

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

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Unforgettable Memories

How the time has flown! It was 45 years ago when I first arrived at Augusta Military Academy, although I can't now recall the exact date – my memory isn't as good as it used to be.

I was studying English at Washington University in Washington, D.C. – I was 15 years old at the time – when I read about the Academy in a magazine. Something clicked in my mind and I wrote asking for the details needed for my entry. After a week or two I had all the necessary documents for my registration and was accepted for the 1956 - 1957 high school period.

My first moments at AMA: I made the trip from Washington D. C. in a Greyhound bus. Then the reception, registration at AMA, my first night, going to the warehouse for a green campaign military uniform and the M-1 – a real M-1 rifle! Then the academy uniforms, which came afterwards as they had to take each cadet's measurements for pants, overcoat and jackets to have the tailoring done.

My first crew cut: That hair cutter was sure hot – about 30 cadets had already had their hair cut – I couldn't say anything at that moment, as I was a new cadet and had to keep cool and pay attention to everything without arguing or saying anything.

The barracks: I was assigned to a room on the second floor -- don't recall the number of it -- and my roommate was Villarreal Pedro, a really nice guy. We had long talks every night and became very good friends. One of my next door neighbors (right side) was Jorge Salame and one of my next door neighbors (left side) was Dan Kash. Very good people and we used to help each other in many ways.

My first visit to the PX: It was a small place but absolutely unforgettable. Cokes and potato chips were the best in the world. We got lots of attention and good words from a person that everybody liked; Rudy was that person and everybody wanted to talk to him.

Before going to breakfast we had a formation every morning (come rain or come shine) and it was great when the weather wasn't too cold, but during winter time it was rough. I guess it was all part of becoming a real cadet or a real man, maybe both. Of one thing you could be sure, it made your brain clearer and your appetite was increased at that moment.

The Sunday parades at Augusta were as beautiful and harmonious as anything you could imagine. We had one of the best bands of any military academy in Virginia. We were very proud of our Academy as you could see at a glance with all the cadets' happy faces. That day was so special – family visitors (those who had any), parents and girlfriends ... those girls!!! Even if they were ugly, they seemed to me as beautiful as Marilyn Monroe. Parades were looked forward to by each one of us because it made all of us feel important and we could see some civilians (girls). Our team of Rollers Rifles was the best, most grandiose, phenomenon ... just great. They were to us new cadets some kind of inspiration to

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continue with the Academy for years to come, with the hope of one day becoming a member of the Rollers Rifle team.

I have an anecdote from the Gym: After winter time had passed we were authorized to go to the gym and swim in the pool – only for those cadets that had no class or any other duty or assignment. Being a new cadet, I did not know that the pool heaters were not functioning at all. I was one of the first ones to jump into the pool. My goodness! The water was really COLD – the water temperature was only 2 or 3 degrees. As I was coming out of the pool fast as I could, I was thinking about things that happen to you when you are a new cadet. After I came out the first time, someone threw my shoes into the pool, so I had to go down there again to look for them. I had to keep smiling at that kind of a joke.

I was also nominated for the Rifle Team. According to **Sergeant Haynie**, I had my marksman examination made and qualified for next year's Rifle Team.

It comes to my mind: Colonel Charles S. Roller, Jr. used to go around the barracks almost every night driving his old vehicle (the gray ghost) on his night patrols. We all respected him and I guess that was what he wanted most.

The garden **Mrs. Roller** had was some kind of a rose museum, had all type of flowers, including exotics – spectacular! People came out from town on Sundays just to visit and see the garden. One night somebody left the door open (on purpose?) and a cow got in. The rest you just can imagine.

John Leroy Gregson's fatal accident: That cold morning of March 23rd, when we came down from our rooms to the front of the barracks, ready to leave on Easter vacation and to say goodbye to each other, we were astonished! First we saw lights that were not usual to see – an ambulance and a police car. Everybody looked at everybody else and asked what was happening. Then we started to hear the news. In the kids' barracks, a .22 loaded rifle was left on the table in one of the rooms the night before. The gun was picked up by a Venezuelan kid, from Caracas – I don't quite remember his name, but it might have been Mario – but I do recall when his mother came all the way from Venezuela to see her son. Not knowing that the rifle was loaded, he pointed it at John Leroy, who was in bed at that moment, and pulled the trigger. That accident took the life of a magnificent boy, well educated, charming, kind, friendly and all the nice adjectives that you can think of. No one ever wants an accident like that to happen but it did.

I still have my 1957 "Recall" and sometimes I take a look at it remind me of my friends and you know what? I always pour out a glass of whiskey and make a toast to celebrate (tonight I will) that I had the opportunity in my life to attend AMA. I am very proud of my ROTC training and always will be.

At that time I guess the most popular cadet was **Pete Kelley**, the most popular M/SGT was Haynie and the most popular teachers for me were: **Majors Davis** and **Hoover** and **Lt. David Holder**.

The 1957 RECALL can be viewed online here:
<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall-1957/>