50 Year Class Reunion  
The Class of ’63  
A&M College of Texas  

April 19-22, 2013  

Class History Address  
“Remembering the Class of ‘63  
By Edis Oliver
Howdy, Ags.

Well, here we are 50 years later. Actually it is 54 years from the time we first met. When we first walked across the campus of the A&M College of Texas in the fall of 1959, few of us gave a thought to meeting up again in 2013 to share fellowship, talk over old times, and have a few drinks together at Muster. We did not even know what Muster was. But here we are, products of the *Aggie Dream*.

Like most of you my parents did not bring me to the campus, help unload my car, and move me into my dorm room as parents do today. I loaded my foot locker and suit case into my 1947 Plymouth in Waco and drove the 90 miles to College Station. My first stop was the Housing Office to learn of my assignment to Squadron 11 in Byrd E. White Hall, aka Dorm 10. I drove to what was then known as the “New Area”. By today’s standards it was new, built in 1939, the “Quad” as it is now known, was only 20 years old. There was a curb entrance and paved driveway, so I drove on in and parked just outside Dorm 10, opened my trunk, and began to carry my foot locker and suitcase to my room. As I was unloading a uniformed student wearing boots walked out the door and asked what I was doing. I said “I’m just moving in”. Charlie Benson, I later learned was the C.O. of my new outfit, Squadron 11. He said, “well, I suggest you move your car as soon as convenient, and by the way, where were you intending to park?” I said, “right
along that row by the dorms over there”. He said “That is reserved for Seniors. You might want to find the freshman lot”. I thanked him and moved on in.

Shortly thereafter I met Mike Syptak, my freshman roommate, or fish ‘old lady. Mike had driven down from Omaha, Nebraska, where his father was a Deputy Wing Commander with SAC. Mike was a second generation Aggie, and we immediately bonded mostly because he was the only guy in the outfit that was shorter than I was. Like most of you, I met Aggie buddies from all over the world, from places I had never heard of like Covina, California, Piggott, Arkansas, and Yazoo, Mississippi, and Levelland, Texas. We came literally from all over the world, from military families, farms, ranches, small towns and large cities.

I drove 90 miles to get to Aggieland, but others like Bane Lyle came 5,000 miles.

So over the next few weeks, we learned to be fish, how to march, wear uniforms, and behave. We learned the Aggie War Hymn and the Spirit of Aggieland. We learned a new language, the language of the Corps and the Mess Hall. Some adjusted well, some struggled. But whether we realized it or not, we were all growing up. We were learning individual responsibility and accountability. We learned to say “No excuse, Sir”, when we screwed up. We learned to balance the discipline and regimentation of the Corps of Cadets with the need to go to class, study, prepare for tests, and make our grades.

We were assigned duties like Whistle Jock, Laundry Detail, and Phone Duty. In each dorm, 200 of us shared one phone in the lounge. And it was not a 16 Gb cell
phone. It was a nickel a call pay phone. And what duty was more stressful than being the fish manning the hot corner at chow? Don’t let any food or drink container run out. Don’t short-stop an upper classman. Answer campusology questions while trying to eat. And what about the most dreaded meal of all: the weekend open tables where you are likely to be seated with cadets from other outfits? Whip out, call the roll, run the hot corner. Call the roll again in the middle of the meal. Get up and whip out again for the names you missed. Hopefully, the upper classmen would be in a hurry so you could eat after they left. Some fish lost weight because of the mess hall stress, while others gained weight because it was the best food they had ever had.

Football season had its own routines and drills. Yell Practice at the Grove was another hazing opportunity for upper classmen. The first Midnight Yell Practice before a home game was a real treat. The Band formed in the Quadrangle of the New Area about 11:30 and marched out with the Drum Majors and Yell Leaders leading the way with torches. The Corps fell in behind the Band. We marched completely around the campus to near Sbisa Dining Hall where the 2nd and 3rd Brigades fell in. We marched to the Grove for a boisterous and rowdy Yell Practice. Some were lucky enough to have dates.

Yell Leaders competed for the best “Fables”. You would have to discuss fables with Tom Nelson and Bill Brashears, but I think they just recycled them every four years. And Fables always depicted the opponent of the week in an unflattering light, and the best fables were always a little racy.
There was the one about the Cajuns just before the LSU game. A young Cajun, named Francois, came home and told his father than he had met a young girl named Germaine that he was going to marry. His father said, “well Francois, let me ask you a question. Has she ever had sex with her brother? Francois said, “No, of course not”. Well, said his father “ Has she ever had sex with her uncle”. Francois said “No, she is a nice girl”. His father then said, “Well, then, has she ever had sex with her father?”. Francois said “No, she has never done such a thing”. His father then said “Well, Francois, I think you should pass on this girl, Germaine, because if she is not good enough for her own family, she is not good enough for ours”.

Who can forget the first Corps Trip to Fort Worth for the TCU game. Over 4,400 cadets magically showed up in downtown Fort Worth in uniform for the 9:00 A.M. Corps of Cadets parade down Main Street. Some fish had to wear white socks over their hands for the parade because they forgot their white gloves. Seniors from the lead parade outfits found open bars along the street and watched the rest of the parade standing in the crowd with a beer in hand.

Fights had broken out in recent years, and we were warned at the Yell Practice not to travel around Fort Worth after dark in uniform and to always travel in groups of 3 or 4 ..... hundred. There were the outfit parties after game where upper classmen tried to hit on the fish’s dates. The goal of every cadet was to get a great date for the Corps Trip and get lucky. Well, getting lucky was really a dream from 1959 to 1963, and there was a lot more talk than luck. The Houston Corps Trip saw our first parade cancelled due to sleet and rain and most of us
listened on the radio to the Aggies ran out of time against the mighty Rice Owls. But rain did not cancel the outfit parties.

Kyle Field holds many great memories for Aggies, not so much for the wins for the Class of ’63, but for the camaraderie and images of the Corps standing together, humping it, yelling, and Sawing Varsity’s Horns Off. In 1959, Kyle Field was 32 years old. Today it is 86 years old and by the 2015 season the last of the original Kyle Field will have been demolished and replaced. But the 12th Man still humps it, yells, saws Varsity’s Horns Off, and stands the whole game.

But nothing in the fall of 1959 prepared us for Bonfire. We had chow an hour early on Friday before Thanksgiving, loaded into army trucks and headed for the cut area. We hauled logs from dawn till dusk. The technology was similar to the Egyptians building the pyramids. All that was missing was the whips. We worked for three straight days in the cold, mud, and drizzle. But watching the Bonfire burn made it all worth it. Every Aggie from our class still refers to cold, drizzly November days as Bonfire Weather.

We all took our books home for the Christmas holidays with every intention of studying for the finals arriving immediately upon our return after the new year. But few books got opened as we were anxious to see all our old high school buddies and recount and compare our first semesters away from home at college. But as 1959 drew to a close, here are some of the events of that year:

- Castro was named Premier of Cuba.
• Rawhide debuted on TV with Clint Eastwood.
• American Airlines flew from L.A. to New York for the first transcontinental jet flight.
• The Barbie Doll went on sale.
• Eisenhower signed the bills for statehood for Alaska and Hawaii.
• Tom Landry is hired as Coach of the Dallas Cowboys.
• Nikita Khrushchev is denied access to Disneyland.

We returned from the holidays, hit the books and got through our first final exams. After the semester ended, some of our fish buddies never returned. Some dropped out because the Corps life was not for them. Others did not make their grades. But for those who returned, the second semester was generally easier. We knew the rules. We had learned to balance study and Corps life, and in 4-1/2 months we would become upper classmen. We were bolder with “Good Bull”. Drown outs of sophomores and floating dorms increased. We were sent on good bull details in the mess hall such as crawling under tables at the direction of a senior to light another senior’s paper napkin on fire.

Bull Ring ruined a lot of spring weekends. We had drill on Saturdays, and following drill was Bull Ring where rams (demerits) were walked off. Our fish buddies went home and had dates while we marched on Duncan Field and practiced close order drills supervised by sophomores and juniors who were just as mad as we were about having to be there.
Larry Mims brother, Percy Mims, was commander of the Second Wing. As many of you know, Percy passed away two years ago. But he made a great contribution to the Corps of Cadets. In the fall of 1959, Percy wrote and distributed a booklet entitled “Social Customs, Corps of Cadets, A&M College of Texas”. Its purpose was to help Aggies develop the social poise to truly be a ‘Soldier, Statesman, and Knightly Gentleman”. It had chapters on:

- Conduct of a Gentleman
- Hints on Good Grooming
- Conversation
- Introductions
- Table Manners
- Co-ed Do’s and Don’ts

The suggestions on “Co-ed Do’s and Don’ts” were provided by women from Baylor, Texas, and SMU. It quickly became known as “Mims’ Manners”. Co-ed Do’s and Don’ts included such advice as “If your date does not smoke or drink, do not ridicule her, or try to make her smoke or drink”. “Be careful not to blow smoke in your date’s face”. “Do not overindulge in drinking while on a date even if your blind date is repulsive”.

However, I am here to tell you that Percy was way ahead of his time. Here is the current Brooks Brothers booklet entitled “How To Be a Gentleman”, and I think Brooks Brothers plagiarized Percy Mims. It was good stuff and some in this room might use it today. But it was written for the Second Wing, easily the most
socially polished outfit in the Corps. Who need Mims’ Manners was the First Brigade.

Our first final review saw us change belt buckles, caps, and brass. We said goodbye to the Class of ’60 and got our first taste of leadership training from the sophomores moving up to juniors. We went home proud of having made it through our fish year ready to exact revenge on the incoming fish class in the fall of 1960.

But we had learned class cohesiveness. We learned that we were the Class of ’63, and that loyalty to class, classmates, and fish buddies meant everything. And it stuck with us. Dick Schuenemann tells the story of his father, Class of ’24. The Class of ’24 was down to about five members. Once the class passes 55 years, reunions cease, and there is a class dinner. So the Class of ’24 was having its class dinner. One of the five was the Class Agent and he announced he had a letter from Randy Matson to read. Randy’s letter said that since the Class of ’24 was down to five members, and the Class of ’23 was down to only three members, would they consider combining their class dinners? That called for a motion and a class vote. One classmate raised his hand and said “I move that if we cannot have our own class dinner we don’t have one at all....... I never did like those guys in the Class of ‘23”.

We returned in September anxious to see our fish buddies and recount the summer adventures. Most of us had spent August getting our uniforms ready, brash and shoes shined, ready to hit the ground running. We were ready to whip
those new fish into shape. We learned direct leadership by being assigned a squad of five or six fish to train.

The sophomore year went fast. We were sharper, more confident, the stress of being a fish was over. It was more about grades because the courses were harder. We were now really into our majors. Many changed majors. We had Corps trips to Dallas and Austin. Survival consumed less of our time. Getting dates for football games, Corps Trips and special weekends was more important. Before the SMU Corps Trip, I thought of a girl I had gone to Waco High with named Elizabeth Bell. She was in the Zeta Tau Alpha sorority at SMU. I called her parents and got her number in Dallas. From the payphone in the Dorm 10 lounge I called her and asked her if she would be my date for the SMU football game and post-game outfit party, and by the way could she get dates for five of my buddies. We had never dated in high school, and I guess I had not made much of an impression since she declined and said she had other important plans, which I later found out was washing her hair.

Kyle Field was again a place of many disappointments and we got pretty tired of singing The Twelfth Man. I have never sung it since.

The year 1960 ended with other important events having occurred.

- The first Playboy Club opens in Chicago.
- Elvis Presley ends 2-year hitch in US Army.
• Russia shoots down Francis Gary Powers' U-2 spy plane over Sverdlovsk.
• Roy Orbison releases "Only the Lonely".
• The Israelis captured Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires.
• The birth control pill hits the market.
• Cassius Clay captures Olympic light heavyweight gold medal.
• John F. Kennedy was elected President.

After we returned from the Christmas holidays, May came quickly. Many of our grades suffered the sophomore slump, but we hung on until Final Review when we said goodbye to the Class of ’61, and put on the white belts, stacked brass belt buckles. and caps with the white braid. We were really upperclassmen.

September of 1961 again brought renewed fellowship with outfit and class buddies. Most of us had been home for the summer working and were ready for our Junior years. The Junior year started in the fall of 1961. Being a junior was pretty easy, unless you really screwed up and picked a fight with a senior. Corps Trips were back to Fort Worth and Houston. We were better at getting dates and occasionally more mature at outfit parties.

Many signed ROTC contracts and began getting monthly stipends. That was sometimes extra spending money and sometimes survival money.

Most of us still did not have cars and many relied on hitchhiking. Hitchhiking stories abound in this class. One classmate tells the story of getting a ride from a nice lady in Bryan on Sunday when it was raining hard. The only problem with the
ride was that she had a few errands to run first, like having the hitchhikers help deliver flowers to members of her church ...... in the rain. She then gave them a ride to the north edge of Bryan.

Or, Marshall McGalliard’s trip from College Station to the panhandle town of Spur, Texas which took seven rides with the last dropping him off at 2:00 A.M. in the morning on a west Texas highway.

Or, Mike Walker’s story about his ride from Houston with a guy with a scarred face who was drinking from a gin bottle while telling Mike he was recently involved in a head-on collision while driving drunk. The driver explained that the other driver was killed. He was a country singer named Johnny Horton.

But the big event was that we got our Senior Rings. There was no ceremony the way it is today. I remember just going over to the Registrar’s office and picking mine up. But we had them and that was what was important.

The junior year ended with the much anticipated Final Review. We passed in review the first time as juniors, went to a nearby dormitory and put on the senior boots for the second pass. Senior boots cost about $100 and most of us bought used boots because we could not afford new ones. But we were seniors!

The year 1962 saw the following events:

- The Cuban Missile Crisis.
• NFL prohibits grabbing of face masks.
• Russian newspaper Izvestia reports baseball is an old Russian game.
• Beach Boys introduced a new musical style with their hit “Surfin”.
• John Glenn is the 1st American to orbit earth in the Friendship 7.
• US advisors in South Viet Nam join the fight.
• Mick Jagger and Keith Richards perform as Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys.

The fall of 1962 was the start of our senior year. I had wised up and remembered that we had another Corps Trip to Dallas this fall and I would need a date. So I called Elizabeth Bell in Waco that summer and we started dating. That way when the SMU game came I would be set. As an aside, we kept on dating, got married in January of 1964, and I am proud to say she has been my wife of 49 years. Just this morning as we were dressing, I said to Liz “When we were dating in 1962, could you in your wildest dreams have imagined that we would be coming back to A&M 50 years later to see all our friends at this reunion. In your wildest dreams could you have imagined that we would be back here and I would have the opportunity to address our class at this reunion?” She did not say anything for a minute or so. Then she said “Edis, I don’t want to hurt your feelings because I love you, but for about the last fifteen years, you have not been in my wildest dreams”.

Well, the senior year also went very fast. We were on the home stretch to graduation, particularly the guys with contracts. Graduation on time was crucial. Some of us in engineering had struggled with courses such as Thermodynamics. I
am a licensed engineer, and still have no idea what entropy and enthalpy are. I remember my former fish Ol’ Lady, Mike Syptak like all of us had really sweated Thermo. Of course we had to have a “C” in our major. Mike was hovering on the cusp between a C and a D as many of us were. He went to Professor Fletcher, who was our mutual Thermo prof, and explained that he had an Air Force contract. His father was career Air Force. He intended to be career Air Force and he had to graduate on time. He told Professor Fletcher that if he would give Mike a “C” in Thermo, he would promise never to practice engineering the rest of his life. He got the C.

The year 1963 was a transformative year in America.

- “Dr. No”, was the first James Bond film to be shown in the U.S.
- The push-button phone was introduced.
- Instant replay was introduced for football.
- Dr. Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream” speech.
- And later that year President Kennedy was assassinated.

While many graduated in May of 1963, many stayed and got additional degrees, or just took longer to complete the courses. But the end of our four years in the Corps was the end of an era. The Corps shaped our lives. We learned the Aggie Corps values although they might not have been on the entrances to the MSC as they are today. We learned that Texas A&M stands for:

- Excellence – Set the Bar.
- Integrity – Character is destiny.
• Leadership – Follow me.
• Loyalty – Through Unity Strength.
• Respect – We are the Aggies, the Aggies are we.
• Selfless Service – How can I be of service?

We learned that “Excellence” in the little things like shining brass and shoes, keeping a straight gig line, and marching properly count. And those things have carried through our lives.

We learned that “Integrity” means Aggies do not lie, cheat, or steal, and those posters are on the wall in every academic building at A&M today.

We developed the “Leadership” qualities that enabled Billy McCoy, Jay Blume, and John Hedrick all to become flag officers in the armed forces, and countless other classmates to own, build, and run their own companies.

Men like James Ray who endured seven years as a POW in the Hanoi Hilton knew what “Loyalty” to his comrades meant and that is gave him the courage to survive.

We learned that you earn “Respect”. You don’t get it by wearing a sophomore belt buckle, a white stripe on your cap, or senior boots. You earn respect by how you conduct yourself and the example you set every single day.
And finally, “Selfless Service” is what sets Aggies apart through public service and work in countless churches and on non-profit boards. Selfless Service is what causes Aggies to give back to Texas A&M to help in some small way repay this school for what it gave to us.

All these things we learned from those upperclassmen who came before us and we passed them on to those who came after us.

We have had the great good fortune and blessing to attend what Robert Gates called “A Unique American Institution” that created what he called the Aggie Dream. Dr. Gates described the Aggie Dream this way. He said Texas A&M is a place where young men, and now women, come, many from modest means and the first in their families to attend college, learn the Aggie Core Values, and go on to achieve great things in business, education and government. Men like Lee Adams, the first in his family to attend college, who graduated with a B.B.A in Business, joined the American Rice Company, rose to become CEO, and travel the world over negotiating rice deals. And Joe Merritt, who built Dixie Iron Works into a large and successful business manufacturing oil field components. Or Marshall McGalliard who had to get seven hitchhiking rides to Spur, Texas when he was a student, and who now with his family farms 14,000 acres in the Texas panhandle. And this list could go on to include everyone in this room who has leveraged and parleyed their experiences at Texas A&M into great achievement.

So here we are having grown up at the greatest time in the history of the world, in the greatest place in the history of the world. Fifty-four years after we first met
and walked across the campus together whipping out all the way. Fifty-four years since we first learned to polish our shoes and shine our brass. But most importantly fifty-four years since we began to learn what it means to be a Texas Aggie.

God Bless Texas A&M. God Bless the United States. And God Bless the Class of ’63.