

THE BATTALION

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Commemorating the fallen reminds Aggies they have

Big boots to fill

J.L. Huffines, Class of 1944, and his Corps of Cadets buddies never got to wear their senior boots.

In May 1943, when they should have been anticipating the end-of-the-year Corps of Cadets trip, celebrating their shiny new Aggie rings and building the strong bonds Aggieland is known for, they received orders to report for duty to a war that was getting deadlier and bloodier by the hour. Within 48 hours of the call, Huffines and 650 other cadets were sent by train to Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio to leave behind their Aggie identities and become World War II soldiers.

Huffines still has the letter he received sent by Thomas O. Walton, the president of A&M.

"Beside the attributes of the soldier, you have that spark of something that men trained at A&M College possess; that something which in this war may be the difference between defeat and ultimate victory," Walton wrote.

Huffines was sent to fight in the 3rd Armored Cavalry under the command of Gen. George S. Patton.

One Christmas in Europe, Huffines got word of another Aggie in a nearby outfit. In Aggie Muster tradition, the friends got together, ate a little and relived their time as cadets at A&M. Through the grace of his Aggie friend, Huffines was sent back to his hungry troops with a hot meal — his first in weeks.

"He was our Santa Claus," Huffines said. But this would not be Huffines' last Aggie Christmas.

While he is considered Class of 1944, and his Aggie ring reflects the same, Huffines and his buddies who survived the turmoil of war (80 died in combat) returned to Aggieland in 1947. They finished their senior year as civilians, with no uniform and no senior boots — the very symbol of great achievement and sacrifice. Those who had sacrificed three years of their lives for their country never received the Aggie honor.

Friends fill the void

Two years ago, Huffines sat with two friends and co-workers in the office of his successful car dealership in North Texas discussing Aggie traditions.

Bob Mohr, Class of 1965, said Huffines just hung his head low and said, "I never did get my senior boots."

Mohr and Bill Milburn, another co-worker moved by Huffines' Aggie spirit and stiff Corps handshake, decided to fill the void with the ultimate Christmas gift. They presented Huffines with a custom-made mahogany case displaying his new Holick's boots beside his saber, mounted cavalry guidon and other keepsakes.

"After 57 years, I got my boots," Huffines said. "It was hard for me to talk. That made my tenure at A&M complete."

This year, Huffines will be the honored speaker at Muster in Rockwall County, and for good reason.

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