

# BORN TO BE AN AGGIE, BECOMES BEEF INDUSTRY ICON

BY CALLIE WHITWORTH

Being an Aggie has impacted all 89 years of a man's life, from war to ranching to becoming a top teacher at Texas A&M University.

Frank C. Litterst Jr. was born to be an Aggie; he had little chance of being anything else. His father, Frank C. Litterst Sr., was the starting quarterback at A&M. Frank Sr. graduated in 1919 and later carried Frank Jr. to Aggie football games beginning at the age of five.

Litterst was studying animal husbandry at Texas A&M University when the United States became involved in World War II. During that time every student at Texas A&M University was a member of the Corp of Cadets. Litterst would later be awarded as captain of "A" Battery.

As a result of the war, Litterst and the rest of the class of 1943 took summer school classes to graduate a semester early.

"I was commissioned in the U.S Army May 6, 1943, and got married two days later," said Litterst.

Litterst was an army officer and was shipped to the Pacific. The ship encountered a cyclone when Litterst was sleeping on a cot, and was thrown back and forth across the deck. After being drenched, he found a friend and fellow Aggie and crawled into the tiny bed to escape the weather, said Litterst.

On a mission in the mountains of New Guinea to search for Japanese soldiers, Litterst suffered an injury to his left leg and was shipped back to the states.

"When we got back to the

states we had our first big meal on a big large table. The table had fried chicken piled higher than you could look over and also lettuce, tomatoes and milk. All I had eaten in New Guinea was powdered food and spam. I lost 32 pounds," said Litterst.

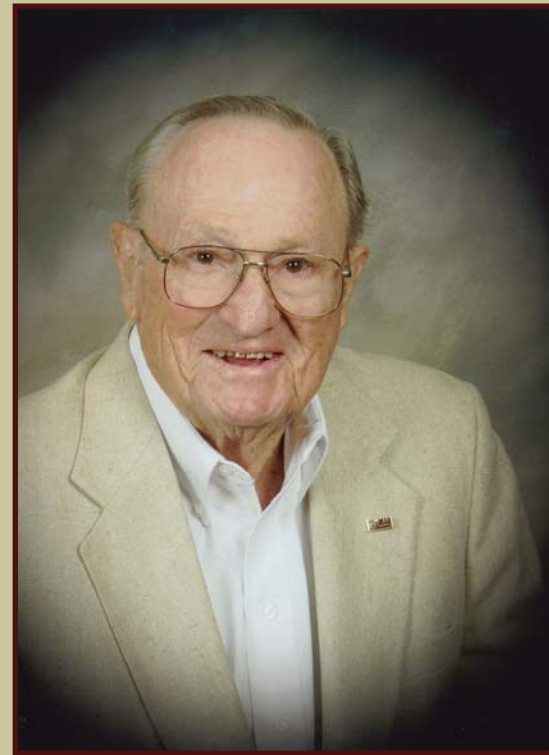
Litterst said that a good meal in New Guinea was when they received beef heart from Australia.

At the Hammond General Hospital in Modesto, Calif., Litterst went to his ward to find only one person, a fellow Aggie. Litterst asked Aggie O.D. Butler, later head of the Texas A&M Department of Animal Science, where his bunk was, to find that he was bunked right next to his classmate and friend, Jake Webster. Litterst and Webster continued correspondence during the war between their stations in Germany and New Guinea.

"Jake wrote to me and said he had been shot in the arm in General Patton's Third Army and said he was coming home. I wrote back and said I'm coming home too, wouldn't it be neat to be in the same hospital," said Litterst. "Of all the hospitals, I ended up right next to him."

After the war, Litterst worked in feed sales and ranching. Litterst said he didn't have enough money to get into the cattle business until Herman Heep helped him by cosigning a note to buy cattle.

"I still have the bank note



with his name on it in my safe," said Litterst.

Litterst's father and Heep attended Texas A&M together. Heep would sleep in my father's room to be protected from upperclassman because Heep was a little man and my father was on the football team, said Litterst.

In 1966, Litterst became the beef cattle specialist for Texas A&M's Texas Education Agency, where he educated more than 12,000 ranchers and visited some 2,400 Texas ranches in 10 years with the Agriculture Education Specialist's Group, said Litterst.

"During those days, our ag ed specialists would leave campus on Monday and go to the weeklong training set up by the FFA teachers in the community where the high school

## Retired Faculty Focus

★Frank C. Litterst Jr.★



Left, T.D. Tanksley, Jr., Gene King, Frank Litterst, James Bassett and Harold Franke, all retirees of the Department of Animal Science.



Class of '43 Aggies Cecil Carlisle (center) and Frank Litterst (right) with friend at Camp Davis, North Carolina.

was located. Mr. Litterst would teach the ranchers at the school every night and return home Friday. But during the day he would visit as many ranches as the teachers and county agents could cram in a day before the night's class," said Dr. Larry Boleman, who worked with Litterst at the time.

"He traveled across Texas teaching short courses. I never walked away without a clearer understanding about the production of food and fiber. He would take what was normally a dry subject and put in words regular folks could understand," said Richard Winters Jr., son of Litterst's lifelong friend and classmate, Richard Winters Sr.

Litterst was recruited by Animal Science department head Dr. O. D. Butler and became a lecturer at A&M in 1975; he taught three courses and managed the TAMU Beef Center. Between working cattle and teaching students, he changed clothes up to four times a day, said Litterst.

Boleman said that Litterst was the best TAMU Beef Center teacher ever because he had so much firsthand experience teaching for those 10 years on the road with ranchers and in the high school classrooms. He could

relate to the students in practical application terms with a "how to" approach rather than a textbook theory.

"I remember Dr. O. D. Butler being so proud that he was able to take Mr. Litterst off the road and put him in the classroom where he belonged," said Boleman.

"I wasn't academically qualified to be a professor at A&M because I only had my bachelor's degree. My first office was a tiny room that I shared with grad students, that's how I rated," said Litterst.

Litterst said fellow Animal Science professor, Howard Hesby, taught him how to keep a grade book.

"After the first quiz, I rushed down to Houston for the steer show. My secretary called and said grades had to be submitted and she can't find my grade book anywhere. I said it's in my pickup truck at Houston. So I told her to give all the girls As and all the boys Bs," said Litterst. "I was more of a cowman than I was a professor."

Litterst taught for 14 years and had 8,000 students. He has received many awards including Texas A&M's Distinguished Alumnus Award in 2009.

"Mr. Litterst is an icon in Texas beef cattle education and is still revered and known all over the state. Whenever I would go out in the state conducting Extension Beef Cattle training programs, someone would come up afterwards and ask about Mr. Litterst. The ranchers and his students were and still are so fond of him and his teachings," said Boleman.

"Frank Litterst is the Department of Animal Science and he is Texas A&M University. He has influenced so many lives over the years and continues to do so. Frank is a treasure to us and we are so fortunate to have him as part of our "family," said Dr. H. Russell Cross, professor and interim head of the Department of Animal Science.

Litterst still attends Aggie athletics and has never missed a Saddle & Sirloin Club banquet, where he gives scholarships to Animal Science students each year. He even spoke at the Gonzales Aggie Club to a packed room of ranchers and former students for Aggie Muster.

"I love the Department. I think it's the best in the United States," said Litterst. ■