

# Augusta Military Academy

## Oral History

Frank Williamson, '60  
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“Well Franklin, tell us about yourself”, asked the tall, handsome assistant football coach, **Major Mal Livick**. This was my idea of what was going to be “a walk in the park.” I related my high school graduation, great junior year with letters coming from many colleges expressing their interests in my football abilities. Added to that, I told Major Livick about my tragic Senior season as co-captain of the Benedictine High School Cadets football team. In the 2nd game of the season, I was clipped on a punt return and my leg was broken. After 5 weeks in a cast, I was knocked unconscious (again on a punt return, but a legal tackle.) I “came to” in an ambulance on the way to the hospital. Soooo, the letters started to become few and far between. In actuality, I had missed my Senior year football season.

At the end of this litany, AMA **Head Coach Bill Ralph** joined us and agreed that I should have one military school football season before entering college level football. Then Coach Ralph stood up and I said to myself, “My God, he’s a giant”! Bill Ralph, a VMI graduate, 3 letter man, just towered over me. He was about 6’7” & 275 lbs. Meeting him reinforced why **General Roller, “The Big Boy”** hired Ralph as his football coach. I never got over the fact that he could throw a football 70 yards while standing flat-footed still. We had a great year with 5 wins, 1 loss & 3 ties.

In those first three weeks of early practice before the remainder of the cadets, both new and old, arrived to the grounds, we were lucky enough to choose our roommates. The six occupants in CW Barracks, #353 A&B became the greatest of friends; **Ed Trott, Mike Harlow, Bob Gevrekian, Rich Newman, Bob White** and me.

The “**Iceman Cometh**” escapade took place during the very unusual snows that we had that 1958 December, when we left for Christmas holidays, we had over thirty (30) inches accumulation. During study hall, a huge, icy snowball came crashing through our back window hitting one of our lockers. Upon investigating, we discovered deep footprints in the snow. “has to be non-human” The next night, same thing, but numerous missiles. A detail was formed to hide out in the snow under white bed sheets in the snow laden pasture behind CW Barracks. We saw the ICEMAN and raised the alarm with the OD and we all chased “this being” all the way up through the Old Stone Church cemetery and “it” disappeared across the Valley Pike. The Iceman never came back, even though some cadets still see his image to this day.

After Lights Out and TAPS, the on-duty faculty officer came to each stoop and knocked on each door, saying “Right?” If you responded “Right” that everyone was in their own room, “all present & no person that did not belong in that room was there. Well in the Spring of that year, my 5 roommates decided they were going to break the boredom by going to Verona and its pool hall. Immediately after lights out, the guys all left and headed up Route 11, walking towards Verona. Hitchhiking as well, mostly walking. Well the OD officer knocked and I replied “wrong”. All hell

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broke loose. The faculty officer called Major Livick, who drove to the pool parlor in Verona. Don't know how he did it but he got there ahead of the AWOL cadets. Were they surprised? Huh! It was them or me when the knock came. I was awaiting their arrival back in CW353 A&B We still laugh about it to this day. Gee, as I watched from Hoover Hall, I didn't really miss hauling coal from its delivery site to the boiler room.

Whenever something troubled the Officer of the Day, such as firecrackers landing in the courtyard of Big Barracks, usually after TAPS, the OD inevitably wound up on our stoop pointing fingers at our room and its occupants. (probably not incorrectly). We did instigate about every mischievous prank or downright foolhardy act that could be imagined, like the time we went without shaving one side of our faces as "we had been contracted for a shaving commercial." Not true!

That year the enrollment at AMA was just over 600 cadets from 2nd graders to Post Graduates like me. Bob White and I tied for 2nd place behind **Mike Stratton** as BEST NEW CADET. Additionally, Bob and I played lacrosse for **Col. Hoover** and Bob also wrestled.

You may remember that our classes were Tuesday thru Saturday morning. After ROTC training on Monday, you could go to Staunton, Waynesboro and even Harrisonburg catching up with young ladies at Stuart Hall, Fairfax Hall or even college first year ladies at James Madison College (before that school became a co-ed university, now JMU) All this was dependent on whether or not you had any spending money for frivolities such as buying a lady a soda. Well, I never had much spending money but an opportunity came up one Monday in the Spring. Line Coach Sgt. John Thornton told me that he and Coach Ralph were going to Ingleside to play golf and asked Bob White and me if we wanted to go. We said sure! What they didn't tell us was that we had to caddy for them without a cart, up and down those hilly fairways all afternoon. They did give us a few dollars.

General Roller had his own dairy farm & milking barn on the adjacent acreage right behind barracks. One of the greatest pranks was to steer a cow or two up to the 2nd stoop of Big Barracks during the night. Did you know that you can get a cow to go up steps but not down steps? Can you imagine hearing Reveille and finding a 2000 lb. milk cow outside your room (between you and the Sinks.) Not a pretty sight! That prank continued on each year until the school closed.

These are just a few of memories made 60 years ago, gee, time really does fly.

I made lifelong friendships then and since then with the annual reunions and working as a Trustee for the AMA Alumni Foundation and serving as Chairman and also serving on the Board of Directors for the AMA Alumni Association. Probably One of my greatest honors was to be in the initial class of AMA Alumni Medal recipients.

The years have passed but the memories are the same and I loved that school, then and still do. It is absolutely phenomenal that as I turn off Int. 64 West and head north on the Valley Pike (Route 11), I get this little stomach flip or excitement or perhaps the feeling in anticipation of "going home".

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