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Videos of A&M Movie Being Made Available

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Anyone who has been around Texas A&M or Aggies for any time at all has likely heard of "We've Never Been Licked," a 1943 movie centered on Aggieland, its military heritage and its traditions.

For a number of years, in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and even into the '80s, the movie was broadcast by Texas television stations, usually the night before the annual Thanksgiving Day football game against the Texas Longhorns. Then it seemed to disappear, except for twice yearly showings on campus by the Memorial Student Center Travel Committee and, more recently, the MSC Jordan Institute for International Awareness.

The perennial question has been "Where can I buy a videotape of 'We've Never Been Licked?'"

Until recently the answer had to be "You can't. It isn't available." But, that's no longer true. Thanks to the perseverance of Tom E. Wisdom '60 of Houston, executive vice president of VCA Teletronics, Inc., video cassettes of the legendary movie are being prepared for home video sales.

Three years ago The Texas Aggie received a number of inquiries about "We've Never Been Licked." I responded by getting in touch with Memorial Student Center advisors who worked with the groups handling the campus showings. MSC Program Director Paul Henry sent me copies of correspondence in which the Class of '88 had sought to gain ownership of the film rights with the intention of presenting the movie to the university and making video cassette copies available.

They learned the rights had been sold to KingWorld Productions (Oprah Winfrey, Wheel of Fortune, etc.). Further pursuit of ownership in 1988 again proved fruitless and a new \$2000 four-year contract was negotiated for campus screenings.

There the matter seemed to end. But efforts to find a way to make video cassettes available for sale to Aggies continued. Learning of Tom Wisdom's background in video production, duplication, and distribution with VCA, I enlisted his help and gave him the address and phone number of KingWorld Productions.

For two years, he doggedly kept at it, in spite of being told that KingWorld "was not interested in selling" rights to the film. They did offer to sell him rights to 20 movies, including "We've Never Been Licked," but the cost was prohibitive.

Then in late 1989, Tom got together with Association of Former Students Field Director Porter S. Garner III '79 to produce video cassettes of Texas A&M's January 1940 Sugar

Bowl win over Tulane. He later sent complimentary copies to members of the 1939 National Championship football team or to their families. When Tom called me to share the response from the team and family members, we again discussed the movie and he told me it was time to "take a new run at King World."

This time KingWorld indicated some willingness to discuss the matter but then, in July of this year, Tom received (in his words) "a real shocker" from Jonathan Birkhahn, King World's vice president for legal and business affairs.

"He told me that KingWorld had broadcast and theatrical rights, but not home video distribution rights."

So it was back to square one.

As Tom tells it: "A trip back to Cooper's old files brought Leo Gutman, of Gutman&Gutman in New York, to the forefront. Leo had acquired "We've Never Been Licked" in the mid-70s along with six other films. He sold most of his library to KingWorld in 1984."

Tom interrupted Gutman's California vacation to tell him about Birkhahn's comment. Gutman laughed in surprise and said, if written permission from KingWorld could be obtained, he would help clear the way for videotape distribution.

"I'm happy to help you in every respect at no charge except for out-of-pocket expenses, i.e., copyright search, print or print-to-tape transfer...as my contribution to good old TEXAS A&M!" he stated in his letter.

In a three line letter, dated August 30, Birkhahn confirmed that KingWorld had no objection to Tom pursuing the video cassette project he had outlined.

Then on September 19, Gutman faxed Tom a message that the copyright search, along with the KingWorld letter, "puts you in the clear." Tom then proceeded to obtain a high quality one-inch videotape master.

"This was the day before the 30-year reunion of the Class of '60," Tom said. "So I called (Co-Class Agent) Don Chase. When I told him of my acquisition, he said let's meet and see if it could be a project for the Class of '60 to help the Corps and A&M."

The next morning Tom met with me and Association of Former Students Executive Director Randy Matson '67 to discuss possible ways to market the movie to the best benefit of A&M. Randy suggested the proposed Sam Sanders Corps Visitor Center project could use help and noted that the movie certainly has strong sentiment for the Corps.

At the reunion business meeting the next afternoon, the Class of '60 listened to Tom's presentation and the response prompted interest in adopting it as a class fund-raising

project. After Tom sat down, Bill Heye '60 Corps Commander during their senior year and currently heading up the Corps Development fund, spoke to the class about the funding needs for the Corps Visitor Center.

Class Agents Chase, Dick Damon and Don Draper were approached after the meeting by class members wanting to help with the project and urging them to follow it through. Chase said that any profits from the project will be used to help support the Corps Center and for scholarships.

Tom's next step was to arrange for videotape production as well as publicity and packaging design. I put him in touch with MovieArt, an Austin firm that distributes old movie posters and related materials. Through a partnership, Tom purchased a theater poster for use on the cassette sleeve and seven full-color lobby cards to be used in promotional materials.

Classmate Don Morris '60, controller of BWC Photolabs, offered his services in preparing the theater poster for sleeve reproduction. It is anticipated that the poster and lobby cards might be reprinted for sales on campus and elsewhere.

The video copies of "We've Never Been Licked" will be available in limited quantities in a collectors edition and a special release edition, Tom said.

"If this not-for-profit project does come off on schedule, lots of old grads can recall the Old Army days, and today's class of Aggies can get a taste of those old times," Tom noted at the end of September. "It should be a fun and rewarding project."

Editors Note: At the same time all this was coming together, I received a letter from Hank Avery '44 containing photographs of the funeral of Reveille I in 1944. When I called him, we got to talking about Tom Wisdom's project and Avery sent me nine original glossy photographs used by Universal Pictures in the promotion of "We've Never Been Licked." He has allowed us to reproduce copies for the Texas Aggie files and for the Texas A&M University Archives.