

The 51st salute

The 51st Army Air Forces Technical Training Detachment recalled its history this weekend

By Moriah Balingit
News Reporter

When the 240 members of the 51st Army Air Forces Technical Training Detachment arrived on the University campus in May of 1943, they weren't accompanied by tearful parents or minivans full of belongings. Members of the "Fighting 51st," as the unit was called, wore ironed uniforms and marched to class in formation. They hadn't even chosen to come here, but were rather sent by the Air Force to take prerequisite courses for a meteorology program.

Unlike many of today's freshmen, they weren't "undeclared." The year included an intensive course of geography, physics and math to prepare the men. In addition to the burdens of schoolwork, they would have military drills and physical education.

"Most of us took four years of math in one year, so it was pretty intense," Charles Cable of Flight A said.

At their 60th reunion Sunday, 26 of the 100 or so surviving members of the Fighting 51st gathered in a small room at the Phoenix Inn to remember their days at the University.

Bob Groud of the 51st said that the program was just as strict and regimented as what one might find at the prestigious West Point Military Academy.

"We didn't have the entertainment aspect (of college)," he said. "It was very much regimented."

The men lived in Hendricks Hall, which was formerly a women's dormitory, displacing the residents. In addition, Howard Cook of Flight C said they had "very good cooks."

"I think we had the best army duty of



Tim Bobosky Photographer

At the Phoenix Inn on Franklin Boulevard during the first reunion of the Fighting 51st in 60 years, Gail Myers (left) and Phyllis Ross (center) crack up over Jim Arndt's monologue about his poem on the meaning of "going 60."

anyone that year," he added.

The campus also had women, an environment that most servicemen didn't have. In a pamphlet put together by the Fighting 51st, a dedication reads, "We dedicate this book to the girls ... for they made this year different from other army years."

The women, according to some of the men, were equally appreciative of the Fighting 51st's presence. The war had depreccated the male population at the University because many of the men were serving in the war.

"We were their salvation," Groud said with a chuckle.

The women offered them relief from their strict, regimented days in class. Sororities held parties and dances most weekends.

"We had a dance band called Father Bailey and they played for dances every weekend," Cable said.

While the men had no spare time during the week, taking several classes during the day and compulsory study

sessions at night, their weekends — which started Saturday morning and ended Sunday evening — were free. Some used that time to study, but Bob Williams of Flight C occasionally didn't.

"I was old enough to buy liquor. I would buy champagne and we'd go behind a bush and drink," he said. "But I think a lot of the time we would ... study."

That year at the University changed the lives of the men of the 51st forever. Many returned to college and their classes at the University guided their courses of education.

Harold Summers expressed his gratification for the education that the University provided him.

"They expanded our minds and our appreciation for the world in which we live," he said.

Contact the people/culture/faith reporter at moriahbalingit@dailyemerald.com.

REAGAN

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Jacques Chirac. "Ronald Reagan won America's respect with his greatness and won its love with his goodness. He had the confidence that comes with conviction, the strength that comes with character, the grace that comes with humility, and the humor that comes with wisdom."

Shortly after Reagan died, the American flag waving above the White House was lowered to half-staff and official Washington began planning to pay tribute to a man who was to many Republicans what John Kennedy was to Democrats.

"He took a party of accountants and added some heart and soul to it," said Gary Bauer, a conservative leader who served in the Reagan administration for the entire eight years.

With Reagan's death there are now four former living U.S. presidents. Two of them competed with Reagan for the GOP presidential nomination: Gerald Ford in 1976 and George H.W. Bush in 1980.

Speaking from his summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine, the elder Bush said: "The finality of all of this is going to hit the American people very hard." Ford called Reagan "an excellent leader of our nation during challenging times at home and abroad."

Former President Bill Clinton often said how much he admired Reagan, particularly his buoyant manner. "Hillary and I will always remember President Reagan for the

way he personified the indomitable optimism of the American people."

It was that style that allowed Reagan to maintain strong friendships with the likes of Democratic lions such as the late Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, the former speaker of the House from Massachusetts, and former Illinois congressman Dan Rostenkowski.

"Ronald Reagan's love of country was infectious," said Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee. "Even when he was breaking Democrats' hearts, he did so with a smile. ... Despite the disagreements, he lived by that noble ideal that at 5 p.m. we weren't Democrats or Republicans, we were Americans and friends."

"President Reagan was born in the heartland of America, and his life will always occupy a place in the hearts of the American people," said House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill.

Many were the politicians who said that they were pulled toward public life by Reagan's inspiration.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said, "He was a hero to me. ... Ronald Reagan always inspired me to be a leader, to do what I can do to make our country stronger."

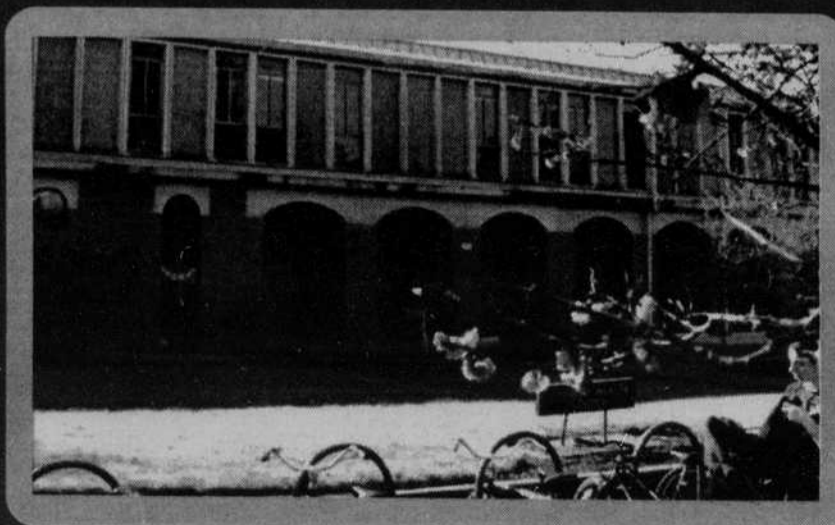
"I grieve today for the loss of my modern philosophical hero," said Sen. George Allen, R-Va.

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