

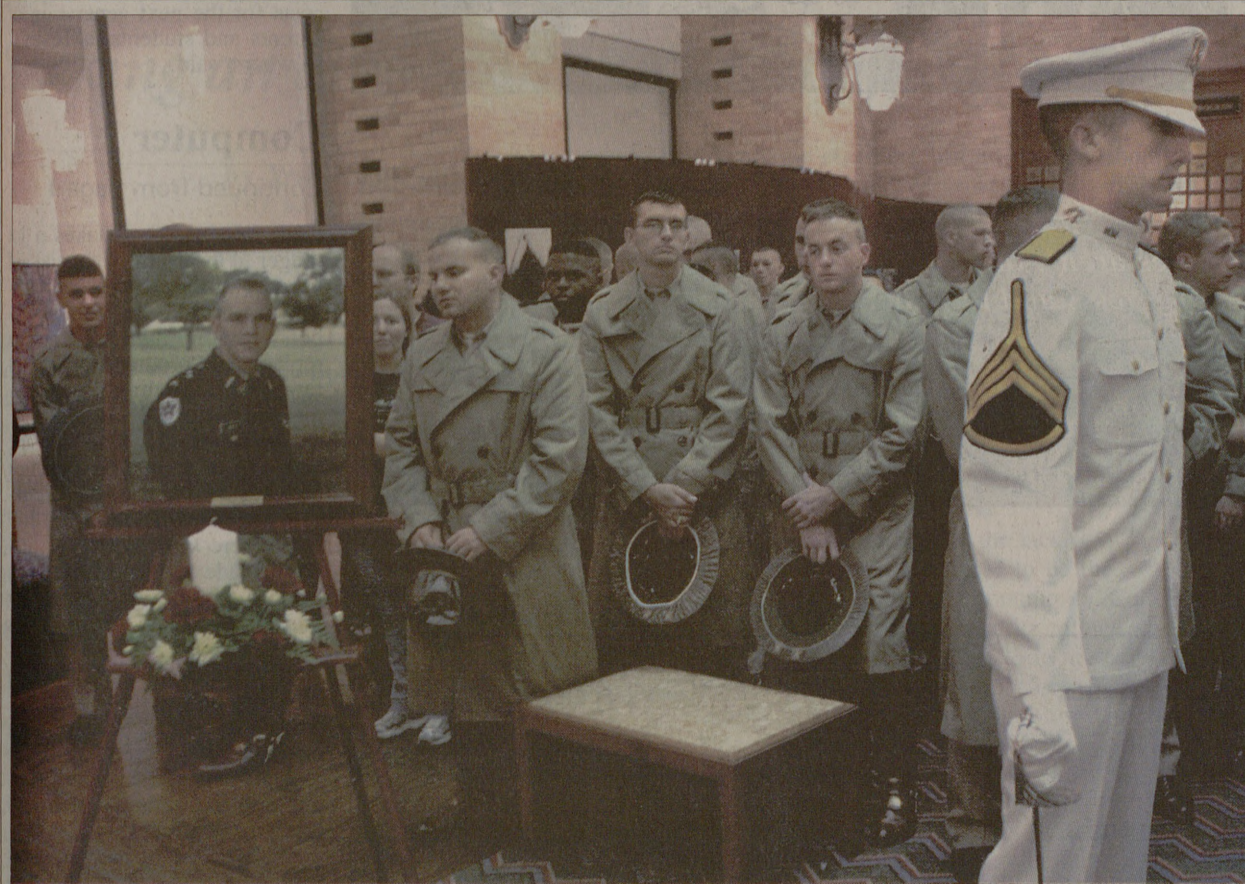
THE BATTALION

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JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Above: A Ross Volunteer stands by the picture of **Nathan West**, one of the 12 students killed in the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse, before the candlelight ceremony held in the Memorial Student Center Flag Room on Monday. Right: **Tim Kerlee Sr., Janice Kerlee, Carolyn Adams and Ken Adams** stand in silence while "Amazing Grace" is played on bagpipes. The **Kerlees** lit a candle in front of Bonfire victim **Timothy Doran Kerlee Jr.**'s photo, while the **Adams** paid tribute to their daughter, Bonfire victim **Miranda Denise Adams**. For more photos, please visit www.thebattalion.net.



JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Four years later Loved ones remember Bonfire victims at candlelight tribute

By **Bart Shirley**
THE BATTALION

At 2:42 a.m. on Nov. 18, 1999, 12 Aggies were killed and 27 injured when the Aggie Bonfire they were constructing toppled over. On a gray, drizzling evening four years later, several hundred Aggies gathered in the Memorial Student Center Flag Room to pay tribute to the fallen in a candlelight vigil.

Large photographs of the 12 victims and a collage of pictures of the event four years ago, were displayed on easels in the Flag Room. Two members of the Ross Volunteers stood at attention Monday, guarding the photographs.

At 6 p.m., family members, friends and representatives of the dead filed into the Flag Room from the Forsyth Gallery. Each victim's name was called, and their respective family members stepped forward, lit a maroon candle from a central flame and lit a white candle arranged at the base of the photographs.

After all the candles were lit, a bagpiper played a piercing rendition of "Amazing Grace." This brought some of the crowd to tears, as the notes echoed off the walls of the MSC. The piper played through the melody twice, and then stopped. The crowd slowly filed out without much being said.

Most of the crowd included students too young to remember Bonfire, or the tragedy. **Joel Wixson**, a freshman civil engineering major, came to the vigil because of his involvement in Fish Aides. He said Student Body President **Matt Josefy** encouraged his

group to attend.

"Part of the reason I came here (to A&M) was for the spirit of the school," he said. "We all felt like it (Bonfire) was something important."

Fernando Rolon, a freshman member of Squadron 3 in the Corps of Cadets, said he felt the need to pay his respects.

"I came to get a taste of it," said **Rolon**, a history major. "(I came) mainly out of respect."

Most of the attendees came out because of similar motivations. **Janice Kerlee**, mother of Bonfire victim **Timothy Kerlee Jr.**, kissed her hand and pressed it to the picture as she lit the candle underneath it.

Kara Beckmann, a senior history major, lived next door to **Jamie Hand** in the FHK complex, and was visibly upset during the vigil.

"She was just the most beautiful person I've ever met," Beckmann said. "(She) always had a smile for me."

Beckmann said getting to know the **Hand** family has been the biggest blessing to arise from the tragedy. She still remembers the collapse vividly.

"To me, it's like yesterday," she said. "It's like I'm there, all over again."

The vigil was originally to be held at the **Lawrence Sullivan Ross** statue, but was moved inside due to rainy weather. Holding the ceremony inside the MSC could be more appropriate for the occasion, students said.

"I thought it was nice," said **Mike Turley**, a sophomore general studies major.

Reveille Ball begins Push Week Wednesday

By **Carrie Pierce**
THE BATTALION

To fill the void left this fall by the absence of a University-sanctioned Bonfire, student organizations have joined forces to create a week of student activities to raise Aggie spirit leading up to the Texas A&M vs. University of Texas football game.

Push Week officially begins Wednesday night with Reveille Ball from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.

The week-long series of events is put on by a variety of student organizations to boost spirit and morale, said **Jason**

Sherrieb, director of Fall Activities Council. Push Week was Student Body President **Matt Josefy**'s idea, **Sherrieb** said. **Josefy** wanted to provide options for students by incorporating as many groups as possible into a week of campuswide planned events.

Main events this year include Reveille Ball, "Rock Varsity's Horns Off," Chi Omega Songfest, 12th Man Acoustic Jam, E-Walk/Elephant Walk and yell practice, **Sherrieb** said.

Sherrieb said it is a common misconception that fall activities were established

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Reveille Ball

Where: Reed Arena
When: Wednesday at 9 p.m.

Free of charge to all Texas A&M students

Dress is formal

Approximately 1,500 attended Reveille Ball last year

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SOURCE: FALL ACTIVITIES COUNCIL

Dewhurst calls for tuition justification

By **Rhiannon Meyers**
THE BATTALION

Lt. Gov. **David Dewhurst** said Friday he wants public universities to justify large tuition increases to legislators.

"Some of the tuition increases at our public universities for Spring 2004 are higher than what we had been led to believe when the Legislature passed tuition deregulation this year," **Dewhurst** said in an e-mail dated Nov. 14.

In the e-mail, addressed to State Sen. **Florence Shapiro** (R-District 8) and State Rep. **Geanie Morrison** (R-District 30), **Dewhurst** called for a convening of the Joint Select Committee on Higher Education to review accountability, affordability and accessibility at public universities.

"Increasingly, many families and students are falling into substantial debt so they can afford the dream of a college education," **Dewhurst** said. "I'm very concerned about keeping our public universities affordable and accessible for the working families and students of Texas."

The 16-member committee will meet in December to discuss current and future tuition increases. **Shapiro** said the committee will first meet with the legislative budget board to review decreases in state funding for each institution and then meet with each university to hear their

justifications for the tuition hikes.

"We will hear from all of the universities that have increased tuition, have them lay predicate for their increases and see if they mesh," **Shapiro** said.

Shapiro said legislative concerns about tuition hikes stemmed from the University of Texas officials talking about increasing tuition by 13 percent in the upcoming spring semester and 26 percent in the Fall 2004 semester. Texas A&M and The University of Houston have also set tuition increases for Spring 2004. A&M raised tuition 5.3 percent while UH raised tuition 12.3 percent.

The Legislature passed tuition deregulation this year to alleviate budget problems. **Shapiro**, who did not originally support a full tuition deregulation, said the Senate only wanted incremental increases of \$9 per semester hour.

"But we negotiated, and this is the result of that negotiation," **Shapiro** said. "We voted for it, and now we have to live with it."

Shapiro said the results of this committee study could influence legislative action on tuition deregulation when the Legislature meets again in 2005.

For now, **Dewhurst** said he hopes this committee will hold universities accountable for tuition hikes that could potentially make higher education unaffordable for some.

See Tuition on page 2

Muhammad convicted of sniper attacks

By **Matthew Barakat**
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — In a verdict that could cost him his life, a stone-faced **John Allen Muhammad** was convicted Monday of using a high-powered rifle, a beat-up car and a teenage sidekick to murder people at random and terrorize the Washington area during last year's sniper attacks.

The jury immediately began hearing evidence on whether the 42-year-old Army veteran should get the death penalty or life in prison.

"We reserve the death penalty for the worst of the worst," prosecutor **Richard Conway** told the jurors. "Folks, he still sits right in front of you without a shred of remorse."

Muhammad stood impassively as the verdict was read, looking straight ahead with the same enigmatic look he had throughout the trial. Two jurors held hands, and two others wept. Family members of victims held hands and wiped away tears.

The jury deliberated for 6 1/2 hours over two days before convicting **Muhammad** of two

counts of capital murder. One accused him of taking part in multiple murders, the other — the result of a post-Sept. 11 terrorism law — alleged the killings were designed to terrorize the population. **Muhammad** is the first person tried under the Virginia law.

Muhammad was found guilty of killing **Dean Harold Meyers**, a Vietnam veteran who was cut down by a single bullet that hit him in the head on Oct. 9, 2002, as he filled his tank at a Manassas gas station. He was also found guilty of conspiracy to commit murder

and use of a firearm in a felony.

The victim's brother **Robert** said he believes **Muhammad** deserves the death penalty: "I must say that I can't think of too many more heinous crimes than this one."

Fellow suspect **Lee Boyd Malvo**, 18, is on trial separately in nearby Chesapeake for the killing of FBI analyst **Linda Franklin** at a Home Depot in Falls Church. He also could get the death penalty. **Malvo**'s attorneys are pursuing an insanity defense, arguing that the young man had been "indoctrinated" by **Muhammad**.

Is SIMS too old?

SIMS is an information system that holds student records and has been in use at Texas A&M since 1986.

- SIMS cannot track students before they are admitted.
- SIMS must be updated yearly with changes in financial aid.
- A new program would cost an estimated \$30 million.

ANDREW BURLESON • THE BATTALION
SOURCE: COMPUTING AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Replacing computer system could cost \$30 million

By **Jacquelyn Spruce**
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M officials have recognized that the University's student information management system is old and in need of replacement.

Student Information Management System (SIMS) keeps all records about students, including student applications, the student registration system, grades and financial aid.

Tom Putnam, director of Computing and

Information Services, said the information system available now was implemented in 1986. Although it has been modified since then, it is still underdeveloped and difficult to use since it does not coincide with some current computer programs.

Putnam said the system is not designed to use the Web, and that certain programs, such as My Record, have been augmented into the system to try to update it and make it Web accessible. He said accessing programs such as My Record is similar to working on a "computer in front of a computer." To process the information to the

Web now, the information has to be sent to SIMS as well.

"We want the new system to be entirely Web based," he said.

Putnam said problems with the current system include the necessity of updating it every year for changes in financial aid.

"Because our system is no longer a standard system, we have to support it ourselves," **Putnam** said. "We have to buy certain programs for financial aid and stitch

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