

Softly call the muster

Comrades answer, 'here' for Aggies on April 21 who have died within year

By Mia B. Moody
Of The Battalion Staff

Muster is more than just a ceremony; it is a way for alumni to relive the victories and defeats won and lost upon drill ground and in classrooms during their college days.

The first Muster was held June 26, 1883 at an Aggie get-together. One member of the group had died during the previous year, and when roll was called, a friend answered for him.

In the early 1900s, the observation of Muster was changed to April 21, San Jacinto Day, in commemoration of the battle that won independence for Texas 150 years ago. Every April 21, Aggies gather throughout the world to pay homage to all students and former students who have died during the year.

Muster achieved national fame during World War II.

A group of Aggies stationed on Corregidor Island in the Philippines gathered in an underground shelter while the Japanese dropped bombs overhead. Fifteen days later, the island fell to the Japanese and all the soldiers were either captured or killed.

The main ceremony of the worldwide observance is held on the A&M campus. A roll call is read for those who have passed away. As each name is called, a candle is lighted and a comrade answers "here." This response symbolizes that even though the Aggie is no longer present in body, he is present in spirit.

Muster is more than a ceremony; it represents a pledge and responsibility of A&M men and women that has been handed from generation to generation. It is a way for students to renew their loyalty and unity, which constitute the basic foundation of their relationships with each other and their love and devotion for the University.



Photo by Phelan M. Eberhart

An unidentified woman expresses her sorrow for a loved one during the roll call portion of

Aggie Muster 1989. During muster, Aggies remember those who died during the year.



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During Muster, A&M students light a candle and answer 'here' for those whose names are read during a roll call for A&M students and

former students who have died during the year (above). Ross Volunteers fire a 21-gun salute at the ceremony (below).

Silver taps unites all Aggies to remember those who died

By Richard Tijerina
Of The Battalion Staff

On the first Tuesday of every month, a mass of silent Aggies gather together in the heart of campus in front of the Academic Building to say a final farewell to fellow students who have died during the month.

One of the oldest Aggie traditions, Silver Taps as it is known today, has been pieced together over time. Its complete history remains unknown, but according to legend, the first Silver Taps was held in 1898

for former Texas governor Lawrence Sullivan Ross, president of Texas A&M from 1891 to 1898. Silver Taps has been held at the Academic Building, near a statue of Ross, since 1918.

During the ceremony, the area immediately behind the statue is reserved for family and friends of the A&M student being honored. All around the area, the crowd who has gathered solemnly waits in the darkened campus for the Ross Volunteer firing squad. At 10:30 p.m. the firing squad begins its 21-gun salute and after the third volley, six buglers play "Taps."

"Taps" sounds three times — to the north, once to the east and once to the west — and then a crowd of silent Aggies leave. The firing squad remains in position. Usually the lights come on again.

The ceremony is held the second Tuesday in September for Aggies who have died during the summer. On the day of every Silver Taps, names of the deceased Aggies are posted on the base of the flagpole in front of the Academic Building. Notices of the ceremony also are posted in several places around campus, including in front of Sbis Dining Hall and the Memorial Student Center.

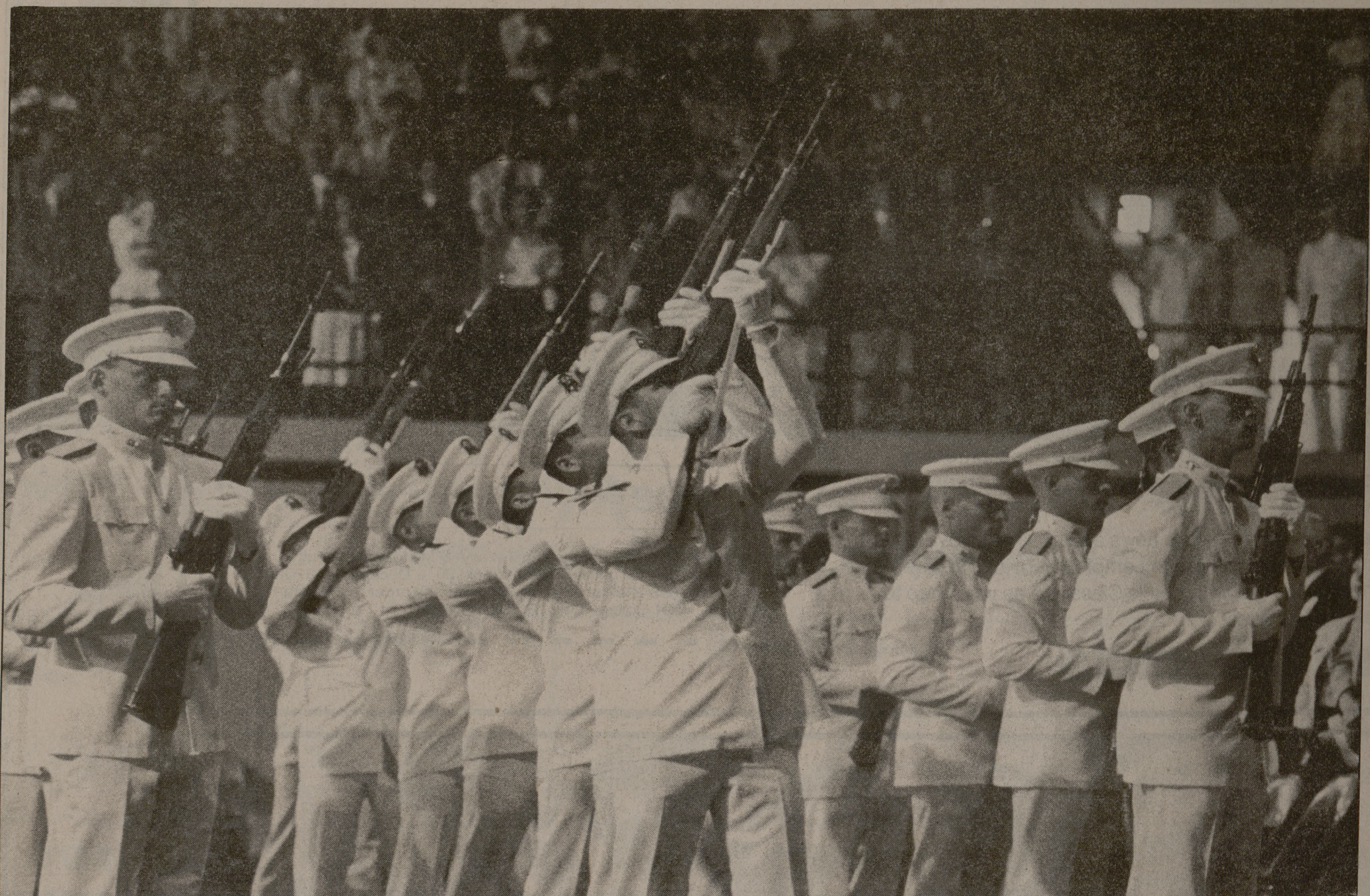
The ceremony can have quite an effect for those who experience it for the first time. In October 1988, an A&M freshman wrote this letter about Silver Taps to his parents. It best describes the solemn event:

"Dear Mom and Dad,

"Right now it's 11:00 and Cal Quarters is over. I should be in bed but there's something I have to tell you both first. I'm sitting here at my desk with tears in my eyes and thinking more about life itself than I ever have before.

"I'm not crying because of what I'm going through — but rather

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