Remembering the Class of '65

As we celebrate our 50th Class reunion, tradition requires that we reflect on our time as students while at Texas A&M. So let’s go back through the halls of memory to a time more than 53 years ago to a special place we came to know as “Aggieland.”

Let’s start by setting the scene. In September 1961, College Station’s population was less than 5,000 (minus the students), and Bryan had about 30,000 residents. Texas A&M, as we know it today, did not exist. In its place, was “The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas,” with an enrollment that fall of 7,734 students, all male, of which 4,214 were members of the Corps of Cadets.

Dr. Harrington was the Chancellor of the College and Earl Rudder was the President. Colonel Davis was the Commandant of the Corps; Colonel Adams was the Director of the Band; Jim Myers was in his last season as the head football coach; James Cardwell was our Corps Commander; and Jim Davis was head yell leader.

That fall Roger Maris hit his 61st home run in the last game of the season. The cold war was in full swing with a standoff of American and Soviet tanks in Berlin. President Kennedy sent 18,000 military advisors to South Vietnam, and the #1 song in Sep ’61 was “Take Good Care of My Baby” by Bobby Vee.

At the time Texas A&M was considered a “highly selective educational institution.” To be admitted, an applicant had to be:

- At least 16 years of age;
- A male;
- A person of “good moral character”
- A high school graduate or the recipient of some “equivalent level of education, and
- Free of any “contagious or infectious diseases.”

The cost of attending A&M was less than $400 a semester for room and board, and the tuition cost was just $50 a semester. There were no cell phones, computers, email, or any other technological gadgets that current students find so essential. Also there were no room phones or television sets, and no air-conditioning in the dorm rooms.
FISH YEAR

It all began on Monday, September 11, 1961, when 1,894 naive, young men were weathering the elements of Hurricane “Carla” to report for “New Student Week.” The stated purpose of New Student Week was “to get the freshman off to a good academic start.” In truth, it was a crash course in Corps survival. Some of the things we learned that week were: to march; to “speak” (always “howdy” never “hi or hello”); to “whip out”; to “wildcat and hump it;” to make beds, shine shoes, polish brass, clean rooms, wax floors, properly wear our uniforms; and answer campusology questions on demand.

We learned that upper classmen were always addressed as “Mister,” and to put a “Sir” at the end of every sentence. We were also taught to always carry matches, should an upper classman require a “light.” Another important subject was “bathroom etiquette.” Since the Corps was founded on “the privilege system”, the toilet stalls were assigned by class, with seniors getting the coveted one closest to the window. We also learned never, never to flush a toilet without warning those in the shower of the rush of hot water that would surely follow that act. This was accomplished by shouting “crapper” and patiently waiting for the those in the shower to reply by shouting “shoot.” Failure to strictly follow this procedure could be disastrous.

We quickly discovered that Aggies didn’t speak Standard English except in class, around visitors, or when away from the campus (and sometimes not even then). Instead, they used a special language in which a room was a “hole;” a roommate was a “Fish Old Lady;” a floor was a “stoop;” a bed was a “sack;” a pep rally was a “yell practice;” a smile was a “buzz;” and freshmen didn’t have first names but were always addressed as “Fish Somebody.”

Even the food had different names. Meals were “chow;” meat was “bull neck;” eggs were “cackle;” beans were “artillery;” salad was “rabbit;” milk was “cow;” water was “sky;” and dessert was “cush.”

While we are on this subject of food, dining, for freshmen, was primarily a “spectator activity.” We were allowed at the table to serve the needs of the upper classmen, and then, if time permitted, to eat. The benefit of this arrangement, however, was that we didn’t experience the “weight gain” more common today. When it came to “cush,” freshmen had to learn it by answering the upper classmen’s questions. The “desirability” of the cush
dictated the difficulty of the “cush question.” If, for example, the cush was Boston cream pie, a typical “cush question” would be something like: “How many tiles are there in the campus swimming pool?” Whatever answer was given was always wrong. On the other hand, if the cush was “bread pudding,” freshmen could have as much as they wanted; sometimes a great deal more than they really wanted.

Upper classmen came in three flavors: sophomores were “pissheds”. They had a few privileges and were supposed to train the freshman; juniors were “serge butts,” who had more privileges than sophomores and ran the Corps; and seniors were “gods,” who had the privilege of doing whatever they wanted. Freshmen were “Fish,” and had no “privileges at all.” But this wasn’t strictly true. Freshmen actually had many “special privileges,” such as: the “privilege of not doing” things that normal people do; the “privilege of doing things” for the upper classmen that they were perfectly capable of doing for themselves; and the “privilege of waiting for next year”.

The rest of New Student Week was devoted to such activities as having our heads shaved by the MSC’s eight friendly barbers; receiving our government – issued uniforms, most in “gently used condition;” and buying additional uniforms, books and other supplies. Those who bought their books from “Old Army Lou,” also received a bonus when they sold them back - a valuable lesson in “accelerated depreciation”.

The highlight of New Student Week was “The Speech.” An address given by each outfit’s CO or First Sergeant on the subject of “Great Aggie Truths.” As we sat in the hall of our dorm, our knees pulled under our chins, our arms around our knees, and our backs to wall, the speaker forcefully told us that: “Highway 6 ran both ways;” one of the men sitting next to us would be gone by the end of the semester; our girl friends had already forgotten us and were running around with ‘High School Harrys’ who couldn’t even pass study hall;” our parents couldn’t possibly love us since they had sent us to a place like this; and finally, the only people who could get us through our freshman year were our “fish buddies.” Now, there was more to this Speech, but these were the positive and uplifting points.

At last, New Student Week was over. Once we had registered for our classes and the College had our tuition money, we had the weekend to get
acclimated to our surroundings and wait for the real fun to get started. Then the next week, the pissheads hit the campus and all hell broke loose. Never have we had so many people yelling at us from daylight to midnight. It seemed as though we had to learn a thousand things all at once.

As ‘Fish”, our daily lives were closely regimented. A typical day started with “First Call” at 6:30 am, and ended with “Lights Out” at 10:40 pm. In between, there were three mandatory formations, classes, weekly yell practices, and a three-hour compulsory study period known as “Call to Quarters” or “CQ.” Of course, “Lights Out,” did not mean sleep. Rather, it marked the start of our nocturnal duties such as “laundry detail, mail detail, and, floor waxing.” And there was always time for individual and group “constructive criticism sessions” with our helpful sophomores. As for the week-end, it started after Saturday Drill and ended at 7:30 on Sunday evening. To freshmen, the most important things were: sleep or ‘sacking out;' mail; and getting the heck out of this place as often as possible.

As for “sacking out,” the best places to grab a quick nap were the MSC; the YMCA lounges; Cushing Library; and best of all, the main lecture hall in the chemistry building with its air-conditioning. Mail or the ritual of checking the mail was of primary importance. In our time, the only contact most of had with the outside world was by letter. Therefore, we faithfully checked our post office boxes at least twice a day. If we found a letter in our box, even if it was just advertising, the trip was a success. And if the letter was from a young lady, the day was made, unless it was a “flush letter.” A “flush letter” was A&M’s version of a “Dear John Letter,” and these letters started arriving shortly after the fall semester began.

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.

And only four answers could be given to upperclassman’s questions:

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 introduced to PINKY L. DOWNS, the Texas A&M "official greeter". And we all remember Tripod, and Ranger, President Rudder's bulldog. I think Ranger liked us better than he liked the General.

We loved our Fightin' Texas Aggie Band brothers and at first envied the white pisspots they wore with their fatigues. But we quickly learned those white helmets were like a beacon attracting every pisshead on the campus.

There were bulls; there was bullring, bull text, bull neck, 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 and scrub and wax floors. 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 10 p.m. And then if we screwed up that day we had a bitch session in a pisshead’s hole. Imagine 35 fish sitting on a 10 x 12 floor with their chins resting on their knee caps. Now add 10-12 sophomores sitting on the bunk beds, desks and radiator smoking cigars or cigarettes politely pointing out all the ways we had screwed up that day.

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 an upperclassman started giving you licks on your behind with a broom, the broad side of a saber or a F-stick.

We experienced our first midnight yell practice the Friday night before the Cougar High game. This gave us a brief break from upperclassman harassment as uniforms were not worn, everyone was more relaxed, and no one was yelling at us Fish. The following day, Saturday, September 23, 1961 we experienced our first football game as Fish in Kyle Field. The Aggies tied Houston 7-7, but it was an amazing first experience. Especially at halftime when the announcer came on the public address system and in a booming voice said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, forming at the North end of Kyle Field is the Nationally Famous "Fightin' Texas Aggie Band." The drum major then gave the command "Recall, Step off on Hullabaloo!" And there was wildcatting all over the stadium. The three drum majors started the band with their batons and the
trumpets played “Recall.” The crowd rose to their feet and remained standing throughout the halftime drill. To this day I don’t know of any other band that is shown as much support and respect. It made us all proud that we had chosen to become “Fightin’ Texas Aggies.”

We also experienced our first Silver Taps on October 18, 1961, that honored Herbert Rogers, an Aggie Senior EE major from Hebbronville, Texas who was killed in an auto accident. All lights were turned out and it was dark as we gathered in front of the Academic Building. We stood quietly in the open air and heard the sound of the precision marching of a small group of the Ross Volunteers. Their heels struck the sidewalk together in a slow mournful cadence. There was one leader in front of three columns, each with seven Cadets. Each cadet, was dressed in the white RV uniform, and carried a rifle on his shoulder. They halted and prepare a 21-gun salute. The explosions echoed off the surrounding buildings as if a cry of pain and grief are spreading throughout the campus. Then silence returns, and the clear sound of Silver Taps pierced the air as six members of the Aggie Band play their trumpets. Three times, they play it in a mournful harmony. Tears came to many an eye as they played.

The TCU football game was a Corps trip. Each year the Aggie Corps of Cadets made two trips and had a Review (March-in) through downtown. One was to the Dallas (SMU) - Fort Worth (TCU) area. The second was to Houston (Rice) or Austin (tu). In 1961, the Corps Trips were to Fort Worth and Houston. We ended the football season with a record of 4-5-1, which would be the best record we experienced while at A&M.

After the break for the Christmas holidays, we hit the books and got through our first final exams. After the semester ended, some of our fish buddies did not return. 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, because we knew the rules. We had learned to balance study and Corps life, and in 4-1/2 months we would become upper classmen. Then, spring hit the campus and all the fish were puzzled by water fights, shining Sully, and “Good Bull”. Drown outs of sophomores and floating
dorms increased.

And, finally came the big day that we had all waited so anxiously for—“Final Review”……. Remember how much pleasure it gave us after the first time around to throw our fish caps high into the air? Old Army Lou looked happy as the little kids he hired picked up our hats.

Looking back on our fish year, I truly believe the pissheads’ goal 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 fish year, I set three goals:

1. Wear an Aggie Ring
2. Wear Senior Boots
3. Graduate

During that year many of us developed a love/hate relationship with A&M that carried through the rest of our years there. I’m sure many of us stayed because our fish buddies did. Thank God for Classmates who were there when we needed them.

**Sophomore YEAR**

The Fall of 1962 came and we found that many of our classmates did not return to campus. In fact the Corps sophomore class size was down to 1,076 from the 1,894 we started with …… a 43.1% reduction. After a summer that passed all too quickly, we had returned as mighty pissheads—only to have a midnight session in our First Sergeant’s room the first week to learn just how mighty we actually were. Our other activities throughout the rest of that year consisted of mustering grade points that were lost our fish year; assembling, mimeographing, and distributing old bull-text poop sheets; and trying either to obtain contracts, get our beloved D&C papers, or even more diligently planning to join the beard and shower shoe fraternity at Law Hall.

That Fall President Earl Rudder’s home, the oldest building on campus, was almost completely destroyed by fire. Many students eating in nearby Sbisa Mess Hall came pouring out to fight the fire and save many of the President’s possessions. And Hank Folberg’s first season as the football coach did not go well, as we only won 2 games that fall. I believe that was the year we started
kissing our dates on first downs.

With the increased freedom we gained our sophomore year we quickly learned that Sam Houston State in Huntsville had a 10:1 girl/boy ratio and it was only 60 miles away. We started frequenting local watering holes like The Triangle, East Gate Lounge, Franklin’s, Uncle Ed’s and Uncle Jimmy’s. 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, there were the peaceful resorts at Sealy and La Grange—better known as the Chicken Ranch.

The best of all road trips was Splash Day – the day they opened the beach in Galveston. When we couldn’t take the mess hall food anymore we went to Wehrman’s, Youngblood’s, Zarapes, the Northgate’s fine restaurants and the ever-popular Shipley’s Donuts.

We lived for mail that came into the North Gate Post Office or to the MSC. Our link to the outside world was the one phone in the guardroom of each dorm. There was the MSC, Guion Hall, Academic Building, Trigon, G. Rollie White, Kyle Field, the Grove, Duncan and Sibisa, the Exchange Store, the Clay Pits, the Campus Theater at Northgate, the Palace Theater in Bryan and the Circle Drive-In..... famous for beer busts and bad movies. The 16 Corps dorms with names we learned our fish year, but quickly forgot so we just called them by numbers 1 through 17.

And who can forget signing up for classes at Sbisa at the beginning of each semester? We spent most of the day going to various booths trying to get the right courses, at the right time with the right professor. When you had to have 144 hours in most majors to graduate, it took skillful planning to juggle your required course load mixed in with a few grade point courses.

And also the monsoon season that 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.

Then there was the campus laundry—they managed to take the elastic out of your socks and underwear and put it in the collars of your shirts. You also got at least one free broken or lost button.

On football and dance weekends, we would sometimes make the run to Whiskey Bridge. We kept our dates at private residences or at luxury motels like
the Saber, the Sands, the Holiday Plaza and the Western. When you stop to think about it there weren’t a lot of places to go or things to do at the place some lovingly called Sing-Sing on the Brazos, but we all managed to find some creative or joyful activity with our buddies to occupy the time.

Other events that occurred our sophomore year included:

- A bill was introduced in the Texas Legislature to change the name of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas to Texas A&M University
- The Texas Maritime Academy accepted its first students.
- President Kennedy gave a speech at Rice University stating we would put a man on the moon by the end of the decade
- The Cuban Missile Crises began
- NASA launches Gordon Cooper on Mercury-Atlas 9, the last Mercury mission.
- On 27 April 1963, the A&M board ruled that effective 1 June 1963 eligible women would be admitted into graduate programs and veterinary medicine as day students. Wives and daughters of faculty and staff, wives of students in residence, and women staff members would also be admitted to undergraduate programs.

At the end of that year we took the required tests for our advanced ROTC contracts, and prepared to become juniors by buying our “serge uniforms” and “captain midnight greens (most in ‘gently used condition’).” At last, Final Review arrived and this time it didn’t rain. On the second time around the Drill Field, we worn our serge and white belts with the “stacked” belt buckles and said goodbye to the Class of ’63.

Junior YEAR

When our junior year started, only 488 members of the Class of ’65 remained in the Corps of Cadets. That was only 25.7% of our original fish class.

On a brighter note that Fall it was a perfect 5-0 season in stealing mascots……. the fish class of ’67 stole every mascot in the SWC, They said the Shetland pony mascot for SMU was one mean little $OB....meaner than their football team. And Rice had this really cheesy looking paper mache owl that weighed a ton. And they definitely stole Bevo. Not only the Texas Rangers but the campus cops, t.u. campus cops, Austin and College Station cops and the
Highway Patrol were looking for him. Ol' Army Lou volunteered his bookstore as headquarters for the Law, and he kept the coffee going. Ags would drop by and mention that they saw a stock trailer with horns sticking out over near Snook, and a bunch of cops would go roaring off. They sent them on goose chases all over the county!

We had a great Town Hall our junior year with performances from Peter, Paul and Mary, Marty Robbins, Brothers Four, The Kingston Trio, Benny Goodman, and Pete Fountain.

Other events that occurred our junior year included:

- Texas state legislature officially renames school Texas A&M University, with the "A" and "M" being a symbolic link to the school's past but no longer officially standing for "Agricultural and Mechanical".

- PRESIDENT KENNEDY was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963. We all remember where we were and what we were doing when we heard. The Bonfire was subsequently cancelled.

- The Beatles' “I Want to Hold Your Hand” and “I Saw Her Standing There” were released and were heard all over campus.

- The Surgeon General reported that smoking may be hazardous to one’s health (the first such statement from the U.S. Government)

- Cassius Clay defeats Sonny Liston and is crowned heavyweight champion of the world.

- Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing President Johnson to take any measures he believed were necessary to retaliate and to promote the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia.

Later that spring our Texas Aggie baseball team won the Southwest Conference Championship, and as the spring semester ended, we prepared to become Seniors. We bought our senior boots, most of them "gently used," and at Final Review, proudly wore them knowing that we had earned the right to do so. Just as Final Review was ending, a miracle occurred. ... Suddenly, the sun was brighter, the sky was bluer, and the birds sang more sweetly.

**SENIOR YEAR**

The summer before our senior year was mainly devoted to “military training.”
Most of those in Army ROTC went to sunny Fort Sill, OK for six fun-packed weeks of outdoor activities, while those in Air Force ROTC went to Webb Air Force Base in Big Springs, TX. A small group of our Classmates spent that summer in Quantico, Virginia, participating in the Marine Corps' Platoon Leaders Program. Our Class distinguished itself in all of these venues, and upon returning home, we found that our Aggie Rings had arrived.

Here are some of the things that happened our senior year:

- The enrollment of the College reached 8,339, of which 3,156 were in the Corps. There were 279 seniors, members of the Class of ‘65 in the Corps.
- Membership in the Corps of Cadets became voluntary for male students.
- 254 female students enrolled at Texas A&M for the fall 1964 semester.
- Five male freshmen became the first African-Americans in the A&M Corps of Cadets.
- Our football record that fall was 1-9 with our only win over SMU. The overall football record for our 4 years at A&M was a disappointing 9-27-3.
- Elephant Walk was a bit more solemn for us seniors, but only because it was the end of our useful life as a member of the 12th man.
- The building of our last bonfire, which was one of the largest ever built at the time. Of course, since it was a senior privilege not to work on the Bonfire, many of us left the campus after Elephant Walk, not to return until it was time to burn it.
- Finally, May arrived and with it the “Senior Ring Dance.” As tradition required, our dates turned our rings so that the “65” faced outward to the world. Many of those young ladies went on to marry their dates after graduation.
- Then it was May 22, 1965 – Graduation Day. At 9:00AM we graduated (or some us did anyway) in G. Rollie White followed by the Commissioning Exercises where 135 members of our class were commissioned Second Lieutenants in the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps. At 2:00PM, we marched Final Review; listened to the strains of “Auld Lang Syne;” and took the salute of our outfits as they marched by for the last time.

Other events of 1965:

• April 9, 1965 – In Houston the Astrodome opens.

• July 28, 1965 – President Johnson announces the increase of US troops to Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000, and to more than double the number of men drafted per month - from 17,000 to 35,000.

CONCLUSION

For many of us after leaving A&M, one of our first stops was military service. Members of our Class served with distinction in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard in both officer and enlisted ranks. Some made the military their life’s work, and they did it well. Eight members of our Class became “Flag Officers” with seven Generals (3-Army, 3-Air Force, 1-Marine Corps) and one Navy Admiral.

The Vietnam War definitely touched us all in some way, and many of us were called to serve in Vietnam. Sadly, 12 members of our Class made the ultimate sacrifice for our country while serving on active duty during this period. We may never know all the circumstances of their service, but we do know the dignity of their death. They died performing their duty as Aggies have always done, and in so doing, they honored us all.

After military service, we married, raised families, pursued our careers, and served our communities. However, despite how busy our lives were, something always drew us back to A&M. That “force” was “the Spirit.” In recent times, it has become “fashionable” in some quarters to explain away the “Spirit” by saying that from outside no one can “understand it,” and from inside no one can “explain it.” We know better. Those who have lived “the Spirit” know that it holds no mysteries” At its core, the “Spirit of Aggieland” is simply love: love of God; of country; of family; of friends and neighbors; of “fish buddies;” and yes, love of our school where we learned the lessons that shaped our lives. In part, this love is evidenced by the more than $41 million dollars in gifts, bequests, and pledges, we have made, individually and as a Class, to A&M.

Since graduation some of our classmates have continued to give of themselves in service and support Texas A&M. Included among the Members of the Class of ’65 are:

• 11 Endowed Century Club members with The Association of Former Students
• 1 Past Commandant of the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M University
• 1 Past Vice President of Student Affairs at Texas A&M University
• 9 Classmates that have served the class as a class agent
• 4 Distinguished Alumnus recipients
• 2 Past Board Members for The Association of Former Students
• 2 past 12th Man Foundation Executive Committee Members
• 1 Classmate has served on the Board of Regents for Texas A&M University System
• 22 Classmates that have served as a President of their local A&M Club

The world has turned many times since we first met in the fall of 1961. The sights, sounds and experiences of those distant days are now wonderful memories, watered by tears and nurtured by the laughter and smiles of yester year. With the passage of time, our Class has become smaller. Many good friends are gone. But in the beauty and serenity of Muster, our most treasured tradition, we will think of them again. And if we do so in our hearts, free from the “clutter” of the conscious world, they will be “forever young.”

And here we are just short of 55 years later. When we first walked across the campus of the A&M College of Texas in the fall of 1961, few of us gave a thought to meeting up again in 2015 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. We have lived, loved, worked, made mistakes and have learned from them. We have fought, won and sometimes lost, but never quit, and because of all these things we have become better individuals.

WELL DONE CLASS OF ’65. WELL DONE!