

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

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The Hermit That Lived Behind The Barracks

I was a new cadet in the fall of 1966. Although I attended the non-military Summer School the previous few months and felt like I knew the buildings, grounds and some of the faculty, I was still just 13 years old and very, very impressionable.

As was the MO of AMA, I heard the stories about the Hermit that lived behind the barracks...in a cave ... near the river ... and who sometimes came to the barracks in search of clothes, blankets and food. We never really believed it, did we??? And even if we did, I never saw him...and words were cheap.

During summer school I'd been taken Snipe hunting, but figured it out before being left out in the pasture at 10 p.m. ... thank God!!! And I sat up late with old cadets listening to the Hermit stories – sometimes curious ... sometimes scared and usually skeptical.

Thanksgiving and Christmas break came and went. It was February and the radiators were keeping us warm as taps blew and I fell asleep on the top bunk wrapped in my blue AMA patched blanket. It must have been 3 a.m. when I heard the noise. I awoke and listened carefully, but could only hear the silence of the courtyard and 300 kids asleep in their bunks ... only an AMA cadet knows this sound.

Then it started – it was a step, a hard step and then a dragging sound like the other foot didn't cooperate. It was slow and deliberate and there must have been 10 seconds between each step. I guessed it was 4-5 rooms down the stoop and coming my way. I opened my eyes, but was too scared to look at the windows in my door.

I slid deeper into my blanket and listened as the steps grew closer and louder. The fear that overtook me was powerful – I didn't know what to do, but I thought whatever it was would know I was awake and come into my room. I was petrified as the footsteps came past my door and stopped. The seconds seemed like minutes and the minutes like hours.

I must have held my breath, trying not to make a sound, for I didn't want to know what was outside on the third stoop, south-side of the barracks. The footsteps and dragging started again and went past my door and headed down the stoop, until I couldn't hear them anymore.

I lay there wide awake listening to any sound ... a door opening, a cough, a scream ... anything ... but it was silent and I waited for Reveille. I had never been so glad to hear the scratching of the record that next morning as the OD woke us up for Reveille. I hadn't slept for the past 3½ hours.

I casually asked my roommates and a few other friends if they had heard anything last night and they all said they had not. I thought if I didn't say anything, others would report what they heard so I wouldn't have to. The day went by and no one said a word and no one had heard anything unusual.

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I slept with two blankets the next night and awoke every few hours listening for the sound of steps and dragging, but never heard them again. It was weeks before I told my story and by then it was just a story – fear wasn't present as I told the tale.

To this day it remains a mystery – was it a joke one of the old cadets played? Or perhaps it was the Hermit that lived behind the barracks, in a cave, near the river ... walking the barracks in search of clothes, blankets and food.

I Wish I Would Have Kept On Running...

It was my Junior year – the 1969-1970 school year. I reported early for football and the 2-a-days were brutal. The sun was hot and the metal stairs in the barracks sounded like a construction site as the cleats on the feet of the football squad ran up and down them like ants on a hill. Up one side and down the other.

We were in good shape by the time the Corps arrived. It was early in the season and we were playing Fishburne. I was on special teams and they'd just scored. The ensuing kick-off had me blocking on the left side. As I hustled down the sideline I selected a victim and threw a cross body block, just knowing I'd take him out of the play.

I rotated so he wouldn't kick me in the privates as he was running, only to catch his knee in the small of my back. I felt the stinging ... then the numbness ... then I couldn't move my leg. The coach and a teammate helped me off the field and onto the bench. After a few minutes I couldn't move, but they determined my leg wasn't broken.

The pain started and soon came a stretcher to take me to see **Miss Molly**. The pain was in the small of my back and shooting down my leg. I laid in the infirmary, unable to move, for three days. The only comfortable position was on my right side. The Doctor visited every afternoon and rubbed and pushed on my back telling me it was a bruised muscle, until my parents arrived and insisted I get X-rays.

A trip in an ambulance to Kings Daughter's Hospital and numerous X-rays showed two cracked vertebrae in my lower back.

I remained in the infirmary for 4½ weeks, people helping me with homework assignments and daily necessities. I'd daydream that I was well and would run everyday if I only recovered. Soon, I was able to stand up and walk, then I regained my strength.

I started running soon after I returned to the barracks. I got out of the infirmary in time to sit on the bench (not dressed out) for the last game of the season. I played football my senior year without incident and continued running till I graduated.

Wish I'd kept on running -- no telling where it would have taken me!