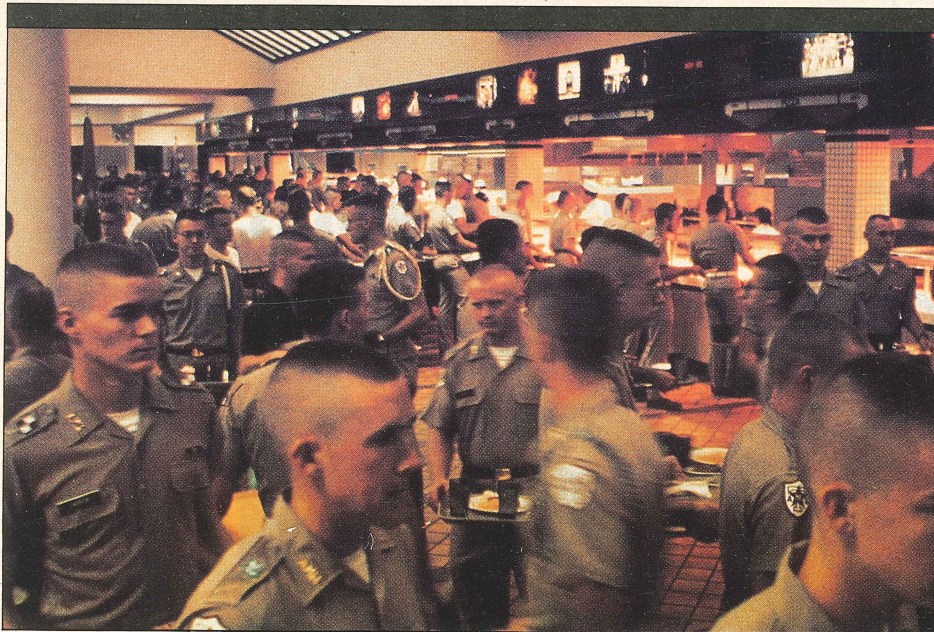


TRENDSETTERS



Seven two-sided stations serve 2,200 cadets in 14 mins.



At meal's end, a one-of-a-kind accumulator holds all trays.

THE TEXAS A&M 'VERY FAST FOOD' SYSTEM

At Texas A&M University in College Station, TX, a revolutionary "Plate-Ready" System has recently been installed that enables more than 2,200 ROTC students to be served a wide variety of full meals or hot snacks in approx. 14 minutes and eat family-style at a single sitting.

As part of an overall dining hall and kitchen renovation last year, a new soda system—reportedly the largest of its kind in the world—that produces 850 gallons of beverage in the same 14-minute period was also custom-designed and installed in the unit (see p.56). And, when each meal is completed, diners deposit their dish-laden trays onto a one-of-a-kind "accumulator" that holds up to 2,200 trays.

All three "space age" systems were designed to attain high quality and speed-of-service as well as to improve customer satisfaction, says fsd Lloyd Smith, who helped design this unique mass-feeding system for the cadets. The need to cut high labor costs and reduce food waste were among his top priorities in the planning.

March in and fan out: Some 37,000 non-ROTC students may dine in any of TAMU's 20 other dining areas, but the Duncan Dining Center (named in honor of a former fsd) is exclusively reserved for cadets. They march daily to breakfast and dinner, 16 abreast, and fan out upon entering the hall to

pick up their trays and flatware.

- Neon signs above counter areas announce what dishes are available at each station. As Smith describes it: "It's like a banquet dish-up. All the same food is assembled per station. No verbal communication is needed as to choice, as three servers per station pass the plate from one to another. The first might supply roast beef, the next might add broccoli, the last a portion of mashed potato—all within two seconds.

- But choices abound on the 180-ft. "Plate Ready" System, with its seven

- double-sided stations (plus one for soup and another for sandwiches). French fries are dispensed from four 150-lb. deep-fat friers (backed by two others). Each of two burger stations is backed-up by chain hamburger broilers. And the pizza station boasts two jet sweep-type double-sided pizza ovens.

- Multiple salad, beverage and dessert bars complete the food lineup. Thanks to neon signs, decisions can be made as far away as 40 yards from each line, Smith points out. The result: smoother and speedier service

for cadets-on-the-run.

Family-style a must: Smith and his predecessor, Fred Dollar (now president of the Texas Restaurant Assn.), really had to "sell" the administration on the benefits of this revolutionary system. Recalls Smith: "They felt that family-style service—which A&M has had since the 1890's—was essential. They felt that sitting together at tables was what held (the cadets) together. We were looking to reduce food costs and labor. Unlike funded military academies, food costs here come out of regular funding, like at any other university."

The previous foodservice staff of 96 was reduced to 60, with 15 students working part-time.

Patent-pending: With "only a 'practical' engineering background," Smith, working with Boston inventor Sam Weihe (one-time owner of Adamation Dishwashing) designed the tray accumulator and is now applying for a patent. Explains Smith: "When you set a tray down, one tray moves forward and stops. It's a system of five levels of short conveyors (about 11-14 ft. long) easily accessible to the bussing unit."

Price tag for the total renovation of the 1939-built hall and kitchen was \$7 million. Included was all equipment, the architect's fee, and upgrading of the airconditioning and electrical systems.

By Karen Weisberg

Cadet eating habits refine daily prep

Depending upon their computer system for volume averages and purchase-habits based on years of experience in serving meals to cadets at TAMU, fsd Lloyd Smith's foodservice staff today can predict to within 15-20 men, the number of cadets who will show up at mealtime—and what they'll eat—so waste is kept to a minimum in the prep room and serving-ports.

A&M's Plate-Ready System is offered only at breakfast and dinner, because class scheduling through the day precludes the traditional mass march to lunch, which is served from 10:15 A.M. to 2:15 P.M.

All breakfast stations are clearly marked by neon signs. Typically, one offers assorted baked omelettes, oth-

ers fried eggs, pancakes, French toast or taquitos (a soft corn meal shell filled with scrambled eggs and bits of breakfast meat).

A variety of danish, muffins, donuts, croissants and rolls as well as sausage and biscuits are piled up in kettles, and placed at highly visible intervals between "food ports."

For dinner, plate-ready choices may include roast beef with mashed potatoes, gravy and green beans; or oven-roasted pork loin with sauce, dressing and corn O'Brien.

Typical 'fast-food' items—very popular and *always* available—include: hamburgers (850 are sold daily); pizza (390 slices per day); hot dogs (80); assorted sandwiches (500) and French fries (1,050 servings).