

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

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Thinking back all those years, I can't recall a single fellow cadet or staff member that I didn't like. While I loved them both, **Major Roller** and **Major Hoover** were the two that could cause some real fear from time to time.

Big Boy, just by being himself, struck fear in cadets if you had reason to fear him. I recall Major Hoover teaching Spanish by standing behind you with a fencing foil -- broken as I remember -- and whacking your butt when you failed to conjugate verbs correctly!!!

While I marched my fair share of penalties, I never had Big Boy whack the palm of my hand in the front of the Big Room during his classes or had to load coal in the boiler room.

I remember when I used to drive around the school after many snow storms with **Paul Bratton '48**, in the Army truck, plow on the front, to clear roads. We always had to do the roads around **Colonel Tom's** and Big Boy's house as well.

Paul must have had a special connection with Big Boy as he was always driving the school bus, running errands in the jeep, or doing any sort of chores around the school. He was a great guy and ended up as our '48 Battalion Commander.

Remember "SKUNK IN THE COURTYARD" in the middle of the night? Some poor skunk would get into the courtyard and the Corps of Cadets scared the poor critter to death by chasing it around the quadrangle until enough got sprayed to help get it out again.

Remember rolling the old WW I cannon on rugs into the courtyard, past the O.D., and somehow missing Big Boys frequent trips in the "Grey Ghost"?

I remember going skunk hunting under the mess hall with a bow and arrow. The object was to get the skunk to freeze in the light of a flashlight and then shoot it before it had a chance to smell up the mess hall. We had to get a special pass from Big Boy to do it.

I worked in the armory with **Charlie Fowler**, **George Maust** and **Fred Shappee** when we converted from the 1903 Springfield rifle to the Garand when we received the Garands after the war.

Those cosmoline parties were a real mess. The fumes from the solvent were fierce and we had to keep those little windows open in the armory, which was below ground to the left of the Arch. I also recall helping teach Cadets how to open and close the breach without getting their thumb slammed in the action.

Remember all those rainy and snowy days when we marched up to the Old Stone Church on Sunday morning (and for Colonel Tom's funeral)? I recall **Reverend McBride** and his sermons. I

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joined the Church while there, and remember it well.

How about those Sunday white glove inspections and how damned hard we all worked to get things PERFECT. Rifle, shoe shine, brass, tight bed spread, waxed floor, washed windows and mirrors, everything dusted (including on top of the door). Then the inspector would find that one small spot you missed and write you up!!!

Remember all of those preparations for the Apple Blossom Festival Parade in Winchester? We made the big trip to Winchester, marched in the parade and did a great job! In exchange, we got about six hours off to roam Winchester – you could see it all in three hours, as I recall.

At that time my home was in Washington, D.C. We used the Greyhound bus system to get back and forth for the Christmas and Easter breaks. It seemed to take forever in those old, smelly buses. Sometimes we would sneak a bottle of wine on board to ease the pain!

I can't remember exactly which year it was when practically the entire Corps of Cadets got ptomaine poisoning in the mess hall from eating cream puffs! I was one of the lucky ones who didn't eat them.

Visualize 400+ cadets, and most of the staff, going from both ends -- violently -- all over the place!!! I remember **Al Gonzales** and I were carrying medicine around to everyone, at the direction of the doctor and trying to convince them they weren't going to die. The next day it took hoses to clean up the mess in Big Barracks. You had to be there!!!

I remember when I was recruited to help slaughter pigs in the slaughter house (on Colonel Tom's property, as I recall) for the mess hall. Shot them in the head with a .22, slit their throats, and then hung them up for gutting and cleaning with lots of boiling water.

I had never done it before – or since – and I couldn't eat pork for a long time without it smelling or tasting like that slaughter house!

After the war we got a link trainer (as surplus probably) and had some fun trying to fly in it. That triggered trips to the airport for flying lessons. I never soloed, unfortunately -- ran out of money!

I'm sure you remember when a cadet got in serious trouble and we were all called out into the courtyard (after lunch as I recall) to watch the fellow get a lot of licks on his rear from a senior cadet swinging a broom (taped up) or a saber.

They would read the charges and then the punishment before laying into his rear end. I wonder when that practice was ended? Probably before the school closed! I also wonder how today's Politically Correcters would respond to hazing and corporal punishment -- which I think were good for us all in the long run!

I remember all of those meetings in the Big Room (including the Saturday night movies) where

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Major Roller (Big Boy) held forth! Every guest speaker spoke there (I remember how proud **Major Manch** was when his son, Shorty, came back from the war and we were all so proud of him).

I can also recall how Big Boy interrupted his classes to read a note carried by a hapless cadet who had thrown spitballs in class, cut class, or some other offense. He would dispense instant justice with that rod he used as a pointer which was as big around as your thumb -- four or five licks on the open palm of your hand as I remember.

By the way, when did Major Roller become Colonel and then Brigadier General? In what year did he finally get rid of the Grey Ghost (a gray mid-30's Dodge, I think it was), and what replaced it? Remember how it seemed that he never slept?! The Grey Ghost would cruise all the way around the barracks at all times of night and you could always tell he was in his office when it was parked outside

Mother Mack ran the infirmary during my entire four years. A kindly old lady, she always was able to get you fixed up. I was an asthmatic and she always had the medicine on hand and would make sure I was well before she released me.

How about the PX? Another favorite spot for the skunks to rally at night! When I first arrived at Augusta at the age of 14, I found that everyone smoked cigarettes. The rule was that if you weren't 16 you had to have written permission from home to smoke.

I wrote my letter home and got a burning reply from my father (which I still have) which pointed out all of the problems associated with smoking and then said that if I was going to do it he gave permission! I finally quit six months ago at the age of 72! Smokes were about 19 cents a pack back then in the PX.

Early on in my career at Augusta we had laundry boxes which we sent home to get our laundry done. With about a one-week turnaround, my mother would do the laundry, starch and iron the shirts and put in a bag of cookies for the return trip.

Later on, Shifflets handled the laundry and dry cleaning for us. There was also a shop in the basement near the armory where we took our laundry bag (I still have mine) and clothes to be dry cleaned.

That was where we bought our uniforms, shoes, etc. They also had a tailor for your uniforms. I recall when the Eisenhower jackets were introduced and how we liked them. Did they ever get rid of those high top shoes from the Civil War we all hated? When?

You can view the 1948 RECALL here:
<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall-1948/>