ENCOUNTERING AGGIELAND IN 1942.

By: Paul F. Deisler, Jr., '46

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Best -
Enjoy -
Paul

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DEDICATION

In the fall of 2013 Cynthia Ann (Annie) Forman, '16,
a student at Texas A&M University,
asked her grandfather,
Howell Northcutt Forman, Jr., '46,
if he would ask some of his classmates
to provide their own Aggie stories for her.
I took up the challenge with enthusiasm
and the result may be more than
anyone might want. Still, here is the result
and, because she instigated all this activity
on my part, I dedicate the collection of stories
to Annie Forman. I wish
her a happy and successful career at A&M and
a happy and successful life beyond
Aggieland's borders.

Paul Deisler

Paul Frederick Deisler, Jr. '46

ENCOUNTERING AGGIELAND IN 1942.

By: Paul F. Deisler, Jr., '46

Every boy who went to A&M in my time, as is true today in general, brought with him his own background and personality, but it was a more primitive age. This mixture of characteristics and conditions colored his experiences at A&M, modified the effect that A&M had on him and made for different stories for different boys. I say "boy" and "his" because in my day A&M, except for our redoubtable mascot, Reveille, the first Reveille and like no other, was all male. I will write a bit about my pre-A&M background to aid in understanding what I found at A&M after I arrived.

My World before A&M.

Born in El Paso in 1926, my first school was a one-room schoolhouse named Benevento School with one remarkable teacher (shades of Tom Sawyer) for all eight grades, Miss De Vrain. It was the depths of the Big Depression, 1932, an unpromising and difficult time, yet my parents were always able to keep food on the table. I lacked nothing necessary and, even at the time, I realized I was lucky and was deeply grateful.

The school had two outhouses, one for girls, one for boys and, in the cloakroom, a hand pump for water and a big dipper that we all shared for drinking. Miss De Vrain had her own indoor facilities plus a septic tank. Hers was a more refined life.

Heating was provided by a large, potbellied stove in one corner of the schoolroom and the term "air conditioning" had not yet come into common usage. My fellow students were mostly the children of Italian or Polish immigrant farmers, who ploughed both human and animal wastes into their fields each spring, emptying their barns and outhouses. It was a pungent time of the year. We called outhouses "Chic Sales" after a popular outhouse comedian of the time. He was a lot more popular with me than were his namesakes.

The farmers and their children had nothing against bathing, but did it seldom and so did their kids. Some mothers still sewed their children into their long johns at the beginning of winter so they wouldn't catch colds. Mid-spring was bath time and there were some kids you just didn't wrestle with! Still, I came home with my share of head lice. Our classroom like our spring, could also be described as pungent. I made no objection; there was no point in doing so. Such was life.

Our playground was about six acres of open grass with a seesaw and four swings. On it we played many things and some of the big boys bullied smaller boys. One day several big boys herded the smaller ones toward a ditch at one edge of our playground to a spot hidden from Miss De Vrain's office window. Other kids followed, some obviously knowing what was going on. In the ditch a big boy was on top of one of the larger girls, the clothing of both partially loosened (but not revealing).

She was on her back, grinning and showing no signs of distress while he, on top and also grinning, made strange (to me) motions. At first I thought he was bullying her but later I realized that they were putting on an act to enjoy the reactions of the younger children. For my part, what I was seeing was my first, impromptu class in sex education. It was indeed a rough-humored student body, most raised on farms. Formal sex education classes still were decades in the future.

Among the kids I developed several good friends and I had a wonderful collie dog and two fine cats (one died of snake bite). I also had good parents who understood kids. Thus, my life was complete and happy, with Sunday school at the local Northern Baptist church and a nice Sunday school teacher.

Still in New Jersey but in more urban circumstances, I went next to Edgarton School in Newfield. It had regular classrooms and indoor plumbing, central heating and was a good, standard school. The little I learned about softball I learned there. There were a bunch of agreeable kids in my neighborhood and life went on dreamily as before. In the summer-time, my sole dress was a pair of shorts, period (in keeping with my friends). Getting up in the morning for a day of adventures in the woods behind our house was a quick affair, though my mother did demand at least a lick and a promise face washing and hair combing. Callused feet saved shoe leather.

For a short period we lived in Fordham, NY, where I attended Public School Number 9. The only good thing there was to say about Fordham or the school was their proximity to the Bronx Zoo. The school was abysmal.

My father accepted a very good job offer in Santiago, Chile. We had previously lived in Viña del Mar after leaving El Paso and before living in New Jersey. In April 1935 we went back to Chile. It was a wonderful place to live and grow up in and my parents had no problems with relocating.

For a brief time I went to the British High School, waiting for a place to open up at the Grange, another British school. The British High School helped me brush up on my Spanish, taught me Chilean mathematical notation and gave me an appreciation of the Grange when I got there, by contrast. Every new boy at the British High School had to fight several other boys in his class to establish his place in the pecking order. This stood me in good stead because the same savage custom prevailed at the Grange. It also accounts for my interest in boxing, the one sport I liked very much and took seriously at the Grange. Would-be bullies steered clear of me when they found out I could box. I did well in the annual tournaments. I also enjoyed rugby and football (soccer, here) as intramural sports but could pass up cricket any time (too slow-moving). I enjoyed informal swimming, hiking, climbing and other outdoor sports, but did not consider myself a real fan. Boxing and horseback riding I took as extras after school, staying for afternoon tea with the boarders.

The Grange was a great school and I have always counted myself very lucky to have gone there. It was good preparation for A&M. Run on the lines of French schools of the day, it was very strict, both wide-ranging and demanding academically. Discipline was tough, along the lines of comparable British schools, but fair; beatings were administered by the Headmaster, as

needed (one, expertly delivered, set me straight; I never needed a second). I had learned to live with (or evade) superior authority. In general, the Grange was a good school for a kid like me. It is where I acquired my love of science and languages. I acquired several very good, lifetime friends (all dead now). As I grew up, I always had a dog and a cat. I couldn't imagine life without them.

The Grange in Santiago, Chile, was not a religious-affiliated school, but it was British and therefore the prevailing religious influence was Anglican. We lived beneath the frowning gaze of God seven days a week during the school year (little mention was made of His love, but we were abundantly taught that he helped those who needed help, especially if their faith was strong). There were prayers and Bible readings before school (plus "God Save the King" and "Puro Chile", the two national anthems). On Sundays there was Sunday school, usually followed by church. Seven days, count 'em, seven.

All of this emphasis on religion stood me in good stead. Other kids accepted it passively while still others rebelled against it. I was among the few who really believed what I was taught. Thus I thought of myself as a true Christian. I did not rebel against it, as some did, I took it to heart, believing what I was taught. This belief, changing slowly as I matured, was a great help over many years. For example, when a friend of mine, an American boy, a neighbor but not a schoolmate, named Bobby Cantwell died of polio I did as I was taught and "took it to the Lord in prayer" -- and it worked: I was comforted by my very prayers.

Bobby had left my house not feeling well one Saturday and was dead a week later, of polio. Death came home to me, then, but I had no need of comfort from parents, pastors or psychologists (psychologists were rare birds, then). My religion helped me, then and throughout many years. What I have come to understand is that my early religious immersion was a good thing, forming a sturdy and self-reliant moral character in me, which is with me now. It serves as my true guide, now. Getting rid of specific false beliefs was no bad thing, not too different from learning that there is no actual Santa Claus. Life goes on, enriched.

Where I was deficient was in social graces. There had been almost no girls in my life. I did not know how to dance or to express affection to girls. I knew how to be respectful of my elders and how to address them, but that was all -- and I was gentlemanly: "real boys do not harm girls". The one girl I was crazy about for a time in Chile was the sister of my best friend, but I was too bashful to ever admit my intense puppy love to her (she was a beautiful tomboy. I think she would have laughed, albeit kindly). She died many years ago after bearing eight children. She didn't need the likes of me!

There was no dating, of course. Chilean girls were all guarded by dueñas, mothers, aunts, and, most fearsome, by large, fierce, older brothers. I didn't make great progress in the matter of social graces in El Paso, either. I went by myself to my senior prom, "cutting in" now and then. That was allowed, though not appreciated. Also, since about sixty percent of El Paso High's students were Spanish speaking, there is some doubt about the degree of Americanization that my father had hoped for that I actually achieved. Nevertheless, my patriotism

was strong as demonstrated when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. My mother wouldn't sign the letters for me to join the Navy when I was seventeen so I had to wait until I was eighteen. Then I hitch hiked to Houston to volunteer, but that's another story.

I learned lots of Mexican swear words at El Paso High, however, sometimes handy to have. And I enjoyed, when possible, El Paso's rugged outdoors, climbing Mount Franklin often and Mount Cristo Rey at times and exploring the canyons with my buddies. At first I was a bit of an oddity at El Paso High to some of the students, but I acquired good friends there, too, and life became happy, again.

That summer (1942), after graduating from El Paso High, I spent in Mexico, traveling with my parents as my father travelled as part of his work. My parents lived in Mexico City but I also spent a lot of time with them in San Luis Potosí and Monterrey, shorter times elsewhere. I acquired more Mexican Spanish, had fun with the American kids of my father's company's American employees, who were home for the summer and, in Monterrey, I made friends with a very charming, female stray cat. I gave her the temporary name of Mehitabel because of her cheerful, tough nature. For her, I was a good source of food. A good summer it was, all round.

At the end of the summer of 1942 I went to El Paso with my mother to get ready to go to A&M. I knew I was academically advanced and planned to build on that and to go on to graduate school. I also knew, before laying eyes on A&M's campus, that I wanted to study chemical engineering. An extensive visit to a lead refinery in Monterrey, with all its by-products (including silver and

gold) made me see that that would be a great field for me. What I failed to discern was the degree of my immaturity. Two of my uncles, one a Tea Sipper and the other an Aggie, recognized this in me. Both recommended I go to A&M. Both were right.

Thus, by the time I entered Texas A&M I had acquired a fairly advanced knowledge of science and math, spoke English and Spanish fluently and had a good working knowledge of French. I also had acquired good study habits, a love of reading and a major dose of Christian morality. All have stood me in good stead throughout life.

Off to the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, 1942 -- a Few Tales.

Going to College Station. Students arriving at American universities nowadays almost need moving vans to bring all their many possessions with them and they are generally accompanied by a family member, sometimes by several family members, who guide them and run interference for them. They have usually made visits to the campus when searching for a school, interviewed professors, and so on. With WWII on, military training seemed a good idea and my two uncles had both recommended A&M. Armed with this meager foreknowledge and considering that A&M's tuition and fees were low, I set off for College Station, unaccompanied by choirs of Angels. I was more like a laboratory rat about to be let loose in a maze -- with rain.

With my few possessions in a battered steamer trunk, my mother, grandfather, grandmother and great

grandmother saw me off at the Union Depot in El Paso. At about 9:00 p.m. the next night I arrived at the main station in Houston in steamy weather, went on foot, trunk and all, to one of the old, red brick railroad hotels that were then across the street and checked in. Fortunately, I got a corner room on the fourth floor and so had cross ventilation. I shared a bath with the room next door and I slept on top of the covers, naked. Still, it was a hot, sweaty night. (AC? What's AC?) At age sixteen I had put a lot of miles on me, traveling with my parents, and I knew the ropes. The trip to a previously unknown destination posed me no fears and I enjoyed the scenery, my traveling companions and the Pullman dining car food.

The next morning I had a large breakfast, checked out and lugged my trunk back to the station to find a huge mob of would-be Aggies waiting to board the Sunbeam to College Station. I didn't do too well because I only managed to find a seat on the floor. The ninety miles of scenery passed unseen by me and others in similar positions.

Finally, the conductors announced "College Station". I was about to learn the truth.

The First Week. It had been raining and would continue to do so sporadically throughout the day. The small, yellow railroad station looked wet and dreary. A large group of upper classmen was waiting for us, with trucks. After telling us to check our bags (I checked my trunk) they told us to get aboard the trucks so they could take us to Bryan to buy certain additional articles of uniform. I had no idea where Bryan was or, for that matter, the center of the campus so I went along. As it turned out we were taken to clothing stores where I bought things I

needed that were not issued by the college, all at normal prices. The upper classmen were, in fact, shills for the stores but there was no extra charge for the ride and we were all taken back to the train station where we checked our purchases. Afoot, I then followed the crowd, hoping they knew where we were going. It turned out to be a muddy field behind some red brick dorms. In the field were small, unsheltered kiosks, arranged alphabetically, where we were to register for classes, get room assignments and so forth. It was drizzling and the men manning the kiosks looked wet and miserable.

I stood in line at the "D" kiosk and soon received my class card with my freshman engineering class schedule (marked "chemical engineering"), my assignment to Company B Chemical Warfare Service, my room assignment and my room key. I decided to check out the room first.

My room turned out to be on the third floor (or "stoop" in Aggie speak) of dorm 1, one of the nearby red brick dorms. It was Spartan but complete. Two desks and chairs (with their backs to the window), a two-bunk, (upper/lower) bed with mattresses, a dresser with mirror, a sink with mirror and two closets one on either side of the door, facing inward. The white plaster walls were bare and the maroon floor was concrete.

The door was unlocked and, inside, was a partially emptied duffle bag in the middle of the floor with a tag that said "Leslie Boas Moss, Shreveport, Louisiana". I had learned my roommate's name and provenance and, I supposed, that "Leslie" was not exclusively a girl's name as I had thought.

I retrieved my trunk and purchases from the station (I don't know how many miles I walked that day, but I

was up to it) and set about unpacking, storing my trunk at the back of my closet. I knew which spaces were mine because Moss (Grange-like, we called each other by our surnames) had marked his with some of his possessions. Thus, I got the lower bunk and the rest of the leftovers for my stuff.

Moss then arrived and we met. I was to be his roommate for two semesters, a classmate for all of my A&M days and a friend for life. He was a fine fellow with a great, quiet sense of humor and a fund of Cajun stories and jokes. He had the knack of appearing not to study hard but made Bs easily. I grew to admire and like him.

To my present sorrow, Les Moss died in December of 2012, having led a good and successful life. He and his delightful wife Betty, a friend of my wife, had three children, two girls and a boy. Betty died many years before Les and he was stricken. He never remarried. He was the founder and owner of an industrial air conditioning company in Houston. His business lives after him. By example, he contributed mightily to my true Americanization.

Dinner was next, in Duncan Hall. By then I was famished, having missed lunch. I was glad to fall in with others in a rag-tag formation, all still in civilian clothes, march (in a manner of speaking) to dinner and fall to. I don't remember what was served but it would all have been delicious, no matter what.

I looked forward to resting up, getting to know my roommate after dinner and going to bed. That was not what happened. Back at the dorm, a "bleed meeting" was called. All freshmen were to sit on the floor at one end of our hall. There we were harangued by a series of upperclassmen who explained to us the abysmal state of

our existences and ourselves. As one of them explained we were not to forget that our standing as human beings was 10,000 feet below the whale droppings on the bottom of the ocean. We also learned of our duty to render one year of abject service to the upperclassmen in return for the next three years of being served. Service consisted of being room orderlies, helping seniors take off their boots, making beds, making up, taking and fetching laundry to and from the laundry, itself, running errands and carrying out details (assigned tasks). (as things turned out, I never got the promised service because A&M changed). Our duties also included submitting to beatings as necessary or on general principles, to not sit on campus benches or to walk on sidewalks (since there was little automotive traffic, walking in the street posed no hazard). We also learned that we were to call just about any creature we thought might outrank us "sir" (all women were to be called "ma'am") --shades of the Grange -- and so forth. We were advised to memorize our student handbooks so as to learn what proper behavior and language were on all occasions . Bread, for example, was "gun waddin'" while mustard was "baby". I thus added a fourth language to my repertoire.

So it was, too, that I learned Aggie freshman table manners. We were to sit when told to and see that upper classmen were served first; then we could eat what was left. There was a special activity reserved for freshmen: "meal hounding". That was a special blessing for freshmen like me with large, teenage appetites. It meant that, at the end of a meal, we could roam the dining room, filling our plates with whatever leftovers we could find. That time was often the best part of the meal.

I learned many other things that would keep me out of much, but not all, trouble. There were the "on general principles" punishments. No one escaped punishment, deserved or not.

By this time I had some inkling of what was in store. I had no idea, however, of the full intensity of exposure to the culture that prevailed at A&M in those days or that we were to go far beyond army discipline and training in our daily lives. I would not have believed it without experiencing it and I would not have believed I would put up with it as I did.

The rest of my first week passed in more formal orientation into the ways of Texas A&M. The Commandant of the Corps, various professors and Dean Bolton were among the speakers. We were issued our uniforms, began drilling and settled in, with several more bleed meetings. The following week, classes began. The one entertaining thing that happened occurred during the Dean's talk.

Dean Bolton was a very dignified figure, slightly portly and with a deep voice. He had barely gotten started when two large and active great Danes appeared on stage. The way they greeted the Dean made me think they might have been his. Whipping his legs with their tails, leaping up to lick his face, they flustered the Dean. Finally, with the would-be cadets laughing like crazy, two cadets appeared and led the happy dogs away.

Freshman Living Conditions. As far as living conditions were concerned, I had some advantages in having gone to the Grange School in Chile. Rooms were big enough for two boys and well-appointed with necessary furniture. They often had sinks, convenient for shaving, washing

face and hands, combing hair and getting a drink of water. Showers were communal as were other bathroom facilities at both schools, except that at A&M there was abundant hot water whereas only cold water was available in Chile. Aggies were virtually effete.

Urinals were open with no visual barriers at both institutions, as is almost universally true in public urinals for men in the United States and many other countries.

Toilets at the Grange had stalls, affording normal privacy, but not at A&M. There were two students in my company who, with no barrier between them, enjoyed playing honey moon bridge while sitting side by side. Very convenient.

I soon got used to a complete lack of privacy and, with the number of hospitalizations I have undergone in recent years, this lack of embarrassment at my very human body or its functions has stood me in good stead before doctors, nurses and nurses' aides who have had to do everything including bathe me. For a military school like A&M, I considered this simple living necessary in view of what we might encounter in the field (slit trenches, for example, such as we had at my summer camp in Chile). Public nudity outside the dorm was prohibited at A&M, as is universally true, but the uniform for going from my room to the showers was a pair of wooden clogs (to prevent athlete's foot) and a towel slung over my shoulder.

My parents were unusually fastidious about bathrooms (even though my father had served in the trenches in WWI) and, as an only child growing up with them, A&M would have shocked me if it had not been for experience at the Grange.

Military Life. There is no need to bring up academic studies here other than to say that, when I went to graduate school at Princeton, I found myself well prepared to compete with other schools' graduates, including those from the best-known schools of chemical engineering. I was their peer.

My father always wanted to go to West Point, but four years of illness and partial illness precluded him from going. He would have liked me to go there, too, but settled for Texas A&M with some pleasure. In addition to pro-A&M advice from my uncles, I liked the idea of military training in wartime (it was 1942) and, A&M being a low cost school, $141 for my first semester, all in, including part of my uniform, it was economically attractive as well, so there I went. The idea of A&M's discipline, after the highly disciplined Grange School in Chile, didn't faze me and, in fact, I liked the idea of military life.

Life lived to the accompaniment of bugles was easy to get used to, from Reveille at 6:00 a.m. to taps and to bed at 9:30 p.m. (a special African donkey lived in his own stable near our dorm and sunrise was his time to bray, generally before 6:00 a.m.). We responded to other bugle calls throughout the day, principally for forming up for mess. We marched to breakfast and dinner, but went at the appointed time on our own from class to lunch. We had our own, assigned seats at mess with our platoon mates and had our table customs (explained later). Military Science and Military Regulations were easy courses being straightforward subjects, though some of the films on personal hygiene, necessary as they were, were startling at times.

We wore our uniforms at all times, including proper insignia, except for specific sports or in bed and kept our shoes shined, our hair of regulation length, our nails cut and ourselves clean. I liked wearing my crossed retorts, in brass, on my collar as a member of the Chemical Warfare Service and as a would-be chemical engineer.

Freshmen had duties as orderlies to upper classmen which I did not find unreasonable, the army having orderlies at the time. I just thought it was a part of my training in military life and living. Such duties included making up and fetching an upperclassman's laundry, running errands, helping seniors take their boots off, polishing shoes, boots and insignia, making beds and policing upperclassmen's rooms; in other words, normal orderly's duties.

I enjoyed marching, especially with a band and still more especially on public occasions such as Final Review at the end of each year (with our mascot, Reveille, bouncing along in front). I liked martial music and marching, with its special exercises with our rifles, was much like dancing. It offered the pleasure of performing rhythmically and in synchrony with your company mates and it promoted comradely bonding with them. Military life at A&M was a life of healthy physical and mental exercise and simple ethics. It included military drill every week and physical education every day. I had never felt so good and have continued exercise as part of my routine for the rest of my life.

I also enjoyed going into the woods to practice firing 4.2 inch chemical mortars, a primitive weapon designed to deliver missiles filled with such delights as mustard gas or Lewisite to an enemy or his territory (ours did not use full charges to drive the missiles; we wanted to

wreak no actual destruction on the campus). There was a knack to that and it took teamwork and practice to fire a missile while avoiding personal damage from the tumbling missile; the mortars' barrels had no lands.

I liked following compass directions, as one might on actual scouting missions. Not so pleasant but necessary were visits to the gas chamber for actual contact with tear gas. Learning how to put your gas mask on quickly and efficiently was essential in avoiding pain and tears after the gas was released into the chamber. At first, tear gas smelled nice, like fresh apples, then it hit. We learned, in class, the odors of other chemical agents so as to be able to protect ourselves from their presence in the field. They were not tested on us in the chamber, however, being too dangerous. This was a necessary part of our training. As far as the basics were concerned, when I joined the Navy I found that Texas A&M had already taught me what I needed to know about military life and its fundamentals.

Hazing, "Details" and High Jinks. Every student was issued a student handbook, a small book with much information in it. Its most sardonic joke was "Hazing is prohibited at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas by Texas State Law", or words to that effect.

Hazing could be anything from verbal abuse at a bleed meeting (or on another suitable occasion) to a beating with a board. Every upperclassman had to equip himself with a board. About the size and shape of a cricket bat, it was a heavy device made of wood. It was actually a fearsome weapon. Sometimes there were hazing incidents gone wrong when severe injury or even death occurred. This was especially true of the Cavalry.

Action of some sort was then taken by the college authorities but, in the ordinary course of events, a blind eye met cases of hazing. During a beating, a freshman assumed the position, standing up straight and tall and grasping his crotch with both hands to protect the "family jewels" from harm. After all, Aggies wanted Aggies to be able to produce more Aggies. The beater would "assume his position", standing to one side of the hazee and leaning back so as to wield the board with all the force he could muster with his weight and muscle. Beatings seldom consisted of more than three blows, though there were exceptions, administered expertly to the backside of the unfortunate hazee. Sometimes there were witnesses, sometimes not, depending on circumstances. The other purpose of the crotch grabbing was to pull the hazee's pants forward to tighten the backside into a desirable target. The only other detail needed here is that practice made perfect.

Sitting on the wall, knee bends, pushups or other exercises and catching butterflies were also used in hazing. Sitting on the wall was the most difficult one, I thought. I could do any number of knee bends or pushups in those days but sitting on the wall took a special type of muscular effort. In it, the freshman placed his back against a wall and slid down until he was in a sitting position (but without a chair). Bracing your thigh muscles and knees kept you from sliding further down and then you simply "sat" there, unmoving, as long as the upperclassmen wanted you to. Talk about stiff knees!

Upper classmen had vivid imaginations so there were plenty of other types of physical hazing to be imposed. These were mainly aimed at getting freshmen into

ridiculous poses. Pushing a golf ball along the hallway floor with your nose was one of these. All of these types of hazing might be used during bleed meetings, but were imposed at other times as well.

What was the good of all of this? Supposedly, it showed you who was boss, punished you for infractions, made a man of you, was for the amusement of the upperclassmen or was given on general principles, the main general principle being that if you hadn't received a beating in too long a time you probably deserved one for some infraction you and others were not even aware of. The 'general principles' hazing taught you that life was often unfair.

Quirky and strange (or arbitrary and capricious, as lawyers are wont to say) and sometimes brutal or disgusting, hazing offered one very great benefit to freshmen: it bonded them to each other like no other thing could. I made very firm friendships at that time, most of whom have now been erased by death -- though never erased in memory. A strange benefit, but one I am thankful for.

On the other hand, the lack of consequence to the beater gave too free a hand to fellows inclined to enjoy beating hapless and helpless fresh-men. There was one such P-head (sophomore) in my company. If a freshman heard the "plink, plink" of a board being bounced on the floor, on its nether end, as he came up the stairs to his floor, he should turn back.

The particular P-head who owned the board took a very evident and sadistically vicious delight in beating someone who, under the rules, couldn't fight back. There was something seriously wrong with that P-head (and with a culture that encouraged such behavior).

Christmas Joy. At Christmas time, before we all went home or wherever we went, the freshmen were treated to one memorable event. I don't know just what was done in other outfits, but in B Company, Chemical Warfare Battalion there was a special hazing event.

Each freshman was required to equip himself with a board, hold it by the bottom tip in his left hand and, on Christmas Eve, go from one upper-classmen's room to another's and knock. When one of the upperclassmen appeared at the door the freshman would say "Merry Christmas, sir" and would hold out both hands. If the upperclassman took the freshman's right hand and responded with a "Merry Christmas", oh joy! The freshman was home free. If the upperclassman took the board, the freshman assumed the position and the upperclassman then gave the freshman nineteen strokes with the board spelling out M-E-R-R-Y -- C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S, one stroke for each letter and space, dotting the "i" and crossing the "t". The upperclassman then told the freshman "Merry Christmas" and the freshman said "Thank you, sir" and left. I considered this custom totally barbaric and a distortion of an important Christian holy day.

The next day, after several of such jolly encounters, the freshman's backside was deep purple. Undershorts had to be soaked off in a shower. In two weeks purple skin had returned to normal. I won't discuss what "normal" was. Some of us had freckles.

In my case, my mother was set to storm Aggieland, but I convinced her that having proven I could take it "like a man" her storming would lose all I had gained. I never told her about my one beating at the Grange. Life among the other boys would have been impossible had

she raised the issue and I liked them and my school and wanted to stay. I respected and admired the Head Master and considered his punishments just and fair.

A Strange Detail. One afternoon in the early fall of 1942 Moss and I were in our room in Dorm 1, studying, when the door burst open and two juniors came in. One had a text book in his hand. It seems they had a detail for us (a task a superior has an inferior perform). The book was a text on Rural Sociology, an area I had never contemplated before. They had, one of them said, a take-home exam, a paper, to be completed jointly over the forthcoming weekend and turned in on Monday. Both "had" to leave campus that weekend and, therefore, would have no time to carry out their assignment. Instead, we were to write the paper for them. Its topic, as I recall, was "Divorce in the Rural Community" or something like that. Moss and I both expressed our total ignorance of Sociology, rural or otherwise, and of divorce in any case. "But, sir..." we protested. "It's all in the book", the juniors said, handing the book to Moss and leaving the room. "Don't forget, first thing Monday."

In the room two would-be chemical engineers stood bemused. We decided to do it and began to look the book over. It had plenty of big words, but little content. We decided we could concoct a reasonable facsimile of an incomprehensible, scholarly sounding paper and got to work. Some four hours later, we had our product, good, bad or indifferent. Come Monday, one of the juniors came to our room, hand out. Moss gave him the paper. Without even glancing at the paper, the junior took it away. We awaited the result and our subsequent punishment.

Several days passed. Then, one day, the juniors returned, all smiles. They had the paper with them and it had earned a B. The juniors were exuberant. Though I was glad of the result and of there being no beating for failing the exam, my heart sank. "Now", I thought, "we'll have to write more of those pieces of junk". It was not to be. Maybe it was a one-paper course. In any case, I lost whatever respect I might have had for Rural Sociology. I was glad to put the subject of Rural Sociology behind me as I consigned the paper to my mental waste bin.

Underdog Strikes Back. While freshmen put up with a lot, they did at times gain the upper hand for a time. For example, a pair of upperclassmen, roommates, who were under disapproval by the freshmen in their company, came back from a weekend Corps trip to find they had real difficulty opening the door to their room which opened inwards. Something yielding was in the way. They found that their room was entirely filled from floor to ceiling and wall to wall with inflated balloons. A neat deal and it got so many laughs there was no "general principles" punishment of all the freshmen. No one was punished.

I thought up and carried out one bit of revenge myself one time. During my second freshman semester, a fellow member of my company (another freshman, a chemist) and I worked in the chemical dispensary making up and handing out standard solutions to chemistry lab students, washing, storing and handing out glassware to them and so on (for the magnificent pay of 35 cents an hour). Usually we were very busy. One afternoon, things were quiet and I

suggested to him that we try our hands at making some nitrogen iodide. I had been reading about it and it sounded interesting. He asked why? When I told him, he agreed wholeheartedly.

I could have carried out the plan by myself. However, as an accomplice, he could not as readily be a witness for the prosecution. Anyway, with him involved it was more fun.

We made a bunch of NI_3 in a large graduate cylinder. Nitrogen iodide is made in water and is a brown, clotted-looking precipitate suspended in the water. Kept wet, it is harmless. Dry, it explodes when touched by a number of substances, especially protein, releasing iodine vapor. It was perfect for my purposes when it came to playing a prank on an upperclassman we especially disliked.

After work we sneaked the graduate cylinder out of the lab and took it back to the dorm. When the upperclassman left his room (it was catty-cornered to mine), we hurried in and painted the seat of his desk chair with the suspension. We got out of his room and the water in the suspension evaporated as we waited in my room. We sat in my room, quietly, listening.

We heard, first, footsteps and then the opening and closing of the door to his room. Soon, there was a loud **WHAP** sound. He had sat in his chair in his woolen pants and wool is almost pure protein. The explosion stung, as we knew it would, but caused no real damage. He came out of his room and looked around angrily as we came out of my room, all wide-eyed innocent as if to see what was going on. "We saw nothing, sir". (What's a little lie compared to a major sin?). He then proceeded to ignore the whole thing.

Later he found out the full extent of what had happened to him when he went to take a shower and others in the shower room saw the large, purplish-brown, horseshoe-shaped stain the iodine had left on his backside. Everyone laughed, even the other upperclassmen present. It took a good two weeks for the stain to wear off. My colleague and I were not even suspected and it is only now, at age 87, that I finally confess, with great satisfaction, to this act of chemical warfare and retribution.

At one point some upperclassmen decided to have fun with some other upperclassmen. They would "detail" (order) several freshmen to sneak into an upper classman's room in the middle of the night, kidnap him and his roommate and heave the struggling pair into the showers, set on "cold". We who perpetrated the actual deeds were off Scot free because we had been detailed to do it; we were not obliged to reveal who had detailed us to the task. It was a pleasant task that we enjoyed thoroughly. In fact, we enjoyed it so much that we decided to go into business for ourselves. More fun!

The upperclassmen were not stupid, however. They soon realized what was going on and beat all the freshmen. There was a windowless basement room in that dorm, an unused storage room called "RA Hall" by the freshmen where such events as general beatings took place. It was quite a sight, but none of the freshmen seemed especially put upon. We had had our fun and we anticipated the penalty.

Funny Stuff. Here are several bits of funny stuff I will mention in particular.

1. Airy Outs. From time to time, in the middle of the night, all would be sleeping peacefully in their beds and the upper classmen in each company would wake up the freshmen and air them out. They would run us across campus dressed in whatever we had on to hold a yell practice. The yell leaders would stand on a platform with the freshmen bunched up below them, humped (hands on knees, knees bent), giving one yell after another. Around the freshmen the P-heads ranged themselves, then the juniors and then the seniors. Many of the upperclassmen held hands to contain the freshmen who, at the end, were to break out from the encircling upperclassmen, running in all directions. Many dog piles of boys resulted. One time, I tripped over one such pile, went head first over it and landed on my head (no real damage to the head in question). However, I went around with a stiff, sore, bent neck for several weeks afterwards. Still, it was all in fun and I enjoyed airy outs. Pretty goofy!

2. Cross-Dressing. One day a year all freshmen, campus-wide, had to wear rouge and lip-stick, speak in high voices, skip everywhere they went and chew tobacco. Why? If there was a reason, I do not now recall it. I took it as another "general principles" thing. No one was fooled; we still had no girls among the students. We all had sore calves the following day, a distaste for lipstick (a greasy mess) and, in my case, a hearty dislike of chewing tobacco. Who knows,

that distaste may have saved me from throat or buccal cancer. At least some of the faculty were amused.

3. Mom's Idea of Fun. Once, while I was a freshman, my mother came to College Station to visit me. When a mother or father visited a student, even a freshman, everyone was polite to them both. At lunch that day I sat at my usual place at table, my mother next to me at my usual table mate's seat. My mother got settled and talked to the cadets, who were polite and courteous. In the center of the table were salt, pepper and other condiments, including a small bottle of the small, dusky green, extremely hot, preserved Louisiana peppers whose preservative juice was usually sprinkled on greens. "Oh," she said, "I haven't seen these in a long time! I think I'll have some while I wait for the food". She picked several from the bottle and put them on her bread plate, asking "Anyone else?" She put the bottle down amid a flurry of shaken heads and "No, thank you, Ma'ams."

I had told her how these peppers were used as a way to haze freshmen. An upperclassman would order a freshman to put one or more peppers in his mouth and chew them up. He would then be ordered to open his mouth so the upperclassman could see that the pepper was still there and then would be told to sit with the pepper, unswallowed, in his mouth. Finally the

sweating freshman would be told he could swallow the pepper. The ordeal was over.

My mother picked up a pepper, placed it in her mouth and chewed thoughtfully. "Mmm..." she said, "that's good!" She ate several and then the food came. The boys, including me, sat with mouths open, watching. I knew she liked spicy food, but this was much more than even I knew. She knew she had stunned them. The meal proceeded quietly thereafter, several of the boys casting covert glances in her direction, not quite sure of what they had seen. They were unusually polite to me.

4. Classroom Humor and Cheekiness, An Example of Each. During my first freshman semester one required course was algebra. I already knew algebra from my school in Chile but the homework load was daunting (as many as forty equations to be solved in an otherwise busy evening of study). The purpose seemed to be to flunk as many students as possible by mid-term. It worked. Just after mid-term, Moss and I were moved from Dorm 1 to Dorm 3 (B Company's home dorm) because room became available. Some sixty percent of the incoming freshmen had flunked out.

At that time, the main requirement for entering A&M was to graduate with a B average from an accredited Texas high school. It was also possible to take special exams and pass remedial courses (once admitted provisionally).

Because the school was so over-crowded at the start of the freshman year my algebra class was overcrowded, too. There were, perhaps, sixty students crowded into a classroom meant for thirty. The professor was Dutch and his English accent was unusually thick and guttural. He was short and, consequently, not easy to see from the middle of a crowded classroom.

One day our professor, Dr. Lorenz, told us he spoke seven languages. "Yes," said an anonymous voice from somewhere in the crowd, "and you'll have eight when you learn English". No one was ever caught nor was there any general principles punishment of the entire class. Everyone had a good laugh except for Dr. Lorenz, who stood on his dignity. He was still hard to see.

After I returned from Naval service during WWII, I was in a class in Mechanical Engineering required of all Chemical Engineers. The regular professor was not teaching that semester and we had a graduate assistant in his stead. Graduate assistants are usually pretty good as teachers, having been students, themselves, not long in the past. This one was abysmally bad. He was so bad he had to refer to his notebook constantly, copying proofs out of it because he didn't under-stand them well enough to be able to write them out without notes. He was unable to answer questions and the class soon tired of him.

One day the class became especially restless, talking in low voices to each other and

throwing erasers and spit balls at each other or at the walls. The graduate assistant ignored the growing hubbub but, finally, when a spitball hit him he turned around. He never knew who had thrown the spitball but he turned around just in time to catch me in the act of throwing one. It, too, got him in the forehead. Ooops! I knew I was for it. He asked me what I thought I was doing? I decided to tell the simple truth: "I was throwing a spitball at you, sir". The class fell silent. "Why did you do that? I won't have that sort of behavior in my classroom, not if you want to stay in it", he said. Still being truthful I said. "To let you know you are not much of a teacher, sir" or words to that effect. (Note the use of "sir"; I was nothing if not a polite Aggie). I figured I was in the soup so I might as well make the best of things and give him an honest appraisal. He turned red, paused and then sent me to the office of the Department Head with a note.

The Department Head read the note and asked what I had to say. I told him the whole class was disgusted and why. I didn't want to drop the course because it was required but could not help but make my disapproval known. After a bit more discussion he told me to go to the assistant the next morning and apologize and that, if I did that, I would be allowed to stay in the class.

The next morning I apologized briefly but thoughtfully and respectfully and thus stayed in the class. I worked very hard for the rest of the

semester and did A work The assistant showed who was boss, however, by giving me a final, overall grade of B (below my actual, earned numerical average in the course). I took it as standing for "Badge of Honor". In the next several decades I became less impulsive and can now hardly believe I had behaved as I did, no matter what.

Most of my professors at A&M were at least competent, with very few exceptions, and some were outstanding. Dr. Jensen (Physical Chemistry), Dr. Middleton (Analytical Chemistry), Dr. Burchard (Organic Chemistry), Dr. Lindsay (Chemical Engineering), Dr. Klipple (Mathematics) and Dr.Abbott (English) were all outstanding by any measure. Dr. Abbott, one of the few Liberal Arts professors I encountered at A&M, taught me an elective course called "Argumentation and Public Discussion", a course that opened my eyes to a whole new realm of intellectual thinking, to pure logic without symbols or numbers. One professor was outstandingly bad -- and thereby hangs a tale.

I do not recall his name (no matter!) but he taught (or was assigned to teach) a course in American History. My high school teacher in El Paso was so much better a teacher than he that he would have been shamed had he ever known. She, however, both knew and loved her subject and her love was evident in her teaching of it.

The history professor gave an exam. I had done well on his previous exams and expected

to do well on this one, too. It dealt, as all his exams did, with matters of historical fact, no thinking required. If you wrote down what the book said, you should make an A. I knew I had done well on this one, too.

When he handed back my graded paper there were no grading marks on it, just a great, big F at the top. I was flabbergasted, then furious. I raised my hand and when he signaled me I asked, "Sir, since I answered all the questions correctly, why did you give me an F?" His answer did nothing to improve my opinion of him. Instead, it abruptly worsened lt. He said, "Because everyone needs to get an F now and then". He saw himself as a part of the hazing game, a part he had no right to. He was a faculty member, not a member of the Corps. I got up, my paper in my hand, and started to walk toward the door. "Where do you think you're going?" he asked. "I'm going to see the department head about having my paper re-graded by someone else, sir" I replied. "Wait a minute" he said, coming and taking the paper out of my hand. "Let me look at this, again".

He sat at his desk and began going through the paper, making check marks question by question. The class sat silently as all of this went on. Finally, he crossed out the F, wrote in an A instead, and handed the paper back. I folded it and put it in my pocket, saying nothing. Thanks were not due, in my opinion. The rest of the semester in his class went smoothly, though

I remember little of what he taught. My high school teacher's teachings sufficed.

5. Uncle Ed's. B Company Chem Warfare had a custom of its own. Every year, at the end of the spring semester, the Company would form up and march to Ed Hrdlcka's, a bedraggled beer joint in the Brazos River bottoms, where the upperclassmen paid for all the beer and the freshmen had to drink all they bought. In fact, we had to chug-a-lug our beer and be promptly served another. I was then seventeen. Uncle Ed, as we called him, had no regard for niceties like the drinking age. The idea was that each freshman would drink until one was the last man standing. There was no prize, but from then on the hazing time was over with.
It was a humid, hot day in May when this year's event occurred. Inside Ed's place it was dark and cool, smelling of fresh beer, stale beer and urine, a lovely spot, indeed. After a while, boys began falling over, no more beer for them. I remember the upperclassmen commenting on me and my surprising capacity for beer despite my youth and innocent appearance. "Must be the German in him" one said. Finally, I was the last one upright and the captain decided it was time to go home to our dorm. I stood up, smiling, and made my way to the door. I stepped out into the May heat and it hit me like a hammer. The only thing I can remember of the trip back, not in formation this time, was having my arms around the necks of the captain

and first sergeant, singing I know not what. They held me under the armpits because my legs wouldn't work. Thus, I suppose, I got home, the first and last time I ever got drunk. But I was no longer subject to hazing. There is a sequel to this story.

The first memory I have of my return to the dorm was waking up Ton the shower room floor with a half dozen other inert freshmen, the drain partially stopped up to give about a four inch depth to the cold water on the floor, with more cold water pounding down. My first thought was that I had my chemistry final the next day and needed to study. That was also the last thought. I had passed out on my bunk, not to wake up until just before the exam.

I walked as if on air into the exam room, the big lecture hall in the chemistry building, took my exam paper in hand and sat down. I had no qualms and was perfectly calm, awaiting my fate. I began answering questions and, about half way through the exam period, I finished the exam. Just as calm, I handed my paper in and left.

I did not learn a lesson from all this: I got a hundred percent on the exam but never got drunk before an exam again (or at any other time). I was pretty sure it wouldn't work another time, but I never found out. My grades stayed pretty much the same, very good but not terrific.

6. Only at A&M. Boy's schools develop their own, unique customs. Here is an especially Aggie one. At a football game as a particularly critical point in the game, for example, such as kicking the extra point or a field goal, or the need of especially good luck with the ball on the 1-yard line, the yell leaders would signal "hold the left one." All left hands of the Corps would be thrust into their left-hand pants pockets and, in principal, though I cannot attest to everyone's having actually done it since their hands were invisible, the left one would be grabbed (gently) and squeezed (also very gently) for good luck. Did it work? I have no statistics. I wonder if today that custom still prevails, so many Aggies now being girls.

Deans Can be Fooled but They Don't Stay Fooled. This is not a student prank but it's worth including. One semester a dance troop came to the campus advertised as a group of artists of the dance offering a cultural experience. The Dean recommended that the students take advantage of this cultural opportunity, and so we did. We soon found out the troop was a very ordinary troop of strippers who took their clothes off as they danced to bump-and-grind rhythms, to the delight of those who got to see them until the Dean, learning the truth, closed the whole affair down and gave the troop fair warning to get out of town. The troop did well at the box office, but there was to be no return engagement. The especially irreverent among us laughed loudest.

Aggies on Strike. Aggies on strike? Isn't that against all regs? Isn't that mutiny? Well, yes, but there are circumstances...

A fellow student, a highly popular senior from Louisiana named Broussard, Boudreaux or some such, was caught swimming in the nude in the Hayden Natatorium one night, well past midnight. He was accompanied by his girlfriend, similarly attired (sighs of envy from the Corps). All would have been well if he had been given a reasonable punishment. He was sentenced to suspension from school for at least one semester. A sentence like that, in wartime, would make him instant draft bait, and could become a sentence of years or life. Outrage abounded among the Corps. Our leaders met with the President and his henchmen to no avail. They were adamant. They forgot that they were not just dealing with a few leaders but, rather, with a well-disciplined, well-trained Corps of Cadets.

After supper, our leaders ordered us to fall out, fall in and, following the bands (Infantry and Field Artillery, playing together) we marched, all orderly, to the Administration Building and surrounded it. Our enemy was within, and we left open no clear avenue of escape. Our cadet Commander and his cohorts went in to palaver, again to no avail. We moved closer to the building, some entering and taking up positions on the ground floor. The Dallas Morning News was called and a reporter came and began interviewing all and sundry.

As the night wore on, some slept, some played cards and some engaged in bull sessions, but all were as adamant as our opponents. Our leaders appeared periodically with word from the negotiation front, but little progress was evident. Finally, early in the

morning, an agreement was reached. The punishment was reduced to a severe reprimand and confinement to campus but the miscreant would remain in school. We had won! An orderly march back to our dorms ensued and the strike was over.

The Dallas Morning News did us proud and we all learned a few lessons from the event: the people do have power if they organize and a negotiated settlement is better than courting out-and-out mutiny. I learned a lot that was useful in my future negotiating with labor unions, one of which was to respect them but to argue hard. It was a sociology lab come to life and a good thing in the end. And, yes, the Corps could stage a strike, especially in those days when the Corps was comprised of the whole student body.

The Aggie Spirit. At the Grange school in Chile we had nothing like the more intense school spirit of schools in the United States. It was there, but not as "do or die" in its intensity. It was more subdued and gentlemanly. The focus was, instead, on a simple but not obsessively strong desire for your team to win – but to win fairly and squarely. You should want your team to win, but in any case, win or lose, to do their best. Sportsmanship was important: we would cheer for our side and its batsman when a boundary six was hit in cricket, for example, but we would clap for the other side, too, when one of their players did something especially skillful.

Here, in the United States, there was the "winning is the only thing" spirit, just doing your best didn't cut it. Football games were especially raucous affairs with yells, not always disciplined (sometimes boos), from the crowd. At El Paso High's games, fistfights sometimes broke out

and there was plenty of drinking in the stands, comely, young cheer leaders (all-male yell leaders at A&M), led the crowd in formal cheers (yells), in group physical displays of one kind or another and the singing of fight songs, accompanied by the band. It was altogether quite a show with, at A&M, much excitement built up days before the game with the hanging of bed sheets-become-banners out of dorm windows with slogans on them such as "Gig 'em Aggies", "Beat the Hell Out of Podunk U" and other more elaborate or insulting ones on them. It was all a great display and out-poring of Aggie spirit.

Aggies at a game all sat on one side of the stadium, our opponents' well-wishers on the other. In our uniforms, with the freshmen massed and surrounded above and on either side by upper-classmen, with the band in the middle of all and with the yell leaders on the field in front of us, we presented a very potent and impressive picture of solidarity. It was a handsome sight and the evident solidarity was a major demonstration of Aggie Spirit in action. We became a true, real, Twelfth Man on the team. The enthusiastic yells often blanked out the signals.

The Aggie Spirit was, itself, a phenomenon lodged in the heads of Aggies and bringing them together. Solidarity was further enhanced by yell practices, bleed meetings, hazings and customs, living together and serving, suffering and enjoying life together, intimately en masse. In my experience at the time, feeling the presence of the Aggie Spirit among us was, for me, as potent a feeling of its palpable presence as that that pervades a religious congregation during Holy Communion, one of my favorite parts of any Christian service. To me, one Spirit, the Aggie Spirit, was as

tangible as the other, greater Spirit. I was well infected with the Aggie Spirit.

The Aggie Spirit remains instilled for life, especially if acquired by wide-eyed young freshmen during an old-time freshman year. I feel it today in me. Meeting an Aggie I have never met before gives rise to brotherly feelings, even at my advanced age; we have something strong in common. The statement, "Once an Aggie always an Aggie" remains true and love for the school, itself, is evidenced by the outpouring of service and money by Aggie-exes. I hope the Spirit is the same now in a more civilized era, but I cannot imagine how it can be, exactly. Still, military units with rugged training but no hazing, develop a strong "esprit de corps", much like the Aggie Spirit.

Going to a Football Game Some Years After Graduation. If there is any doubt about the lasting power of the Aggie Spirit, this incident should dispel that doubt.

My family and I were living in Houston, Texas and I was living there, again, for the first time since leaving Texas A&M in January of 1948. Shell Oil Company had completed the move of most of its headquarters staff from New York to Houston and I was almost out of a job. My job had been to coordinate the move of some six hundred and fifty head office employees of the related Manufacturing, Transportation and Supplies and Marketing Departments from New York to Houston without losing a man-hour's work or a gallon of sales. Fall was almost upon us and I had not been to an Aggie football game for years. The old feeling came over me and I had to go to a game. Thus it was that one cool and

sunny Saturday that fall I and my family went to College Station, tickets in hand.

We had lunch at the student center, barbecued links with beans, good Texas fare and a novelty to my largely Connecticut-California raised kids. Then we wandered the campus. I was intent on giving my family a tour that would create in their minds an image of the place so influential in my upbringing.

It was getting close to game time and I said we should pick up the pace and head for the stadium. Suddenly, in the near distance, the band began to play. Without my volition, my legs and feet began to run toward the band. I didn't start to run, I found myself running. There I was, an out-of-shape, fortyish vice president of a major oil company, dressed in suit and sports shirt (my concession to informality), running like a kid after the band. It had all come back to me. The Spirit was alive and well in me.

My family straggled behind me. "What's wrong with Daddy?" asked one. "Don't worry, he'll be all right. He's just being an Aggie" Ellen, my wife, reassured them. And so I was. In fact, I was more than all right, I was having the time of my life. I was elated.

In the stadium, the game began. It was as usual, the bands played, the yell leaders and cheer leaders performed, the students yelled or cheered. I had secured seats on the non-Aggie side of the stadium so we could watch the Corps and the Aggie band. Some other spectators wondered why I yelled at odd times, but one of my children explained that I was a misplaced Aggie.

By the end of the third quarter it was obvious we were about to lose. The kids wanted to go. I said, "We stay to the end". The fourth quarter came and went and

we lost. The kids again wanted to go home. I said, "This is not yet the end. Wait and see". I had the car keys, so they waited, puzzled. Soon, the yell leaders came onto the field and signaled a yell. We went through an entire yell practice, all about the game the following week. I explained to my family that the job of the Twelfth Man, the Aggie student body, was to stick by and encourage the Team, win or lose. Only when the yell practice was over could we go home.

I had hoped that a real day in Aggieland would encourage my children to go to A&M. In any case, for various reasons, none ever did. However, I had had a wonderful day. Even though my team lost.

The Floor's on Fire. Dorm 3, along with the other new dorms, was at the end of the steam line from the central power plant on campus. It brought steam to the radiators of our rooms. Texas winters in College Station were chilly, but rarely cold. One evening, the weather was very cold and the steam had condensed in the line. Our radiator received, at best, a low flow of warmish water. I finally suggested we do something about our increasing chill. We had, as the rooms of all Aggies seemed to have, a bottle of Sloan's Liniment (mostly turpentine) for aching muscles and a bottle of rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol or IPA) for the same aches on the dresser. The latter seemed better suited for my scheme.

I poured some IPA, enough to form a circular puddle about a foot-and-a-half in diameter, onto our solid, incombustible, concrete floor and lit it with one of the matches freshmen always carried so they could light upperclassmen's cigarettes (I didn't smoke). A beautiful,

conical flame sprang up, light yellow with a bluish tip. Soon our room was permeated with a gentle heat and the pleasant odor of traces of propyl aldehyde (and, no doubt, odorless, poisonous carbon monoxide, among other combustion products). Later, a repetition of the process kept the room comfortable until taps. The cold spell lasted for several days but we kept warm every evening.

One evening our door was flung open and an upperclassman barged in. He came to an abrupt halt and his eyes went wide as he saw the flaming cone in the middle of the floor. He said not a word but he looked as if he might pass out. Turning around, he left, closing the door gently behind himself. Nothing was ever said about what he saw. We were clearly beyond Aggie justice, for some reason.

Reveille. Our beloved school mascot was a dog, Reveille. Unlike her successors of the same name (successive numerals added) she was not a sleek, highly bred, long-nosed collie. She was a mongrel, a mixed-breed, black and white terrier, short and very fat. She had the privilege of sleeping in any cadet's room and of eating in either mess hall when and what she pleased. If she scratched at your door, you welcomed her in. As a result, she had thousands of "masters" who were all her servants. Some dog's life! I never noticed any special preference on her part for one cadet over another; cadets were all acceptable to her. As the human population changed with time, she simply took on the new boys as friends.

This *ad lib* life meant there was no pretense at weight control, whatever. She was plenty fat. She also

liked to be in the middle of things, bouncing along, head and tail high, in front of the Corps as it marched on and off of the football field, drill field or on any occasion. She was always present at any gathering, joining in freely as was her right and duty. We all loved that little mongrel and I thought it was especially appropriate that she represent us. We were, when you get right down to it, pretty much a mongrel set of human beings. I have not been able to accustom myself to thinking that the later, sleek, well-groomed and beautiful collies that have taken her place as true Reveilles, though, by definition and tradition that is what they are.

Reveille had a rough and ready air about her, in no way was she genteel, and she was, therefore, much more of an Aggie, in my view. When she died she was buried at Kyle Field with all pomp and honor as befitted her status. Some dog, she was! She has been joined by several of her successors, each in its own grave, over the passing years. Despite her somewhat comic appearance, she had a certain dignity as she pranced, proudly, in front of the Corps of Cadets.

Tessies. We had school dances at A&M and, since the boys did not dance with each other, girls were imported for the dance weekends. Dance weekends were few and far between, but they were popular. Our source for girls was the Texas State College for Women (TSCW) at Denton. To house them on campus, two or more dorms would be emptied out, the usual residents bunking in with student friends on campus.

The campus YMCA would act as a temporary dating service and I, with all the other Aggies wanting dates for the dance, would go there and sign up. Before the

dance, I would return to the YMCA where I would be given a slip of paper with a girl's name and lodging on it. I would present myself at the stated time at the dorm and there a matron would give me a serious once over and fetch the girl in question.

Politeness reigned and, soon, we were at the dance in Sbisa Hall. Things generally worked out well for me, my dates were nice and I was a gentleman (I hoped) and I had fun at the dance. A&M engaged some of the top big bands of the day (for example, Kay Kayser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge, which was plenty loud). After the dance we often went in groups to some nearby joint, brown bagged bottles in hand, where we ordered setups (cokes and ice, usually) and felt very wicked, taking a few sips. Then back to our dates' dorms by the witching hour where, under the watchful eyes of the matrons, we said good night. Taking a date into my dorm room was strictly forbidden as was entering more than about three feet into a girl's dorm. The entire affair was very chaste, there being only a few chances for a quick kiss or hug. Though continuing contacts may have occurred between Tessies and Aggies, I never had further contacts with my dates of the evening. The girls were nice enough but they were not the girls of my dreams (nor did I enchant them). That girl came later.

Final Review. One of the truly stirring events each year was Final Review. It was a massive military exercise with five-thousand or so boys, all in Aggie uniform, formed up on the drill field in their companies and battalions, ready for the general commands about to come. In each company one member was the guidon. The guidon was generally the shortest member of a company whose

shortest pace set the marching stride for all members of the company. He marched in the first rank of his company, at the left end, carrying the guidon for all the company to see. The great Aggie Band supplied the marching rhythm for all of the five thousand troops, one hundred and twenty paces per minute.

After marching onto the field and taking up our positions, there followed a long period at parade rest while speakers addressed the ranked cadets from the reviewing stand. These times could be harrowing, especially in May under a hot a humid Aggieland sun. Cadets, from time to time, overcome by the heat, passed out. I remember watching the neck of the cadet in front of me turn pale, break out in beads of sweat and then turn mottled. I knew he was about to faint and readied myself. When he began to crumple, I caught him by the armpits and lowered him carefully to the ground. Another cadet then took his ankles and, by armpits and ankles, we carried him to lie in the shade of one of the trees surrounding the drill field. We stayed with him for a few moments and, when we saw he was breathing easily, we returned to ranks, the ranks closed up and it was as if he had never been there. My company marched away when its turn came, leaving the supine body of our companion to make its way back to the dorm as best it could when it reawakened. He got home safely.

Our turn to march behind the previous company finally came and off we went, down the field to our right, a left turn at the bottom of the field, then a march straight ahead followed by another left turn and soon we were marching past the reviewing stand, "eyes right", saluting, on command, the officials on the stand. Our mascot Reveille bounced around, making her presence

felt during all of it, the band played and the Stars and Stripes and the Lone Star flags, the latter in a position subordinate to the former, blew in the breezes, furling and unfurling under the sun. It was an altogether glorious, patriotic event, an event of dedication to flag and country, akin in spirit to a major religious ceremony. The Aggie Spirit was in evidence throughout.

It occurred to me that all the time we had been standing at parade rest while others had marched, the high officials on the reviewing stand had been standing under the same sun, saluting each passing company. The generals and the doughboys must both be prepared for the same rigors, in the end.

After a second march before the reviewing stand the review was over. We marched back to our dorms and to very welcome showers and clean clothes. Rare as they were, I loved Final Reviews, a very fitting end to an academic year.

Corps Trips. Corps trips were a great adventure for a young freshman. I would set out, sixteen years old the first time, with a minimal overnight bag in hand, with some clean underwear and, perhaps, a shirt in it along with a tooth brush and tooth paste, money for a few hamburgers or bowls of chili in my pocket and a light heart, with thousands of other Aggies, all headed for the next away-from-home Aggie football game. I'll never forget the feeling of being young, healthy, ready for anything and foot loose in the great state of Texas that setting out on a Corps trip always gave me. I felt I could go anywhere, thanks to the generosity of Texas drivers. Only getting my first car, after I returned from service in WWII, gave me that same, free feeling. For a boy who

had traveled the world on overland buses, Pullman trains and ocean steamers, hitch-hiking might have seemed a comedown, but it was the minimalist nature of hitchhiking, the freedom from encumbrances, even a vehicle, that enchanted me. It was especially fine when I was traveling with one or two buddies to share the adventures to come.

A major hotel in the city where the game was to be played usually became the Aggie headquarters, usually with a room set aside where Aggies could get together. At Thanksgiving time in 1942, the hotel was the Stephen F. Austin Hotel on Congress Avenue in the very center of Austin and Aggies in uniform were allowed to sleep free in the hallways.

On the Friday night of the game weekend in Austin against our then arch rival, UT, I took advantage of the offer and found a sleeping spot under a bench on a stair landing. I deemed that under a bench would be safer than on top of one, not as soft as the cushion on the bench but safer from being sat on or otherwise bothered. I expected a rowdy night and I was right. The hotel was mighty tolerant.

Early on that Saturday morning another Aggie and I went in search of breakfast on Congress Avenue. Looking up the avenue after breakfast, we saw one of Austin's most beautiful sights, the capitol. Texas' capitol building is possibly the most beautiful such building in the Nation. Built of Texas red granite in Italian Renaissance style, it is graceful and symmetrical, with a slim and equally graceful dome, the whole building set among trees and grass with a curved driveway. Although we had no reason to think the building would be open at that time on a Saturday, we decided to walk up the avenue

and see it up close. When we tried to open the great doors we found them unlocked, so we entered and stood at the center of the Texas star on the floor to look up at the dome from the inside. It was a magnificent sight. Impressed, we were startled when a gentleman in his fifties called out to us, asking what we wanted. We said we were just looking, never having seen the capitol before, and he offered to give us a tour. We thanked him and introduced ourselves, Aggie fashion. He introduced himself in turn and turned out to be the head of the State Education Department (I have forgotten his name) and proceeded to give us a detailed tour and an account of doings at the capitol. What a piece of luck! I figured that having a man like that to head up education in Texas was a very good thing. At the end, we thanked him and made our way to lunch and then to the game.

It was a glorious fall day, perfect Texas weather for football, and I enjoyed being a part of the Twelfth Man (as Aggie spectators were called, the other eleven being the team). The true members of the Twelfth Man do not leave the game until the very end, as is the case with the eleven members of the team itself, yelling and encouraging the players to fight on, no matter how things are going.

Half time always brought a wonderful display. The bands of A&M and the opposing school played, marched and counter marched in turn, each band member in perfect unison with the others. The Aggie band always seemed more solid, much more military and measured than the others did with their garish uniforms and excessively rapid steps. That day in 1942 the Aggies lost, but I remember it as a good day, anyway. Had we won, it would have been a perfect day. Games, then,

were played in daylight, starting late in the morning or early in the afternoon. There were few night games as is common now. Most stadiums were not lighted. Sometimes Aggies spent the night away, most headed back toward College Station, arriving home in the wee hours of Sunday morning. That Thanksgiving game I had no reason to stay in Austin but hitch-hiked home, instead. In later years I had a very beautiful and delightful third cousin at TU. She would get me a date and a buddy of mine would be hers. There followed a very pleasant evening including dinner at one of many good eating places in Austin, then, already, a center of civilization in Texas. One time a friend, Howell Forman, my last roommate at A&M, and another of his friends stayed with his sister Etha, who lived and worked in Austin and so we all went home on Sunday.

Corps trips were always great adventures, on the road and at their destinations, never twice the same. Much steam got blown off during Corps trips, lightening the cares of being a student and developed a more complete view of what the world was like than I would have without Corps trips. No other school than A&M could have given me this opportunity.

Bonfire. For about ninety years the customary Bonfire was built and burned at A&M around Thanksgiving time, the time of the Texas A&M-UT football game. The act symbolized many things to many people: how badly A&M was going to beat TU that year, the strength of the Aggie spirit and, undoubtedly, other things including the sheer exuberance of youth set loose. Then, in the fall of 1999 the custom came to an abrupt end.

In the early hours of that fateful day, the nascent Bonfire structure, under construction and already about six stories tall, collapsed, killing twelve of those engaged in building it and injuring over twice as many. The venerable custom was brought to a halt by the banning of bonfire from campus in the future. Everyone was shocked and, as usual, there were plenty who predicted, after the fact, that it was bound to happen.

The University instituted an alternative memorial ceremony, building therefor a beautiful monument on campus in the memory of the deceased where an annual commemorative ceremony could take place. Bonfire was, officially, no more. Some do build a non-sanctioned bonfire off campus, but the original, old-fashioned Bonfire is gone. In the face of what happened, the memorial and its associated ceremony are sensible, official outcomes.

In my more primitive day, youth believed itself immortal and we built our annual Bonfire with a will. I served on one of many squads of freshmen detailed to scour the local woods for fallen or dead trees to bring back to campus as raw materials for Bonfire. In my case, an upperclassman had secured a flat-bed truck on which we stacked the trees we found. Back on campus, a tall tree was installed in a hole in the ground, ropes to its upper trunk holding the central tree upright. Other trees were leaned against the first tree and tied in place to prevent collapse of the emerging and eventual structure. One squad found an abandoned chick sale, which was tied to the very top of the central tree's trunk and, ultimately, with the freshmen, working like ants, Bonfire was ready.

Once built, additional logs were laid in concentric circles around Bonfire. Some time previously, TU

students, dashing by in a car, had driven through and thrown a fire bomb into the heart of Bonfire, igniting it prematurely as was the intent. The circles of logs were installed to serve as barriers to cars.

Additionally, squads of freshmen, supervised by P-heads, surrounded Bonfire around the clock, guarding it against attack. Lighting Bonfire when we wanted it lit was our goal. I had 8:00 p.m. to midnight watch duty. I sat around a campfire with a few other guys, swapping stories and feeling important. Other similar groups were on guard. That particular year, no attackers showed up or, perhaps, seeing how well-guarded our cherished Bonfire was, they came, they saw, they scampered and we enjoyed a feeling of adventure.

With a lifetime spent working in industrial facilities, with my last position for Shell Oil Company having been Vice President for Health, Safety and Environment, I am very conscious of safety matters and can see how seriously hazardous those Bonfire activities I entered into with so light a heart really were. Not only safety but liability concerns have been a part of my past business and professional life. I find it difficult to believe that the authorities at Texas A&M would not have seen factors such as safety and liability, and more, as well, before 1999. I have found, however, that even organizations with potentially hazardous operations can be oblivious to the problems involved in some familiar operations until disaster strikes and consequences become abundantly clear. I write, now, not say what should have been but, only, to report life as it was when I was young at Texas A&M. In summary, we had fun, we seemed invincible and unkillable to ourselves and to the authorities of the day. The comrades among us who did the most

dangerous things were cheered as heroes, no one thinking of them as possibly dying or harmed. The only surprise is that some ninety years had passed without such a disaster taking place. Bonfire is gone, leaving those of us who participated memories of fun but, each year, we are called to remember those who died in 1999 and to learn from them. No more Bonfire, but a new and solemn Aggie tradition remains in its stead.

Inter-School School Hi-Jinks. Rivalry was strong among the schools of the old Southwest Conference and not only on the football field. Students often pulled inter school tricks. Here are two such tricks.

While I was freshman, some Aggies unknown to the larger community of Aggies decided to pull a trick on Rice University. One night, cautiously and undetected they stole onto the Rice campus in Houston and made their way to where the Rice mascot, a stuffed owl, was kept. The Aggies were able to steal the owl, a magnificent and fierce-looking thing, and take it back to College Station. There they put it on display and kept it well guarded.

Rice students rose to the challenge, making forays into Aggieland, without success. I remember seeing the stuffed bird with a disconsolate look on its face (according to my imagination). The school authorities of both schools finally had to intervene and, in time, the Rice Owl was returned to the Rice student body. We worried that our beloved Reveille might have been placed in danger by this trick, but revenge, if that was what it was, came in a different form.

One night, while Aggie attention flagged, some Rice students crept onto our campus and went to the front of the Administration Building. There, there was a tall,

metallic flag pole on which the U.S. flag flew each day. The Rice students raised the Rice Owl flag, removed the lanyard from the pole and, as a final insult, greased the pole, leaving the Rice Owl flag flying at the top of the pole.

Morning came and the usual small squad of Aggies went out to raise the flag only to be greeted by the scene just described. I came by a little later. The small gathering of Aggies had grown to a large, frustrated crowd, the Rice Owl flag fluttering serenely above their heads. Some of the Aggies were trying to boost others up the pole to where they hoped there was no grease. There was no such place, however, and it was finally necessary to call a fire truck with a long ladder to take down the Rice Owl ensign and install a new lanyard so the U.S. flag could fly again. We never did figure out how the Rice students had accomplished our embarrassment without disturbance in the middle of the night. We had to hand that one to Rice.

Hitch Hiking. Hitch hiking was the way to go in my time. It was much safer, then, and having your own car was still well in the future for most cadets. Once in a while, I took the Southern Pacific's Sunbeam to Dallas or Houston. It was luxurious, in my view, and you got a good lunch. I had to be feeling pretty flush to do it.

One thing made hitch hiking better then, for Aggies. It was the Aggie bench. Just about every town in Texas, little or big, had Aggie benches, suitably marked benches sponsored by local Aggie clubs, alongside the highways at the edges of the towns. Aggies wanting to hitch a ride would gather at these benches and, taking turns, would wave their thumbs for rides. There was no trouble with

or from the Aggies, and they rarely had difficulties with a driver. Drivers who knew the system knew it was safe to pick up Aggies and were therefore prone to stop and offer a ride. There was mutual benefit in the benches. Only late at night or in the early morning hours might a lone, hitch hiking Aggie meet with trouble. Usually, therefore, we traveled at least in pairs. One time, for example, I was alone at a bench in Brenham at about 2:00 a.m. A car with two men in it had passed the bench several times. This time it stopped and the passenger leaned out and offered me a ride. I thanked him but waved him on, saying I was waiting for a friend. They left without demur, coming back a few more times. Another Aggie having shown up, I left with the new Aggie and avoided trouble. I may have been guilty of misjudging the two men's intentions, but it was a case favoring prudence. I feared that they wanted not to give me a ride but, simply, they wanted *me* -- and I was outnumbered. No, thanks.

Sometimes, since going to a ball game meant leaving College Station late on a Friday when pre-out-of-town game drinking had already begun, I and whatever buddy was with me would be picked up by a drunk or two. Their drunkenness soon became apparent by their speech and driving and the problem then was to get down without angering them or accepting their urgent invitations to stop at the nearest bar for a drink or two with them. This was usually accomplished pretty easily by confusing the drunks as to where we were really going or some such ruse. One drunk and his tipsy girlfriend picked up my friend Howell Forman and me in north Austin. We wanted to go into Austin. We wound up

close to Waco before being able to disengage. Some detour!

On another occasion, on a late afternoon, Howell Forman and I were hitch-hiking back to College Station from Dallas. The driver of a pickup truck picked us and a third Aggie up and we got in the back of the truck. Soon, having had little sleep over the weekend, we all went to sleep. I woke up well after dark, a light shining in my eyes. We were parked in front of a café and the driver said he was going in for some coffee. We decided to join him. Seated at a table, I decided to order a beer. The waitress, pretending shock, said to me, "No beer! Don't you know you're in Waco?" I didn't and settled for coffee.

On my way to Dallas with two other Aggies we were picked up by a pastor and his wife. They were going no farther than Madisonville, but that was in the right direction so we climbed into the back and were soon in conversation with the man of God, a friendly soul. Suddenly, a rear tire blew out. Before the driver could organize himself, the three of us were out of the car and fetching the spare from the trunk. Soon, we had the job done and the trip got underway, again. Aggies do not abandon a driver when he is in trouble. They stay and help. We had proven ourselves to be good Aggies, familiar with Aggie ethics.

Sometimes a ride could turn out to be a simple pleasure. One afternoon, I was hitch hiking by myself, on my way back to A&M. I had waited a long time with nary a ride. A small, battered pickup truck pulled up in front of me, its bed loaded with watermelons. The driver was an elderly black man, old enough to be my grand-father, with the callused ands of a hardworking farm

worker. He asked where I was going. "Get in" he said, "that's where I'm going" and we headed for A&M.

We fell to talking and it became apparent that I had met a happy man. He had suffered much and frequent disappointment and discrimination all his life. He still could not walk up to the main counter of a roadside hot dog stand and buy what he needed, simply and easily, as I could. He had to go to a special window at the side of the stand and ask, humbly, for what he needed, his turn always last. He had had difficulty being allowed to buy a bit of ground for a farm but, persisting, had ended up with a loving wife, grown children whom he loved, the truck I was riding in, the small farm where he eked out a bare living for himself and his family growing vegetables and watermelons with hand tools, and enjoying precious little security. He made no complaint and was happy. He took no personal pride in himself or his accomplishments but thanked his God for His great kindness. When I finally got out of his truck, he would accept no money "for gas" or any other reason and I knew I had been in the presence of a truly good man. I realized how much I had for which I had not sweated and how much unearned and untrammeled opportunity I was heir to. I never saw him again, but I have never forgotten him and the lesson in honest humility he taught so naturally.

<u>We've Never Been Licked</u>. In the spring of 1943 Walter Wanger brought his movie crew to campus to produce a movie about Texas A&M and its Spirit titled "We've Never Been Licked". The school backed the enterprise and gave the movie crew a good deal of latitude of action. Time has, fortunately, been kind to its memory in me, dimming it considerably. It was at best a class B tear

jerker. It was made, so a current blurb says (Google) as a morale-raising movie for Aggies overseas in WWII. The general idea was that even wartime divisions, suspicions of treachery and enmities could not defeat the Aggie Spirit. Google it if you want to know more.

In it I am visible only once as I rose up from humping it during a yell practice. It was a frontal view and my ears stuck out seriously in those days, the right one more than the left, and that caused me to show up against the background of other cadets. We were herded into the stadium one night where we staged one yell after another amid shouts of "cut, cut" until whatever effect was being sought was had. My only other part was of students flooding down the wide steps in front of the chemistry building, fresh from a freshman chemistry lecture by Dr. M. B. Harrington, an excellent lecturer and, later, President of Texas A&M (I was to get to know him personally as a fellow trustee and prime joke teller of the Board of Trustees of the Texas A&M University Research Foundation many years later). I could not find myself in that crowd. We were all in white lab overalls and we repeated the scene several times. My ears were no help in this instance. In the end, there was a free showing of the finished movie on campus. I saw it and thought not too highly of it. I also saw it a second time.

The second time I saw it was aboard a Patrol Craft Small (PCS) a wooden hulled, Navy sub-chaser. I was undergoing one of several weeks' worth of training-at-sea in antisubmarine warfare. We had a number of young naval ensigns in the training group. I was a trainee along with the others, four of whom were Tea sippers. We crowded into the tiny officers' mess of the ship (136 feet long, overall) and watched the movie. Soon he B-

class character of the movie made itself apparent and I, the only Aggie present, was subjected to lots of good-humored but tedious razzing. The movie did nothing for my morale, which was already plenty high, but it presented A&M as a childish place, not worthy of notice. Walter Wanger did A&M no favors.

Summer 1943 Forward. Most of what I have written so far took place during my freshman year. That year and that class was to be the last of the old-time Aggie freshman years and classes. At the end of the spring, most seniors and many juniors
were pulled into the active army and sent, soon, to Europe and the Pacific. At A&M the army had discovered a large, concentrated force of pretty completely trained soldiers. A little more training and they were ready for combat.

The rest of us were not numerous or diverse enough to sustain the Corps as it had been and great changes ensued. We still retained our corps assignments by battalions and companies (I, for example, was still a member of Company B, Chemical Warfare Battalion) and drilled with them but our living conditions became mixed. For example, while my new, assigned roommate Archie Broodo and I were both from the Chemical Warfare Battalion, we were not from the same companies and our neighbors next door and beyond were from different outfits (Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, Signal Corps, Infantry, etc...). Those of us living on the same floor of our new dorm were not from the same outfits and the coherence of a company whose members lived together was lost. Many of the customs of each company were no longer sustainable. Thus it was that I found myself

rooming with Archie Broodo, not Leslie Moss, in one of the older dorms, Milner Hall, near the older of the two mess halls, Sbisa Hall.

Archie was from Dallas. His father had died some time previously and his mother, a strong woman, whom I met, lived there by herself. The family were from Turkey and were Sephardic Jews. I had known a very few Jews in Chile but now Judaism and its various branches became an interest of mine, continuing to the present day. Archie was a fine man and student, very active in the classroom, the Hillel Club and on campus, with whom I kept in touch over the years. He died some years ago leaving behind his wife and several children and having had a very good career in nuclear engineering, a field for which training in chemical engineering was very useful. Archie was one of many Aggie successes in later life, as were my friends in general.

The last time we got together in person was when, in the ied-1970s I gave a talk at Texas A.&M to the chemical engineers (several hundred strong). Archie was present and I spoke on "What Every Chemical Engineer Should Know About Toxicology" (later published in the "Journal of Pharmacology and Toxicology". We had lunch together and compared notes on how different our careers had become from anything we might have imagined. At that time, I had become vice President for Health, Safety an Environment for Shell Oil Company and Archie was an independent consultant.

The summer semester of 1943 was to teach me much about other people, other fields of study and other ambitions. That semester was also when I acquired a lifetime, close friend in the person of Howell Northcutt Forman, Jr.

I had to make a formation but had lost my hat. I ran around the first floor of Milner Hall hoping to find someone from whom I could borrow a hat. On the side of the dorm opposite my own a door was open and Howell was seated inside. I went in said the usual "Howdy" and explained my mission. He loaned me a hat and off I went.

Later that day, I bought myself a new hat and brought Forman's hat back to him. We fell to talking, learning a bit about each other. So it went, visiting each other's rooms, going to a movie or a football game or participating in bull sessions with or without other friends and, before I knew it, we were friends. We were both seventeen and first semester sophomores. I use the word sophomore rather than P-head because neither of us ever even thought of beating a freshman. The worst I ever did to a freshman was teach him algebra or chemistry when he asked for help. That I enjoyed and, coupled with the teaching I did during my graduate years (much later) I conceived the idea that I might become a teacher or a professor. That's another story.

I'm a generally friendly person and have always made friends as I have moved from one place to another. Even now, in my old age and past the life-long friend-making years, I have made friends with people at my retirement home. Perhaps it was that I was an only child and had no built-in friends within my family that I sought friendship elsewhere. I usually find something attractive about everyone, though there are exceptions, people who do not attract. On the other hand, there are those who are especially attractive. Attraction is hard to define, but people attractive to me tend to be people with good qualities of mind and morals, not prigs or prudes but who

have their own thought-through standards of morality. Also, people with a breadth of mind and grasp are attractive, combined with good senses of humor. Finally, those who are most attractive tend to have a large degree of wisdom about human behavior and life in general.

I've had two good friends who fell into this special category, the first one was Philip Beglin, in Chile, an Irish Catholic and as fine and admirable a boy as one could find. When we met I was nine and he was almost twelve. Despite the age difference, we hit it off. We were in different grades at the Grange but Phil was the center of a small group of boys, of which I was a member, that played together after school and on weekends. He was born in Chuquicamata, a copper mining town in the north of Chile, spent some time in Seattle, Washington, and chose American citizenship at age eighteen. We kept in touch and visited each other when possible for decades. This was easy at the times when Ellen and I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area with our growing family. He, too, served in the Navy and later became a urologist, living and practicing for the rest of his life in San Francisco. He and his wife Joan had seven children and, at last count, twenty-two grandchildren. Phil and Joan were life-long and good Catholics. Any Pope would be proud of them.

I last visited Phil in 2005, in San Francisco, shortly before his death. We were life-long friends, a wonderful thing. With life-long friends I have had a sense of brotherhood, something I did not experience directly within my family. From our first, brief conversation about my hat a life-long friendship developed with Howell Forman.

First Changes at A&M. In the fall of 1943, Howell and I roomed together at Leggett Hall. Later, we were separated and/or brought together as roommates by the quirks of A&M's roommate shufflings. These shufflings were made necessary as A&M received more V-12 and ASTP units from the Navy and Army, respectively. Members of those two units and of the Corps of Cadets lived, trained and studied very separately. The table following this narrative shows all of my dorm and roommate assignments, including those with Howell Forman. Looking at my own assignments, I see that I, along with everyone else, led a gypsy life. Moving was easy; I had only to pack my steamer trunk and go. These changes were the first of several profound ones in A&M.

Howell Northcutt Forman, Jr. was born in Longview, Texas. His father was a cotton classifier for the government (later a broker) for two or three years during the depression and his family moved three or four times during the period. He and his family, father, mother and older sister, Etha., lived in Caldwell, Texas, for about a year. Howell remembers it as a great place to live and he thoroughly enjoyed it. He was about four or five years old at the time. Following the death of his father in an automobile accident, Howell did the rest of his growing up in Forney, Texas, near Dallas. He had moved there with his mother and sister to be with relatives.

During our years at school I visited Howell's home in Forney at least three times at his invitation, and saw his mother and sister Etha at College Station when they came to visit. I got to know his family well and to admire their strength of character and cultivation of mind and

manners, men and women alike. No wonder Howell turned out so well! He had a fine family. His sister Etha was a few years his senior and, in my estimation, a true, very well read intellectual. It was Etha who sparked my interest in and love of ballet.

One evening while visiting the Formans in Forney she said she had tickets to the ballet in Dallas and wondered if we would like to go. The answer was "Yes, thank you" and we went. The ballet was "The Prodigal Son" and I was stunned by the flaming colors, the intensity of the story, the athletic abilities of both the dancers and the ballerinas and the intertwining of dance and music. It was a breathtaking experience. I became a convert and went to the ballet when possible. My wife did not like ballet the way I did so we never became season ticket holders. Still, I have Etha to thank for introducing me to one of the great human accomplishments.

I was lucky enough to call Etha, on impulse, a few days before her death. I wasn't sure I should, knowing death was imminent, but the impulse said "call". She was obviously delighted and I felt I had done something good for her in making that call. Without question, it did much for me.

Roommates to Shipmates and Back. In May 1944 Howell Forman and I began looking into joining the military. I had turned eighteen in January, he had turned eighteen in the previous October and we were free to join if we wanted to. We had student deferments but, speaking for myself, I wanted to join actively in the War before it was over. I had wanted to join for some time, and now I could. I decided to finish my fifth semester at A&M and then go.

We considered various possibilities such as Sea Bees, Underwater Roger teams, and so on and finally hit on the Navel Air Corps. One of us had received a colorful recruiting poster with pictures of an F4U Corsair, the premier fighter plane of the Navy and it looked great. "Get your Navy wings of gold" the poster said. I had a predisposition to joining the Navy, having enjoyed shipboard travel as a boy. We looked it over and said, in effect, "why not?" Thus are great decisions made.

We got letters of reference from our favorite professors, copies of our transcripts and, with these and some Navy papers, hitch hiked to Houston where the Navy put us up in the Rice Hotel, room and breakfast paid for. Fancy quarters and treatment for a pair of Aggies!

The next morning, bathed, breakfasted and neatly dressed, we presented ourselves at the recruiting station near the hotel with our hopes of joining the Navel Air Corps. We were given the necessary written and physical exams for joining the Navy with exams for the Air Corps, specifically, to follow later in Dallas.

The next thing we had to do was take off all our clothes and line up with a bunch of other guys to start through the process of our physical exams. I was glad that at least I was clean. The corpsman who took my blood sample told me "You're my first since I finished my training. I hope I don't hurt you" as he got his needle ready to harvest a blood sample. I think he was nervous because his hand shook and he raised a great bruise on my arm before he finally found a vein. He needed more practice and I was part of that. Howell and I were then sent in different directions. We met again afterwards.

All else went smoothly until I met the psychologist. I had never been interviewed by a psychologist before but I had been interviewed by a psych student at A&M as part of his class assignment. I expected a Rorschach or some word association tests, at least. I did not expect what actually happened. Here is the scene: Picture a skinny, naked young man seated on a low seat on one side of a large desk with an imposing psychologist in white coat, shirt and tie seated in a large, executive chair on the other side of the desk. My seat was as undignified as possible: one of those U-shaped toilet seats set on three legs.

Silence. More silence. Further silence.

The psychologist then cleared his throat, giving me an intense, meaningful glare. He asked me a question: "Do you like girls?" I responded, "Yes, sir." He made a notation on a sheet of paper, signing it with a flourish, and told me where to go next. Thus was I professionally certified as psychologically fit for Naval service!

My opinion of the psychologist started out at neutral but dropped far down when I saw what he believed was a true exam. Suppose I had been a homosexual who wanted to get into the Navy because it was full of boys? I would have given the same answer, I guess. What else? Some test!

The professor of the psych student I mentioned was of much better quality. The student had given me a Rorschach test, a word association test and asked a number of cogent questions. He became disturbed as the testing went on and went away muttering that he would "have to talk to his professor about this and would get back to me". A few days later he returned, much relieved. His professor had told him I obviously had had

a very strict, rigorous, religious upbringing but there was no need to worry. I was quite normal. The professor was right about me, though how he got to that conclusion from my tests remained a mystery to me. I guess he knew his stuff.

I passed my exams, physical and psychological and became a happy member of the U.S. Navy. Howell also passed his tests, but was not accepted outright for some reason. We both returned to A&M to finish our fifth semesters, I taking a brief trip to Dallas for my specific Naval Air Corps exam, which I passed with the flattering notation that I had "an athletic appearance". Appearances can indeed be deceiving!

At semester's end, I was sent home to El Paso to wait for a letter calling me to active duty. Howell was sent to Forney for a similar wait. His letter informed him that the program he was aiming to get into, the Navy's combat air crewman program, was closed. During his Dallas exam for that program Howell was told his feet were flat, a surprise when he later told me about it. Just what do flat feet have to do with the Navy, a force in which much active duty time is spent sitting down? "Negative Planus 2 Degrees" was the diagnosis, which I did not understand. Google now has told me that it is medical talk for "flat feet", describing the degree of flatness.

During my Naval Air Force exam in Dallas my heart rate proved to be low, but I explained that I had been running cross country. The corpsman said "Breathe a little". I did, the rate came up and I passed, becoming an Naval Aviation Cadet. Ultimately, while in Flight Prep School at Natchi-toches, Louisiana I transferred to Midshipman School so I could earn a commission faster

and go to sea. The Navy had a momentary surplus of pilots and therefore lengthened a required period of tarmac training by six months. My comment at the time was, "I'll never get into this war at this rate!". I had more red blood than sense, in those days. I guess my Americanization was complete.

On March 8, 1945 I became a Naval Ensign at an impressive ceremony in the gymnasium at Notre Dame University, in Indiana. I was then sent for antisubmarine training in Miami (ashore classes) and San Diego (at sea classes, with a tame sub I got to ride on) and, finally, was given orders to serve on the USS PCE(R) 855, somewhere in the Western Pacific Ocean. I was delighted. I had gotten what I wanted, service on a small vessel which, by nature and design, where I would be close to the sea. I served in a variety of positions at different times on that ship: censor (at first), sonar officer, stores and commissary officer, mess officer, engineering officer and watch stander. Just what I wanted, variety, on a ship so small that the usual Naval protocols went by the board. You only saluted the Captain the first time you saw him each day, for example. You saluted no one else. There are many stories I could tell of life on that little ship but this is not the place for them. It was where Howell Forman and I became shipmates, however, before returning to A&M.

Howell persisted and was able to join the Navy, feet and all. He went to gunnery school in Oklahoma, midshipman's school in New York, and then to sea. We kept in touch, though the mails were slow, and thus I learned that he was to come to Hawaii. As an officer searching for my ship I had stayed at a BOQ (a Quonset hut) at Camp Catlin, on Oahu. I called and found Howell

was due in soon. We had an opening for an officer on our ship and I asked the Captain whether Howell could fill that opening. At first the Captain demurred, saying service by friends on the same ship had been known to break up a friendship, but when I explained that we had already been roommates at A&M and that that had had no bad effect, he agreed. Orders were written and I went to Camp Catlin to get our new officer. Thus it was that Howell Forman came aboard the PCE(R) 855 in the capacity of Recreation Officer.

Soon, we had liberty on the same day and went ashore to explore Waikiki together. It was early evening and dinner seemed the best bet for beginning our explorations. We found a small, nice looking restaurant, went in, were seated and ordered French lamb chops with all the side dishes. We were both hungry and it was a delicious dinner. When the waiter came and asked us, "Anything else, gentlemen?" we said, almost in unison, "Another round of the same". The waiter's eyes widened. He wasn't sure he had heard correctly. We reassured him that the lamb chops were great and we wanted new, complete dinners. He brought us our new dinners and we cleaned our plates. The food wasn't bad on the ship (how could I criticize it? I made up the menus) but this was superb. After our second round we had dessert and coffee, paid the bill and left.

I remember this event as one of great contentment. I not only had had a very good dinner but I had had it with a very good, old friend in a comfortable place. What better way to say "Welcome aboard?". We spent the rest of the evening at the Officer's Club at Ala Wai and then went back to the ship. I'll never forget the surprise in the waiter's eyes!

I don't recall exactly how long it was before the USS PCE(R) 855 left Pearl Harbor for San Diego but it was about three months. Once there, Howell Forman and I went ashore on our first joint liberty to explore the town. First, we stopped at the landward end of the dock where our ship was docked where there was a pay phone for Howell to make a call to his Midshipman School girlfriend back in New Jersey. Howell put a call in to the operator, but the operator kept having trouble putting it through. Finally, when she suggested he try again later, he got desperate and said, pathos in his voice, "But, Ma'am, I've just gotten back from overseas!" whereupon the call went through. I stopped listening then because I was laughing too much and, besides, what was said next was none of my business. I had to hand it to him. It was a fine example of Aggie-turned-sailor chutzpah.

San Diego is a fun town for sailors and all hands on m ship had fun. I'll leave the details for other pages (if they get written) except to say that Howell and I enjoyed the place, together and with others. Along with several hundred young military officers we discovered the Junior Officers Tea Dances that took place on Sunday afternoons at the grand, old Coronado Hotel then, as now, a wonderful, Victorian structure. There I met one Margaret Adams, a lively, Irish Catholic, student nurse at a Catholic nursing school. She and I enjoyed sneaking her (just her, not me) into her dorm after her curfew, fooling (so we thought) the nuns. I understandably saw much less of Howell on liberty after I met Margaret and my attentiveness may have given her the mistaken idea that I was marriage-ready. My last day in San Diego I went to tell her goodbye and her mother wouldn't let me in the house. Saddened but wiser, I went on my way.

It was time to leave active duty for civilian life. From San Diego Howell and I were sent, together, to Camp Wallace, then just south of Houston where we both chose to go on inactive duty rather than take an out-and-out discharge from Naval service. I don't know why Howell made that choice, but I did because I was sure we would soon be at war with China and, having missed much of WWII, I wanted to serve my country in wartime. I was ready to go. Howell was called up during the Korean War and I, as an engineering graduate student, was never called up. I served a total of twenty-five years in the Naval Reserve.

We left Camp Wallace and, having removed our hats, jackets and insignia of rank, we hitch hiked to Forney on a very long, hot day in August, drinking cold cokes at every opportunity. Our joint Navy days were over.

Back at College Station after brief, separate, visits with family, we roomed together with other returning veterans, all now civilians, in Walton Hall as long as we were completing out studies at A&M. Our Corps days were over and our lives were vastly different. We no longer belonged to any organization, we simply lived, like lodgers, in assigned rooms and ate at our assigned mess hall (Sbisa or Duncan Halls). We both had commissions in the Navy so it was no Aggie senior boots for us. I was lucky because in our entry in Walton Hall several other students I knew well from the old Company B, Chemical Warfare Battalion days, lived there, too. It was a cozy arrangement, to have other friends present who went to my same classes. In effect, we all were back together again.

My first semester back, in the fall of 1946, gave me a wake-up call. I had not forgotten what I knew but I

had slowed down in test taking. The first test I took, in Organic Chemistry, I got a lower grade than I might have because I wasn't fast enough to finish the whole test in the time allowed. I went into high gear, cut my Christmas in El Paso with my grandparents short and came back early to school to study. I cured the problem and finished the semester in good shape, despite having to take my finals while suffering from the flu.

In the spring semester I was, finally, a senior. I took extra credits in advanced calculus, a course not required but I wanted it, with the idea of taking it easier in my last semester. Half way through the semester I decided I needed a break from institutional life and an incessant student grind. I had not really been with my parents, except for a few brief visits, for about four years and I was tired. I decided to take the summer of 1947 off from school, go to El Paso, where my parents were then living and get a job; and so I did. My parents thought it was a good idea and I slept on a day bed in my Dad's home office.

At the Texas State Employment Agency in El Paso I got a very good job: man of all work at an umpire lab on the north bank of the Rio Grande, opposite the American Smelting and Refining Company's copper smelter. My typical day (Mondays through Saturdays at noon) was to arrive early, open up and sweep the lab, feed and play with Mehitabel (another Mehitabel) the cat and her nameless kitten, set up ore and other samples for later analysis and then go, when my boss showed up, to another copper smelter in East El Paso where I would get together with a foreman and grade copper scrap, thus establishing its price to the refiner. I was the shipper's representative and the foreman and I had many

arguments over the price to apply to different car loads of scrap.

I bought a car at a sheriff's auction for these trips to the other smelter. The car had been impounded for over a year without being claimed. It needed much repair, which I did myself, and it got me to work and back and, at the end of the summer, to College Station and elsewhere, as long as I was in no hurry. My car had so many aches and pains I called her Dolores and, altogether, I felt as if I were living in clover despite the fact that my social life with peers was zero.

I enjoyed being with my parents after a long separation and I've always been glad to have added a bit to my childhood, that summer. I was twenty years old.

After lunch I analyzed samples, tested concrete building blocks for builders and did whatever other chores there were. It was a perfect summer job and a good break from regimentation. At the end of each day I fed Mehitabel (she fed her son), scratched her behind her ears and closed up the lab. My boss's wife took care of Mehitabel on the weekends, not that Mehitabel needed much care. She was a skilled huntress.

My boss liked the way I worked and offered me a job he knew of as manager of an ore flotation mill in Alpine, a job, as he pointed out, with a future. I declined with thanks and continued on course. I've often wondered what life would have been like had I, on impulse, said "yes" and settled in Alpine for life. I like West Texas and there are many worse fates than that would have been.

Back at A&M, Howell and I were once again roommates, finishing our last semester. I needed only seventeen hours to finish and so took a light semester, leaving time for weekend trips, Saturday handball

followed by beer with friends and other student-like fun. It was a good, final semester.

Howell and I had both accepted jobs with the DuPont Company in Waynesboro, Virginia, he as an engineer in the plant, I in the lab, in research. It was at the lab that I met my soon-to-be wife, Ellen Bardwell, a chemical engineer (she passed away on September 11, 2011). In Waynesboro, Howell met Ethel Hanske, his soon-to-be-and-still-is-his wife. Thus was a quartet of long-term friends formed. Marriage does not have to separate friends. In this case, new ones were made. Not bad!

Aside from a few reflections on all of this, this brings to a close my selected list of things that happened to me at Texas A&M, or that I came across, especially but not exclusively during my freshman year.

Reflections.

Following the spring of 1943, Texas A&M began a series of changes that would continue for more than twenty years to form the A&M that exists today, a school with more students (for the first time, this year, 2014) than the University of Texas, with both male and female students the vast majority of whom are civilians but, at its heart (in my view) having a Corps of about 2,000 that offers a pathway to military careers in all the armed forces and is a focus for the Aggie Spirit and Aggie traditions.

In the 1950s the old Bryan Airfield was bought by the College and a separate campus was set up for freshmen to keep them separated from the rest of the school. The purpose was to break the cycle of hazing and I fervently hope it succeeded. In my day, an

innocent, wide-eyed sixteen-year-old like me could be bulldozed into thinking that he had to succeed in what was an extremely flawed system in order to prove himself a "man". Hazing was a part of the culture at A&M for generations, as was true at the United States Military Academy. While it created a special bond among freshmen, true military training is rugged enough to supply that bonding. After all, young males have a tendency to bond and to achieve "esprit de corps", the equivalent of the Aggie Spirit; and the Aggie Spirit is a good thing, far beyond the confines of the football stadium.

Barring hazing, A&M was a good school in my day. It was the right school for me, doing me a lot of good. The same good and more could have been accomplished within a truly military culture, however, and my question, in retrospect, is why it took so long to come to understand this? The Administration and the Military at A&M had insufficient understanding of their purpose and responsibility. Much has changed for the better, however. A continually better A&M, keeping the good from the past and moving to better and better states in the future, with no loss but with improvements in the Aggie Spirit and Aggie values is my sincerest hope. Many schools are excellent. I ask not merely excellence of Texas A&M but maintenance of the school's unique spirit and American character far into the future.

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MY DORM AND ROOMMATE ASSIGNMENTS			
DORM	**YEAR**	**SEMESTER**	**ROOM-MATE(S)**
1	FRESH-MAN	1 (1ST HALF)	MOSS
3		1 (2ND HALF)	MOSS
3		2 (1ST HALF)	MOSS
LEGGETT		2 (2nd HALF)	MOSS + GARDNER
MILNER	SOPHO-MORE	3 (1ST HALF)	BROODO
LEGGETT		3 (2ND HALF)	FORMAN
WALTON		4	BROODO
PG HALL	JUNIOR	1ST 3 WEEKS OF 5	ME + 3 OTHER MISCELLANEOUS
16		REST OF 5	LEGLER
AWAY FOR NAVAL SERVICE			
WALTON	JUNIOR	6	FORMAN
WALTON	SENIOR	7	FORMAN
TOOK SUMMER 1947 OFF TO WORK IN EL PASO			
WALTON	SENIOR	8	FORMAN