

# S.A. team's Cotton Bowl game

**On a cold, rainy day in '44, 'Horns, Ramblers engaged in a slog for a tie.**

Can you tell readers more about the 1944 Cotton Bowl that pitted Randolph Field vs. the University of Texas Longhorns? How did the Randolph Field football team get to the Cotton Bowl, and whom else did Randolph Ramblers play that season?

— Edward David Sepulveda

As discussed in last week's column, during World War II, college football and the military cooperated for the duration, nearly morphing into each other as military trainees and reservists played on teams representing colleges, and former college players played on service teams organized at military installations. Because they boasted players of similar experience and quality, the two kinds of teams often played each other.

Football was thought to prepare fighting men for combat, writes Wilbur D. Jones in his 2009 book "Football! Navy! War!" and "as a calculated by-product, (this cooperation would) prevent dismemberment of the game." Following college football became downright patriotic, Jones says, and the "altered sport . . . provided a huge moral boost for the home front, both civilians and military."

The Ramblers, representing Randolph Field — home of primary, basic and advanced flying training at that time — were one of the top-ranked service teams in the country. With the military's blessings, they were allowed to accept the invitation to play the University of Texas Longhorns — an aggregation of mostly naval trainees who had just been crowned Southwest Conference champions — in the eighth Cotton Bowl, Jan. 1, 1944. It was the first bowl classic matching college and service teams, and the first to feature a San Antonio team.

The game was unique in Cotton Bowl history, says a program game summary provided by the Cotton Bowl, as "the only time a military installation has played in the classic." Though they were portrayed as the underdogs in that matchup, the Ramblers numbered an impressive array of



COURTESY PHOTO

**Randolph Ramblers player Martin Ruby, who previously played for Texas A&M, came out of the locker room to enlist during the A&M-Fordham game in January 1942.**



**PAULA ALLEN**

former college players, including All American quarterback Glenn Dobbs, formerly of the University of Tulsa, and others who had played for colleges in Texas and in the northeast. Randolph Rambler Martin Ruby, while playing left tackle for Texas A&M, had been named MVP of a previous year's Cotton Bowl.

"That game, against Fordham University, was played Jan. 1, 1942, just three weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor," writes reader Tom Morgan. "At halftime of that game, 31 men in the stadium enlisted in the Naval Air Corps."

Among them was Ruby, one of three players who came out of the locker room to enlist. As Morgan notes, "They played the first half of the game as civilians and the second half as enlisted men."

For Ruby, who became a captain in the Air Force, it was also another chance to bring down the Longhorns, undefeated by A&M since 1939.

For the 1943 season, Texas had been ranked No. 14 in the nation, while Randolph was No. 20, and the Longhorns were a 2-1 favorite to win the Cotton Bowl, according to Lane Bourgeois in "The 1943 Randolph Field Ramblers: March to the Cotton Bowl." By the book, however, the teams appeared to be a near-equal match. Randolph "boasted the best pass offense in the country for the season, both college and service football," says the San Antonio Express, Jan. 2, 1944. On the other hand, Texas "not only had the nation's top pass defense but also held the all-time record for pass interceptions."

The Ramblers included an All American, but so did the Longhorns in their end, Joe Parker.

When the Longhorns and the Ramblers entered the stadium, the audience for this much-anticipated contest was smaller than expected. New Year's Day 1944 was cold and rainy in Dallas.

Though bowl organizers had predicted crowds of at least 35,000 to attend and had papered the stands with 10,000 free tickets for service members, only about 13,000 spectators "huddled in raincoats and under umbrellas" to watch the two state favorites struggle in the mud. For everyone else, the game was broadcast over WOAI radio in San Antonio, over the Mutual system nationwide and by short-wave radio all over the world.

During the first quarter, Randolph got an early lead when Dobbs passed to teammate Leslie "Tex" Aulds — a professional baseball player and one of few in the game without a college football background — for a 15-yard touchdown. In the second quarter, Texas quarterback Ralph Ellsworth "threw a long pass over the head of defensive back Walter Parker and into the hands of George McCall at the 2-yard line (and) McCall hauled it in for the touchdown," writes Bourgeois, historian of the 12th Flying Training Wing at Randolph AFB.

"By halftime, Texas Coach D.X. Bible had called the weather the worst he had seen in 30 years of coaching," says the Cotton Bowl summary.

The rest of the game was a frustrating blur of fumbles, interceptions and kicks that fell short. In the fourth quarter, says Bourgeois, "Defense ruled the day as both teams slogged it out."

The game ended mercifully in a 7-7 tie, first in Cotton Bowl history.

"At the conclusion of the game, among the mud and the muck, the contestants shook hands," Bourgeois says.

Ruby, who would go on to a 10-year career in professional football, was again named MVP. His team donated "its entire end of the Cotton Bowl purse to the Army Air Forces Emergency Relief Society," a private charity that aided service members and their families in financial distress, says the San Antonio Light, Dec. 26, 1943.

The Rambler Fitness Center that opened in 2007 at Randolph AFB is named in the wartime team's honor.

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## Tears at the store, then an epiphany

Perhaps during the holidays more than any other time, unexpressed emotions can bubble up at the most unexpected moments. On a recent Thursday morning, I stopped in at Walgreens to pick up a photo order I dropped off the day before. I finished off a roll of 35mm film at my 84-year-old mother's birthday party, and that roll contained pictures of someone else I love who lives in another city.

The young woman at the counter, who was pleasant and looked a few months pregnant, could not find my order. She looked high and low. At first I felt patient, confident she'd find my pictures. But the longer she looked for my order, and the more she said she couldn't find it, the more upset I got. Obviously stressed, she summoned a manager's help. He couldn't find my order either.

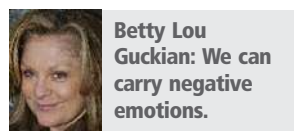
I asked, heatedly, "Don't you remember me? I was in about 3 o'clock yesterday and we flipped through the coupon catalog together? I will be very upset if you cannot find my photos!"

Suddenly, she remembered. I had taken back the roll of film and said I would return Sunday when the new coupons came out.

I felt 1 inch tall — even smaller than a mouse. Remorseful about my behavior and embarrassed that I had forgotten something I'd done only yesterday, my hands covered my face. I looked at her and said I was very sorry and it was all my fault, not hers. She began to cry, saying only that she was glad I'd found the film.

Her tears brought mine. I extended my hand across the counter and she took it. Again, I looked her in the eyes and said, "I am so sorry." She reached over and hugged me and I hugged her back. And then I left.

I walked to the parking lot, climbed inside my truck, and asked God and myself out loud, "What just happened? Why did I get angry? What am I afraid of?" It occurred to me that



**Betty Lou Guckian: We can carry negative emotions.**



when I had walked into Walgreens, I was carrying things that no one could see, not even me: the birthday party with my aging mother had caused me to fear losing her; months of unemployment had caused me to feel financially insecure; and I am separated from someone I love.

I realized that I carry around emotions like worry and fear without realizing it sometimes, and that those emotions can make me sensitive to the least little thing, which otherwise would not be a big deal.

My Walgreens experience had lasted only a few minutes, but it left me feeling profoundly more compassionate for people, including for the young lady at the photo counter, who may be carrying around things inside, too.

I had caused someone to cry. It was the very last thing I would ever want to do to another human being. I was grateful. I apologized on the spot. Grateful she accepted. Grateful for the "came to" moment that showed me sometimes we are the offended and sometimes we are the offender. That day, I was the offender. And, I thought, how can I hold anyone else to a standard I myself cannot honor?

Certainly, every day presents opportunities to practice compassion at home and in the world. And, perhaps, the holidays are a particularly good time to do so.

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## PORTRAITS

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Colo., in 2005 by Cheryl Haggard and photographer Sandy Puc'. Haggard and her husband contacted Puc' when they learned their newborn son wouldn't live to be taken home.

After the photo session, Haggard shared her story, and in a year's time Puc' received almost 100 calls from other parents.

The organization is now an international nonprofit group with about 5,000 photographers, including 12 in San Antonio and 36 in the Houston area.

"We get a lot of hobbyists who say our mission speaks to their heart," said Jacque Lopez, interim executive director.

Photographers are selected through an application process that includes a portfolio review by a 10-member committee.

Session photos are retouched to remove evidence of physical trauma and hospital equipment. The goal is to provide images that will sustain the memory of the child, not the circumstance in which the photograph was taken.

"People ask, 'How can you do that?'" said San Antonio photographer Jennifer Denton. "My question is, 'How can I not?'"

Denton, a professional photographer who has volunteered for Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep for three years, took Troy Ramirez's photos. Since no extended family saw Troy before he died, Danyelle Ramirez said having the pictures is a blessing.

"He was hooked up to so many monitors, and there was bleeding and bruising, and the pictures I



PHOTO BY JENNIFER DENTON, COURTESY OF CHRISTINE MORIN

**Matthew Morin, who was diagnosed with Dandy-Walker syndrome, was born Jan. 13 and lived for 10 hours.**

took with my camera show all of that," Ramirez said. "As a mother going through it, it's one thing, but I'm sure it would have been difficult for my family to see."

"It's extremely difficult for me," Denton said. "But any pain I'm feeling is minuscule compared to what the family is going through."

Danyelle's mother, Marisa Ramirez, has some of Troy's photos on display in her home. They bring her peace, she said.

"I lost my grandchild and I had to deal with helping my daughter grieve, too," she said. "When you don't bring the baby home, you don't get to make memories. At

least with this, you can remember what the baby looked like. That's a lot."

Denton also took photos for San Antonio mom Christine Morin, whose son Matthew was born Jan. 13 with Dandy-Walker syndrome, a malformation of the channel in the cerebellum that allows fluid to pass between the brain and spinal cord. He lived for 10 hours.

"They rushed him off to NICU, then came back and said they were using a bag to help him breathe," Morin said. "They said as soon as they stopped doing that, he would pass away."

Morin heard about Now I Lay

Me Down to Sleep from a Methodist Hospital social worker she called for advice prior to delivery.

"I knew my son was probably not going to make it," she said. "My 8-year-old was very excited to have a baby brother, and I didn't know how to tell him."

She immediately knew she wanted the photos to be taken and said having them helps her heal.

"It's something I wouldn't have had at all," she said. "You can't capture that moment again."

Katherine Ratcliff, director of the Center for Infant and Child Loss, a program of Any Baby Can San Antonio, has worked with some families who have had photos of their children taken by Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep.

"I don't think they realize how valuable that is," she said. "I've met parents that have nothing — no picture, no hair, no foot stamp, no anything."

"Parents will never get over it," she said. "They'll learn to live with it. This gives them an opportunity to start that journey and have something to hold on to."

Houston photographer Kimberli Smith has volunteered for Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep for two and a half years. Like Denton, the work deeply affects her.

"I get in there and am in photographer mode, but there is at least one point in every session I start crying," she said. "Emotions are what drive me to get the portraits I get. I'm capturing the love for the child."

Caroline Draughon of Houston gave birth to her daughter Avery on Feb. 23, 2009, at Clear Lake Regional Medical Center. Six hours later, Avery began seizing. She

was diagnosed with herpetic meningitis encephalitis, a virus that was passed to her from her parents, neither of whom knew they were carriers. Avery died March 22, 2009.

"Avery is probably the atypical 1 percent something like this happens to, but it happened," Draughon said.

Family members came to the hospital a few days before Avery died to say goodbye and have a picture taken with her. Smith took the photos.

"Kim was fantastic," Draughon said. "She was with us for hours. She had a picture ready for the obituary and a slideshow ready for the funeral. And she would not take a dime from me."

"You don't find out about them unless you have a child that's dying, but that whole organization is phenomenal."

John Vega, a part-time photographer in San Antonio, began volunteering for Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep in January.

Vega's mother always carried a little box with her everywhere she went. When he was a child, Vega opened it and found two pictures of a baby's coffin. When he asked her about it, his mother told him she'd had another son in 1963 who lived only six days, and the pictures were all she had to remember him.

"She adored those pictures," Vega said. "She passed away two years ago, and I took the little box and put it in the coffin with her. She wouldn't have wanted to be without them."

Vega does the work in his mother's memory. He said he believes she would have embraced Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep if it had existed when she needed it.