able to initiate the reforms A&M needed without tossing aside the traditions and culture that made A&M unique.

"Rudder was a stabilizing factor, and he ensured that we wouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater and jettison all the things that make A&M different from every other school," Adams said. "As an Aggie, he understood tradition and he knew that students didn't come to A&M just for a diploma."

Eddie Davis, Class of 1967 and president of the Texas A&M Foundation, said Rudder's vision and courage saved A&M from stagnation and irrelevance.

"The institution was dying. A small, all-male military school, the world around it was changing. Unless you were a kid without much money, or you had some family connections, A&M didn't have much appeal," Davis said. "Those changes have helped make A&M what it is today, and only Rudder, an Aggie and a war hero, could have done it."

Women, minorities changed face of A&M

By ELIZABETH RAINES THE BATTALION

A headline from a July 2, 1927 article of The Bryan-College Station Eagle titled "8 states and 2 nations are represented in the Student Body at A&M College this Summer" is evidence of how far Texas A&M University has come in diversifying itself in the last 125 years.

When the University opened its doors in 1876, officially, only white males were allowed to attend. It took 87 years for Texas A&M to integrate both by gender and color,

which happened in 1963.

John Adams Jr., Class of 1973 and author of three books on Texas A&M's history, said there was not nearly as much resistance to the integration of African-Americans as there was to women.

"The biggest [problems] were bringing women to A&M," Adams said. "There was much more excitement over that. The issue of blacks was much ado about nothing."

Adams said that even the Texas A&M Mother's Clubs were against women attending A&M. He said everyone kept wanting to know "why do they need to come here when there are other schools that they can go to?"

Suanne Pledger in Heidi Ann Knippa's thesis "Salvation of a University: Admissions of Women to Texas A&M," recalled that the first year females were present on campus that they were met with hostility from the student population and certain portions of the faculty.

"For the first time, I knew what people [felt] when they [were] considered as having the wrong color or nationality," Pledger said.

Knippa said women at A&M encountered an unwelcome environment in the 1960s. She said that, in the beginning, the University did not provide campus housing for women or an adequate amount of women's restrooms.

Women were accepted into A&M on a limited basis in 1963, and full admission of women began in 1971. The Corps of Cadets allowed women to join in 1974.

The University began accepting African-American students in 1963. Three African-American students enrolled in A&M summer school programs as "special students" in the summer of 1963. In 1964, five African-American freshmen became the first to join the Corps of Cadets. In 1967, Charles Dixon Jr. became the first African-American to graduate from Texas A&M. Fred

McClure became the first African-American to become student body president in 1976, one hundred years after the University opened.

Although male international students were attending Texas A&M before either women or African-Americans could attend, their enrollment steadily has increased since Texas A&M began. According to university archives, 43 international students attended A&M in 1954, 546 in 1965, 968 in 1974 and 1,988 in 1996.

Adams said when he attended A&M, nobody paid much attention to the diversification of the University.

"We never thought of it as diversity," Adams said. "Things moved on. Life was fine."

Texas A&M University President Dr. Ray M. Bowen said the University is inadequate when it comes to minority enrollment.

Dr. Frank Ashley, Director of Texas A&M Admissions, said the current minority enrollment is not up to A&M standards.

"I think that a lot of people still have perceptions that everyone here is in the Corps of Cadets and that there are hardly any minorities here at all," Ashley said. "One thing we are trying to do is change that perception."

Ashley said he tells potential minority students and families to come to Texas A&M and see if it is the place for them.

"Being a minority myself, I will tell kids that A&M is not for everyone but to come and see for yourself if it is the place for you," Ashley said. "If we can get the kids on campus, we will capture them, and they'll come to A&M."

Both Bowen and Ashley cited the Hopwood v. University of Texas decision of 1996, that struck down affirmative action at the university level as one of the reasons for the still low minority numbers.

"I think that Hopwood created a big obstacle for us at Texas A&M," Ashley said. "Hopwood limited a lot of the financial resources that were available for minority students."

Ashley said that although A&M's minority enrollment took a "nose dive" after the

Hopwood decision, the minority enrollment numbers are slowly going back up.

"We are in a recovery period now," Ashley said. "We were doing good in the early 1990s; my goal in admissions is to surpass what we did."

Ashley added that although the top ten percent rule is in place to help increase minority enrollment, it is not dealing with the financial problems that they are running into. Ashley said the problem does not lie in students being admitted to Texas A&M but in getting them to attend.

"The top ten percent rule gets kids accepted, but because the financial aspect is missing, students are choosing to attend other universities out of the state," Ashley said. "My dream as director of admissions is that the student population here at Texas A&M would reflect that of the state of Texas population," Ashley said.

Advertisement for the Texas A&M Cadet Nutcracker Series. It features a large illustration of a nutcracker soldier in a dark uniform with a peaked cap and a sword. Text includes: 'Introducing the Texas A&M Cadet Nutcracker Series™ by College Station artist Nadine Stuth. The Officer of the Day™ is available at the Texacats booth during the Memorial Student Center Hospitality Committee's Craft Fair (Nov. 29th-30th) and online at AggieLandGifts.com'. A vertical banner on the right side of the ad reads 'THE TEXAS A&M® CADET NUTCRACKER SERIES™'.

Advertisement for the AggieLand Memorial Service. It features a large photograph of the Texas A&M dome building at night, illuminated with lights. Text includes: '4:30 6 PM 12 A 1 AI Get y 9/2 or F'. At the bottom right, it says 'Sponsored by Memorial Stu'.

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When David asked by a visitor what "Gig 'Em" meant, he said it was one of many things that cannot be explained in a traditional science class. "I think that C that people don't such an everyday Gig 'Em was c practice before University footb frogs — poking t mon expression a asked what the A horned frogs, he Giving a thur became the first

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