

MUSTER REFLECTIONS ACROSS 3 CONTINENTS

By Matt Josefy '04

Editor's Note:

Matt Josefy '04 is a Class Agent and former student body president who returned to Texas in 2010 after nearly six years abroad. He is now a lecturer in the Department of Accounting at the Mays Business School. He wrote this essay last year about his diverse experiences at Muster events around the world.



While the Muster ceremony on main campus (top) is a solemn and reverential event, the hundreds of local Muster events that take place around the world each April, such as the 2010 Hong Kong Muster pictured above, are more akin to family reunions: "Respects are paid and tears are often shed, but at the heart of the day is the celebration of life and community," says Matt Josefy '04 (back row, second from left in the Hong Kong photo).

It makes me feel special to know that one day, somewhere in the world, an Aggie will read my name and everyone gathered will answer here. We honor every student that attends here; that's why Muster is my favorite tradition."

While several students explained their favorite traditions to a roomful of the best and the brightest of Texas high schools in the Wehner Building last spring, I found myself drifting back through my own Muster experiences spanning three continents in less than a decade—from the vantage point of the stage at Reed Arena, to the grassy knolls of Hyde Park in London, from a restaurant in Kowloon, Hong Kong, and now back in College Station, where the classmates of my grandfather Col.

Glenn Jones '61 celebrated their 50th Reunion last year.

It was in his honor that I attended my first Muster in G. Rollie White, where we as a family were honored with the opportunity to share our grief with the extended Aggie family. While I don't remember many specifics of that night, I will always remember the magnitude of thousands signifying their love and support.

In my grandfather's absence, I escorted my grandmother Barbara Jones Cox this year and obtained a unique preview of the bonds between classmates that grow deeper with age. These gentlemen were ecstatic to see her and treated her like family, bestowing me with the highest compliment: "You look just like your grandfather."

Their weary backs straightened as the Ross Volunteers saluted them entering the tunnel under Reed Arena. On the floor, the unison of their bellowing voices resonated through my body, bringing goosebumps with each call of '61 as well as many of the names from neighboring years.

It's certainly still true that nowhere is the hallowed Muster observance more powerful than right here in College Station at Reed Arena, where the silence of over 13,000 is truly deafening. In recent years, the intermittent flashes of hundreds of phones prematurely break the darkness in anticipation of the bursts of the 21-gun salute. As student body president, I spoke to scores of audiences and was quite comfortable in front of a crowd, but standing in front of the

on-campus Muster in 2004 was one of the most humbling and overpowering feelings I have ever experienced.

That same year, I participated via teleconference in the first Muster for our new branch campus in Doha, Qatar. After the brief ceremony, in which they read the names from Silver Taps and the three Aggie soldiers who were killed that year, one Qatari student said, "I am glad today to know and see that when I pass away that people all over the world will remember me, people from different countries, who even speak different languages and have a different religion." What a powerful connection in an often closed region of the world!

Following graduation, I was shocked to discover that if the on-campus ceremony is a somber remembrance with the reverence of a funeral, the bulk of Aggie Musters around the world are more akin to a family reunion when someone is absent for the first time. Respects are paid and tears are often shed, but at the heart of the day is the celebration of life and community.

My wife and I had only been in London for a few months when the first Muster invitation was circulated. We eagerly looked forward to seeing some familiar faces and, perhaps more important, having access to a recently imported stash of Velveeta and Rotel.

The uncertainty of inclement weather makes Muster in London an unpredictable affair, but it almost always starts out in Hyde Park. First-timers to the ceremony always look a bit tepid when we line up to do the War Hymn, but gain their confidence as the swaying begins. Everyone in the park begins to turn and look at an assorted bunch of Texas Aggies who have graced the upscale public lawns.

You can almost hear them whisper: "Mummy, why do you suppose they think they can sing?"

While we never received any invitations for subsequent chorale performances, people usually would linger closer to try to ascertain the meaning of the symbols on our maroon flag, partnered with the great banner of our state.

Perhaps it was just our perception, but they seemed to scoot a bit further away when we pulled out the candles and in turn completed the familiar chants of the annual readings. From the outside looking in ...

When the rain clouds approach, it's a mad scramble to grab up the blankets, the Frisbees and the food. We dash to a nearby apartment (usually thanks to Rachel Weikel '96), and it's only moments before the dominoes are being shook on the table for the first hand of 42. Perhaps the most important advantage of having moved inside is access to the microwave to reheat the queso.

We ended up observing Muster five times in London, and while there was a transient crowd, there were also the regulars we longed to see again to reminiscence of the times we all shared at our alma mater. Being the good Ags we were, we of course pointed out all of the flaws in the current decisions and discussed how much better things were in Old Army days.

In April 2010, we were relatively new residents of Hong Kong but eagerly counted down the days until Muster. We were jubilant with our small crowd of six or seven, which spanned in age from 20 to 65. Almost none of us had met before, but there was not a stranger in the bunch. There was a couple of current students overseas on an exchange program, a traveler, an engineer who'd married a Chinese woman, a banker on overseas assignment, and a former professor. We even welcomed a converted Iowan into our midst, mostly to man the camera, of course!

We convened our Muster in a dark Italian restaurant, doing the readings of the ceremony over the din of whatever indistinguishable '80s music was playing. We would have gotten stares, I'm sure, if the restaurant hadn't been so deserted. We then progressed to another integral part—taking our picture for *Texas Aggie* magazine. The organizer pulled out a full tripod and we lined up against the rail, looking back toward Hong Kong island. A Star Ferry passed through the background. Young Chinese couples walked past us down the promenade, returning to

their apartments on the 30th or 40th floor, but never the 38th or 48th because of the unlucky association.

After at least six or seven takes, we walked together back to take the light rail public transportation home.

While all of us have our particular Muster memories, undoubtedly the most discussed Muster was on the island of Corregidor, and so before moving home, I was compelled to venture out to the little tadpole land mass just across the bay from Manila, Philippines. We took a trolley tour, led by an alleged descendant of General MacArthur himself, eventually reaching Malinta Tunnel, a remaining symbol of the bravery of the soldiers who defended the island long enough for the Allies to regroup and eventually retake the Pacific. Where the shadow ends and the light begins to shine through at the end of the tunnel, a simple unadorned picture is hung. Most people probably never notice it, but it's a picture of that renowned gathering in 1946, when Aggies returned to the island to commemorate the brave souls from the 1942 Muster. The tradition kept by so many brave men over 70 years ago continues today.

As the Aggie family gets larger with each incoming class, it's more important than ever that we continue to Muster together.

More than anything, Musters everywhere are a reminder that our time is limited and uncertain. It is our privilege to love and be loved, to give selflessly and receive graciously, to sacrifice readily and thank regularly, to dream recklessly and reason deeply, to live with abandon and be the best that we can be. There is much that is more important than self and life is fuller and deeper when we recognize that fact. We truly are part of a larger family around the world—a family that both reunites and remembers.

The roll call is just a beginning. For just as we have honored our fallen comrades in their deaths, we must also pass on their legacy of service in the way that we live our lives.