

(left) Aggie Rings are checked twice before boxing and shipping. (right) The gold is poured into an "Aggie Ring tree," which later gets separated into individual rings.

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VIEWS



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A poster with personal notes and photos served as a surprise high school graduation gift.

FROM FACTORY TO FINGER

Hard work goes into earning Aggie Rings — and making them, too



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When I came to Texas A&M three years ago, I didn't realize how special the Texas A&M Aggie Ring was. Raised in a Longhorn household — pause for appropriate hissing — I didn't really get what was so special about the ring until my own Ring Day drew closer and closer.

Now, three years later, the day of getting my own Aggie Ring has come, and I understand it. As I itch to have mine on my finger, I get why it's a big deal. But, like, many other Ags, I didn't understand the process that little piece of gold had to go through before getting on my hand and on the hands of the other 4,900 Aggies getting their rings Friday.

Last year I had the great pleasure to go to the factory where Aggie Rings are made and

see the process from start to finish. Starting from nothing more than a molding of hot wax, the Aggie Ring goes through hours of heating, cooling, sanding, shining, polishing, antiquing, washing, pebbling and engraving (and half the time, set with a diamond).

The process from Aggie Ring-tree to boxing and shipping can take two to three days of excruciating detail. Every single crevice is shined and polished. The ring is made to be just the right thickness, to be sturdy but not sharp. It is inspected twice before shipping.

Seeing the men and women who have, on average, spent two decades making Aggie Rings, seeing the care each ring is given as it is hand crafted, gave me a completely new perspective on how special the Aggie Ring is, not only to those who wear it but to those who forge it.

Their hands show the wear and tear of their hard work, many of them working without gloves or only with a small leather finger protector. Those who work with the

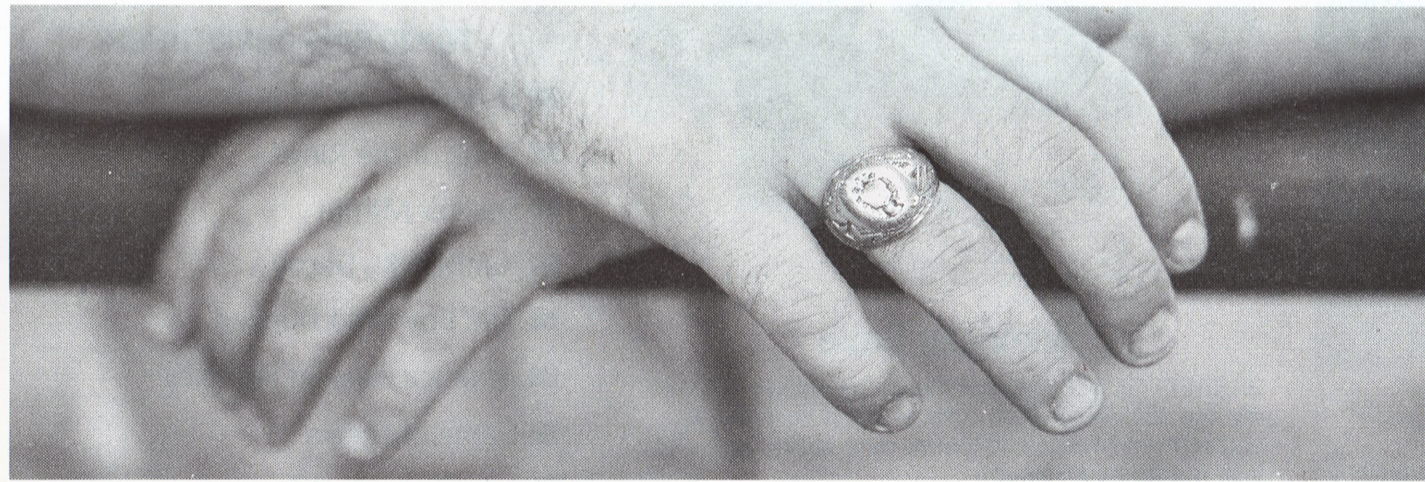
hot gold are often up at 5 a.m. to begin the process.

Just as no two Aggies are the same, neither are any two rings, as each undergoes hand "pebbling," the act of adding the small indents at the bottom of the ring. Other instances of close hand crafting further makes each ring unique.

The workers were so thrilled to meet us, too. They took pride in their work, and said they looked forward to seeing Aggie Rings around outside of the factory.

At the end of the four-hour trip, I not only felt honored to get to one day wear the Aggie Ring because it was a symbol of this beloved university, but because it is a symbol of the passion that goes into hard work of all kind. And Friday, at 7:45 p.m., I get to forever have that reminder on my right hand.

Lindsey Gawlik is a telecommunication and media studies junior and news editor for The Battalion.



One ring, generations of history

By Trey Reeves

Behind each Aggie Ring is a story, one that tells of the long and difficult road the wearer traveled to achieve the golden symbol of success for their time as a student at Texas A&M.

For some, that story transcends themselves, as the rings they wear so proudly were passed down from Aggies of years gone by.

For Glenn Hudson III, Class of 1985, it was important to continue the legacy of his father, Glenn Hudson Jr., Class of 1943. Plus, it saved some money.

"Basically we were just being cheap, to be honest. It was less money we had to spend to get a college education, and my dad wasn't wearing his ring anymore," Hudson III said. "We melted down the ring, and it has Class of '85 on it. And then on the inside it says Glenn Hudson Jr. Class of '43 and Glenn Hudson III Class of '85."

Hudson Jr. was older than many of the parents of his son's classmates. Being a young, able-bodied man in the early 1940s, he was called into service in Japan to serve on the front lines during World War II.

"If you were due to graduate in May of 1943, they graduated you early, in December of 1942, because they needed people with some sort of military background," Hudson III said. "He went home to San Antonio, and then that night the military called him and told him to be at the train station the next morning."

Hudson III said the ring he now wears was probably responsible for keeping his father safe, and therefore able to start a family once he returned home. On his first day in the country, a general spotted Hudson Jr.'s Aggie Ring, which sparked a conversation.

"An older guy asked him, 'Son, are you from Texas?' when he looked down and saw

the ring," Hudson III said. "It turns out it was a general. He told him that he was changing his orders and that he needed him to be a general's aide. He was in Japan for six years and was never shot at. Who knows what would have otherwise happened to him."

Agricultural science junior Garrett Hancock also continued a family legacy by wearing a ring that belonged to his great-grandfather, Frank Foster, Class of 1953, who died during Hancock's senior year of high school.

Hancock said Foster gave him the ring upon hearing his decision to attend A&M and join the Corps of Cadets, and that Foster had been instructed by his cousin to keep passing the ring down to members of their family.

"My family and I were visiting for the weekend and I wanted to tell him my decision because he was a Class of '53," Hancock said. "He went to his room and brought back a box and preceded to tell me a story of his cousin, Ralph G. Griffin '46, and how he had been given this ring to pass down to a Foster. Because of my commitment to the organization that had shaped my great-grandfather and many other Foster's alike, he wanted me to have the ring and carry on the Foster tradition."

The ring Hancock has worn proudly since completing his 90th hour last semester now serves as a reminder of those in his family that came before him, and what he has accomplished during his time at A&M so far.

"Ever since that day I have held on to the ring as a reminder of what I started and a token of my gratitude for my family," Hancock said. "This journey has been the best time of my life, but when I see my ring on my finger I know that it is only the beginning. From '46



Photos by Ali Bradshaw — THE BATTALION

Ag science junior **Garrett Hancock** wears a ring that belonged to his great-grandfather, Frank Foster, Class of 1953.

to '16 a lot has happened and from '16 on I know the best is yet to come."

While the link to his family's past is clear, Hancock said the link he feels to his larger Aggie family is still just as prevalent.

"I am very joyous of my accomplishments at A&M and I feel that this ring is a symbol of those accomplishments and those before and after me," Hancock said. "This ring holds special value to me, yes, but it is a symbol that all Aggies one day share. My ring is just as special as any other ring that is worn by the Aggie family. It's our connection to each other."

'This ring is for you'

Ring Day cements my family's pursuit of happiness



John Rangel
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Today I graduate. Not with a diploma, but with a Texas A&M Class of 2016 Ring. Three semesters remain, but the only verification anyone asks for when they hear you are an Aggie will finally rest on my finger at 12:30 p.m. Friday.

More important than the ring, however, will be the people who present it to me. My mom and dad, sisters and brother have all taken the day off from work. They will drive with my aunt from San Antonio Friday morning, and they'll finally get to see how I spend the better half of the year. Maybe they'll even pick up *The Battalion*.

I grew up in a family perfect because of its drawbacks. Day trips to the beach or to the river saw all six of us crammed into a single car; Sundays were spent sweating through church before large family lunches at my grandma's house. My parent's generation worked hard for what they had, and my generation was pulled struggling into this work ethic. Weeknights were spent in front of textbooks, on a sports field or at a piano bench. Weekends were filled with home repair jobs or beneath the hood of a car.

This adolescence of activity was dictated by a constant mantra: "You will go to college, you will get an advanced degree and you will do what is necessary to make it all happen." Never mind the uncertain finances and the possibility of debt. It was an unquestionable mandate. Academics and discipline were instilled in me from a young age, but it wasn't until college that I realized why.

I am the completion of my family's American Dream. My great-grandparents fled north to escape the Mexican Civil War, and created a new home in South Texas. My grandma tells me stories of how she took care of her siblings and helped her parents keep the family afloat in their new country; she dropped out of grade school and never learned how to read. She had six children who scattered across San Antonio to become teachers, join the military and start families on their own.

One of her sons joined the Marine Corps straight out of high school. He traveled the world and wooed a San Antonio girl with letters and weekend visits. They married and worked full time, sometimes at multiple jobs, to provide their four children with every opportunity possible.

One of those children looked up at the night sky one evening, and wondered what could possibly be there. His parents didn't have the answer, but they told him if he worked hard, one day he might go there and find out.

A decade or so later, I am on my way. It amazes me to think that my grandmother never had the chance to read, yet I now study engineering at one of the best universities in the world. The ring I will wear is not just mine. I am only the current chapter in my family's American story, and I am incredibly blessed that so many people worked hard before me to make it possible. No success is possible without sacrifice, and no sacrifice is worth it without family.

Thank you Mom, Dad, Rebecca, Sarah and Michael. I love you. This ring is for you.

John Rangel is an aerospace engineering junior and *SciTech* editor for *The Battalion*.