

EDITORIAL

ROLL CALL

Aggies in war remembered

The call to Muster is a call to remembrance for all fallen Aggies. This year especially, Muster echoes more poignantly than in the past. Muster is celebrated by Aggies around the world, and this year Aggies will be remembering their friends in combat in Iraq. This April 21, Aggies are on the field of battle, risking their lives to free the oppressed Iraqi people.

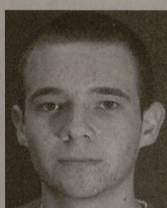
Aggies serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom will experience a closer connection to Muster, just as the Aggies fighting and mustering in the Philippines in the caves of Corregidor were closer to Texas A&M's values that day.

A&M has a long history of serving the United States in its wars and conflicts. With the current conflict, not only does Muster touch a chord that resonates louder and louder in our hearts and homes, but many other A&M traditions ring more loudly than in past years.

Traditions such as the Memorial Student Center, a living tribute to Aggies who have served and died in combat, and the Corps of Cadets, in which many Aggies begin their careers in the armed forces, are held to a higher esteem than previous years. Silver Taps continually reminds one of A&M's connection to the United States military. This connection is more evident now with the current conflict. It is hard not to experience this connection vicariously through these various traditions.

Muster is a time for remembrance. It is our duty as Aggies not only to remember our fallen comrades, but to celebrate A&M's rich tradition of supporting our country through the armed forces.

Should the tribute be exempt from budgetary cuts?



MATT RIGNEY

Recently Robert M. Gates announced that Aggie Bonfire will be disrupted for another year pending the legal battles concerning the 1999 collapse. While breaking the news to the student body and media, Gates told The Battalion that the planned Bonfire Memorial will be "exempted from all budget cuts from this date through its completion." While the collapse should never be forgotten—it claimed 12 Aggies and injured 27 others—during the University's hard financial times, the memorial that remembers these students should be subject to the same restrictions as the rest of the current student body.

When the University unveiled the winning memorial design in March 2002, The Battalion reported possible costs between \$4 million and \$7 million, with the number nailed down to \$5 million by September. The contest held to find the winning design for the memorial cost the University \$550,000. These costs, plus the costs of litigation concerning Bonfire, will eventually amount to tens of millions.

On paper, one sees these expenditures as prime candidates for the budget cuts the state required, but the legal costs cannot be reduced; lawyers will always be expensive. The \$550,000 contest money has already been spent. This leaves only the memorial as a viable option for cutting costs of this expensive endeavor, but Gates has unwisely protected this cost from being reduced by even a few dollars.

Texas A&M will decrease its budget by 12.5 percent for 2004, as reported by The Battalion. To achieve this, nearly every department faces "very tough, and almost certainly controversial decisions about budget priorities," according to Gates' memo sent to top administrators and college deans. These cuts are already apparent in the faculty hiring freeze implemented by Gates this January.

By excluding the Bonfire Memorial from the spending decreases, Gates will be forced to cut deeper into other academic departments and student services or raise tuition. The recent rejection of fee increases by students clearly shows the administration how students feel about cost increases.

Departmental decreases will only lead to a decrease in the services the University can offer. Dennis Corrington, director of the Recreation Sports Department, told The Battalion on March 4 that the department has already taken money from its \$5 million reserve fund.

Gates announced that the budget cuts will not affect the top programs in the University as much as others, keeping the hopes of Vision 2020 alive. This will make the weaker departments at A&M become even more strained and lead to an overall decrease in the quality of an education.

The memorial should still be built, but a \$5 million price tag is too high of a price to pay. Saving a million or even a few hundred thousand dollars on the Bonfire Memorial would ease the pain for the lower-ranked academic and student departments, which would help to sustain the value of an A&M diploma.

Student Body President Zac Coventry, who also sits on the Bonfire Memorial Planning Committee, labeled Gates' decision as appropriate, pointing out the value of human life over everything else.

"It's the Aggie thing to do," Coventry said. Coventry is right; the Aggie thing to do is build a memorial to remember these 39 students directly affected by the collapse, but doing so at the expense of the current students at the University disregards the most important responsibility of Texas A&M: to provide a valuable education.

The loss of 12 members of the community is a tragic event, and building a memorial is something this community needs to do to remember these Aggies.

However, actions speak louder than 12 expensive pillars. Every month in a solemn ceremony, this community remembers Aggies who have died. Millions of dollars are not spent to remember these students each month, and millions of dollars do not need to be spent to remember 12 Ags who passed more than three years ago. An outpouring of student support on the anniversary of this event will hold more meaning than objects built at the expense of the University's academic programs.

Gates has a great responsibility in devising the diminished budget for the 2004 school year while still balancing the agenda of Vision 2020 and some decreases cannot be avoided. His decision to exclude the Bonfire Memorial from any budget cuts over-fulfills another responsibility to honor the 39 students who either fell or were injured on Nov. 18, 1999, and in doing so, he neglects another 45,000 surviving students who attend this University.

Matt Rigney is a sophomore journalism major.



BRIENNE PORTER

"A day that will live in infamy," President Franklin D. Roosevelt said this about the day Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese. For Aggies, the day that will live in infamy is Nov. 18, 1999—the day Bonfire collapsed. Twelve Aggies died in the collapse and another 27 were injured. For many on the Texas A&M campus, Nov. 18 is a day of sadness and remembrance. It is not a day easily erased from the memory.

When Texas A&M President Robert M. Gates announced that the Bonfire Memorial project would not be subject to budget cuts, some people protested his decision. While the University is facing a financial crisis, the Bonfire Memorial project should not be subject to the same budget cuts. To do so would be to disgrace the memory of those the A&M community lost that fateful night.

Many students argue that the Bonfire Memorial is using money that could benefit current students on this campus. With the Dairy Science Center closing because of funding problems and other departments, such as the journalism department, facing similar budget cuts, the Bonfire Memorial seems to be a prime candidate to lose funding. Yet, the memorial is not a luxury.

The Bonfire Memorial is a necessity.

Students must not forget that 12 Aggies lost their lives on campus while participating in a time-honored tradition. These deaths did not only affect their families and friends, it resonated with all students. The tragedy brought the A&M community closer together. "The collapse was shared by thousands of people," said Neva Hand, mother of Bonfire victim Jamie Hand, to reporters in November 2001.

Bonfire 1999 is a distant or non-existent memory for many on campus, but the tragic event still affects the Aggie community. In 2001, then-President Ray M. Bowen decided not to hold an official Bonfire memorial ceremony. On that night, a tearful Janice Kerlee, mother of Bonfire victim Timothy Kerlee Jr., said, "Two years ago, they said they would never forget, they said they would always be here." Yet, many have chosen to forget. Building this memorial will be a permanent statement pledging A&M's continued remembrance of our fellow fallen Aggies.

Remembering Bonfire 1999 is the duty of current and former students. A&M has memorials for other fallen Aggies. The Memorial Student Center is a place to commemorate Aggies who lost their lives in war. Silver Taps is observed every month for current students who have died. Muster is held once a year on April 21 to remember fallen Aggies.

Yet, there is no memorial for these 12 Aggies who died and the 27 who were hurt with the collapse of Bonfire. These Aggies were partaking in a tradition on the A&M campus, and were killed while doing something they believed in. The Polo Fields in which Bonfire was built is not a distant land, but a spot here on campus.

A permanent structure needs to be constructed so no one forgets that on that spot 12 fellow Aggies lost their lives. Right now, the only evidence marking the spot where 12 fellow students died is a lone Bonfire pot on a stick surrounded by 12 simple white crosses. This makeshift memorial does not do these fallen Aggies justice.

To not have a Bonfire Memorial is to dishonor the students involved in the tragedy and those to come. Future students need to know about Bonfire 1999 and those Aggies who are no longer here. It is a reminder that the past is never far from the hearts and minds of the A&M community. Without a permanent structure commemorating those lives lost, A&M is denying the memory of one of its most tragic events. The wounds of Bonfire 1999 are still healing, and some of these wounds will never heal completely.

Memorial ceremonies are not enough for these students. They are not concrete. As in 2001, memorial ceremonies can be canceled. A permanent memorial will protect against such a thing from happening again. As Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. J. Malon Southerland told The Battalion in October 2001, "We'll always remember Nov. 18, and the best way to do that is through the permanent memorial."

While the University struggles with a budget crisis, the Bonfire Memorial project must not be altered. To properly remember the 39 hurt and killed, a fixed structure is necessary. Gates was correct when he announced that the project would be exempt from budget cuts. Bonfire 1999 is not that long gone, and it must always remain in the minds of Aggies here on campus.

Brienne Porter is a senior political science major. Graphic by Radhika Thirunarayanan.

THE BATTALION

EDITORIAL BOARD

<i>Editor in Chief</i>	BRANDIE LIFFICK	<i>Asst. News</i>	MELISSA SULLIVAN
<i>Managing Editor</i>	SOMMER BUNCE	<i>Member</i>	SARA FOLEY
<i>Opinion Editor</i>	BRIENNE PORTER	<i>Member</i>	MATT MADDOX
<i>News Editor</i>	ROLANDO GARCIA		

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647. Email: mailcall@thebatt.com

MAIL CALL

Matthew Gaines deserves recognition for political achievements

In response to Matt Maddox's April 16 column:

Maddox seem to have forgotten the fourth man whom we, the students of A&M, have memorialized on campus through a statue. Lt. Gen. James F. Hollingsworth was a member of the Class of 1940 whose caliber of leadership is indicated by the list of military decorations he received while serving our country during World War II and the Vietnam War. Hollingsworth was a member of the Corps of Cadets at A&M, and he did continue on to be the school's most decorated general officer. However, his contributions to the University are not necessarily notable.

It seems as though the main reason Maddox is opposed to the commemoration of Matthew Gaines is because you feel he did not have any direct contributions to A&M. It is true that he was not the sole responsible man for passing the Senate Bill No. 276, April 4, 1871, which established the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. The students who propose the memorial to Matthew Gaines did not simply pick him because of his race, as was claimed. Gaines has been recognized by the House of Representatives of the 77th Texas Legislature in H.R. No. 753, which states that the Legislature "pay special tribute to the life of Matthew Gaines for his exceptional public service."

Not only was Gaines "one of the foremost African American leaders in Texas during the second half of the 19th century," as stated by H.R. No. 753, he was a state senator and a great leader in his time. He worked to provide safe polling places for members of all races. He supported a bill that established a tax-supported school system for all Texans and one that exempted "educational, religious, charitable, and literary associations from taxation." (H.R. No. 753) He continued to advocate

Democracy through political activities until his death in 1900.

The addition of a fifth statue to this campus would neither detract from the historical value of the school, nor would it undermine the accomplishments of the four other men we have already honored. Gaines deserves to be memorialized on campus. Although he may not have directly had a grand contribution to this school, he was nonetheless a powerful leader among all citizens of Texas. In 1997, the student body felt it necessary to commemorate Lt. Gen. James F. Hollingsworth because of his military accomplishments. Why is it so hard for the Aggie community to accept a commemoration of Matthew Gaines for his political accomplishments?

Lauren Christina Garza
Class of 2006

Ticket prices too high

In response to the April 16 front page article:

I am a dedicated Ag, Class of 1974. For those of you have not heard, football ticket prices for next fall have gone up a bunch. The game with T.U. will be \$75.00 per ticket and a season ticket is now \$375.00. I am still proud to be an Aggie, but I am not proud of squeezing out a bunch of great fans who can no longer afford or justify the price of a ticket. I am told that our prices are the highest in the Big 12—not much of an honor.

President Robert M. Gates, Board of Regents, will somebody reign in the "new" athletic department before it gets any worse? None of us needs to hear about the cost of running the program, since it has gone from high to ridiculous. One more thing—have you heard about the economy?

David Stasny
Class of 1974

PETA fights the wrong way

(U-WIRE) COLUMBUS, Ohio -- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is a group that is becoming more and more visible in our society. Clever marketing campaigns have helped the group to succeed in spreading their message across the country. In short, PETA thinks humans should just leave animals alone. They fight for animal rights and try to convince people to become vegetarians.

Don't get me wrong, I'll be the first to agree that a majority of the animals raised to be eaten are mistreated. But that's not going to stop me from eating them.

One of PETA's recent moves launched a worldwide campaign against KFC. PETA argues the chickens raised for KFC are given no rights. They live in spaces the size of a piece of paper, are mishandled by workers and are routinely still alive when their throats are cut. Yes, this does sound bad, but accusations alone are not enough to keep the Colonel from whipping up his secret recipes.

Instead of blasting KFC for their malicious ways, why not sit down and talk to them about ways to make it better? In their

minds, PETA members have to know they will never be able to drive KFC out of business, so why not do something productive with their time?

In another campaign, PETA let us all know that Jesus was a vegetarian. I don't know for sure, but I doubt that PETA as an organization was around 2,000 years ago. So just like anyone else could do, they are interpreting the Bible in a way they see fit to benefit themselves. Personally, I think Jesus liked his seafood. All of his buddies were fishermen at one point, and let's not forget about the second-most talked-about miracle in the Bible: the multiplication miracle. Jesus thought he had something that tasted so good he just had to share it with everyone else, so he turned two fish into 5,000 just so his friends could discover the same love for flounder.

One last example of a PETA campaign is of the organization trying to do the unthinkable: Getting the Green Bay Packers to change their name.

Apparently, the name "Packers" refers to people who work in slaughterhouses, whose job it is to kill animals. Could you

imagine Vince Lombardi coming into the locker room before a game and telling his team, "Sorry men, PETA's here. We've gotta change our name. We're no longer the Green Bay Packers. From now on we're just gonna be the Green Bay Beans."

I don't think so. All joking aside, PETA does have some good points. The treatment of animals can stand to improve drastically, but they're pushing their cause at the wrong angle.

Everyone who eats animals knows the animals were killed before they appeared on a plate. But just because PETA can convince someone that the animals were terrorized before they were killed will not keep anyone from eating them.

Come up with a plan to minimize terrorism, and go from there.

Maybe PETA is right and I'm wrong. But until the new "Lion King" movie comes out and Simba is wearing a PETA necklace, I won't hold my breath.

Erik Bussa is a columnist at Ohio State University.