

A ghost of the University of Texas: Tragic Tower will reopen

by David Zeman
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

AUSTIN, Texas - For 33 years, the ghost of Charles Whitman has peered down at the University of Texas' red-tiled campus of the University of Texas, a deer rifle in his hands. They remember him, a flat-topped graduate student and former Marine, the nice young fellow with the pretty wife. He ascended the university tower one blazing August morning. Calm, polite, smiling even, he lugged a footlocker up the stairs, loaded for Armageddon.

When the gunfire ended, 16 people plus Whitman were dead, 31 others were wounded, and America would never again feel entirely safe in a public place. "Even today, I can't walk across that campus without feeling that tower is looking at me," said Bill Helmer, a graduate student who narrowly escaped death on Aug. 1, 1966.

Whitman's perch, on the tower's observation deck 231 feet above campus, has long been closed to the public. But after years of lobbying by students, the deck - outfitted with metal detectors, guards and protective cages - is to reopen Sept. 15. "It's time," said Eric Opiela, the student body vice president. "Everyone wants to see the view; the view is awesome up there." University President Larry Faulkner said that in opening the tower, UT hopes at last to cleanse itself of Whitman's shadow. "This community has had a lot of psychological difficulty with what happened in 1966," Faulkner conceded. It was time to create positive memories, "to get people thinking about the wonderful experiences they'd have at the top of the Tower."

This is a story about remembering a tragedy, and then moving on. And of a school determined that it will no longer be prisoner to its darkest chapter. That the reopening comes as schools nationwide are turning into high-tech fortresses after a new round of shootings is an irony not lost on some on campus. "It's interesting to think of the tower in light of Littleton, Colo., and Pearl, Miss.," said Rosa Eberly, a UT professor of rhetoric who teaches a class on the legacy of the tower shootings. "One might think of Whitman as the first of these

schoolboys with guns." But even though school massacres have become numbingly familiar today, Whitman's acts were simply unthinkable in 1966. Back then, the face of evil was Richard Speck, the acne-scarred ex-convict with the "Born to Raise Hell" tattoo who killed eight student nurses in Chicago 19 days earlier.

Evil was Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood," a 1966 best-seller about two drifters who murdered the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kan., one night in 1959. Whitman did not fit the portrait of a sadistic madman. He was a freshly scrubbed student, from an affluent family; looking at his smiling photo, it was possible to imagine him as someone's son. "Whitman put a face on mass murder that it never had before," said Gary Laverne, author of a 1997 book on the shootings, "A Sniper in the Tower."

Almost from the start, UT officials agonized over the legacy of the slaughter. Should the university hold a memorial service for the victims? Should it raise a plaque acknowledging the toll of Whitman's carnage? Or should it simply move on and hope that one day people would forget? The school chose to move on. "You just wanted to cover your eyes," said university historian Margaret Berry of the grief that followed the killings. "It was all just too horrible."

Even today, university freshmen born years after Whitman's spree are well versed on the shootings. How could they not be? As soon as they are accepted to UT, there is always a mother, an uncle, a teacher or a friend to remind them of 1966. Opiela, 21, of Karnes City, Texas, was told not to mention Whitman when conducting freshman orientation tours this summer. But students peppered him with questions. "It's part of the lore of the tower," he said last week. Some say the very act of closing the tower has strengthened Whitman's hold on it. "The quickest way to turn something into a shrine is to make it forbidden," Laverne said. "When you remove these restrictions, you remove the mystery."

Incoming freshman Laura McDonald, 17, of Austin echoed a nearly universal sentiment among students, saying, "Closing the tower made it such a big deal that it makes you remember Whitman. I don't know why they kept it closed for so long." Actually, the tower did not close for good in 1966. It reopened

10 months after the shooting. But after four students jumped to their deaths in four years, the school closed the deck in 1974.

In the years since, there had been little acknowledgment of the Whitman deaths. But as students streamed to class each day, the tower was inescapable, standing silently - some say menacingly - over the heart of campus. To the south, at the base of a statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, is a bullet mark from Whitman's rifle. The shot was fired at Austin police Officer Billy Speed. It missed, but the next one killed him. The mark has widened and been worn

smooth from decades of students running their fingers along its grooves. Whitman's siege lasted 96 minutes. It proved the archetype for modern mass murder.

He was 25 years old, an architectural engineering student with an easygoing manner and the rugged good looks of the Marine he had been. At age 12, Whitman became the youngest Eagle Scout in U.S. history. He was, as some friends later remarked, the "all-American boy."

In March of 1966, his wife, Kathy Whitman, urged him to visit a psychiatrist at the university. He complained to the doctor that he had underachieved in life and felt depressed. He'd been having headaches, he said, and had the gnawing suspicion that something was wrong with his brain.

He expressed resentment toward his father, C.A. Whitman, who ran a successful plumbing business in Lake Worth, Fla. He told the doctor he had struck his wife a time or two. He regretted that. Whitman then confided a recurring fantasy. He said he often thought "about going up on the tower with a deer rifle and shooting people." He never returned for a second session.

Shortly after midnight on Aug. 1, Whitman dropped by his mother's apartment near campus. Margaret Whitman had moved to Austin a few months before, having left her abusive

husband in Florida. Whitman fatally stabbed her with a hunting knife, then returned home and stabbed his wife to death as she slept. He left notes saying he wanted to spare the women the shame of what he was to do next. And as was his habit, he typed a list of daily reminders: "CONTROL your anger," he typed "SMILE - It's contagious," and "PAY that compliment."

Above this list he scribbled one last message: "I never could quite make it," he wrote. "These thoughts are too much for me." About 11:30 that morning, Whitman arrived at the tower with a footlocker loaded on a dolly. He had packed three rifles, a shotgun,

handguns, a machete, a hatchet, knives, 700 rounds of ammunition, a radio and food. Back then, the tower was used as a library. It was, and remains, an enduring symbol of the university, soaring 307 feet above campus at its colonnaded belfry, higher even than the state capital building to the south.

Since opening in 1937, the tower has been used to mark important events at UT. It is bathed in orange, the school color, during commencement, to honor faculty, or when its beloved football team beats rival Texas A&M. Its observation deck was the place to take a date at sunset or to gaze upon the Texas hill country with visiting parents. Its designer, Paul Cret, called the tower and its view, "the image carried in our memory when we think of the place."

Whitman rode an elevator to the 27th floor. He then dragged his footlocker up the stairs to the 28th-floor observation deck. Using one of his rifle butts, he clubbed to death a receptionist.

He then shot four unsuspecting tourists who had followed him up the stairs, killing two. Finally, he was on the deck. It was 11:48 a.m. Whitman peered over the limestone parapet at students walking among the live oak and magnolia trees on the south mall below. His next victim was the 8-month-old fetus inside Claire Wilson, 18. "He could have hit her in the left shoulder or the right shoulder, but he

aimed right for that woman's stomach," said Robert Heard, an Associated Press reporter who covered the shooting. "That tells me the man obviously wanted to do as much ugliness as he could." When Wilson hit the concrete, her boyfriend, Thomas Eckman, knelt over her. Whitman shot him dead. Whitman did most of his work in the first 15 minutes, running from side to side, picking off bewildered pedestrians as far away as five football fields. Students huddled behind trees and posts. The wounded were forced to play dead on the concrete, sizzling from the 100-degree-plus heat.

Police were nearly helpless to stop Whitman. There were no SWAT teams then. Indeed, the concept was born as a direct result of Whitman's rampage. The police had no 911 system to communicate. They also carried only shotguns, which lacked the accuracy to return Whitman's long-range rifle fire. In desperation, appeals were sent over AM radio stations for more weaponry. Local deer hunters flocked to the Tower with their own rifles. They pinned down Whitman and forced him to fire through narrow rain spouts. Heard was one of the first reporters on the scene. He saw two patrol officers dash from one building to another.

He counted to five and ran after them. He was struck immediately. The shot shattered his left arm below the shoulder and knocked him to the concrete. Witnesses saw Whitman scanning the ground near Heard with his binoculars, but the newsman fell outside of the sniper's vision. In retrospect, said Heard, "I should have zigzagged." An hour passed, and the casualties mounted. Police tried everything, at one point commandeering a small plane and placing a sharpshooter aboard. But Whitman's fire drove away the craft. It was then that two young Austin police officers, Houston McCoy and Ramiro Martinez, acting on their own, decided to confront Whitman face to face.

The pair, along with an Austin shopkeeper Martinez deputized on the spot, pushed past Whitman's barricades and opened the south door to the deck. "There was fear," said Martinez, now a retired justice of the peace. "If you say you're not scared, you're either a liar or an idiot." Creeping around the northeast edge, the officers spotted Whitman

crouched in the opposite corner. Martinez emptied his revolver, prompting Whitman to shoot wildly in return. McCoy, standing over Martinez's shoulder, then fired two shots through Whitman's head. Whitman was dead. But he never really went away.

In the vacuum of the university's silence on the shootings, Whitman emerged as a kind of antihero. A television movie was made, but it was shot in Louisiana after UT officials denied permission to film in Austin. Allusions to Whitman are found in "Natural Born Killers," "Full Metal Jacket," and even the comedy "Parenthood." There are Web pages devoted to him and, in Austin, it's not uncommon to see students wearing Whitman T-shirts with the slogan, "Be True to Your School." Whitman also has been the muse for singers, from punk to folk to the quirky Texas country singer Kinky Friedman. "Got up that morning calm and cool/He picked up his guns and walked to school. All the while he smiled so sweetly/And it blew their minds completely/They'd never seen an Eagle Scout so cruel." And yet, said Eberly, the UT professor, "nobody was telling the story of what Whitman's acts were doing to the university. There was only silence." That changed last year when Faulkner, a teaching assistant in 1966, returned to campus as school president.

For the first time, students had an ally in the president's office. "I was willing to clear away obstacles," Faulkner said. At Faulkner's urging, the UT board of regents voted 9-0 last November to reopen the Tower. Refurbishing the Tower and deck will cost about \$600,000. Steel cages were erected to prevent suicides. Armed guards and metal detectors are planned to deter Whitman copycats. The public will have to sign up in advance for tours and pay \$3 apiece to help defray costs.

On Aug. 1, the 33rd anniversary of the shootings, Faulkner dedicated a turtle pond on the Tower's north side to the Tower victims. He spoke of the lives interrupted and those lost. "That the dedication took place at all, so many years later, struck many as remarkable. "If there is a statement," said Opiela, the student vice president, "it's that the past will not hold us captive. It's time for us to move on."

NCAA asks schools to crack down on athletic hazings

by Alan Schmadtke
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Knight-Ridder Newspapers

ORLANDO, Fla. - A yearlong study of campus hazing concluded that 80 percent of the country's college athletes - more than 250,000 experienced some form of excessive team-related activities - and that women athletes are not immune.

Initiation rites such as beatings and drinking binges were discovered across a gamut of sports and in all sizes of schools, and NCAA officials on Monday asked that coaches and administrators take a no-tolerance stand against hazing. "We're going to raise the bar with regard to our knowledge of this issue," said Ron Stratten, the NCAA's vice president for education services. "It's appalling what's going on."

More than 10,000 athletes, 3,000 coaches and 1,000 athletic officials were interviewed for the study conducted by Alfred University in upstate New York. It is believed to be the first national look at hazing and athletics. Hazing was defined as an action "that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers, regardless of a person's willingness to participate." The study found that:

1. Two of every five athletes said they were expected by teammates to drink alcoholic beverages, including sometimes on recruiting visits.
2. One of every five athletes said they were expected by teammates to

participate in potentially illegal acts as "price" for being accepted as part of the team. Some of those acts were beating others, tying up and transporting others or vandalizing others' property.

3. One in five athletes were expected

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-Steve Spurrier

to participate in acts designed to humiliate or degrade first-year players.

4. Most at risk are males competing in swimming and diving, lacrosse, football and hockey.

5. Women aren't exempt. Most of their initial rites involve alcohol, the study said.

Small schools are just as guilty as larger schools in the amount of hazing that takes place but athletes at Division I schools cope with more alcohol-related incidents.

Southern and midwestern schools have more incidents of dangerous and potentially illegal hazing, while eastern and western schools have more alcohol-related hazing.

Recommended solutions were adding written policies at schools, education of coaches and administrators and strong and swift responses by coaches and officials when they come across incidents. When Florida football Coach Steve Spurrier arrived in Gainesville as a freshman in 1963, he and his classmates were given caps. "Our freshman beanies," Spurrier said. "You had to wear 'em."

These days, UF upperclassmen ask the freshmen to shave their heads, a ritual that most Gator plebes give in to without much reluctance. Anything more and the head coach intervenes. Same at Florida State. Seniors usually shave the heads of new recruits.

At Central Florida, the Golden Knights on Friday held their annual Rookie Night, an evening that included singing by first-year players. Last year at UF, Spurrier stepped in. "We had some guys last year who were telling (some freshmen) to do this, do that, pestering them and acting like big shots," said Spurrier, who chose to be non-specific in his recollections. "We put a stop to that quickly."

Most seasons, the only hazing sort of thing that is asked of new Gators - and Spurrier signs off on the request - is for each to a sing a song at the training-table during two-a-days.

UNC breathalyzer study shows students aren't as drunk as expected

by Christine Tatum
College Press Exchange

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (TMS) — Determined to get a different look at student drinking habits at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, researchers armed with Breathalyzers fanned out across the campus, stopping students on their ways home from class, the library, and yes, some pretty raucous parties. What they found in the nation's first collegiate Breathalyzer study involving almost 1,850 Tar Heels was that on average, a whopping 72 percent of students returned to their pads with no alcohol in their bloodstream.

Even on the traditional party-hearty nights of Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 66 percent of students returned home with a .00 blood-alcohol content. On other school nights, the average number of teetotallers was even higher at 86 percent. Researchers conducted the study in October and November of 1997 from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. on all nights of the week, stopping students randomly in front of residence halls, greek houses and off-campus apartments.

Of those students approached, 1,790 agreed to take a Breathalyzer test. "I'm not surprised at all by these results," said Rob Foss, manager of alcohol studies for the UNC Highway Safety Research Center, which conducted the \$350,000 study with funding from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the North Carolina

Governor's Highway Safety Program. "Other Breathalyzer studies we have done with drivers and recreational boaters show similar results — less drinking than is generally believed. We have

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substantial misperceptions about alcohol use in this country. "Yes, most UNC students drink," he continued. "But they don't drink most of the time, and they certainly don't get drunk most of the time. They simply don't drink as much as everyone seems to think they do."

Foss and other university officials are eager to spread that news to UNC students, whom they believe are more likely to drink simply because they think everyone else is. Destroying erroneous and widespread notions that unhealthy habits rule on campus will help change students' behavior for the better, Foss said. "People go along with what other people are doing because they want to fit in," he said. "It's not a conscious choice, but it's a powerful factor at work in all our

lives."

The UNC study does not paint an accurate picture of alcohol consumption on college campuses nationwide, said Dr. Henry Wechsler, director of the College of Alcohol Studies at the Harvard University School of Public Health. Wechsler's studies, which coined the term "binge drinking," surveyed thousands of students at 116 institutions in 1993 and 1997. Binge drinking happens at least once in a two-week period and is defined as consumption of five or more drinks in one sitting for men and four or more drinks in one sitting for women.

Wechsler's 1997 study found that 52 percent of students drank to get drunk, compared to 39 percent surveyed in 1993. The Harvard studies also found that the number of student drinkers who were intoxicated three or more times in one month increased by 22 percent over the same four year period, and that four out of five fraternity and sorority members are binge drinkers.

"The UNC study is fine and not in conflict with anything I've ever found, but it has to be interpreted for what it is: a look at one moment in time," Wechsler said. "It's true that students who drink don't drink all of the time. With that in mind, it's important to understand that just because a student isn't drinking on one night doesn't mean he or she hasn't binged in a two-week period."