

125 Years Tradition Bound by Spirit



GUY ROGERS • THE BATTALION

practice so everyone would know the yells for the next day's game."

The yell leader position was created in 1907, said Kevin Graham, a senior yell leader and marketing major.

"The cadets had dates come in from Texas Women's College, but since the Ags never won any games, the ladies threatened not to come to Kyle (Field). The upperclassmen told the fish to keep the ladies entertained," Graham said. "They got their hands on white janitors' uniforms and waved their hands to keep them entertained. After a while, the upperclassmen took the role on for themselves."

Among the most visible and ubiquitous symbols of Aggie tradition is the Aggie ring, said John McFate, chairman of the Traditions Council and a senior biomedical sciences major. To earn an Aggie ring, a student must have completed 95 credit hours and have senior standing.

McFate said the only change to the design of the Aggie ring since its creation in 1894 has been the change in name from the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas to Texas A&M University in 1963.

"There is a lot of symbolism on the ring," McFate said. "The shield symbolizes the protection of our alma mater. Inside the shield are 13 stripes representing the 13 original colonies. Inside the shield also are five stars representing the five stages of development we go through here: mind, body, spirit, emotional poise and integrity of character. On top of the ring is your class year."

"When you get your ring, the year faces you. At ring dance, you turn your ring around so the year faces outwards. This means you are ready to face the world," McFate said.

A more solemn tradition, and one that Aggies of any classification can participate in is Silver Taps.

Held on the first Tuesday of the month following the death of a current student, Silver Taps is a ceremony held in honor of the student or students

who have passed away. During the day, flags on campus are flown at half-staff, and the students' name, class, major and hometown are posted at the base of the flagpole in the Academic Plaza.

At 10 p.m., all lights on campus are turned out, McFate said, and hymns are played from Albritton Tower, ending with "Amazing Grace" and "How Great Thou Art."

"At 10:30 p.m., the Ross Volunteers march into Academic Plaza at a slow cadence and fire a 21-gun salute," McFate said. "After that, a special rendition of 'Silver Taps' is played from atop the Academic Building to the north, south and west. Not the east because the sun will never rise on that Aggie again."

Another tradition that honors fallen Aggies is Muster.

Smyth said Muster was first held in 1883 by an association of former cadets who read a roll call and said, "In reunion, we meet and live over again our college days, to victories and defeats won and lost upon the drill ground and classroom. Let every alumni answer at roll call."

The most famous Muster occurred on Corregidor Island in 1943, led by George Moore, Class of 1908. Amid flying bullets, Aggies read a roll-call for the present, Smyth said.

During the 1980s, the Corps of Cadets was invited to the San Jacinto Battleground for a re-enactment of Texas' fight for independence. Smyth said that the Corps was to play the Mexican Army while the state guard played the Texans.

"Since Aggies don't like to lose, when they staged the battle, Mexico won, and so the Aggies were not asked to return," Smyth said. "That was April 21, so Muster began to be held on April 21, with all sorts of field days and fun stuff."

The Muster tradition has developed into an all-day affair. Members of the 50-year reunion class are invited to celebrate their anniversary, there is a flag-raising ceremony at sunrise and at 7 p.m. the Muster ceremony occurs.

At the Muster ceremony, a speaker addresses the reunion class and students and there is a roll call for the absent — Aggies who have passed away in the last year in the College Station area.

"Friends and family answer 'here' to symbolize that although the Aggie has fallen, they are still with us in spirit," Smyth said. "After that, the Ross Volunteer firing squad fires a 21-gun salute, and 'Silver Taps' is played for the fallen Aggies."

From the solemn to the amusing, Aggie traditions are fairly well-known, even if not all of their origins are understood by students, Smyth said. But, she added, these traditions are the reason many students choose A&M.

"I think that most Aggies have a general understanding of all of our traditions as far as history goes," Smyth said. "Most Aggies have a general idea of all traditions, most Aggies value all tradi-

Tradition sets A&M aside as the oldest institution of higher learning in Texas

By MAUREEN KANE
THE BATTALION

When David Leefink, Class of 2000, was asked by a visitor at Texas A&M this weekend what "Gig 'Em" meant, Leefink said he thought about it but was not sure. He is not alone — Gig 'Em is one of many traditions that Aggies hold dear but cannot explain, said Paige Smyth, a Traditions Council member and sophomore biomedical science major.

"I think that Gig 'Em is one of the traditions that people don't know the origins of because it is such an everyday thing," Smyth said.

Gig 'Em was coined by Pinky Downs at a yell practice before the 1930 Texas Christian University football game. Smyth said giggling frogs — poking them with sticks — was a common expression at the time, and when Downs was asked what the Ags were going to do to the TCU horned frogs, he said, "We're going to Gig 'Em!"

Giving a thumbs up and saying "Gig 'Em" became the first hand sign of the Southwest

Conference and remained so until the University of Texas created the "Hook 'Em Horns" hand sign 25 years later.

"Gig 'Em" remains a popular expression and a universal sign of approval and support, Smyth said.

Students may hear "Gig 'Em" all over campus, but one place that they will definitely hear it is at Midnight Yell Practice — the place it originated and where it has become part of a yell.

Led by yell leaders, the Midnight Yell tradition began around 1920, said Sam Seidel, head yell leader and a senior animal science major. He said the first Midnight Yell consisted of "a bunch of cadets who were real excited about the next day's game and went around campus picking up people and the band, and brought them to the YMCA building."

At that yell practice, the yell leaders got up on the steps of the YMCA building and started making up yells and had a yell practice at midnight. Yells changed from week to week, depending on who they played, so they had a Midnight Yell

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