

focus

Muster legacy rich; tradition continues

Wartime, ex-cadets in Muster history

By PAIGE BEASLEY
Battalion Staff

The sound of the "Aggie War Hymn" was smothered by blasts from Japanese artillery and the guns of Corregidor Island in the Philippines.

Voices roared in the dim recesses of "The Rock" (Corregidor), as 25 Texas A&M College men met on April 21, 1942, to answer "here" for dead classmates and to toast cups of water to the Texas heroes of the battle that made Texas an independent Republic.

A radio message sending word that the Texas A&M Corregidor comrades were alive and still had the spirit of San Jacinto brought national recognition to the Aggie tradition. The Rock fell to Japan 15 days later, but the spirit and loyalty of these Texas Aggies added inspiration and significance to the annual Muster tradition.

Corregidor was a loss for America, but it's reported that people at home renewed their confidence by saying,

Although recognition wasn't gained until 1942, the Aggie Muster can be traced back to 1883.

"As long as our boys have the courage and nerve to hold a college muster in the fall of defeat, we are bound to win in the long run."

Although recognition was not gained until 1942, the Aggie Muster can be traced to 1883 when "ex-cadets" returned to college during June for commencement exercises. A statement of objective for the Association of Ex-Cadets concluded, "In the reunion we meet and live over again our college days, the victories and defeats won and lost upon drill ground and in classroom. Let every alumni answer roll call."

Early mustering of Aggies usually took place at parties or banquets held during commencement activities. These gatherings were used to recognize and honor Aggies who had died the previous year. The Association of Ex-Cadets was discontinued a few years later, but the tradition of roll call of deceased comrades has been preserved.

Since its founding, Texas A&M has observed April 21, commemorating the defeat of Santa Anna's army by Sam Houston and his "Army of the Republic of Texas" on the San Jacinto battlefield. Houston commanded about 700 men who were

beaten in all ways but one — the spirit of freedom. This patriotism was to be respected forever, as were the lives of Texas Aggies.

During the 1890s, the Corps of Cadets visited the San Jacinto battlefield near Houston on April 21 to participate in sham battles and

When these American fighting men sang that Aggie War Hymn to the accompaniment of a darn good band. . . this war was forgotten — Wick Fowler, war correspondent.

maneuvers with the Texas National Guard. A parade down Houston's Main Street followed the event.

In the early 1900s, April 21 was set aside as a "Track and Field Day" for competitive athletic events similar to intramurals.

When the events were cancelled in 1930, "A determined student body, 300 strong, marched in orderly military precision through 'Old Main' and thence to the home of President David F. Houston, to insist upon some observance of the anniversary of the Battle that won Texas' independence," states an old list of Aggie traditions found in University Archives.

"The campus battle ended in a draw — the student body returning to classes after lunch. Those students vowed then, however, that the greatest day in Texas history should never again be forgotten by A&M or its sons."

In addition to honoring the freedom of Texas, Aggies began recognizing deceased comrades by answering "here" for the absent during the roll call at April 21 gatherings. "If there is an A&M man in one hundred miles of you, you are expected to get together, eat a little, and live over the days you spent at the A&M College of Texas," directed the March 1923 edition of the Texas Aggie. The Association of Former Students of the A&M College of Texas, as it was once called, did much to institutionalize "Muster" that year.

State and nationwide rallies of former students provided Aggies an opportunity to "meet old friends again and live over the old days at College Station." A special program by the association was broadcast by the student radio station WTAW, D.X. Bible, head coach of athletics addressed the radio audience, accompanied by Aggie yells from cadets and a medley of A&M College

songs. Music was furnished by the "Aggieland Six."

Wartime reunited Aggies all over the world, as men from Texas A&M fought and died on every battlefield of World War II. Aggies mustered in the trenches and towns of France, met in foxholes all over Europe and gathered at Army posts in America.

In 1944, war correspondent Wick Fowler wrote: "Those Fighting Texas Aggies — well, they swarmed into Naples (Italy) from miles around for their annual San Jacinto Day get-together and 85 Kyle Field-trained throats turned husky in a hilarious evening of song, cheering, and reminiscence.

"The lights in the second-floor ballroom went out, but the situation didn't dim the spirit of the celebrants who ranged in rank from buck private to Major General. It's not often

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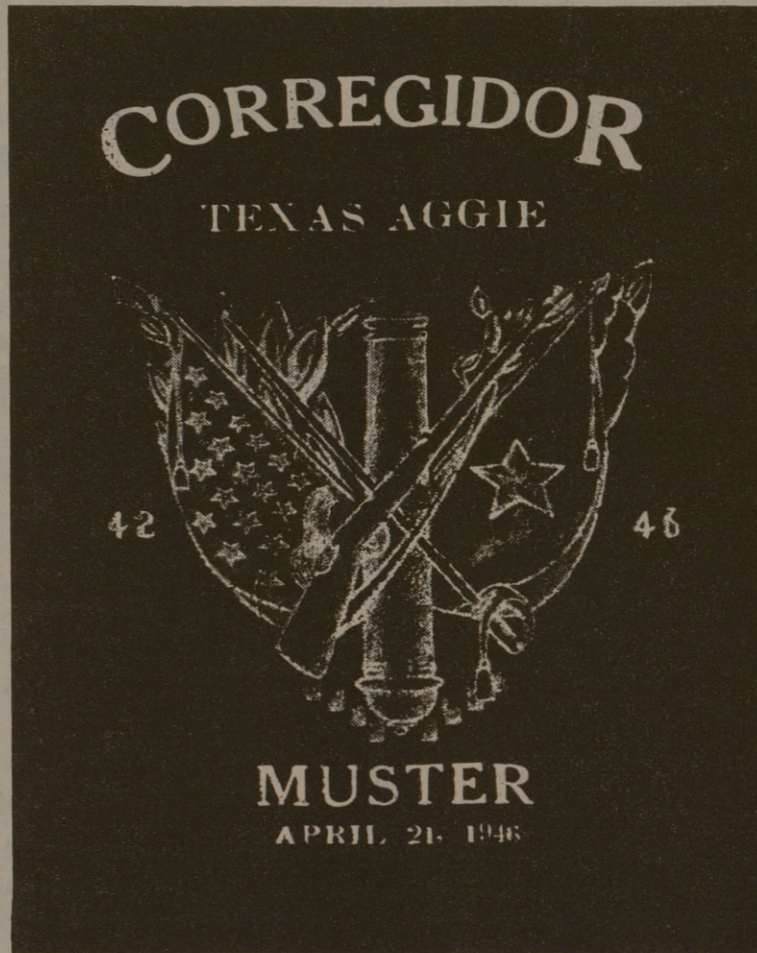
that you see enlisted men and officers with their arms around one another, but when these American fighting men sang that Aggie War Hymn to the accompaniment of a darn good band from one of the divisions this war was forgotten," correspondent Fowler concluded.

Two years later, more than 400 former students of Texas A&M College staged their annual Aggie Muster at the Special Service Hotel in Bad Hamburg, Germany.

The event was reported in Stars and Stripes, the soldiers' newspaper in WW II. "Coming by jeep, train, plane, shank's mare and practically every other type of transportation available, the 400 Aggies came from almost every zone in Europe where American troops were stationed."

The Aggies "gathered first for a bull session that reunited numerous buddies for the first time since the war had parted them in their classes at College Station, Texas," the paper reported.

And so it has been over the years, the loyalty and unity of Texas A&M University students as expressed at Muster. Remembering also the heroes of San Jacinto and the dead Aggies who established "a tradition of duty to freedom and duty to home, which every A&M man preciously holds," we may always mark them "present in our hearts."



They came from miles around by jeep, plane, train and other means of transportation to renew friendship, relive college days, and recognize those who had lost their lives in the war.



They mustered in Corregidor, Germany, and any place there were Aggies.

Photos courtesy of University Archives

Corregidore survivor to speak

Campus gears up for Muster

In this ceremony we honor the memory of fellow Texas A&M men and women whose death prevents their answering Roll Call at this annual Muster. The Roll is a symbolic Roll Call of all students and former students whom death has taken from our ranks, but whose memory lives in our hearts. As each name is called, a comrade will answer: Here! — Dr. John Aston, Class of 1906

By MICHELLE SCUDDER
Battalion Staff

Whether the annual April 21 Muster ceremony in 1978 is ob-

served by two persons or 2,000, in Rio de Janeiro or College Station, the history and significance of the event will be unchanged as Aggies will meet to answer "Here!" for their deceased comrades.

The "roll call of the absent" will be held at 437 locations around the world, 200 of which are in Texas.

The Ross Volunteers, The Singing Cadets, and the Silver Taps Buglers will participate in the campus event at 5:30 p.m. Friday in G. Rollie White Coliseum.

Retired Army Col. Thomas Dooley, Class of 1935, will speak at the campus Muster. Dooley is a

survivor of the World War II invasion of Corregidor Island in the Philippines and participated in a Muster there in 1942 led by Gen. George F. Moore.

"We wanted a speaker who hadn't spoken here before and Col. Dooley was highly recommended by former students as a candidate for speaker at campus Muster," said Joe Marshall, student chairman of Muster committee.

Other students on the program are Corps Chaplain Bandy Seybert, Troby Hoffacker, Terry Stanislaw, Lisa Swanson, and Joe Reagan, head yell leader.

Reagan will read the roll call of students who have died since April 21. Eddie Joe Davis, director of management services and member of the Brazos County Association of Former Students, will read the names of the Aggies from the Brazos County area.

"I don't think I need to urge anyone to attend. Muster is not that type of thing," Marshall said.

Texas A&M President Jarvis Miller will address the Washington, D.C., Muster. He is among speakers from the campus, including 10 students, who will appear at off-campus programs.



Corregidor Island in the Philippines fell to the Japanese in 1942, but that didn't stop the Aggies. During Japanese bombardment of the island, Aggies read the roll call of the absent and sang the Aggie War Hymn. Aggies met

again four years later to honor those Texas A&M comrades who died on Corregidor. Aggies also mustered in Honolulu, making toasts to A&M and other WW II heroes.

Photos courtesy of University Archives



'Taps' ceremony differs from most Aggie traditions

By AVA KING

Thousands of students walk solemnly across the darkened campus. They gather in silence in front of the Academic Building. Sons and daughters of Old A&M and first generation Aggies alike come together to pay their final respects to a fellow Aggie student. Street lights are out.

At 10:15 p.m. the Memorial Student Center bells send the strains of hymns out into the quiet night. Ten-thirty comes and the resounding steps of the Ross Volunteer Firing Squad breaks the silence. The squad marches at a slow cadence and comes to a halt before the statue of Lawrence Sullivan Ross. With rifles raised, they fire a 21-gun salute to honor the deceased. The shots spit fire into the night and the sound echoes off of the surrounding buildings.

Members of the Corps of Cadets out of uniform, are joined by others who stand at attention as seven buglers play a special arrangement of "Taps" three times. As the last note fades into the distance, the crowd quietly disperses. Soon the only reminder of what has taken place are the small clouds of smoke slowly rising over the center of campus.

The event that has just been described is Silver Taps. It is the final tribute paid to an Aggie who is enrolled as a student at Texas A&M at the time of his death.

The first Silver Taps was held in 1890 for Lawrence Sullivan Ross, former governor of Texas and former president of Texas A&M. The ceremony was held in front of Old Main until that building burned in 1912. It was then moved to Goodwin Hall. The Academic Building has been the site of Silver Taps since 1918.

Through the years, new elements have been added to the tradition of Silver Taps. In the 1920s, the flag at the main flag pole was first flown at half-mast the day of the ceremony. Two buglers arranged and played the music "Silver Taps" in the 1930s. From 1955 to 1973, chimes were rung prior to the ceremony. The use of the chimes was resumed after the renovation of the Memorial Student Center in 1975.

The name of the deceased Aggie is posted at the base of the flagpole the day of Silver Taps. Notices of the ceremony are posted at the doors of the library, the University Center and all dormitories.

Silver Taps is a memorial service for the departed, but it is much more. It is a chance for those Aggies still living to gather to share with one another the unity and spirit of Aggieland and to act as one in bidding their comrade "farewell."



Films, guides available in Muster kit

The Texas A&M Former Student's Association sends a "Muster kit" to any former students interested in organizing a Muster. The kit offers suggestions for the ceremony but leaves the particulars up to the club.

The kit offers Muster committees the opportunity to request faculty, staff, or students from campus to speak at their Muster.

The kit also gives Muster committees the chance to order supplies to assist them in their ceremonies. Films such as "That Certain Spirit," "TAMU Today," and "Research Impact" are free on a reservation basis.

"The Sounds of Muster," a cassette tape featuring The Singing Cadets and the Texas Aggie Band is available for \$3. The order form also includes such available as place mats, maroon crepe paper,

ATM stick-on name tags, and cocktail napkins with block ATM logos.

The kits includes several hints on having a successful Muster, such as whom to invite, how to contact all the former students in the area, how to publicize the Muster, and what the program should include.

Enclosed in the kit are two samples of Muster prayers, instructions for a candlelight service, lyrics of

"The Aggie War Hymn," "The Spirit of Aggieland" and "Aggie Muster Day." Also included are Silver Taps poems, Muster prayers and "The Last Corps Reveille" poem.

In return for the help, Former Student's Association requests a Muster report relating particulars of the ceremony.

— Michelle Scudder