

## Concise Corps History

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Established in 1871 under the provisions of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act in 1882, the Agricultural and Mechanics College of Texas (AMC) formally opened its doors for instruction on October 4, 1876.<sup>1</sup> As was the case with all Land-Grant institutions, AMC was founded to provide instruction in agriculture, the mechanic arts, and as an institution dedicated to educating and training men in military science.<sup>2</sup> From this foundation, the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets was born.

Much of the proud heritage of Texas A&M is built around the Corps of Cadets. Student life and Aggie traditions at A&M were molded by the Corps of Cadets. While other colleges permitted and encouraged sororities and fraternities, none developed at A&M until the 1970s. Texas A&M did have a number, of academic, honor, social, and hometown clubs and organizations, but the Corps of Cadets became the single, all encompassing fraternity for all the students. This has helped make Texas A&M a unique institution of higher learning.<sup>3</sup> Since the first day of classes the Corps has been the keeper of the Aggie spirit and the guardian of Aggie traditions.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Corps of Cadets is no longer the largest organization on the campus of Texas A&M, it still remains a significant element of the university's prestige. The Corps is a very proud organization, deep and rich in tradition. Its

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<sup>1</sup> Dethloff, Centennial History, p. 29

<sup>2</sup> Leftwich, p. 19

<sup>3</sup> Dethloff, Pictorial History, p. 21

<sup>4</sup> Leftwich, p. 96

members are well versed in the long-standing traditions of their student group and hold the Corps in very high regard before, during, and after their association with the organization.

An insight into how the Corps views its traditional background and the ideology it emphasizes when integrating new members can be seen in this message printed in the Standard of 1972. "The Corps of Cadets has long been known for its gallant fighting spirit. You, as a member of the Corps, will soon feel this spirit and will make it a part of your daily life, for it is this spirit that imbues all with the feeling of unity and devotion to A&M. It is a spirit gained through hard work and loyalty to the Corps and to the University, and it attaches itself so firmly to cadets of A&M that they carry it with them the rests of their lives—Once an Aggie, Always an Aggie... Cadets who have been here before you have been responsible for preserving the best in our Aggie traditions and, as you learn them, you too will be responsible for passing them on, untarnished.<sup>5</sup>

Adherence to tradition, coupled with undying loyalty make the Corps of Cadets a unique organization composed of highly dedicated individuals who administer change for the better while keeping intact the traditional aspects which make the Corps what it is. This is why one can find ideas developed during the early existence of the Corps highly treasured even today. These ancient ideas have been applied to contemporary military and educational needs so that their relevance is not questioned.

The Corps has trained and commissioned officers for United States (and

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<sup>5</sup> The Standard, Corps of Cadets, 1972, p. 8

foreign) military service since its conception. Aggie officers have served in defense of freedom under the American flag in every major conflict since the Spanish-American War. Texas A&M trained and commissioned over 5,000 reserve officers during World War II, and more than 7,000 other Aggies who received military instruction at A&M were commissioned through Officer Candidate Schools. More former students of Texas A&M served as officers in World War II than from any other institution, including the United States Military Academy.<sup>6</sup>

From the ranks of the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets during the war came seven recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest honor bestowed upon an individual for gallantry in the line of duty. Five of these medals were awarded posthumously. Numerous Distinguished Service Crosses—the second highest honor—have been awarded to individuals trained within the Corps of Cadets.<sup>7</sup>

Twenty-nine Aggies served as generals during the war, untold others demonstrated unusual heroism, and thousands more produced examples of men determinedly doing their jobs.<sup>8</sup> In a speech to the graduating class of 1950, General Omar Bradley said, “The men of Texas A&M can stand up to any men in the world and compare favorably their education and training for leadership—leadership in the pursuits of peace, and if it comes to war, leadership in battle.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Leftwich, p. 96

<sup>7</sup> Leftwich, p. 96

<sup>8</sup> Dethloff, Centennial History, p. 471

<sup>9</sup> Dethloff, Centennial History, p. 450

As of 1981, over 180 Former Students of Texas A&M have attained flag rank in the military services.

Texas A&M had its Corps of Cadets training for, and serving in, the armed services for decades before the ROTC program was created by the National Defense act of June 3, 1918. A&M was approved by the United States War Department to establish a Senior ROTC program on October 19, 1916.<sup>10</sup> Before 1965, when ROTC was made optional, the Corps was Texas A&M University. Considered by many as the “military school of the southwest,” peak enrollment in the Corps reached 8,651 during the 1946-1947 school year.<sup>11</sup>

The Corps also maintains its own distinctive uniform fashioned after those worn by the US Army during the 1940s. These uniforms, worn daily, are another one of the many ways in which the Corps of Cadets has preserved the traditions of the past and maintained the unique qualities which separate it from the ROTC units at other American universities.

The Corps has faced many changes, meeting each with the hardcore determination necessary to solve the problems those changes might cause. The first major change occurred in 1947 when the freshmen were moved to the annex (Bryan Army Airfield, now the Riverside Campus) west of Texas A&M originally to simplify training and to prevent hazing.<sup>12</sup> Later, in 1950, the freshmen were returned to the main campus and integrated them into the regular corps units.<sup>13</sup> The next major challenge to the Corps was the introduction of large numbers of

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<sup>10</sup> Ness and Oaks, p. 45

<sup>11</sup> Dethloff, Centennial History, p. 583

<sup>12</sup> Leftwich, p. 27

<sup>13</sup> Leftwich, p. 30

civilian (non-Corps) students into the university in 1965.<sup>14</sup> For a few years immediately after World War I, limited numbers of civilian students, primarily veterans, were enrolled at Texas A&M and were known as casuals. In addition, in 1955, participation in the Corps of Cadets became optional for juniors and seniors. No longer was Texas A&M solely a military school, yet the Corps of Cadets survived. Other challenges and changes have taken place-most for the better-but through them all the Corps has remained as a centerpiece of the university and the keepers of the spirit of Aggieland.<sup>15</sup>

Cadets have remained involved in Texas A&M and can be found in virtually all facets of university life and campus organizations. The Corps itself also has distinct organizations available to cadets, and these groups are well-known for their contributions to the university and the experiences and camaraderie to their members.

Well known to people across the country is the Aggie Band. The first Aggie Band, consisting of 16 members, was formed in 1894 under the direction of Arthur Jenkins and Joseph Holick, a local Czech cobbler. The band's primary purpose was to provide festive music at special events such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.<sup>16</sup> This group of individuals is now a highly respected and very popular unit of the Corps of Cadets. Performing at football games, presidential inaugurations, or parades, the Aggie Band of approximately 300 members portrays some of the best qualities the Corps has to offer.

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<sup>14</sup> Leftwich, p. 14

<sup>15</sup> Leftwich, p. 35

<sup>16</sup> Adams, (1989), p. 8E

The Fish Drill Team (FDT)—composed entirely of freshmen-originated in 1947 while the freshmen were living at the Riverside Campus and had more time on their hands since their upperclassmen were twelve miles away.<sup>17</sup> They have competed in national and state championships earning numerous titles in each competition. The most amazing concept of the Fish Drill Team is that they compete against drill teams composed of upperclassmen that have been drilling together for as long as four years. The FDT is a new group of cadets each year!

Numerous other organizations within the Corps are open for all cadets, but one of the most prestigious is the Ross Volunteer (RV) honor guard. The Ross Volunteers are the oldest student organization in Texas and are named after former Texas governor and A&M president, Lawrence Sullivan Ross.<sup>18</sup> The RVs are the official honor guard for the Governor of Texas and have performed honor guard duties for American presidents, senators, congressmen, and even the Queen of England when she visited Texas.

From the beginning, integrity and honor have been the foundations on which the Corps has been built. Since the first honor code of 1877, cadets have been expected to uphold the best qualities of society.<sup>19</sup> This is in accordance with their code of honor in existence today: "An Aggie doesn't lie, cheat, or steal, and will not tolerate those who do."<sup>20</sup>

The young cadets of the Corps are the keepers of the Spirit, guardians of tradition, and the strong right arm of patriotism at Aggieland. From these ranks

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<sup>17</sup> Leftwich, p. 30

<sup>18</sup> Adams, (1989), p. 8E

<sup>19</sup> Leftwich, p. 19

<sup>20</sup> The Standard; Corps of Cadets, 1990, p. 1:39

march the leaders of the state and nation. Since 1876, the Corps has produced individuals of strength and character who refuse to accept defeat.<sup>21</sup> From the forge of training comes the cutting steel of leadership, exemplified by the many flag officers, Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, and the thousands who have given their lives in defense of their country.<sup>22</sup> From the haunting notes of Silver Taps, through the soft call of Muster, and on to the crescendo of the Aggie Band, the Corps marches across the pages of history--unique in its tradition, loyalty, camaraderie, and power.

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<sup>21</sup> Leftwich, p. 37

<sup>22</sup> Adams, (1979), p. 158

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