SUL ROSS GROUP REUNION
1957-2016
THE HISTORY OF THE CLASS OF ’61
WRITTEN BY GEORGE LOVELAND ’61

Howdy, Ags! Welcome back to Aggieland and our Sul Ross Reunion.

Our bodies and our rings are showing a little bit of wear. In fact, the dots on the bottom of my ring are gone. It doesn’t matter, I never knew what they stood for anyway.

All of us here tonight hold A&M deep in our hearts. We have witnessed the spirit that made this place what it was when we were here and what it is today. I believe the Spirit of Aggieland is as strong today as it was 59 years ago. Times have certainly changed but the spirit we love is alive and well.

Since our time here a new way to describe A&M has become popular. It goes something like this “From the outside looking in it is hard to understand and from the inside looking out it is hard to explain”. If that statement is true today I am sure it applied to the time we spent here over a half century ago.

Bear with me as I try to bring this saying into focus.

59 years ago on September 13, 1957, 2100 young men started their college careers at the A&M College of Texas. 1850 of them joined the Corps of Cadets. Four years later, some 950 of these men graduated and went on to pursue an assortment of careers. Since that day in September, these men have been known as the Class of ’61. In that four year period we laughed, we worked, we played, we cried, we loved, we fought and we fell but we got back up and kept on trying.

Sit back and enjoy your coffee while we reminisce about the people, places and events that shaped our lives forever. Let me set the stage.

In the fall of ’57, A&M was an all-male college with an enrollment of 7500, of which 4100 were in the Corps of Cadets. The Corps was compulsory for everyone except veterans, 4Fs, graduate and foreign students and non regs. The population of the Bryan College Station metroplex was about 35,000 people. Today Bryan College Station has close to 175,000 residents. Dr. Harrington was president of the school. Col Joe Davis was the Commandant and Paul ‘Bear’ Bryant was our football coach. On campus that year the Class of 1907 held its 50th reunion. Those guys were born around 1885. We thought of them as really ‘ole Army’. The president of the United States then was Teddy Roosevelt.

In 1957, Ike was in his second term as president. That fall, the Soviets launched “Sputnik 1, the first satellite put into orbit. It marked the beginning of the Space Age and the Cold War became a reality. “Bridge on the River Kwai” swept the Oscars. Buddy Holly was singing “Peggy Sue”, Chuck Berry blasted out “School Days” and the King, Elvis Presley, was four years into his reign. Remember Joanie James?
She kept us going. We fell in love with her quickly. And thank God there were a record players in the dorm. Guy Keeling had a good one and we played it every night.

Tuition, fee and room and board for our fall semester were $311.95. The second semester cost us $281.95. We were 18 and we were getting ready to learn a whole new way of life. This new life didn’t care about what you had accomplished in high school, the amount of money your parents might have, the size of your house, the quality of your clothes nor the fact that you had a hot new car. We were all equal and we all wore the same uniform. The Corps was a great equalizer.

We were called Fish, sophomores were pissheads, juniors were sergebutts and seniors were gods or zipperheads. Privileges were something we learned about quickly. Basically our only privilege was to cogitate. Webster dictionary defines that word as “think hard, ponder or meditate”. Sophomores had a few privileges, juniors had more and the seniors had them all plus any they could make up. That first week we were issued our uniforms, got assigned to our outfits, had our heads shaved at the MSC and got our class schedules at Sbisa. We then spent the rest of the week being orientated by our juniors and seniors. A lot of us commented on how easy it was. Then the next week, the pissheads hit the campus and all hell broke loose. We had lots of people yelling at us from daylight to midnight. It seemed we had to learn a thousand things at once.

There were bulls, the bull ring, bulltext, good bull and B.S. We used Brasso, blitz cloths and BABO bombs.
We learned to polish brass, spit shine shoes, iron clothes, sew buttons on, keep a gigline straight and scrub and wax the floors in our dorm.

We whipped out, fell in, fell out, sacked out and participated in drown outs. We answered call to quarters five nights a week from 7:30 to 10pm. And then if we had screwed up that day we had a bitch session in a sophomore’s hole. Imagine 30 Fish sitting on a 10x12 floor with their chins resting on their knee caps. Now add 8-10 sophomores sitting on the bunk beds, desks and radiator smoking cigars or cigarettes politely pointing out the mistakes we had made that day. Those sessions lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour.

Thankfully, Wednesday nights were church nights where we could go for an hour’s worth of peace and quiet. We dreaded the privilege of being a whistle jock, midnight mail orderly or sitting on the hot seat in the mess hall. God forbid if you shortstopped a senior. If so the Fish knew he was in for a very long night. If a deal fight started in the mess hall, we supplied the water soaked ammo for the upper classmen. We quickly learned that “crapper” and “hit it” were three of the most important words in the Fish survival guide.

We were not allowed to smile and if we did we got to knock the buzz off by using our open hand to slam the back of our head against a cement wall. During the weekly yell practices in the Grove, we learned the Aggie yells, how to ‘hump it’ and how to squeeze. Squeezing didn’t take long to learn. On Friday night of home game weekends, we followed the Fightin’ Aggie Band to the grove for Midnight Yell Practice. After Yell Practice the seniors made us run around the Quadrangle stealing the wood and
concrete benches so their dates would have a place to sit Saturday morning before the game. Of course once stolen we had to guard them all night from other gangs of roving bench stealers.

We lived in a room called a hole with a roommate we called our ‘Fish ole Lady’. We slept in a bed called a sack and out motto became ‘when in doubt, sack out’. Of course, Fish were not allowed to take naps in their holes so we napped in the Chemistry Lecture Hall, the second floor of the MSC or in the Library. We learned that BQ meant Band Qualified, CT meant Cadet in Training. Non regs were civilians and foreign students were known as Camel Jockeys. Fish ,who entered at midterm, were called “Frogs”. “Day Ducks” were anyone who lived off campus. Most of these guys were married and lived in the luxury apartments at College View.

In the fall of ’57 some of us found out what a “Dear John” letter was. It might have been the first but it sure wouldn’t be the last.

We got the red ass, hit braces, humped it, ate square meals and sat on the pink stool while holding a M 1 rifle or an Aggieland on one’s extended arms. Picture sitting in a straight back chair against a flat wall, now take the chair away and you have the pink stool. We had to carry matches with all their little heads pointing in the same direction. If an upperclassman asked for a match and found we had a match head pointing the wrong way, they were dumped out and then we had to pick them up one at a time, of course, with bending our knees. Pissheads went by the philosophy that if one Fish screwed up all the Fish in that outfit were punished. Not surprisingly, all these things started to bond us together as a class. Over the course of that first semester we started to lose some of our classmates. Some left school, some left the Corps to become non regs, some became Day Ducks and others flunked out. At the end of the Christmas break we would return to find more Fish buddies who did not make it back.

During the weeks leading up to Bonfire, we learned to cut trees, stack trees and then we burned the trees in back of Duncan Hall the night before the tu game.

It was our privilege to whip out to all upper classmen and question them about where they came from and what they were majoring in. Sometimes they spoke in riddles and it would take 5-10 minutes to arrive at “I’m from Waco-taking Ag ED”. Of course, when that exercise was over, we would be late for our next class. Only 4 answers could be given to upperclassmen’s:

1. Yes, Sir
2. No, Sir
3. No, excuse Sir
4. Sir, not being informed to the highest degree of accuracy, I hesitate to articulate for fear I might deviate from the true course of rectitude. In short, Sir, I am a very dumb Fish and do not know, Sir.

We were taught how to grab ‘pooch’. I won’t describe what it means-suffice it to say it was something very important to do before a senior started giving you licks on your behind with a broom.
It was a senior privilege to hold a raffle to raise money for a big date weekend. Of course, the Fish were strongly encouraged to buy tickets. The prizes were either a M1 rifle or a trip to LaGrange. It seemed like the senior’s roommate would always win.

We learned a whole new language for food served in the mess hall. Eggs became ‘cackle’, meat was ‘bullneck’, dinner rolls were called ‘deals’, salad was ‘rabbit’, cereal was ‘scabs’, water was ‘sky’ and milk was ‘cow’. Dessert became ‘cush’. Fish could have ‘cush’ only if they answered a question dealing with campusology. You got an easy question for Tapioca or bread pudding and an almost impossible question for Virgin pie or chocolate cake.

At some schools, the boys of spring were having panty raids. Since there was a serious absence of panties in the Quad at A&M, we resorted to good old fashion water fights.

Somehow with all these things going on we still had time to go to class and pursue a college education.

Looking back on our Fish year, the goal of the pissheads was very obvious. It was to break as many of us as possible. Although they reduced our numbers, they only made the survivors more determined and tighter as a class. At some point in my Freshman year, I set 3 goals.

1. Earn an Aggie Ring
2. Get a degree and commission
3. Wear Senior Boots

Let’s talk about some of the PEOPLE we met and knew.

Number 44 John David Crow, John Tracy, Charlie Krueger, Neil Swisher, what a great name for a basketball player and Carroll Broussard. There were Pinky Downs, Class of ‘06 and Ole Army Lou “That book is out of date Ag, but I’ll give you 50 cents for friendship”. Col. Pelly Dittman and his famous Guion Hall speech delivered 2 weeks after the sophomores had arrived on campus. His messages were short and sweet. He first told us to “Look to the right and to the left because one or both may be gone”. And then “If you don’t like it here, just remember Highway 6 runs both ways”. So much for the feel good speech we really needed. In our sophomore year, General Earl Rudder as Vice President, pushed for changes in the Corps added and set limits.

Our great TAC officers: Lt. Col .Scott, alias the Goose, Lt. Slick Hornstein, Capt. McLaren, affectionately known as the Pig, and Lt. Olson commonly called The Wedge. Our Corps Commanders were John Hagler, Don Cloud, Bill Heye and our own Syd Heaton. Clint Murphy was our class president for 3 years until he married Miss Texas (Linda). He passed the baton to Marvin Girouard for our senior year. Our head yell leaders, Ted Lowe, Smokey Hyde, Joe Leeper and from our own class Soon Todd. Our football coaches the ‘Bear’ and Jim Meyers. We still want our money back for the telegram we sent Meyers at Iowa State begging him to come to A&M. He was not a good pick!

We had Reveille and Tripod and we laughed at the antics of Cadet Slouch in the Battalion. And finally, some outstanding men from the Class of ’60: Percy Mims, Jack Rains, Ray Murski, Don Ellerbee, Willie Binnion, Charlie Lannenham, Charlie Benson, Byron Stone, Don Alexander and Jim Archer. And last but
not least, our all time favorite “Nerion’s my name. And I’m from Lufkin, takin’ BA and you best not forget it”.

SOME PLACES AND EVENTS

Our sophomore year, we got a little more freedom and we quickly learned that Sam Houston State in Huntsville had a ten to one girl to boy ratio and it was only sixty miles away or 2 beers away. The local watering holes were Shiloh, The Triangle, East Gate Lounge, Franklins’, Uncle Ed’s and the best of all, Uncle Jimmy’s. Jimmy would let you keep a running tab and at the end of the month you could give him you contract check (all $27.90) to settle your bill.

If you wanted ballroom dancing you could go to Nezzies or the Onyx in Bryan. For a road trip you could go to the great dance halls in Snook, El Campo, or Washington on the Brazos. For total R&R, we had peaceful resorts at Sealy and LaGrange- the latter better known as the Chicken Ranch. And Splash Days- the day they open the beach at Galveston.

When you couldn’t take the mess hall food anymore, we went to Wehrman’s, Youngblood’s, Zarapes’, the Northgates’s fine restaurants and the ever-popular Shipley’s Donuts. If you had seventy-five cents, Ma Ball’s in Bryan served a country breakfast or lunch to die for. Now the Aggie students have over 360 places to choose from to eat at.

We lived for mail that came into the Northgate Post Office or to the MSC. We checked our boxes every day. Our link to the outside world was the one phone in the guardroom of each dorm. The MSC had payphones and mailboxes. It was also a gathering place for coffee breaks. By the end of our senior year, we had solved every problem known to man.

Guion Hall where we saw the movie “We’ve Never Been Licked”, heard the Kingston Trio and later welcomed the Kilgore Rangerettes. It was a coup to get a front row seat for them! The Academic Building. Sully’s statue, Military Walk, the Trigon, G Rollie White, also known as the ‘Holler House on the Brazos’, Kyle Field, the Grove for yell practices and outdoor movies. Also Duncan, Sbisa and the Exchange Store. And finally the Quads where we assembled and then marched to meals three times a day. Off campus we had the Clay Pits for outfit beer busts. The Campus Theater at Northgate, the Palace and the Queen Theaters in Bryan and the Circle Drive-In in College Station famous for hot beer and bad movies.

On football and dance weekends we made the run to Whiskey Bridge. We kept our dates at private residences or motels like the Sabre, the Sands, the Holiday Plaza and the Western.

If you stop to think about it- in the late 50ies, there weren’t a lot of places to go or things to do at the place we affectionately called Sing-Sing on the Brazos.
SOME MEMORABLE THINGS AND EVENTS

1. As Fish, we were required to wear out uniforms on campus and anywhere else with in a 15 mile radius. If we went home, whether hitch hiking or driving, we went in uniform. Coming back, we would stop either in Hearn, Caldwell, Madisonville or Navasota to put our uniforms back on. Once you went from jeans to a uniform, you started to get a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach. It was time to say goodbye to homes, home cooking and girlfriends and say hello to pissheads. Many times you would look out and see a single rain cloud hanging over Aggieland. A lot of us still get that funny feeling when we see the campus.

2. The great meals of Duncan and Sbisa. My favorites were liver, black on top and green on the bottom, stewed tomatoes and that great dessert bread pudding.

3. Remember the 2 mole men and the day they came out of the steam tunnels during morning formation in the Quad? They tied a real pig and a goose to a stake to honor 2 of our favorite TAC officers: Scott and McClaren. Smokey Hyde was one of the mole men and I never learned who the other was.

4. Our fist football game on a rainy day in the Cotton Bowl against Maryland. We stood throughout the game and yelled ‘til our voices were gone. We won 21 to 13.

5. Remember the great flu epidemic in the fall of ’57 and the resulting lines of cadets waiting to turn their uniforms in and to try again next semester? They had missed too many classes. Thanks in part to some of our beloved professors who kept teaching even with a half empty class. The school was finally shut down, but it was too late. We had already lost too many freshmen.

6. Our first Corps trip to Ft. Worth and the brawl that followed the game. This was the first time we heard and responded to “Ole Army Fight!”. And then on our last Corps trip to Austin where Sonny Todd led a yell on the hood of a slow moving t-sip truck coming around the track.

7. Our first midnight yell practice was held before our first home football game against Cougar High. We joined arm in arm and followed the Aggie Band as it snaked its way to the grove. There we heard the yell leaders tell fables for the first time. My favorite was the one about a monkey and some train tracks. We’ll save that for another day.

8. Our Fish bonfire was built in the rain and cold. The week before Thanksgiving it collapsed. We rebuilt the Bonfire in time to burn it the Wednesday night before the tu game.

9. That cold rainy day in November of ’57 at Rice Stadium when we saw a possible national championship slip away by one point. We tried to sing the “12th Man” for the first time but a lot of us had forgotten the words.

10. The monsoon season always started in late October and ended in early May. This was a great time because you got to wear your pisspot and rubberized poncho. You stayed dry on the outside and wet on the inside sweating off a few more pounds you could ill afford to lose. It was
wise not to leave anything in the pockets because you never knew whose poncho you would end up with.

11. During our four years at A&M, there were ongoing discussions about going co-ed, the Corps becoming non-compulsory and the idea of the Corps changing to a rank based system rather than being class based. You can really see that General Rudder had great foresight. With the Vietnam War escalating, it would have been hard to recruit students to the college.

12. That great comeback our sophomore year in Waco. We were trailing Baylor 28-7 in the 3rd quarter. Charlie Milstead, running at tailback out of the single wing, led a comeback to win the game in the final seconds. 34-28. I am not sure many Aggies saw the winning TD because they were still kissing their dates from the touchdown before.

13. In the spring of our sophomore year, we won the South West Conference Baseball Championship. It was Tom Chandler’s first year as head coach. Fourteen of our classmates helped to win that title.

14. The deactivation of branch outfits, one of the most colorful traditions in A&M history, came to an end our sophomore year. We said farewell to the Jocks, Groundpounders, Triple A, Field Artillery, Signal Corps, Quartermasters, Transportation Corps and the Ordinance Corps. We then said hello to those well thought out and original designations A1, A2, B1, B2 etc. The Corps did not seem quite the same without the cry “Beat the hell out of the Jocks!”.

15. Our senior year, football had taken a down turn. We had a really good team, but the coach was not very good. We sorely regretted the Meyer’s telegram. All was not lost because we resorted to kissing our dates on first downs. Because of three ties that year, our yell in the Mess Hall was “Tie the hell out of Baylor!” or whomever our opponent was that week. The exclamation point of the season came when we were leaving for the Christmas holidays, someone had changed the highway sign to “Highway 6 A&M 6.”

16. Late in the spring semester and very late at night, I can still hear the mournful cries coming out of the senior corner rooms “I hate this damn place!” In a few weeks theses same seniors would gather for final review. There would be tears in their eyes as they marched in their senior boots for the last time in Aggieland.

17. Also there was the great chicken caper in which 6 of our classmates participated. They stole some chickens from the Poultry Science building and placed them in Percy Mims’ hole at the start of Christmas vacation. When Percy returned, his hole was a big mess. The serious problem was that some of the chickens were radioactive and everything in the room needed to be destroyed. These perpetrators will remain anonymous.

18. We had the sacking of Girouard, Martin and Montgomery. Keeling attempted to land a plane upside down at Easterwood Airport. A non reg shot Jerry Gilliland with a bb gun and Gilliland retaliated.

Charlie Preston’s white Edsel, probably the only one ever on the A&M campus. Randy Yeargin’s own private cannon, courtesy of the town of Caldwell and the Fish in his outfit.

19. At the end of our junior year we received our Aggie Rings and at Final Review we wore our senior boots for the first time. We knew we had earned them both.

20. Just before Final Review our senior year, the bulls warned us that if we wildcatted when Syd gave the command “Pass in Review”, they’d withhold commissions. At Syd’s command not a
peep was heard from the Corps but behind the Review stands our dates, fiances, wives wildcatted like the true Maggies they were. We had big grins on our faces but as we approached the review stand, the grins left and we executed a perfect ‘eyes right’. You could hear those ‘eyeballs clicking’.

21. We attended Silver Taps and Aggie Musters. The Muster is something you have to experience to understand, to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that someday Muster Roll Call will include your name.

22. And finally, the Elephant Walk and the Senior Ring Dance where our girls turned our rings around so that ’61 faced out, symbolizing our journey into the world. Then Final Review, Graduation and Commission.

It was an ending but also a beginning. Since those days we have gone separate ways but the friendships we have made will endure forever. We have renewed and rekindled them at 11 formal reunions and many informal get-togethers including 3 cruises. The pride we feel for our class and for A&M has been demonstrated, as Tom said, in our generosity.

We have sent countless sons, daughters and grandkids to follow in our footsteps. The things we learned at A&M during our 4 years have guided us these past 59 years. In addition, because we were on the inside we learned about the Spirit of Aggieland and we embraced it. All of you present her tonight are a living testimony to the experiences we shared. We have come a long way since our first reunion held at the Green Oaks Inn in Fort Worth. Tom Reid was elected Class Agent. I followed in 1976 and Dick Hickerson came on board in 2001. Joe Powell and Henry Holubec joined us as Class Agents at Sul Ross Reunion.

We have lost a lot of good men over these years but we still have a lot left. We plan to stay together as the Class of ’61. When there are just two of us left, it will be time for them to raise their glasses in a simple toast and say, “Well done, ’61. Well done”.