

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

COMMANDERS

PART 4 OF 4

After leading 2,000 cadets, commanders say student leadership of Corps crucial

By Teresa Weaver
THE BATTALION

When students first join the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets as freshmen, they are the lowest-ranking cadets, without any privileges. With most of their freshman year consisting of blindly following orders, the idea of being in charge themselves may never cross their minds.

In fact, every year a senior cadet is chosen as Corps commander, responsible for overall command of the organization. Maj. Joseph "Doc" Mills of the Office of the Commandant said the commander exercises command authority over the entire 2,000 members of the Corps of Cadets with the help of 26 upperclassmen in Corps staff. They help the commander with recruiting, training, discipline and other responsibilities expected of any command, Mills said.

After leaving A&M, most cadets go on to bigger and better things, and former commanders agreed that the leadership skills they adopted as commander helped them later in life.

Mike Gentry, Class of '78, was the Corps commander his senior year. He was a cadet in I-1 with an Army contract and went to law school at the University of Texas before becoming a JAG officer for the military.

"Most people see the Corps as authoritarian," Gentry said. "Just because you are Corps commander and you tell your senior buddies they've got to change the way they do business, that doesn't mean they'll do it."

Gentry is now a lawyer and has lived in College Station for the past 15 years with his family. Being so close to the campus, Gentry has been able to watch the Corps change through the years.

"In some ways A&M has changed and in other ways it hasn't changed at all," Gentry said. "Anything done for three or four years becomes a tradition and most students think it's been going on forever."

As Corps commander, Gentry helped start Corps traditions like March to the Brazos in the spring and Freshman Orientation Week the week before school starts in the fall.

"The biggest job of the commander is representing the Corps to the rest of the student body and administration of Texas A&M," Gentry said. "The Bill of Rights for cadets is the right to have time to study, sleep and eat. If those things are true, the rest comes easy."

Matthew Poling, Class of '90, was a member of Squadron 10 before becoming Corps commander in the fall of 1990. Poling helped create the Fish Review at the end of the FOW week and also helped start the annual Corps/Fraternity baseball game in the spring.

"The Corps commander should have fun with his job," Poling said, "but at the same time recognize the impact his job performance will have on current and future cadets. You are the first among equals and you must have a vision of what you want to do to be successful."

Poling went on to medical school and now is a family practice physician in College Station. Although he went on to hold other leadership positions such as president of his medical school class, he said nothing was really as challenging as being commander for one year.

Poling said the changes being made by the current commandant, Lt. General John Van Alstyne, are good for the Corps.

"The new commandant is completely on the right track as far as what he is trying to do with leadership development," Poling said. "The changes I have seen in a year and a half have been very positive."

Weldon Kruger, Class of '53, is another former commander who has made College Station his home. Kruger was Corps commander his senior year when the campus was still called the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and all students were required to be a part of the Corps of Cadets.

"Being Corps commander was an intense experience," Kruger said. "You are charged with a lot of things. You need to have intelligence, a good personality and integrity to be a good commander."

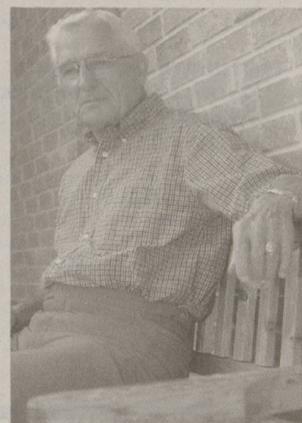
Kruger was a member of Squadron 10 and received a master's in petroleum engineering before joining the Air Force. He is now retired and has lived in College Station for the past 15 years. He works with the Corps Development Council at A&M to help raise funds for the Corps of Cadets.

Kruger said one of the most important differences between the A&M Corps of Cadets and other military academies around the nation is that A&M students have a major role in running the organization.

"I have visited other military academies and the cadets there can't run their own affairs because they are overlooked too closely by professional personnel," he said.

Poling agreed that having students run the Corps is crucial.

"There might be more mistakes made, but the purpose of the Corps is to develop your leadership opportunities," Poling said. "To do things imperfectly is what makes it a great training center."



Top: Dr. Matthew Poling at Scott and White Clinic; above right: Mike Gentry, an attorney, at his office; above left: Weldon Kruger at his home in College Station.

BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION



Ashlee Simpson Autobiography Geffen Records

Review by Carrie Pierce

On Ashlee Simpson's debut album "Autobiography," rather than try to copy her pop princess sister Jessica, the 19-year-old goes for an edgier pop punk sound. At times, however, it seems as if she is almost trying too hard to sound like Shirley Manson or Courtney Love. Crooning about boyfriends, flirting and her childhood, Ashlee's sound and lyrics aren't as mature as these veteran chick rockers, which makes the title of her album almost ironic. Perhaps she should have saved the title "Autobiography" for her third or fourth album, if she's lucky enough to make it that far. With 12 songs she co-wrote, it's also questionable whether this is really her autobiography.

With her regular role on the show "7th Heaven" and her own reality show that chronicles the making of this album, Ashlee has gone about her path to stardom in a slightly reversed way in comparison to her sister. In Ashlee's song "Shadow," she sings "I was living in the

shadow of someone else's dream," but this rising star is definitely no longer living in the shadow of Jessica. The 19-year-old said in an MTV interview, "We're into totally different bands and artists." The album has the same producer as Sheryl Crow, Michele Branch and Alanis Morissette, providing for the mix of rock, punk and pop.

"Surrender" sounds like a Garbage B-side; "Giving It All Away" is a slower version of a Hole song, and "Shadow" is a pop ballad that Jessica would probably be more comfortable singing. At times Ashlee even crosses into Avril Lavigne territory with her slightly angst-filled songs. The album is basically a mix of every woman rocker from the past 10 years mimicked by a singer who might be more respectable once she finds her own style.

The most original and powerful song on the album is the first single, "Pieces of Me," which steals the show with catchy lyrics that sound like they might actually be Ashlee's creation. It is less moody than the rest of the album and a lot calmer. Singing "I can hardly catch my breath, I hope it lasts/ It seems like I can finally rest my head on something real," the song offers a breather from the rest of the album's throater singing.

The only time the album is autobiographical is on "Shadow" where she bemoans that she's "living in a nightmare" because her big sister became a star first. Throughout the entire song she complains about her "broken life," confusing one at the end by scream-

ing "don't feel sorry for me."

In "La La," Ashlee unconvincingly coaxes her lover to do naughty things in the kitchen, the back of the bus, on the floor and on airplanes. Maybe Ashlee is playing the rebellious, little sister card a little too hard.

Although slightly juvenile, a little too whiney at times and not very original sounding, "Autobiography" still has redeeming qualities for when you are driving with the windows down and belting out lyrics. This is the perfect album to purchase after failing a test, breaking up with a boyfriend or when your blonde bombshell sister makes it bigger than you ever will.

★★★★☆

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