

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

Thoughts While Mowing the Lawn

Hugh Harmon, '58

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Personal memoirs of the aide-de-camp to **Charles Somerville Roller, Jr.**

Many may recall an elite group of one known as the “Colonel Roller’s aide.” For those who don’t, the Colonel’s aide was a cadet from J Barracks, that grand old asylum of perhaps 15 twelve year olds, wardened by **Colonel (Doc) and Mrs. Davis**. To be appointed as the Colonel’s aide one must have perfect deportment, an immaculate room, and above all not irritate old “Doc” Davis. Being a goodie-two-shoes could be a singular added qualification.



Persons bestowed this distinction got to wear a gray braided contraption on their left shoulder and were exempt from all Sunday parades. Instead, one’s duties were well prescribed. On Sunday, instead of shouldering a musket, one posts himself at the gate in anticipation for the man to come walking through the field. Upon his arrival one salutes smartly, opens the gate and throughout the duration of the parade trips along two paces behind and one to the left. Or was it right? I never could remember and he kept looking around to see where I had gotten to. No other duties were specified except to go get things or pick up an occasional cigarette butt.

During one of the duller parts of the parade, a lady’s dog got loose and I went to help her retrieve it much to the Colonel’s disappointment since he said he had needed me to be getting him some papers for him out of the front office. Now you may think that to be reason for ending of a budding career as the Aide-de-camp to Colonel Roller. It wasn’t.

This is the factual version.

Remember back in the beginning of the story, I mentioned old “Doc” Davies who lived with our tribe of twelve year olds and how “cranky” he was for no good reason? Well Doc and Mrs. Davis’ apartment was at the top of the stairs in J barracks. The bathroom, in particular, was the very first door. A carefully guarded secret that only I and my roommate, **Tyrone Tomasek**, knew was that the key hole to that door offered a perfect fifty yard seat overlooking a panoramic view of Mrs. Davis’ bath tub.

Remember still the goodie-two-shoes I talked about? There was one of those villains living in a room down stairs who told Doc about our little evening entertainments thus exposing and disgracing us and my career as aide-de-camp was ended after just one day of service.

Many will now remember old Doc Davis. He used to slap you hard in the back of the head and he called me “**Old Rasputin**.” I asked him who that was and he just said he would tell me later. When he went slapping your head you really had to get moving. He would pinch!

Today, I know who Rasputin was. He was an insane monk whom the Russians kept trying to kill but wouldn’t die. It was all over a bath tub. If Doc says so, I guess it all makes sense!

Submitted by Hugh Harmon, C.S.Roller, aide-de-camp. Ret.

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Like all us who were blessed to receive early training at Augusta, I was but one small part in an ongoing legacy known as **Charlie Roller**. We came to him in one form or another but left with indelible impressions that, though we did not know it at the time, would last a lifetime.

My offering is not of me but of Charlie Roller.

I came from a middle class family. Mother a nurse; stepfather, well, he worked. Most of my tuition from my first year at Augusta, age 11, was earned by myself, either in our summer time donut shop at the beach, or other full time summer employment.

Now, all who knew Augusta know there were, indeed, **C.W.'s**. Those were the fellows who outright worked their way through school. They were the same "villains" who woke everybody else up screaming at each other as they made ready to serve us our breakfasts.

Few know about the "work boys," the point to my story.

As I anticipated my Junior year, now with five-year marks on my sleeve, my mother advised Colonel Roller that it would be impossible for them to submit the funds that year. To her amazement, she received a call from the Colonel from his hotel at Atlantic City while he was attending the Miss America pageant.

She said that he told her that he "*had no intention to start his school without that boy and that he (I) was expected to report for classes and something would be worked out.*"

I became a "work boy" and was placed in full control of everybody's laundry. The laundry business wasn't bad and I became Captain of 'D' Company that junior year.

With six years' seniority up my sleeve I decided to take advantage of the benefits at **Fairfax Hall** one evening and not bother to get anybody's permission. Oh, I didn't get caught, it was the perfect crime!

However, I stupidly admitted that I had gone when I found myself among five other Captains who had gone and gotten caught.

Being summoned to the Colonel's office was the worst experience of my 60 years of life, for he cried and I was embalmed with fear. He told me how much I had let him down. He did that much with everyone. He told me how he felt I had stabbed him in the back. He did that to them too.

He told me to just get out of his sight before he gave me a good thrashing and I remember, at the time, that would probably make me feel better than one of his tongue lashings.

It was not for another 50 years that my mother told me that in 1957 the only money sent to Augusta was for uniforms - all the rest "*was worked out.*"

Had I known that at the time that he was giving me the how I had let him down stuff, I would have died on the spot. He never mentioned a word about that.

I made **Ad Astra** the next year. I cherish that little pin. I wore it on a Spring day in 2000 when I proposed to my bride at the cemetery marker of **Charles Summerville Roller, Jr.**

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Tyrone Tomasek was the most aggravating and contemptible person I ever knew.

I know, I roomed with him over six years from J Barracks through Main Barracks. He made better grades than I did for less work and I hated him for it. He was better in athletics than I could ever be, which compounded the felony.

Everyone will remember that there were bugle calls for everything - mostly. Around the winter of 1957, all students of Main Barracks were awoken in the middle of the night to what we, at first, thought to be a prank.

The tune coming from the loud speakers in every corner sounded much more like a cat fight than anything we had ever witnessed before. I recall Ty standing on the stoop, one hand scratching his butt, the other wiping his eyes and saying, "*What the Hell is that?*"

The helpful O.D. was in the courtyard in a bathrobe announcing that the battalion was to fall out immediately in blue jackets.

After the customary "*front and center*" of company commanders it was learned that the Colonel [Roller] had received a call from Western State mental hospital that one of their lunatics was loose and was thought to have been seen along the road in Fort Defiance. The helpful school administrator had offered his troops to search the Old Stone Church Cemetery, and it included one very athletic, but very ghost-fearing, Tyrone Tomasek.

We were marched up the hill and formed about the cemetery in a futile effort to locate this unfortunate soul. Failing that, and totally out of battalion formation, we were simply dismissed to return to barracks.

Making our hasty retreat it seemed that my strength was at a high level, for I not only was keeping up with Ty but, at times, was able to pass him. Then I heard a deadly thud! Stopping to look for my missing running partner, I was horrified to see him wound around a support cable to one of the church posts looking every bit like a shot deer on a staff.

I asked him why he was doing that and he said he knew he was dying and asked me to shoot him since he didn't want to live that way anyhow. The damn fool had run right up the thing was just hanging there.

I didn't hate him so much after that. Anybody in that condition needed to unwind.

He is gone now. I attended his funeral. Knowing our youthful antagonism, somehow I believe he will be at mine.

Some readers may be gratified to know that the fateful bugle call turned out to be "Man Overboard".

The 1958 RECALL can be viewed online here:
<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall-1958/>