

The Southwest meets the Institute, 1943

By Bernie McCarty

"Alvin Dark and the Southwestern Louisiana Institute line are the greatest football combination in the nation, on wet gridiron or dry," exclaimed Houston Post sportswriter Vic Emanuel in his report of SLI's 24-7 triumph over Arkansas A&M in the inaugural Oil Bowl game Jan. 1, 1944.

Why would anybody get excited about schools like Southwestern Louisiana and Arkansas A&M? Because it was wartime and Planet Earth was turned upside down. Crazienss was a feature of all sports during World War II. Nothing in the world of sports, however, compared to what happened to Southwest area football. in 1943.

Wholesale transfer of Marine and Navy trainees rendered most of! the usual Southwest football powers impotent, while instant monsters were created at such tiny grid schools as Southwestern Louisiana Institute (4-0-2), Arkansas A&M (5-1-1), Southwestern of Texas (9-1-1) and North Texas (3-4-1). Randolph Field suddenly exploded on the scene with one of the country's mightiest service clubs. Toss in Texas (8-1) and potent Tulsa (6-0-1), and only the Midwest compared in overall strength to the Southwest. The difference, of course, is that while it was the Notre Dames and Michigans and Purdues which reigned in the Midwest with the aid of service trainees, few football fans were familiar with the new powers in the Southwest. season records cited above do not include bowl games. Southwest area teams participated in all the bowl games except the Rose Bowl.

The Southwest's two strongest outfits, but not by much, were Southwestern Louisiana and the Ramblers of Randolph Field. And the two individual standouts were remarkable Alvin Dark of SLI's Bulldogs and magnificent Glenn Dobbs of Randolph. Dark, a soph star at Louisiana State the previous year, decided not to return to college football after the war, electing to pursue a career in baseball, a sport in which he became rather well known. An All-America at Tulsa in 1942, Dobbs later ranked with the finest pro performers of his era.

It would require this entire issue of the College Football Historical Society journal, and then some, to relate the story of southwest football circa 1943. In particular, interesting tales worth detailed reviews include all the small schools mentioned. Arkansas A&M, for example, strapped on shoulder pads for the first time when it took the field in its opener against Arkansas which supplied the uniforms. But in the space allotted all this writer can do is indicate which teams were rated the strongest, and why. Then we'll review the Southwestern Louisiana campaign.

Randolph Field's only loss was administered by SLI, 6-0 in the mud. In something of a surprise, Texas tied the Ramblers 7-7 in the Cotton Bowl, also in the mud. Randolph might have won both games if Dobbs had been able to pass effectively. His feat of throwing seven TD passes in one game received national attention. Dobbs was clearly the best player on the field against both SLI and Texas, even when covered with mud.

Southwestern of Texas lost only to SLI, 27-6, beat Arkansas A&M 7-0, placed the lone blotch on Tulsa's record with a 6-6 draw, and topped New Mexico 7-0 in the Sun Bowl. The 1943 Pirates included seven starters from Texas' 1942 Southwest Conference champs, with help from Baylor, TCU and Oklahoma, and defeated Texas' 1943 conference champs 14-7. One can only wonder what kind of team Texas could have fielded in 1943 if it had all the players divided between

the two clubs. The transfer situation also benefitted the Longhorns in 1943, however, because they picked up fullback J.R. Calahan, a Naval air trainee from Texas Tech, who turned out to be the top conference back of the year. Texas A&M (7-1-1) had a fine season record, but was thoroughly outclassed by Texas 27-13, was tied 0-0 by North Texas, and was upset by LSU 19-14 in the Orange Bowl.

Only Southwestern of Texas managed to defeat Arkansas A&M during the regular season, and just barely, 7-0. The Bollweevils tied SLI 20-20 in a spectacular contest, which set up the rematch in the Oil Bowl. Arkansas A&M was bolstered by transfers from SMU, Arkansas and Oklahoma A&M. But its leading performers were fullback Charlie Steed and halfback Charlie Gray, moved over from little Arkansas Tech. Forget the rather ordinary record of North Texas Agricultural College. The Eagles lost twice to Southwestern, and led Randolph Field 13-0 in the last period before succumbing 20-13. In this tilt Dobbs completed 29 of 46 passes, including two fourth-quarter TD aeriels. North Texas, loaded with service players from SMU and TCU, tied Texas A&M and beat SMU. Of all the teams mentioned here, only Texas A&M and Tulsa (and we won't get into Tulsa) were not bolstered by service trainees.

Time to mention a few linemen. Number one on the list is Texas end Joe Parker, a bonafide first-team All-American in 1943. All-America recognition also went to a pair of Southwestern of Texas performers up front, guard Harold Fischer (Texas) and tackle "Bubo" Burnett (Baylor). A quick way to present some sort of gauge concerning the season's leading players is to list the all-area team selected by the Houston post: ends Parker and Marion Settegast of Texas A&M; tackles Burnett and Charlie Malmberg of Rice; guards Fischer and Weldon Rumble (Rice) of SLI; center Bill Blackburn (Rice) of SLI; and backs "Spot" Collins (Texas) of Southwestern, Dark, Dobbs and Calahan. So many more gridders deserve mention. This writer would like to especially include tackle Goble Bryant of Texas A&M, halfback Ralph Ellworth of Texas; and the great Tulsa tailback Clyde LeForce. Ellsworth went on to

star at the Naval Academy before returning to Texas, and Bryant later starred at West Point.

Now let's get on with Southwestern Louisiana Institute and return to the Houston Oil Bowl and sportswriter Emanuel's account of the contest.

"The brilliant Dark, a 165-pound brown-haired triple threat from Lake Charles, La., quickly put the Aggies into a hole with his out-of-bounds punting and sensational punt returns on the water-logged gridiron. Meanwhile the Bulldog line, led by two marvelous guards, Weldon Humble and Johnny Magee, bottled up the Aggie ground game throughout. But back to Dark, probably the greatest back in the nation and certainly an All-American on his two visits to Houston. Not once during the afternoon did he do anything wrong. He punted six times for an average of 42 yards, including a 61-yard quick kick. Snaring the soggy pigskin like an outfielder, he returned eight Weeveil punts a total of 118 yards. Dark is a brilliant passer but because of the weather conditions, the Lake Charles boy, who is also the signal caller, shelved the aeriels most of the afternoon. And the mud hampered Dark's speed but not his shifting. Repeatedly he would swerve on the split second to pull away from the outstretched arms of Bollweevil performers."

Emanuel added, "The Bulldogs employed a 5-3-2-1 defense with the great Humble

backing up the line. Defensively, he was wherever needed, coming up to make more tackles than any other player or going back to protect against passes. After Saturday's game Line Coach Bill Stevenson said: 'Humble was the difference in our defense in the two games. No team in the country could score three touchdowns against us when he was in the lineup.' "Humble was in the hospital when the two clubs tied earlier in the season. However, it must be noted Blackburn, also a linebacker, was not in the Bulldog lineup for the bowl game,

Dark booted a 17-yard field goal in the opening period, set up by his 24-yard punt return. He passed 12 yards to Moe Richmond for a score in the second quarter. Dark returned a punt 16 yards, and skipped 13 yards to set up a TD by fullback Bob Pillow in the third stanza. And Dark bolted 26 yards with a punt, then "weaved through a maze of tacklers" to tally the final Bulldog TD from 12 yards out. And he kicked all three conversions. Gray pitched 28 yards to Bill Cromer for the Bollweevil TD. Gray passed well enough, gaining 117 yards, but had three intercepted. Meanwhile, the brutal Arkansas A&M ground attack led by Steed was limited to 23 net yards by Humble and friends.

Southwestern Louisiana Institute's 1943 regular-season schedule consisted of five game because nobody wanted any part of the Bulldogs. Texas coach Dana X. Bible stated he wasn't interested in playing SLI, which may be why Randolph Field, and not the Bulldogs, were invited to the Cotton Bowl. Located at Fayetteville, La., less than 100 miles away, SLI had a lock on the sugar Bowl if it defeated Randolph Field. But Tulsa, the other candidate, insisted a choice be made prior to the SLI-Randolph tilt, and the bowl committee decided Tulsa was the safer choice.

Rice was the biggest contributor to SLI's 1943 success story. All the top players from Rice's 1942 team turned up on the Bulldog campus. The Owls would have been a Southwest Conference title contender in 1943, and when the gridders returned as a group in 1946 Rice tied for the league crown. A partial list of the leading Bulldog performers includes Dark, Richmond, tackle Billy Heard and guard Jim Loflin of LSU, end Saxon Judd of Tulsa, Pillow of Mississippi State, end Art Porter of Tulane, center Edwin cloud of SMU, and TB-FB Virgil Eikenberg, end Windell Williams, tackle Henry Armstrong, QB Pete Sultis, HB Vincent Buckley, and Humble, Magee and Blackburn, all of Rice. In this writer's humble opinion, Humble ranks with the two or three greatest guards ever developed in the Southwest Conference.

The initial Bulldog foe of the year was Fort Benning 176th featuring Bob Waterfield of UCLA, later an all-pro QB with the Rams, and a host of college and pro players. When the season was over, SLI coach Louis Whitman rated Benning the strongest opponent his club faced. Operating out of the single wing, Dark passed to Williams for the first TD, and Waterfield's scoring aerial tied the count at halftime, 7-7. Buckley burst 10 yards to break the deadlock in the third period. Blackburn and Humble combined to stop Benning at the SLI seven early in the final chapter, and the Spirits surged right back behind Waterfield. Blackburn broke the game wide open by returning an interception 50 yards to set up Eikenberg's clinching seven-yard run to paydirt. Eikenberg toiled nearly the full 60 minutes for the Bulldogs.

The much-heralded war relief fund showdown between SLI and Southwestern of Texas was billed as a "Marine Trainee Classic". Staged at Rice Stadium in Houston the evening of Oct. 23, it was the biggest game played before the biggest crowd (20,000) in the history of both schools. Dark enjoyed his finest performance of the season, and Blackburn dominated in the line, as the Bulldogs romped 27-6.

Southwestern Louisiana scored twice in the first quarter. Dark ran 11 yards, then passed 24 yards to Williams to the one, setting up Eikenberg's TD slant.

Dark and Williams combined on a sensational 59-yarder for the second tally. The score could have been much higher. A Bulldog drive in the opening period stalled at the Southwestern two, and another toss, Dark to Williams, was dropped at the one in the second quarter. Dark's long punting, with one boot going out of bounds at the five, kept Southwestern bottled up until late in the second stanza. Time was running out in the half when Jackie Field, the flashiest Texas back of the previous season, uncorked a 54-yard pass to Bill Hearne, setting up the lone Pirate TD. SLI went all the way with the second half kick-off. Dark passed 14 yards to Eikenberg, and finished off the assault from the southwestern 45. Blackburn and Eikenberg threw the key blocks to free Dark, and he "zig-zagged" through four more defenders to reach paydirt. Eikenberg's TD plunge wrapped up the Bulldog scoring in the third period, and Dark kicked his third conversion.

The tie between the Institute and Arkansas A&M was staged in Memphis Nov. 6. Many clubs featuring service trainees were hit by transfers to boot camp Nov. 1, and the Bollweevils lost four starters prior to the game. The most publicized such transfers nationally were Heisman Trophy winner Angelo Bertelli of Notre Dame and unanimous All-America FB Bill Daley of Michigan.

The AP reported, "Southwestern Louisiana Institute and Arkansas A&M swapped sledgehammer blows for two hours in a driving rain Saturday and knocked each other from the ranks of perfect teams by struggling to a bruising 20-to-20 draw. Three thousand drenched customers saw the contest evolve into an individual battle between Alvin Dark and Charley Steed, a pile-driving fullback inherited by the Aggies from Arkansas Tech. Dark's rifle pitching arm and fancy ankling got southwestern off to a 13-0 lead. The Aggies took the wraps off their wheelhorse, Steed, in the second half and marched the first kickoff 75 yards to the tying touchdown. Runs of 21 and 16 yards by Steed climaxed the land push."

SLI gained a 20-13 lead in the fourth quarter. Loflin blocked a punt at the Bollweevil seven and pillow cracked over on the next play for his second TD of the day. Sid Halliday (SMU) recovered a fumble at the SDI 20, and Steed and Wayne Marshall (Arkansas) powered to the endzone in five carries. Steed scored and Marshall's conversion produced the deadlock.

We'll ignore SLI's 75-0 win over Lake Charles Air Base which no newspaper felt obligated to report. The Houston Post is most often mentioned in this report, mainly because the most important Bulldog games were played in Houston. Key information, however, was also obtained from Dallas and San Antonio papers.

Two crucial breaks in the third period were involved in SLI's 6-0 victory over Randolph Field in the season finale at San Antonio Nov. 27. Dark quick-kicked from midfield, placing the pigskin at the one-yard stripe. On the first play Dobbs attempted a flat pass and the intended receiver tipped the ball to Bulldog defender Fred Jacob who romped 18 yards untouched for the TD. Until SLI scored, Dobbs and Co. dominated.

Dobbs rushed for 76 yards and completed eight passes for 85 yards, accounting for 161 of his side's 170 total yards. And he punted the water-logged ball 11 times for a 38.5 average. In contrast, the Bulldogs netted just 99 yards. Across 10 regular-season games, Dobbs was credited with 2157 total offense yards.