

# Augusta Military Academy

## Oral History

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### Bygone Years at AMA, 1929 - 1934

I arrived at AMA in the Fall of 1929 to start a new life – of Military Supervision. I was greeted by (the then) **Major Charles S. Roller, Jr.** and given all the particulars and history of the school.

I registered in and was assigned my room and met my roommate, who was also from New Jersey (we were later designated as Damn Yankees). Later we were assigned to 'A' Company.

All the new men were introduced to the Rat System, which was then very prevalent. We were told and shown just how and where we were to walk in the Barracks, any time that we left our rooms and this was strictly enforced during the whole first year.

After a couple of years, I started doing what I could to try and soften this usage, as some cadets took advantage of the system for hazing.

The only real problem was the cadets from their second year up: they would enter our room and immediate attention was required, or else! You quickly learned about seniority. I can also tell you that brooms were hard as well as swords, especially in the prone position.

A few cadets dropped out of AMA due to this Rat System, although the school still maintained a cadet corps of over 400.

It was hard to get accustomed to the fact that Monday was our day off and not Saturday, which you might expect. This was so that we would not coincide with the cadets from Staunton Military Academy, who had Saturday free, and thus avoid clashes between the two groups.

Yes, there were Walking penalties, the length of each depending on the seriousness of the infraction. Cleaning rifles and brass was a never-ending occupation. Studies were mostly after the Dinner Hour, with a two-hour silent period.

**Colonel Roller**, the other brother, was in charge of the scholastic part of the school. He took care of all the studies and did most of the hiring of teachers.

On Sunday morning we marched to the Old Stone Church, then had lunch, time off and the big Retreat – Full Dress and Marching parade

There were many instances of pranks being played -- some were very quiet, but one I recall disturbed the whole Corps, especially the Colonel: a black powder bomb was detonated in the Courtyard right at Retreat.

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## *Oral History*

No one was actually caught, although during the Finals that year, three cadets were very severely examined verbally by the Colonel, but no charges or withholding of Diplomas occurred and no one was asked not to return.

In my second or third year, there was the beginning of the Roosevelt March of Dimes campaign. The Major had the large athletic building set up for the Ball to be held in that part of the country. That was quite a gathering! The building was packed as were all the roads around the school. The next morning was the clincher -- all penalty cadets were designated as the cleanup crew -- a good two or three-day job.

Because we were a Gold Star Military School, we had a yearly Army Grading Team arrive, so we went through Field Problems, various close order exercises, and all the buildings, including the Mess Hall and kitchen, were inspected as were the Barracks. Promptness was the order of the day while they were there.

There was one thing which was very QT and that was that a small group of third or fourth year cadets, after 10 p.m. or the last bed inspection, would flag down a truck on the road and go to Harrisburg and have a soda or a cup of coffee and then hitch a ride back to school. As far as I know, no one was ever caught.

At our 1933 Final Ball we were blessed to have **Kay Keiser** as the orchestra, which at that time was one of the leading dance orchestras in the country and very popular on radio programs. **Howard Hively** from Cleveland, Ohio, was a close friend of Kay.

After graduating, Howard was a pilot with the 8th Air Force. Last I heard, he was a Major and was flying P-51s when wounded.

An important event for the school was when Charley, the Major's son, started the Cavalry Unit operation sometime in 1933, I believe it was. Many of the horses at that time came from Oliver Lyn's father's farm.

We taught cadets how to ride, how to jump horses blindfolded, and then taught them to shoot the 1911 pistols from a moving horse, even galloping. Luckily, we only had one mount run away with the rider.

The 1934 Graduation Parade included the Cavalry, with the Major, the Colonel and the Cadet Adjutant -- a very spectacular affair.

I have just given a very brief summary of some of my memories during my five years at AMA. Perhaps some of the younger alumni did not have the same experiences and possibly their reasons for attending the school were quite different than the older ones. Then, three wars changed everyone's outlook for many years.

I graduated as 2nd Captain and then received a commission four months after graduating.

I have never forgotten my time at AMA and I know that it played an important role in my life.