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Squirrel Rifle Finds Its Way to Georgia Museum of Agriculture

TIFTON—When the United Parcel Service delivery person handed her the long box, Polly Huff couldn’t wait to open it. The curator of the Georgia Museum of Agriculture at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College admitted that with a thousand chances, she would never have guessed the contents.

When Huff unwrapped the paper around the object, she found a very rare artifact, an 1898 Winchester squirrel rifle in mint condition.
“The rifle was quite a surprise,” Huff said. “And the story that went along with the rifle was really heartwarming.”

A letter enclosed with the rifle identified the owner as Roy Dean Wehunt, a farm boy born in 1925 in Cherokee County. Tucked inside the letter was a faded photograph of Wehunt and a poem he wrote in 1943.

“The picture was of Private First Class Roy Dean Wehunt in his uniform,” Huff said. “The poem was very touching because it described the change taking place in his life from that of a simple Georgia farm boy to a soldier.”

Wehunt served under General George Patton in the Third Army Division, 15th Infantry Regiment, Company A, during World War II. Wehunt served his country all over Europe through the end of the war. By May of 1945, the 15th Regiment had 16 recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor including Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier in U.S. Army history.

A member of the so-called “Greatest Generation,” Wehunt survived the war, returned to Georgia, and married Helen Ruth Adams of Fannin County who made her home in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains.

The story soon took a sad turn because Wehunt was killed in an automobile accident in 1947 while delivering newspapers for The Atlanta Journal.

Wehunt’s son, Stephen, eventually inherited the beloved rifle. Stephen Wehunt married Laveta Margret Waters, who graduated from ABAC in 1969. They now live in Fayetteville and decided to donate the rifle, the photo, and the poem to the Georgia Museum of Agriculture.
“My dad was a simple farm boy, and he loved farming,” Stephen wrote in the letter which accompanied the rifle. “I am sure if he had gone to college, he would have chosen ABAC.”

Huff said that thanks to a generous donation from the Wehunt family, the Museum will be able to display the rifle along with a plaque which will include Roy Wehunt’s photo, his poem, and the story of his life. The display will open in early September.

For more information about the exhibit, interested persons can contact Huff at phuff@abac.edu.

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