

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

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July 11, 2002



BAD START AT AMA

I guess I ended up my time at AMA in pretty good shape, but I surely had a lot to make up for after my first year.

My parents were divorced and I lived with my mother and her parents in Blacksburg. Nearby were two elderly unmarried aunts. I was surrounded with sick old people, and my mother decided that I needed to have a different atmosphere.

My dad's parents lived in Harrisonburg and he was impressed with the AMA cadets who saluted each car that passed them on Route 11. (This was many years before the Interstate Highway system and the big outing at AMA was to walk up Route 11 to The Fort for a Coke.)

So, my Mom and dad got together and decided that I should go to AMA in the Fall of 1946.

Well, at first, I hated it. I mean, really hated it. I was homesick, I was scared, and I decided that Augusta Military Academy was no place for me.

So, I sneaked out the back arch after supper, made a long detour around the Clay Bowl, and reached Route 11 where I caught a ride with the first car to come along. This man took me as far as Roanoke and I easily caught a ride from there to Blacksburg, arriving after midnight.

Next day, my mother had me in the car on my way back. I was not happy and I failed to respond affirmatively when she asked me to promise that I would not run away again. Mother got me back to AMA and turned me over to **Major Deane**, who I think may have been the OC that day. He escorted me to my room and told me to stay there until **Major Roller** sent for me.

The moment Major Deane left me in my room (131 I think it was), I went to the sinks, then out the back arch again, around the bowl by **Colonel Tom's** house, out to Route 11 and into the first car that came by. In those days, anybody in any kind of a uniform would be picked up by most drivers. Lucky me: this couple was on their way to Blacksburg!

My mother was on the way to Blacksburg too. She stopped at Natural Bridge to have dinner. I did not stop, and when she got back to Blacksburg, there I was.

Next morning, while my mother was deciding what to do, a telegram arrived from Major Roller

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saying that I had been expelled. That could have ended my career as an AMA cadet, and that would have suited me just fine.

But more mature heads prevailed. My uncle was a dentist, a civic leader in Blacksburg and a friend of **Don Kelsey**, who owned the Blacksburg movie theater. Don had graduated from AMA in 1930. He called Major Roller to ask that I be given one more chance and my uncle and mother set off with me in the car bound once again for Fort Defiance.

This time, I was delivered into the hands of Major Roller. He told my mother and my uncle that the Honor Committee had reviewed my case and decided to give me one more chance.

I was to be put in a room with two upperclassmen whose job it was to be sure I didn't wander off again. **John Millard** and **Sherwood Helmick** had the misfortune to have a sniveling rat intrude into their lives. But they did their jobs, and I didn't run away again.

I couldn't wait for the Christmas holidays. I wanted to get away from AMA and back home. Then, home for Christmas, I soon found that I couldn't wait to return to Augusta.

And I never looked back!

My second year, I was voted "Most improved cadet." Hell, all I had to do was to stay there to win that award.

The 1950 RECALL can be viewe donline here:
<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall-1950/>