

# Memorial honors Texas A&M bonfire victims



Above: Texas A&M students Caitlin Callaham, left, of El Paso and her boyfriend Jason Potthoff of San Antonio look at the Bonfire Memorial in College Station, Texas, on Thursday after the dedication ceremony. Bottom: Texas A&M students huddle in front of a bonfire in 1996, in College Station, Texas. Since the stack of more than 5,000 logs collapsed on Nov. 18, 1999, killing 12 Aggies and injuring 27 others, the 90-year-old tradition has been on hold and its future remains in doubt.

By JUAN A. LOZANO  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — A granite and bronze memorial was dedicated Thursday in a grassy field at Texas A&M University where a bonfire under construction collapsed five years ago, killing 12 young people.

"Their souls and bodies are not here, but the spirit they all shared is very much here," said Jerry Ebanks, whose son Michael died in the massive collapse of logs. "This will be a place for solace, for meditation and for remembering."

About 50,000 people attended the dedication on the anniversary of the collapse.

The 59-foot-high bonfire, a revered Aggie tradition before the school's annual football matchup against rival Texas, used a tiered stack of more than 5,000 logs. It collapsed in the early morning of Nov. 18, 1999.

Besides the 12 dead, 27 people were injured. Most of the victims were students. An investigation by a university commission blamed flawed construction techniques and lack of adequate supervision.

During the dedication ceremony, Chip

Thiel, who suffered a shattered left leg and a punctured lung in the collapse, tearfully described his favorite memories of building the bonfire and asked the crowd never to forget the unity and camaraderie it instilled.

The \$5 million memorial's centerpiece is a circle of 12 rectangular arches, one for each victim. The arches are connected by 27 large stones, symbolic of the injured.

The 16-foot-tall granite arches are positioned so that each faces the hometown of a victim. Within the arches are 12-foot bronze portals with a sculpted portrait and writings from or about each victim.

After the ceremony, the families of those killed and injured in the collapse walked alone to the memorial, ahead of the thousands who would later visit it.

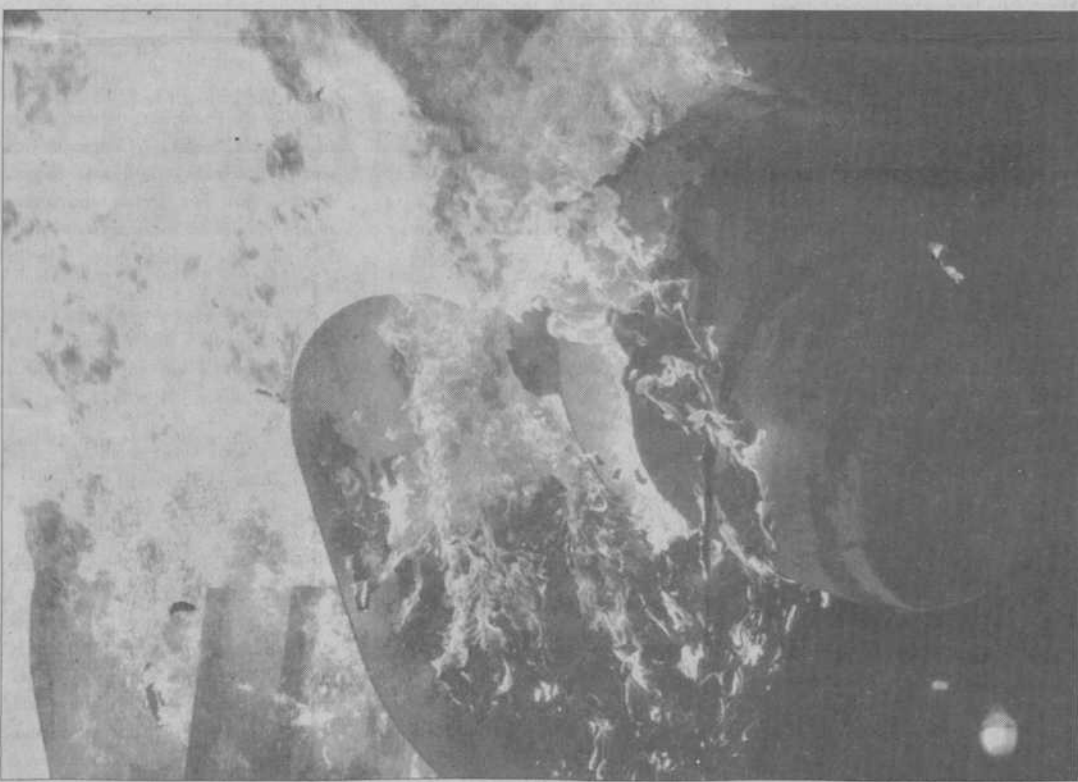
Many relatives left flowers by the arches. When Carolyn Adams stepped inside the portal of her daughter Miranda, she gently placed her head against the portrait inside.

The 90-year-old bonfire tradition has been on hold since the collapse. A&M President Robert Gates has said no decision about the bonfire's future will be made until all lawsuits related to the collapse are resolved.



TOP: JAY JANNER/THE AUSTIN AMERICAN STATESMAN; BOTTOM: BUTCH IRELAND/BRYAN COLLEGE STATION EAGLE

## BURNING FOR YOU



KATIE KIRKLAND/THE GAMECOCK

An effigy of Clemson's Tiger burns Thursday night by the Colonial Center. The annual event draws hundreds of people on the eve of the rivalry game with Clemson.

### TIGERBURN

Continued from page 6

Zachery Scott.

"It went really, really well," said Kyle Bowman, commissioner for traditional events and organizer for Tiger burn. "It was probably one of the biggest crowds we have ever had."

The event started when the full Carolina Band marched down Greene Street from the Koger Center and into the parking lot of the Colonial Center.

After recognition of the Clemson/USC Blood Drive, there was a performance of an original song, and Pastor Will Rowes gave a eulogy for the tiger.

Chosen randomly from a drawing earlier, three students were chosen to light the tiger in what Bowman called a very successful burn.

"It usually never goes that long," Bowman said. "I mean, it has only burned for one minute before. But 10 minutes is really good and the crowd was really pleased."

Bowman said he was impressed by the energy of the crowd and welcome they brought to the band Evoka, and the Presidents of the United States of America that ended the evening.

"There was so much energy out there," Bowman said. "And it is great to see these kids support the football team and the school as a whole."

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