



BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS COURTESY OF RICHARD BIONDI '60 EXCEPT: PAGE 51, *TEXAS AGGIE* FILE PHOTO. ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE JETER '06 EXCEPT: PAGE 46, BOTTOM LEFT, BY ROBB KENDRICK, COURTESY OF TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION; PAGE 46-47 (LARGE PHOTO), PAGE 48, FAR LEFT, AND PAGE 50, MIDDLE AND BOTTOM, *TEXAS AGGIE* FILE PHOTOS; PAGE 48, FAR RIGHT, COURTESY OF CUSHING MEMORIAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES.



By Stephanie Jeter '06

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For yell leaders, hoarseness is a badge. Exhaustion is expected. Being sore just means you're doing your job—and the job is to lead.

Officially, yell leaders are the face of Aggie athletics, promoting and perpetuating support for A&M's teams. Since the yell leaders' start in 1907, their position in front of screaming fans has meant unity for thousands.

Now past 100 years, their job continues to be hallowed. It turns out that yell leaders are a very important part of Texas A&M's story because they help tell it, shape it and, most important, protect it.



In a way, 100 years isn't just a celebration of yell leaders' longevity. In Aggieland, strong tradition isn't contingent on a timeframe. The running joke is give a good ritual a couple runs and it'll stick. Do something twice in Aggieland, and it's a tradition.

Instead, 100 years is about celebrating yell leaders' history, what they've seen and have done for the University in their century, and what the group's leadership has meant during times of transition or trouble.

There were times in A&M's history when fear, sadness or change could have caused the Spirit to lose its strength—it never did. Built on the grounds of tradition, the 12th Man is strong, but it helps to have someone to whom the population can look for support.

Each school year a new set of yell leaders is initiated in the group's rich heritage. Though they have all helped lead the University through could-be landmines, some stories stick out more than others.

A Time Of Change

Mike Marlow '64 was a senior yell leader when school was integrated, the Corps of Cadets became optional and when the University got a new name.

The 1964-65 school year was a big one

a change in student population. Integration was welcomed by students, Marlow said, but bringing women to campus brought major complaint. It was one of the hardest adjustments for the student body during that time, he said, but A&M made it through, even with the initial one women's bathroom.

"Then of course, at Thanksgiving, four days before Bonfire, (President John F.) Kennedy was assassinated," Marlow said.

In the wake of the nation's loss, there was talk of canceling the football game with the University of Texas, Marlow said. The game went on to be televised, but the corresponding Bonfire was set aside out of respect to the fallen president. The stack was taken apart log by log, the cut timber set aside for the fol-

lowing year's use.

Man made it through. "It was emotional," he said. "Like the rest of the nation, we were grieving." Most Aggies were in the Corps, so "he was our commander in chief."

No matter what was happening, the Spirit must be passed down, he said—yell practices twice a week. "It was true yell practice. We had to teach the freshmen the yells," Marlow said. That's what has kept A&M unique.

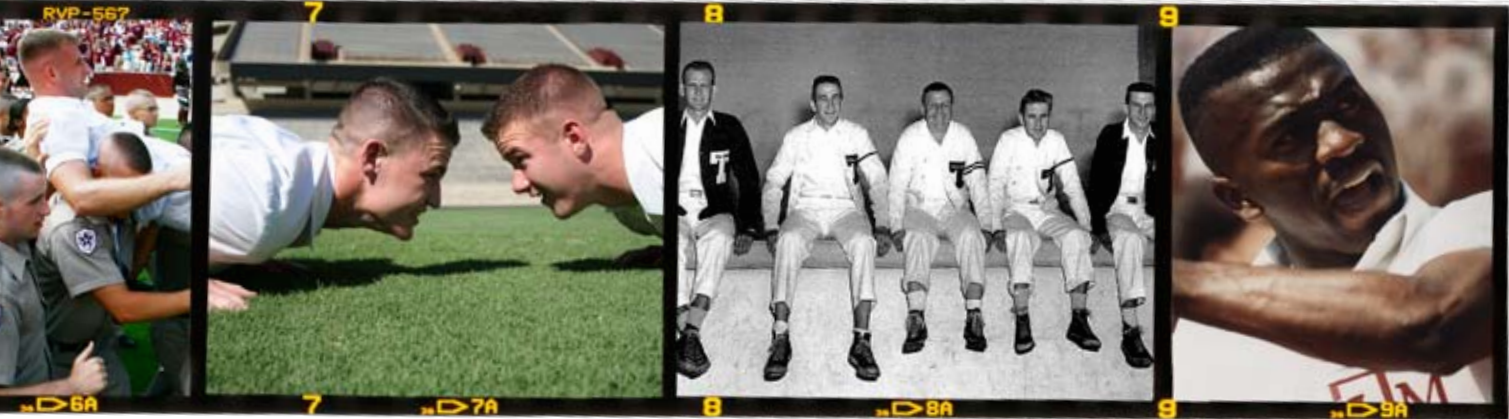
Cadets got their training, but there was still a rebellious streak Marlow's senior year.

"A&M was successful in stealing five mascots," he said.

Marlow can remember several nights being jolted from sleep by a ringing phone. An angry dean from another university or member of law enforcement wanted their mascot back. It was Marlow's job to see to the safe return of each.

First there was the Rice Owl made of fiberglass, then a living TCU horned frog—"there were two in a glass case. We thought one died, but it turns out it was stuffed." A call came at midnight to say that SMU's pony was being chased around a parking lot. Word came a bit later that Texas Tech's painted horse was wandering around by the freeway.

"The biggest one was when we got Bevo. There were five police agents questioning me. I didn't know where



for the former Texas AMC.

"At the very first of the year, President (James Earl) Rudder called in a handful of student leaders," Marlow remembered. "He wanted to lay out the vision for the year."

The University's trailblazer called for

lowing year's use.

Back then, Bonfire leadership fell under the role of the yell leaders, from cut to stack to burn. Red Pots didn't get control until 1974, so Marlow still was one of the few calling orders. The decision to not burn was a hard one, he said, but the 12th

Man made it through. "It was emotional," he said. "Like the rest of the nation, we were grieving." Most Aggies were in the Corps, so "he was our commander in chief."

No worries, he said. No mascot was ever injured—except the fiberglass owl. It was pictured in the *Houston Post*

missing its head.

Marlow was thrown in the fountain only once that year for a home game win, but that was all right, he said. The memories he treasures most weren't created out of success or loss; they were made by being a Fightin' Texas Aggie yell leader.

"It was a little easier to have an influence on students back then," Marlow said. Most of the student body held membership in the Corps of Cadets. "Communication with the student body was easy, because it was easy to communicate with the Corps."

Could yell leaders be able to continue the Spirit when change brought a new student body?

1999

The unthinkable happened. At about 2:30 a.m., Nov. 18, 1999, Bonfire collapsed. Five thousand logs disengaged from the structure. Fifty-eight students were on the stack. Twelve were killed.

Head yell leader Jeff Bailey '00 was asleep in his dorm room when the news came. The Corps outfit a floor below him in the dorms was set to work on stack that night. People were going room to room trying to get a headcount of who was missing.

At the very beginning of the building process, the University television station set up cameras so the building process could be watched from dorm rooms. They called it the Bonfire Channel. "I immediately turned on the TV, saw the lights and ran out there," Bailey said.

What he saw—"It's hard to put words around it," he said. "Chaos."

Chaos with incredible leadership, he said.

"With the fall of Bonfire, the biggest question was what are we going to do? They looked to us as yell leaders," Bailey said. "How do we respond to this unbelievable situation?"

Considering what he saw on the field that morning, "the answer was not to do nothing," he said.

The timeframe between Bonfire and game day seemed to last forever. Yell leaders met time and time again with other student leaders and faculty. Emotions were raw, Bailey said. Meeting the needs

So Many Questions

Just like every other tradition at Texas A&M, yell leaders have evolved over the decades, shifting and changing as each group unknowingly put its mark on the University forever. When it comes to telling Good Bull yell leader stories, there's only one right answer—and it comes from the Association of Former Yell Leaders, which supports the current yell leaders and preserves the group's history. Richard Biondi '60, a yell leader from 1958 to 1960, compiles the stories and checks for accuracy. It's a position he fell into out of necessity.

With his help, and written communication from *The Yell Leader*, the official publication of the Association of Former Yell Leaders, *Texas Aggie* tracked down the origins of some popular yell leader activities.

Q: Have there always been five yell leaders?

Between 1910 and 1920, there were anywhere from two to six yell leaders. From 1920 to 1943, there were usually four yell leaders with a few exceptions—from 1943 to 1945, only three men served, and during the 1945-46 school year, there were two separate sets of four yell leaders. But in 1946, the "veteran yell leader" was introduced, and although his spot is no longer designated for a veteran, it brought the number of yell leaders to five: two juniors and three seniors.

Q: How are yell leaders selected?

In the early days, one individual was elected as the "chief" yell leader and then he was free to choose three more men to assist him in his duties. The election process has evolved over the years—votes used to be restricted to only juniors and seniors, and the senior yell leader elected with the most votes was named head yell leader. Now any junior or senior male or female with a minimum GPA of 2.25 can run for the position, and each student has five votes: three for seniors, two for juniors. The head yell leader is selected from the three winning seniors by a University-appointed committee. Following interviews, the head yell leader is selected by secret ballot.

Q: When did the yell leaders start wearing maroon shoes?

Chuck Hinton '75 and the rest of the yell leaders during the 1974

football season were wearing white tennis shoes with black stripes, shoes that Hinton said got dirty easily. Hinton proposed to find a more suitable shoe and found maroon nylon running shoes in Houston. The yell leaders donned the shoes, and when the Aggies won the first 10 games of the 1975 football season, a new tradition was born.

Q: When did the freshmen cadets start throwing the yell leaders into Fish Pond after an Aggie win at Kyle Field?

It was after a 26-0 victory over Texas A&I in 1940, when 2,300 freshmen cadets captured the two senior yell leaders and threw them into the showers in celebration. The next week, after a 41-6 win over Tulsa in San Antonio, the freshmen tried to strike again by throwing the yell leaders into the showers at Alamo Stadium. The showers didn't work out, so the freshmen found the next available body of water: a sunken garden adjacent to the stadium. The yell leaders have been thrown into Fish Pond—the closest body of water to Kyle Field at that time—ever since.

Q: When did the A&M symbol first appear on the pocket of the yell leader uniform?

The senior yell leaders for 1967-68 thought the plain white uniform needed a little color, so the trio made the decision to add the maroon A&M symbol that continues to be embroidered on the pocket today. (continued on page 51)



of thousands, all in different emotional states, would be difficult, but Texas A&M had to stick together. They wouldn't be able to make it on their own.

Some on campus called for the game to be canceled, saying it didn't feel right to be competitive or yell. Bailey understood the hesitation, but no yelling, no competition? That didn't bring Aggies together, Bailey said. That would be doing nothing.

In the end, the game and Midnight Yell became a memorial. "We grabbed on to that responsibility," Bailey said. "There was never a doubt."

Bailey started carrying a tape recorder to lay down his thoughts. Bonfire tradition held that as head yell leader, Bailey would have recited *The Last Corps Trip* at Bonfire. The poem meant even more now, so he memorized it.

To be in that place with so much grief, searching for hope, Bailey said, "getting in front of all those people was the single biggest thing I've ever had to do. I will always remember."

Thousands met with lighted candles at the Bonfire site, not as individuals, but as the 12th Man. The yell leaders marched in with the band, but Bailey could see the candles coming into Kyle Field. About 60,000 people showed up for Midnight Yell, filling the stadium up to the second deck and into The Zone.

"Our job as yell leaders was to step up in that momentum, to bring the student body together," Bailey said. The goal was to provide an outlet for Aggies to grieve in whatever way the way they needed. Twelve cannon rounds were fired, *The Spirit* was sung and Bailey addressed the crowd.

He doesn't remember what he said, outside of the traditional Aggie prose. But a special memorial issue of *Texas Aggie* recorded some of his words:

"We've got to remember what Bonfire stood for. What makes it special are the Aggies standing around it. So, as we stand here tonight, I hope we yell louder, sing louder and hold each other stronger than we ever have before."

Bailey said it was an amazing moment. Hugs, tears and a little bit of healing.

Nine years out and looking back on his year as head yell leader, Bonfire is what



next couple hours," he said.

But, he said, every yell leader can look back on memories. They all helped to "continue to perpetuate tradition."

Sometimes time doesn't matter. Not when it doesn't change things.

"To keep this great tradition, it's not just about the yell leaders, it's about the student body and the 12th Man," he said. "It's our job to represent and fight for that every day."

Back To The Beginning

Aggie legend introduces its leading men in an almost slapstick way. The story starts in 1907 at a losing Aggie football game.

Back then, A&M was an all-male, cadets-only college—lots of crew cuts, zero ponytails. The arrival of women would eventually come, but at the time, cadets in need of a game-day date would invite women from nearby universities. The railroad served as the shuttle bus of that era.

Aggie lore says that at this particular 1907 football game, the score turned bad enough that a group of ladies from Texas Woman's University in Denton threatened to leave in boredom. Forget the game, they said. It was time to go home.

Cadets couldn't have done anything about the game, but they did have command over the underclassmen.

The story has never been confirmed, but the tale that has circulated for most

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stands out most—that and being soaking wet after being thrown into the Fish Pond after every home game win. A&M was on a winning streak during his years as yell leader, and Bailey's dripping laundry bag proved it. "I can remember sitting there fully spent, barely able to move for the

of the yell leaders' 100-plus years is this: With marching orders given by upperclassmen to entertain the ladies, a few freshmen snuck into a maintenance closet and dressed in the janitors' white coveralls. Coming back to a still dismal crowd and game, the freshmen

So Many Questions (cont'd)

ran onto the track in front of the stands and started telling jokes and leading the crowd in yells.

A! G! G! I! E! S!

It worked, as legend has it. In fact, the shtick worked a little too well—as soon as the freshmen in white janitor coveralls started getting more attention than the upperclassmen, leading the crowd became an upperclassman-only privilege.

And it still is, as evidenced by the most recent batch of yell leaders.

Lans Martin '09, Fletcher Massie '08, Ben DeBayle '09, Weston Wilcox '10 and Casey Schaefer '10 know their purpose, they say, and it's the same one given to the boys in 1907. Support athletics. Support the 12th Man. Be student leaders. Help the less fortunate. Embody selfless service.

It's not an easy job. In fact, since the yell leaders' inception, there have been only 320 who've been asked to complete the task.

The current five get together with former yell leaders often through The Association of Former Yell Leaders. It's a much-needed support system for the new boys on the block.

"At the get-togethers, they always offer us advice and won't hesitate to tell us stories," Fletcher said.

Right, Wilcox said: "We are the face of the University, and there's a lot that comes with that."

They look at their time as yell leaders as a continuance of something good that started long ago.

There's a difference between tradition and history—history has dates but tradition has heart. Yell leaders serve, Martin said. The history has been recorded, but it's the continuing heart of the group that makes the yell leaders iconic. 🍌

The Association of Former Students proudly supports the yell leader tradition by arranging and providing lodging for the yell leaders at each out-of-town football game and bowl game. Thank you for making this possible through your annual support.

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Q: When did yell practices move to Kyle Field?

Yell practices can trace their origins to the steps of the YMCA building and Guion Hall. Practices were moved to the Grove in the 1940s, where they remained until 1960, when they made the move to their present home—Kyle Field.

Q: When did the yell leaders begin carrying torches to Midnight Yell Practice?

Before the 1960s, the senior yell leaders carried torches to light bonfire, but during the 1964-65 school year, the seniors carried torches to yell practice. There is no clear evidence to suggest a year when all five yell leaders begin carrying the torches to yell, but by the mid-1970s, the juniors had joined in on the tradition.

Q: When did formal away game yell practices begin?

Most former yell leaders can remember spontaneous yell practices during away games, but no one can quite recall their regular debut. However, by the end of the 1970s, the practice of scheduling a yell practice for each away game had begun.

Q: When did the tradition of the head yell leader working out with the football team begin and end?

Head yell leader Tommy Stone '67 began working out with the team, and this tradition continued for the next 30 years. Most of the yell leaders—who were even issued lockers and attended team meetings—participated as a member of the scout team or as members of the 12th Man kickoff team. But in the late 1990s, the NCAA ruled that no more than 105 players could suit up and practice prior to the first day of classes. Tim Duffy '98 was the last yell leader to fully participate in the practices in summer 1997; Jeff Bailey '00 was the last yell leader to suit up in pads, as then-coach R.C. Slocum

allowed him to participate in the last two practices of summer 1999.

Q: When did the yell leaders begin wearing embroidered overalls?

Before the 1974-75 school year, yell leaders always sported overalls to Bonfire and midnight yell practice. Jim Bob Mickler '76 was given an embroidered pair, the first set that was similar to the ones the yell leaders wear today, by his girlfriend, Pat (who is now his wife).



Q: When did the junior yell leaders begin kneeling on the 50-yard-line during the Aggie Band's halftime performance?

The Aggies were trailing LSU 17-0 during the first football game of the 1987 season, and head yell leader Doug Beall '88 told the junior yell leaders they needed to concentrate on how to motivate the 12th Man during the halftime performances. The juniors hit the 50-yard-line, kneeling and concentrating on the task just as the Aggie Band hit the field. Their efforts paid off for the defense, as the Aggies held the Tiggers to a scoreless second half. The Aggies may have been outscored 17-3, but yet another tradition was born.