

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

Bill Harris, '48
July, 2001



My memory does not reach back every day but that first year 44-45 as I stood at parade rest every morning and looked at the sun come up over the Blue Ridge mountains, even at 13 I knew this was a special place.

I played JV football JV basketball and tried to keep my nose clean and stay out of trouble. I remember in the spring of 45 the day that President Roosevelt died - he was the only president I had ever known. No one in the barracks had ever heard of Truman.

One day on my small radio I heard parts of the Texas vs Texas A&M game (a 14 to 14 tie) and I heard about **Bobby Lane** and **Doak Walker**. They were my heroes along with **Joe Dimaggio** and **Bill Dickey** and the wartime NY Yankees.

I remember coming back to school after Easter and not having to brace and cut corners. Happy Days. All the boys smoked except me. **John Larus** from Richmond brought cartons of Chelsea cigarettes back to school every time he came back. My father smoked Chesterfields, so one day I wrote him and told him I was going to start smoking and to send me a carton of smokes. WISE MAN! He sent me a carton of the strongest on the market - PICAYUNE - they were dark brown slender from TURKEY.

I lit up and took one big drag and nearly died choking and then throwing up. I never ever tried a cig the rest of my life. I would go to baseball practice and watch **Freddy Oiler**, **Tip Eddy**, **Luther Sikes** and the rest of the team and wish I had been a baseball player instead of football. They seemed to be having to much fun . Even then football was hard work and not fun and so violent.

I remember one time **Coach Chapman** offered a \$5.00 reward to whoever made the first tackle against Greenbriar Military School. On the opening kickoff the receiver caught the ball, ran to his right, straight at me. I had no choice - I had to tackle him right in front of the AMA bench.

He did not try to dodge me, but lowered his head and we had a terrible collision. He was carried off on a stretcher and I was knocked out. Coach used smelling salts to wake me up. When I came to, I looked up and saw him and said, "Where's my \$5?" He said, "Get back in there Harris. Hit another one." I was the biggest boy on the team 6'1" and 210 pounds - huge for 1944.

Maj. Roller was very kind to me and gave me White Pages in department. Thanks to **Capt. Wasco** I was not hazed but stayed busy cleaning my old Enfield rifle, shining my boots and my

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brass and getting my room ready for Sunday white glove room inspection. My roomie Smitty and I became fast friends and life was good

Year One

On September 1, 1944 at age 13, my father, **Dr. Johnny Harris**, took me by train from New York City to Staunton. We stayed one night at the Stonewall Jackson hotel and the next a.m. we took a taxi out to AMA. We met **Major Roller** and enrolled me. I was unaware that my grandfather, **Will McGregor** had been Roller's roommate at VMI around 1900.

The taxi to go back to Staunton was still waiting and Dad left a few minutes later. I stood in the front arch and watched him circle the bowl, turn right out the front gate and disappear. His last words were "*Son, if it is too tough call me and I will come get you.*" Within 18 hours I was ready to call him.

I had tears in my eyes, but the Corporal of the guard took me up to my room on the back of the 3rd stoop and introduced me to Smith M.C., my roommate (real name **Major Clifford Smith**) from Maryland. Smitty took me down to the Uniform Room and taught me to brace, cut corners and I got on line to draw my uniform.

My experience as a new cadet had begun. Only 13, I was huge for my age - 5'11" and weighing in at 175 pounds with a 32-inch waist. While I was in line, an old cadet walked up to the front and asked for a brass belt buckle. I spoke out and said, "*The line starts here!*"

He jerked his head around and shouted, "*Who said that?*" I told him and in a mean and ominous voice he said, "*Harris, be in my room at 10pm tonight - #12 in the tower.*"

The other new cadets whispered to me that he was mean and he would whip me! Smitty told me I had to go and at 10 p.m. I cut corners and braced all the way to #12 in the 4th stoop tower. I was terrified of what was to come. I wore a new pair of pajamas, a new pair of soft slippers and a new bathrobe. I stood at attention in his room and there were 6 six other boys watching

He said, "*Take off your bathrobe, drop your pants and assume the position.*" He shouted, "*Grab your ankles! and grab the family jewels!*" I had been hand spanked and switched a few times in my life, but never like this or with an audience!

He gave me 10 hard licks with a steel paddle with holes drilled in it. I had never felt anything like it and tears came after the first lick. I did not make a sound. Blood blisters formed after about five and then they filled with blood and broke open on the last licks. Blood poured down the backs of

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my legs, soaked my new slippers and ruined my PJ bottoms.

I went back to my room and Smitty gasped and said, *“Come on, you are going to the nurse!”*

“No,” I said, *“I am afraid to go to the nurse! Clean me up! It might be worse for me if I tell on him!”*

I must confess that I carried a grudge against him for 50 years. I finally forgave him when he apologized to me after I saw his name on the AMA alumni E-mail list. He does not come to reunions. One year I was talking to another 1944 new cadet and he told me that he had done the same thing to him! A very sadistic bastard!

Because I was tall for my age, 13, I was placed in the first platoon of Co. **Joe Wasco** was the Captain. On the second day he came up to me in formation and said, *“Harris, come to my room, #5 3rd stoop tower, this afternoon about 5 p.m.”*

I dreaded going after what had happened the night before. I knocked and stood at rigid attention. He said, *“Come in and be at ease.”* He started asking me questions about where I lived and my family.

He said, *“Bill I want you to be my dyke.”* I looked blank and got scared until he explained what that was and told me that I was to come to his room every day, polish his shoes, make his bed, shine his brass and his saber and anything else he asked me to do.

He noticed some blood spots on my pants and demanded to see what had happened. I had to show him and he gasped and asked, *“Who did that?”* I refused to tell him and cried a little. He said, *“Bill as long as you are my dyke, no one will haze you again!!!”* I was his dyke until Easter of 1945 and was never hazed again.

He was very kind to me, appreciated how hard I worked to please him, we became good friends. He graduated that year and I never saw him again until he and his wife came to a reunion just before he died. I made a point of telling both him and his wife how much I had enjoyed working for and knowing him.

From graduation in 1945 until 1999 I never saw him. He was old and frail and seemed quite weak. I could not tell if he remembered me or not.

One night as I slept in my room on the back of the 3rd stoop with Smitty, (Smith, M.C. - Major Clifford), two old cadets appeared in my room with pillow cases. I sat up in bed thinking I was going to be hazed, and one cadet growled at me and said in a whisper, *“Lay down and go back to*

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sleep or I will whip your ass.”

I did as he said, but watched him pick up four pairs of black boots and stuff them in a laundry bag and take them out of the room. I did not know what was happening but I was so relieved about not getting whipped that I fell back to sleep.

The next morning I was amazed to see 900 pairs of black boots, all identical, tossed all over the courtside. The entire corps was in the courtyard on their hands and knees cursing and trying to find a pair that fit.

It was my first introduction to a cadet prank. It made a real impression on me, especially when I saw how mad Major Roller got. We were three hours late to school and did not get breakfast. While on the subject of breakfast, I never ate so many apples, huge platters of fried bacon and enormous stacks of pancakes in my life.

This planted the seed in my young, fertile mind that a cadet could play a trick on the school and how mad it made Major Roller. He would carry on in the guardhouse and in the mess hall and put on a show of temper that was very entertaining. All of this was salted away in my memory and came back to hound me in my next three years and that will be in a future installment.

More about Major Roller

When Winter weather changed into Spring of 1945, Major Roller would spend more time outside interacting with us new cadets. For example, he loved to pick me out - I guess because of my size - and challenge me to athletic events. For example, he would stand by the cannon and challenge me to arm wrestle or leg wrestle or even get down in the grass and stage mock fights with him.

I was 14 by then but had never wrestled a grown man. Invariably he would win and he would roar with laughter and then chide me about being beaten by an old man. All of this in such good humor and with a huge smile and loud laughter.

He obviously liked me or even loved me. Remember, my grandfather McGregor had been his roommate at VMI .

After Easter, when I became an old cadet, I began to really love the school. and to look forward to coming back next year.

One thing I failed to mention was intramural athletics. I played on A company's teams and loved it-basketball and baseball, swimming and tennis etc. The only sport I did not like was boxing

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and wrestling. **Big John Larus** from Richmond was the biggest boy in B Co and he beat me up in both boxing and wrestling.

I forgot to mention **Major Hoover** and the fencing team. He taught me both the “epee” and saber and I spent time every day lunging up and down the hall fencing. He yelled at me and would throw things like erasers at my head. He reminded me of my father, always yelling and cursing

He would drive me back off the fencing area with a furious attack, screaming and cursing me, and then after delivering a fatal stab, he would laugh so hard, the tears would come. He was a wild man, but so passionate about this sport that I stayed with it. Gradually I became reasonably good at the saber, was only average with “epee” and terrible at foil.

Major Hoover also taught me Spanish and would bounce erasers off my head if I did not get it right. One thing I learned from him was agility dodging erasers.

Another of my professors was **Major Martin Mansch**. I took German from him. There were only six in the class. On the first day of school he said to us in most serious tones that if we would study hard, do our homework, and be quiet and attentive in class - all year - on the last day of school he would teach us “**HOW TO HAVE OUR WAY WITH WOMEN**”. Now, that got our attention!!

All year long we remembered that and we were a model class. On the last day we turned in our final exam paper and he stood up to leave the room. I yelled out, “*Major, you promised to tell us something about women.*”

“*Oh, yes,*” he said. “*In order to have your way with women you have to love her for her soul and she will give you her body.*”

Well, the six 14-year-old boys looked at each other and said, “*What did he say? What is a soul? Where is her soul?*” A whole year for that!! I was 45 years old before I understood what he meant, at least I think I know what he meant.

My favorite instructor was BIG BOY himself. I took Chemistry from him in the Big Hall and he taught me one thing: the names and symbols of the three great acids and the four great bases. I can still quote the names and the symbols perfectly.

Unfortunately, my college chemistry teachers never asked that question and I failed chemistry over and over and that was a major reason I got turned down on my entrance to med school several times.

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I was named “most bashful” in the annual - never had a date to any dance. I would hang back and stare at the pretty girls from Stuart Hall and Mary Baldwin. **Nick Fotinos**, a handsome Greek upper cadet always had the prettiest girl and he could really dance. I was so shy and bashful and all I could do was just look at them and try and find their “soul”.

Year Two

My second year, I lived in the 4th stoop tower with **CC (Carol) Phillipps** and **Goodrich White** from West by God Virginia.

I picked a quiet smallish boy named **Carter Wood** to be my dyke but did not have it in me to haze anyone. I never struck any new cadet my last 4 years. I was almost the biggest boy in school together with John Larus and my nature, kindly, and size never required any hazing. I stayed out of trouble, was a squad leader in Company C under Capt Nick Fotinos. I played on **Coach Chapman’s** football, JV basketball and was on the tennis team with **Hal Walters**.

I was 14, very clumsy, and had grown to 6’0” and 190 lbs. I could not dribble without looking down so I had many collisions on the court and was not invited back the next year. My basketball buddies were **Jiggs Farley** and **Bill Sanders** from North Carolina. Jiggs was from West “by God” Va. Both Bill and Jiggs have passed on. I did have 2 visits with Bill Sanders before he died and tried to reach Jiggs but his mother wrote me about his death.

The only thing want to add about my 2nd year is that my mischievous nature showed itself for the first time. I organized a small gang of other 4th stoop boys because my 2 senior roommates would not take the risk since they were both graduating, and just before Easter vacation we went out late at night with laundry bags and picked up every black shoe in the barracks and left them in the courtyard. It would upset Maj. Roller and even though I loved him I could not resist causing him trouble.

We did not get caught and it was a thrill. I talking about it late at night . One of my best friends was a Jewish boy named ----- **Marks**. His mother was constantly sending long hunks of smoked sausage, cookies and even sacramental grape wine MANISHEVIST (sp?). On Sundays when **Bratton** would drive the bus to a Staunton synagogue, I would sneak on board and go find out what goes on in a Jewish temple. This church talk reminded me of a problem I had at the old Stone Church. I had been raised at High Episcopal Church on 5th Ave in New York City. When I learned the Lords Prayer at my home church I was taught to say “FOR EVER AND EVER Amen.” In the Presbyterian Stone church, the Lords prayer ended “FOR EVER Amen.” My young loud voice could be heard allover the church saying an EXTRA “AND EVER.” That’s the way I learned it and I thought the other 600 people in the stone church were WRONG. One Sunday after lunch

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Col. Roller called me in to his office and gently taught me how to end the lords prayer I surprised myself and said, “*Sir, you cannot make me change my way of praying.*” I kept on saying “AND EVER” and he never mentioned it again.

I got my second white page, a Big A for football, a small a for basketball, and **Carter Wood** and I had become good friends, Later he became my very best friend at AMA.

Third Year

I lived on the back side of the second stoop with two great guys, **Johnny Pappas** and **Bob Huntsberry**. Both boys were from Winchester, Virginia and were graduating seniors. Johnny was in the band and the dance orchestra, a talented sax player. Dingleberry, Bob’s nickname, was a crack shot on the rifle team.

I caused them much grief because this year was the height of my tricks played on Colonel Roller. Some were mild, like smearing Vaseline on the doorknob to his office or exchanging doors from sink two with his office door or leaving fictitious notes or threats signed by Kilroy.

He would get so upset and carry on so that it made it more fun. He would storm into the Mess Hall, ring a huge bell to get quiet and then start his tirade. “*Son, Son, Son, some coward named Kilroy slipped into my office and did ----*”. He would yell and carry on and I could hardly keep a straight face. Several times I would glue a roll of caps to the clapper of his bell and muffled explosions and smoke would pour from his bell.

Every one of the silent 450 boys would have to turn their faces away so he could not see the smiles. He would scream for **Captain Tubby Tomaine**, the Mess Steward, to clean up this bell and then storm out. He was the outraged Abbott and I was the tormentor Costello.

I would stay up late at night thinking up tricks I could play on him, because I knew he loved me and it would break his heart to find out his tormentor was me. I went to great lengths to never get caught.

Because of having lived in 4th stoop tower, I was very familiar with the trap door and ladder that led up to the flag tower and the switch to the bright blue neon sign - a huge “AMA” that was clearly visible from Route 11. I would sneak up there at night and turn his sign off.

At first he thought it was a mechanical problem and he would send cadet Bratton up there to fix it. I would turn it off night after night, and he would have a tirade, a screaming tirade about the cowardly cadet who was tampering with his sign. It was good old Bill.

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We had to take one class per day of military training taught by the P M S & T. We were taught how to disassemble many weapons and how to reassemble them even in the dark. One of my favorites was a 47 millimeter cannon.

It was quite small: only six feet from one end to another. It was made of steel and quite heavy, but when it was disassembled, I could carry each part. One of my absolutely best tricks was to break into the armory, steal the cannon, take it apart and then carry it up to the flag tower and put it back together again.

It would barely fit up on top of the parapet and could be seen from down below, the barrel would stick out!!!

The first time I did it, the cannon was reported missing, which brought on a major tirade in the mess hall. I knew he would do that, so I lined the clapper with caps again, so when he stormed in to ask where the cannon was, he rang the bell vigorously and the smoke poured out of the bell and he almost had apoplexy.

It was reported the next a.m. that the cannon was up on top of the flag tower and another tirade followed. This time he beat the gong in the sentry box to get the entire corps out on the stoop. I had anticipated that and had hidden the steel pipe he would use to beat the gong.

He finally ordered **FX Field**, our bugler, to play assembly. The entire corps lined up on the tarmac in front of the barracks and the Colonel said, "*This is a case for the Honor Committee. Meet in my office immediately.*" I was on the Honor Committee, so I knew exactly what he planned to do to catch me!!! Pecks bad boy!

In the fall of 1946, **Charley Jordan** burst on the scene at right tackle and a larger, stronger **Bill Harris** played left tackle. We also had a new coach, an assistant named **Bales**, who was much younger and knew some new ways to play defense, a few other formations besides 6-2-2-1, and he taught Jordan and me how to play defensive tackle, how to shed blockers, how to submarine on short yardage, and how to signal the linebacker what we were going to do.

All of a sudden we had A DEFENSE and Charley and I began getting recognition in the "Bayonet" and even in the Staunton paper. We were still a so-so team, but we were getting better.

Fork Union and Greenbriar Military School from West (by God) Virginia were big rivals. We always played Fishburne on Thanksgiving Day and SMA was not allowed on our schedule because they were rowdies, toughs, and there had been a bloody riot the last time we played in 1941.

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This year in the Greenbriar game, we were leading 21 to 17 in the 4th quarter. Time was running out and GMS had first and ten on their 20-yard line. Chapman decided to give me and Jordan a rest. He took us out and sent in **Hamlin** and **Philhower**.

GMS started marching down the field, made four first downs in a row and all of a sudden had a first down on the AMA 30. "O.K. Harris and Jordan, get back in there and stop them." We trotted out onto the field. All 450 cadets cheered and we lined up with blood in our eyes - we owed GMS a beating because the year before they had beaten us 35 to 6 in the famous game when **Tubby** had served infected cream puffs and the entire corps had ptomaine poisoning.

On the first play they went right at Jordan, he tackled them for a four yard loss. On the 2nd down they ran right at me - another three yard loss - then back at Jordan for another loss. On the fourth down, they passed and I broke in and tackled the quarterback for a huge loss. The game ended, we won, all the cadets stormed the field and carried us off. All the cars parked around the bowl up on the road flashed their lights and blew their horns.

In short, it was a huge victory - perhaps the biggest until the First Orchid bowl in 1948. Colonel Roller gave us Monday off and a big article appeared in the Staunton paper. Jordan and I began getting contacts from local Virginia colleges and universities. We were only Juniors. Life was good. We were unbeaten after that and whipped Fishburne on Thanksgiving Day by 40 points!

- The Mad "Bumber" -

When I was home in New York City for Christmas, I rode the subway down to Times Square and took in some dirty movies and then wandered into a five and dime store. I had \$2.00 left from my Christmas money .

I found a small selection of fireworks. The clerk said that the ones shaped like a small nail keg with a stiff one-inch wick were the most powerful and made a huge blast. I bought 20 of these blasting caps and brought them back to school in a small paper sack.

Since fireworks were forbidden, I had to hide them securely in my room. Neither Pappas nor Huntsberry knew about them. I finally pulled the electric cord out of the back of my little radio and put the bag of bombs in my radio and snapped the back shut. I was careful not to use my radio for fear I would blow up my own room. The room inspectors never thought to open up my radio and they stayed safe for two months.

I thought about how to set them off and decided on using a lit cigarette as the fuse. Even though I did not smoke, my roommates did and there were always smokes and matches in the room.

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Finally, I decided the time was right. The three of us lived on the back of the 2nd stoop, in room 225. I went outside and picked up a dozen small stones about the same size as the bombs. When I was alone in the room, I raised my window, leaned out and practiced throwing the rocks up and over the roof of the 3rd stoop with enough force and angle to sail over the top of the barracks and fall in the courtyard.

It was an underarm motion leaning way out of my window and lobbing the stone up and over and into the courtyard on the grass. I practiced and practiced until I had the motion perfect. That first night after study hall and lights were out, the bugler, good old FX, started playing taps. He played it first in the courtyard then again in front of the front arch and then over on the hill facing the old building.

I lit a cigarette, stuck a fuse in the back end, opened the window, leaned out and lobbed #1 up into the black night and then got into bed. Within seconds there was a huge explosion from the courtyard. It was so loud and powerful it scared me as well as every other person in the school.

The Officer of the Guard called Colonel Charles Roller and reported an explosion in the courtyard. The good Colonel jumped into his car, raced back to school, turned on the lights, and made an announcement for the corps to form up in formation outside while a safety inspection was made. We were all up till midnight. Finally the Colonel decided it was safe to go back to bed.

It was the next day before the guard found some shreds of the bomb and gave them to Colonel Roller. He stormed into the mess hall, nearly pulled his bell out of the ceiling and raised hell calling the Bummer a coward - a yellow bellied coward. I loved it and I still had 19 "bumbs" in my radio. Well, the school was in an uproar. I knew not to tell a soul, particularly my roommates.

That night I did it again. Same time - last note of taps - same lob over the top of the 3rd stoop and again Colonel Roller rushed back to school formed up the corps and began to berate the cowardly Bummer. It was the most successful stunt I had ever pulled. No one suspected me. Even my roommates did not suspect me.

The next morning the Colonel called his Honor Committee into session (remember I was on the Honor Committee) and we began to plot how to stop this attack. Meanwhile, every night at the last note of taps, another bomb would go off. We conducted a barracks search every day and usually I arranged to search my own room. No one found my stash in my radio and they kept going off each night.

Finally, they figured out that the "bumbs" had to be coming from the back of the building. One night when I opened the window, I saw two cadets sitting staring at the back of the building. I

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waved to them, shut my window, did some fast thinking palmed my lit cigarette, walked down the stoop to the corner and dropped the “bumb” into a trash can. I walked back to my room just in time to hear the “bumb” go off in the can. It turned the can over and set fire to the paper trash.

This time the Guard called Colonel Roller and said that there was a fire on the 2nd stoop. Again he rushed over, lined us up and read the riot act to the entire corps. He was a past master at raising hell with the corps. The next day he began to ask for the mad “bummer” to come in and confess. No deal!!.

Next, he began to threaten to punish the entire corps. First, one night after a bad fire in a torn apart trash can, he ordered FX to sound formation and after a speech, he had First Captain Bratton march the battalion out the front gate, turn right and headed us down the highway to Verona, three miles away. He was in The Grey Ghost, the old floating power Dodge, a late 1930s model.

I was a platoon leader in ‘C’ Company and I was scared that a bus or one of the huge trucks that raced up and down Route 11 would wipe out ‘E’ Company. Finally, Bratton and other senior cadets convinced him that this was too dangerous and we turned around and marched back - 450 boys in pajamas - through the front gates and back to barracks and another midnight bedtime.

His next plan was to start punishing the entire corps. The bombs kept going off, but I was running out of ammo. He canceled all trips to Staunton - except for church, no Monday trips to the movies on Beverly Street and no more trips to Stuart Hall.

This was getting serious. The Colonel started acting with the student body officers, the secret Vigilante Committee, the senior faculty, and was threatening to call up the National Guard.

By now, I was running out of ammo. The Vigilante Committee was positioned outside the back of the building and others were positioned at each corner of all three stoops. Delivering the bumbs was taking all of my ingenuity and Colonel Roller was so worn out and beaten down, it was not as much fun.

Finally, I was down to my last “bumb” when Colonel Roller announced in the Mess Hall that he was going to sit in his office all night if necessary and wait for the “bummer” to come in and confess. That night I threw the 20th “bumb”, went to my room and waited until 12 midnight. Then I went down to his office and knocked on his door.

He was sound asleep with his coat off, his tie pulled down, and his head down on the desk. He was so tired I had to shake him awake.

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“What is it Harris?”

“Sir, I came down to tell you that I know who the “bumber” is.”

He stared at me still numb from fatigue.

“Well, who is it? Tell me, sir,” he said.

“I cannot tell you because it would be a violation of my personal honor code,” I answered.

He stared at me and then said softly, *“You know who did it and you can’t tell me!”*

He put his head back down on the desk and I said, *“Sir, I know you have to punish someone and I will take the punishment and I am positive the “bumbing” is over.”* (I was out of ammo.)

He stared at me and said, *“Harris, go to bed. I am going to think this over and I will send for you when I am ready.”*

The next day just before supper, he sent for me and now he was spiffed up and looked better then he had for three weeks.

“Harris, I don’t know who you are protecting, but here is the punishment: 1st you will do 100 Tours. 2nd, you will do 500 Coals. 3rd, you will forfeit one day of Spring vacation.”

That night in the Mess Hall, he announced that last night one of his best boys came down and confessed about the bombing. The incident is closed. There will be no more “bumbs”. There will be no further discussion.

“As you were!” and he stalked out with much dignity! The Mess Hall was in an uproar. Well, who did it?! I never let on and went about my huge penalty without a word. When the corps left for Easter vacation, I sat in my room and waited to see what would happen next.

At 12 noon, the Colonel came up to see me and said, *“Harris, the Mess Hall is closed. Come with me and I will get you some lunch.”* He put me in the Grey Ghost and drove me to his own house where I sat down to a delicious formal lunch with his lovely wife and his sexy 15-year-old granddaughter, Linda. And that was punishment!!

I had supper and breakfast with them and then he drove me to the train station in the Grey Ghost. He put his arms around me and said that he loved me and that I would always be one of

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his best boys. We were both crying. He never mentioned it again and neither did I until right now.

- Girls -

My best friend, **Carter Wood**, would go to Stuart Hall every Monday afternoon to see a beautiful 15-year-old blonde from Washington, D.C. named **Susie Johnson**. Finally, he talked me into it and I went with him.

Susie took one look at me and went back upstairs and brought her roommate down to meet me. She was another lovely blonde, also 15, named **Gaye Dantzler** from Tampa, Florida. I thought she was gorgeous!!!

From then on I went to Stuart Hall with Carter every Monday and began to court Gaye. I also would write her a short letter everyday. They were not allowed to leave the parlor so we would sit, hold hands and whisper. Fabulous!!

Now, enter Coach Bales in this adventure. One day he took Carter and me out to where he parked his car every night. He parked on the road around the bowl and on a downhill slope. He carefully explained to Carter how you could turn on the key, let out the clutch and “voila!”- the car would start. Wow! Wheels!!

He did not say we could use his car, but why else show us how to start it?! Well, we began to practice it at night. We would drive around the bowl with the lights out, then park it in the same spot, sneak back to our room and write the girls telling them about the adventure.

We began to think how we could drive to Staunton and go to see the two girls late at night. Sue was very adventurous and she told Carter about a road that ran behind their dormitory up on a hill. One night we went to Staunton and found the back road.

We told her in letters and actually went several times to check it out We were now going to Staunton every night in Coach Bales’ car.

Well Carter Wood and I continued to sneak into Stuart Hall two or three nights a week. We worked out a system where the two little girls would go to the Stuart Hall gym wearing their pajamas and bathrobes and they would crawl out a gym window, get in Coach Bales’ car and we would drive a few blocks to an old Civil War cemetery.

We would sit under a huge light tower and do some light necking until time to get the girls back

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in. Then we would go back and park the coach's car and fall into bed ourselves.

We worked out a system to tell if the girls knew we were there and if they could and would come out. We would park the car on the road behind their dorm and flash the headlights at their window. A skinny arm would reach up and lower and then raise a shade to say they were on the way.

We were so innocent we did not do anything but hug and kiss and whisper and laugh. I dearly loved Gaye and wrote to her that summer when she went home to Tampa, Florida. Her father owned a lumber business and her mother was really lovely. She liked me and I was devoted to her family.

At the end of the AMA school year, we invited Gaye and Sue to come out on their school bus to our Final Ball. I went home to Houston and we wrote letters all summer - she was a lovely, sweet innocent girl.

Carter and I never drank a drop of alcohol and neither did Sue or Gaye. We just loved each other.

One thing I remember was when Carter and I went to a Stuart Hall dance and a chaperone came up to Gaye and pushed her back and she placed a 6" ruler between our chests and she said in an austere voice, "*Please, Gaye, we observe the 6" rule at Stuart Hall!*" I was stunned and had no idea what she was talking about. I thought, "*6 inches where?*"

That winds up my 3rd year at AMA. By now, Carter and I were best friends and we made plans to room together with my friend **Bill Sanders** from Raleigh, North Carolina, and his friend **Tom Fouracre** from Newark, Delaware. Actually, I had already gotten to know Tom and his wonderful family. We planned to room together in # 5 in the 3rd stoop tower, all four of us, for our senior year, 1947-1948.

Fourth Year

Just before spring vacation we were working hard to get ready for the 1948 GI inspection. I was working 'B' Company hard so we could do our best. Everyday Monday to Friday, we would go out to the football field and practice close order drill.

I taught them some special drills like to the four winds March and a drill where each cadet placed his rifle down on the ground and walked off. The next cadet would pick it up and shoulder the weapon without ever losing a step. We also practiced stacking arms until it was perfect.

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Then, I told them about a cadet falling on the stack, if one ever did fall. We worked longer and harder than everyone else and would come in sweaty and tired and everyone else wondered what we were doing out there so late.

Finally, the big day arrived and I marched B Co out for the two inspectors. We performed flawlessly until we stacked arms and - horrors - a stack clattered down. There is no worse sound than three or four Enfield rifles clattering to the ground.

A split second later, there was a dull thud as a cadet fell on top of the stack. The inspectors prodded the cadet with their swagger sticks and ordered me to March Off! I did so and sent the nurse out with a stretcher to pick up the fainted cadet. We were all heartsick about the stack.

When Spring vacation rolled around, everyone went home except me. Captain Chapman had arranged for me to take a 10-day tour of 10 major southern universities. I would spend one day at each school and then that night travel to the next one.

I met the coaching staff, put on pads, went out to block and tackle and run timed sprints. I met the head coaches at Florida, Georgia Tech, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Vanderbilt, North Carolina, Duke, University of Virginia and Delaware.

Bobby Dodd, General Bob Neyland, Bill Murray, Art Gueppe, Catfish Smith, and Red Saunders at Vanderbilt were all famous successful coaches and were all gentlemen, except for coach Saunders at Vanderbilt. He would not let me go home. He hot boxed me in my hotel room on Easter Sunday and made me miss three planes to New York City.

I ultimately signed the damn contract, but I told him I would never play for him. I finally caught the last flight to New York City and had one day at home before I came back to school.

We had only a few weeks before June week and the final ball. I took Gaye to the ball, but my mother marched in the figure. The Stuart Hall bus went home at 11 and we kissed up against the bus until a chaperone caught us with the damn 6" ruler. We told them - Gaye and Sue - that we would be in as soon as we could get away and for them not to go to bed.

Bill Saunders had his mother's Lincoln and she had brought his girlfriend and Tom had his girlfriend, so we all climbed into the big Lincoln and headed off to Stuart Hall. We picked up Sue and Gaye and headed off up the hill to our favorite cemetery. After a few kisses, Bill produced a huge jeroboam of French champagne and some paper cups.

We toasted each other and drank the entire bottle and did some serious kissing - all eight of us

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packed into the Lincoln. One by one we fell asleep and no one budged until 6:40 a.m. when the sun shined in the window.

We were horrified and rushed the Stuart Hall girls back and then the six of us rushed out to school. We had been missed and Colonel Roller took us into his office and did his “*Son, Son, Son*” speech. The one where we stabbed him in the back when his face was turned. Four of my best boys stabbed me, son, son, son stabbed me.

We were so tired, hung over and scared. I wished he would stab me and get it over with. “*Boys, go to your room, there will be no graduation for you today.*” We were devastated in front of our parents and girl friends.

The corps marched off to the Big Hall and we sat in our room in tears until 10 a.m. Finally the guard came up and told us to get dressed and go down to the graduation. He said that the Colonel had said we could come but we would not get our diplomas.

Well, when he called our names, he relented and gave us our diplomas, but we did not get our sheep skins and the sun rose again in the East. We marched back to the barracks and formed up for the last time. The Colonel came out and told the entire crowd that there had been a terrible incident in which four of his best boys had skipped school and had stabbed him in the back over and over stab! stab! stab!

The crowd of nearly 1,000 were stunned at the passion in his voice. I was crying. He went back to his office and got the huge Company cup and brought it out, showed it to the crowd and told about the 50-year history of this cup. Finally he started walking back and forth in front of the Company Captains, saying something good that company had accomplished that year.

Over to Bratton and then back in front of me and over to **John Larus, Bill Sanders** and then down to ‘E’ Company and back to ‘A’ Company. When he passed me by for the second trip, I gave up. At the last second he turned away from Bratton, broke out in a huge grin and trotted over to me and ‘B’ Company and gave us the cup and a huge hug and kiss for me.

Don Fretz and I carried the huge cup up and down each squad in ‘B’ Company and I thanked each one for his contribution. There was not a dry eye in the house. The most wonderful moment in my life was right there in June of 1948. I did not want to leave - I stayed to meet the parents of all my ‘B’ Company boys. I went into the Colonel’s office for a private goodbye, but I was crying so hard, all I could do was hug him and say “**THANK YOU!!!**”.

One week later after we had moved to Texas, I received a letter from him offering me a scholarship, the Captaincy of A Co and the football team. Being First Captain was a huge opportunity, but I was ready to go on and did not accept. I still have the letter in my scrapbook!

You can view the 1948 RECALL online her:

<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall-1948/>