

The Cannon Caper By Ned Allan

It was the Fall Semester of 1962. The Corps of Cadets were a voting block to be reckoned with on campus at Arlington State College. Nationwide, lines in the sand were starting to be clearly drawn between the two factions of Military and Nonmilitary students. The war in Viet Nam was daily headline news. Protests, Kent State, and burning ROTC Armories, Draft Cards and American Flags seemed to be the order of the day. At ASC, the Sam Houston Rifles, or Jodies represented the most radical of the "Pro-Military" movement as they were nicknamed. Not only were they the best in the land when it came to precision marching, but hard core in dedication and physical stature. The Jodies were campus leaders, future heroes, career Army officers, and the team had a tradition of excellence as the oldest organization on campus.

The other side of the coin, the Jody counter parts, or adversaries, were the Fraternities. Their purpose in life was to party. They dressed and acted in stereotypical fashion. They wore the latest in clothes and fashion with "Gentlemen Quarterly" hairstyles. No real goal or direction, these young men sought to become successful in life by a network of "who you know", or "good old Frat buddy system". To a man, these students were against the war, and, for lack of any real purpose, were the first to line up on the war protesters side along with the Hippies, druggies and flag burners. Alas, there were no fraternities at ASC to spar with. Under the Texas A & M System, no fraternities were allowed on campus. Suitable alternatives would be found elsewhere.

Within the ranks of the Jodies were two distinct elements. One was the serious student who was concerned about getting a degree and a commission (this cadet usually majored in History because of the school's reputation of an easily obtainable degree.) Typical of this "Type One" element were guys like Jerry Houston, Joel Ward, Gary Weber and Rex Latham, all corps leaders, good students, and future Hall of Honor inductees.

The other element of the Jodies was nebulous in nature, somewhat eclectic. These were the risk takers, the guys who lived on the edge. Most of this "Type Two" element ended up on the Sam Houston Rifles by "happenstance" rather than long range planning. They could care less about grades or learning anything in college. They had no real plans other than to have a good time and hopefully obtain a commission. Non-directional, with no real achievement goals, this group included guys like Doug Welch, Mark Lamkin, George Garrett, Ron Watson, Doug Dulaney and Larry Pitz. The common thread between the two elements was the dedication to the Jodies, and wanting to be the best in the world at

something. There would be no Hall of Honor inductees out of the "Type Two" group (even though Welch and Garrett would become Army Colonels and decorated Green Berets.)

A "Mission" was *needed* to rake havoc on the fraternity lifestyle. An unlikely "leader" of any clandestine mission emerged: Bunky Garonzik. After high school, Bunky lived and worked in the oldest and most dangerous area of New Orleans. To put things in perspective, his rent was \$7 a week. He was "street smart", authority snubbing, totally independent, and never considered the consequences of his actions. His mentor was Ron Rendleman (later became a helicopter hero in Viet Nam). Ron had first-hand knowledge of the famous "105 Simulator between the walls at Davis Hall" incident. His reputation was legend, beginning at 16, with the attempt to use his brand-new cutting torch to cut down the flagpole at Highland Park High School, along with Charles Klemme and Fred Yarbrough (all future Jodies).

The Kappa Alpha Fraternity at North Texas State University was picked as the target. This was not a random target. This route step, anti-military group of party mongers had the audacity to have an authentic military cannon in front of their dormitory. Here was a true contradiction in terms, and a spit in the face of anyone in uniform. Their cannon was going to vanish!

A recon mission was first necessary. G2 (military intelligence) revealed that a pledge slept by the window overlooking the cannon, with a 12-gauge shotgun. The cannon, intact, weighed over 1200 pounds. The mission was becoming complicated, but the cannon must go. The uniform consisted of blackened faces, Jody jackets reversed to the black inside, and black berets. Necessary tools were brought to disassemble the cannon that lay only a dozen steps from the dormitory. Assignments were given, and the raiding party practiced until they were as efficient as a Roger Penske pit crew. Vehicle allocations for each part of the cannon were made, and silent hand signals rehearsed. A sworn oath of secrecy about the mission was taken. In Denton, the mission went flawlessly. In less than 7 minutes, the cannon was heading back to Arlington. One thing was overlooked--where was this fully operational, huge piece of military hardware now going to go?

Once reassembled, the cannon completely filled Bunky's third floor dormitory room on C ramp at Davis Hall. No problem, no one used the room to study anyway. The barrel alone weighed over 800 pounds, and the wheels stood nearly 5 feet tall. By three in the morning the solid brass barrel shined like a new penny, and the raiders admired their night's work.

Ben Franklin once said, *"Three can keep a secret, if two are dead!"* By 8 am, half of the Corps of Cadets were lining up to view the trophy. No one can confirm that the C Ramp Commander, Dave (Possum) Murray informed the authorities, but by 9 am the cops were

swarming, and the cannon was once again taken apart, and this time, reassembled on the roof of Davis Hall. The SWAT Team informed the Cadets, "*We know there is a cannon in the dormitory. We will be back in an hour. The cannon WILL be out front.*"

One final time, the cannon was taken apart and reappeared, intact, on the front lawn. A wrecker arrived and the cannon headed north. The Kappa Alpha's now had a *shiny* cannon in front of their dorm, and Garonzik and others had added a footnote to the ongoing saga of capers at UTA.