

A Special Aggie Ring Comes Home

by Jerry C. Cooper '63

"I have come a long way to honor a brave son of this country and graduate of this university — a man who brought honor to his nation, to his fellow countrymen, to his school and to his name."

With these words German Army Lt. Obit Volker Lossner returned the Aggie Ring of World War II Medal of Honor winner Lt. Turney W. Leonard '42 to his family on November 11, Veterans Day.

Lt. Lossner handed the ring to Douglas Leonard, his brother's only living sibling, who represented some 30 family members present. Holding the ring high, the elder Leonard stated, "This will not leave A&M College." He then asked his nephew, Tyree Bell Leonard '65 to come forward with his father's Medal of Honor and present it to "Dr. Bowen and this college, to be kept here."

With a nod toward Lt. Lossner, Douglas Leonard said, "We thank you all that this ring and this Medal of Honor is returned to this college. A great man lost his life in the war, fighting for what he thought was right and for God. God bless you."

Lt. Lossner's 71-year-old father-in-law found the ring after American soldiers reclaimed war dead more than 50 years ago. He recently recalled finding the ring while talking to his son-in-law about the battle. A few days later, he showed him the ring. "Because, like him, I am also a soldier," Lt. Lossner said, "I wanted to learn something about the person who wore this ring...My greatest wish would be to return this ring to him in person, but that, unfortunately, is not possible and this makes me sad...."



"That war caused a deep divide between our people though its pain and suffering that many people still feel," Lt. Lossner told those assembled in A&M's Sanders Corps Center. He said his grandfather "died during the same battle in the Huertgen Forest" and "lies some-

"Our two nations have, since 1945, been able to fill that divide—space by space. The return of this ring should serve as another of those spaces which close this chasm."

"Turney Leonard was one of many who came to liberate my country. And my country has used the change given by his death and those of his comrades to once again become a free and democratic state within this community of nations. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Turney White Leonard and his fellow Americans for which I simply say, 'Danke schön.'"

Lossner and his father-in-law agreed they wanted to return the ring. So, he contacted U.S. Col. Thomas C. Fosnacht, a liaison to the German Army office in Cologne. Failing to find Leonard's name in the Luxembourg military cemetery records, they were prepared to contact the national records center or Texas A&M.

Fosnacht recalled someone suggesting they try the internet. "So, I said, 'Well, put your hometown (Kommerscheidt) in here.' He did and clicked on it."

"I was holding the ring at the time and on the third line—I look at it and here's the guy's name. I clicked on it and up comes the Texas Honor Roll of Heros



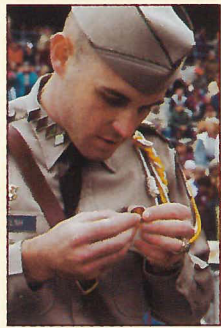
Douglas Leonard raises his brother's Aggie Ring after receiving it from Lt. Obit Lossner, right.

where in a nameless grave. My grandmother who is 86 years old has been searching for him ever since...for 56 years now.

CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR

and there's a picture of his tombstone in Dallas with the Medal of Honor. I turned to Lt. Lossner and said, 'I'm speechless. This is the (his emphasis) Medal of Honor winner's ring from the battle for the Huertgen Forest.' We were able to pull up the citation and we were just... just...what do you say?"

"It was clear for us to take the ring back to the university," Lt. Lossner said. Col. Fossnacht contacted Texas A&M and learned there were family



Corps Commander Mark Welsh '01 examines Leonard's ring during pre-game ceremonies at Kyle Field.

members still alive. Texas A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen '58 invited them to come to campus a week later for Veteran's Day and arranged for the Leonard family to be present. Fortunately, Lt. Lossner had just completed teaching an NCO course at the German Army Maintenance School and was on leave.

Col. Fossnacht mentioned the ring to Gen. Trent Thomas (USA-ret.) while attending the Association of the U.S. Army convention in Washington, and Thomas

called Texas A&M. By the time Fossnacht got back to Germany, he already had two e-mails from President Bowen and a recording on his answering machine. "I knew right away that there would be high interest in this ring as well as giving it a place of honor," he recalled. "I knew that even if it was a normal graduate that they would treat this as something special."

"The fortunate thing is that you have an officer and a gentleman as honorable as Lt. Lossner because that ring could bring several thousand marks or dollars to collectors and it was his own personal desire to return it to the family and bring it back to the United States."



Photos by Jean Wulfson

Turney W. Leonard's photos and belongings are prominently displayed in front of a bas relief image of him in the Sanders Corps Center.

First Lieutenant Turney W. Leonard, Company C, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. Lieutenant Leonard displayed extraordinary heroism while commanding a platoon of mobile weapons at Komerscheidt, Germany, on 4, 5 and 6 November 1944. During the fierce 3-day engagement, he repeatedly braved overwhelming fire in advance of his platoon to direct the fire of his tank destroyers from exposed, dis-



1st Lt. Turney W. Leonard '42 won the Medal of Honor (seen above) just prior to the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

mounted positions. He went on lone reconnaissance missions to discover what opposition his men faced, and on one occasion, when fired upon by a hostile machine gun, advanced alone and eliminated the enemy emplacement with a hand grenade. When a strong German attack threatened to overrun friendly positions, he moved through withering artillery, mortar, and small-arms fire, reorganized confused infantry units whose leaders had become casualties, and exhorted them to hold firm. Although wounded early in battle, he



Texas A&M President Dr. Ray M. Bowen '58 accepts the Medal of Honor presented to the family of Turney W. Leonard '42 from Douglas Leonard, right.

continued to direct fire from his advanced position until he was disabled by a high-explosive shell which shattered his arm, forcing him to withdraw. He was last seen at a medical aid station which was subsequently captured by the enemy. By his superb courage, inspiring leadership, and indomitable fighting spirit, Lieutenant Leonard enabled our forces to hold off the enemy attack and was personally responsible for the direction of fire which destroyed six German tanks.