

# Augusta Military Academy

## Oral History

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### Initial impressions, September 1945:

Without prior experience in the military, I walked casually into the Main Entrance, expecting some friendly introductions. What a shock! First Captain **Dave Brewer** yelled at me, "Hey, Mister, where is your uniform and why are you not at a brace?"

Total bewilderment on my part: What uniform? What is a brace? I was a Merchant Marine veteran (washed overboard at sea), high school hero in football, track, boxing and wrestling. Who was this loud-mouth yelling at me?

I wanted to punch him out and could have done it. The caution of experience warned me to look it over before acting. It was a good thing that my common sense warned me to wait.

Brewer and his Cuban goons could have made mincemeat of me -- a man experienced in driving semitractor-trailers, bulldozers, draglines, etc. I learned to accept Brewer and his ilk, who ruled by fear and brutality.

Dave Brewer had to discipline one of my two roommates, **Clark Campbell** from Charleston, West Virginia. Our door opened after lights out and in came Brewer and his goons. Campbell was told to get out of his bunk and lean against the wall, so he did.

The tape-wrapped broom started whacking on his derrier -- brutal. Campbell gave in and promised to behave himself. He had been dismissed from three military schools for misconduct. He became a good student...Dr. Spock proven wrong, even though he had not yet published.

As I got to know Brewer and his goons, I came to respect his results, but not his methods.

No first year cadet -- "rats" -- could go into the quadrangle courtyard. They had to walk at a brace and cut square corners, with upper classmen watching every move. The Big Boy, **Major Roller**, the Commandant of AMA, had appointed me as school electrician with authority to go anywhere on the campus.

When I had my tool box with me, I could go anywhere. Some upper classmen objected to such freedoms, but they were powerless against Big Boy's orders.

# Augusta Military Academy

## *Oral History*

Another aspect of upper classmen hazing: Big Boy announced in the Mess Hall that undue hazing by bullies allowed new cadets to challenge offenders in the boxing ring or behind the Gym. After several trips to the boxing ring or behind the Gym, neither I nor abused new cadets had to worry any longer about undue hazing by upper classmen bullies.

### **Academics:**

Our French instructor, **Lt. Col. Gardner**, was late in being relieved from his duties in the Army. **Lt. Lane** tried to fill in. He knew less about French than anyone in the class: paper=papier, which was pronounced as “papa-jay”, etc. by Lane.

When Col. Gardner showed up, he had much to do to correct our French. It turned out A.O.K., though.

In Chemistry, taught by Major Roller, he kept us going on the three great acids and the four great bases -- you try giving them -- I wish you success. But, seriously, knowing these acids and bases and their symbols helped me in Advanced Chemistry.

### **Athletics:**

**Coach Chapman** insisted that we run plays over and over again to perfection. It paid off. **Big Bill Harris** was a leader in the huddle -- he would often explain what the coach wanted and, again, it paid off. We ended up winning the National Championship of Military Schools at Chatanooga, Tennessee against McCawley Military Academy.

**Joe Adleberg** introduced us to Lacrosse. Others were outstanding in many sports. **Allen Tomlin**, my roomie, usually won his fencing matches. The **Click** boys were great swimmers, and so on.

### **Skunk Hunting:**

Skunks were plentiful in the area and a dreaded nuisance. **Jim Ragsdale** became our champion skunk hunter. He invited me to go hunting with him. We took bow and arrows as the weapon of choice -- deadly and we did not have to get too close to the quarry.

We did not kill many, but the hunt path led right to the **Rev. McBride's** house, where Jim and I always got to enjoy the pleasant company of the McBride daughters. Big Boy got suspicious of the hunts, so he would come bounding down the road in the Gray Ghost, right past the

# Augusta Military Academy

## *Oral History*

McBride's house.

We would duck behind the honeysuckle-covered porch rail until he passed, then we rapidly said, "good night" to the girls, ran across the road, through the barbed wire fence and scuttled back to the barracks. Big Boy could sniff out mischief and almost caught Jim and me twice.

### **Parades:**

The weather was atrocious at times, but the parade had to go on. Big Boy convinced us to defy the elements and keep on trying. We marched around the Parade Ground many times in blizzard conditions. That toughness to defy stayed with many of us and was of particular help to keep going in Korea.

### **Painting and Punishment:**

Six would-be miscreants got together in Room 211 to plot fun and fame. We planned to paint the Center Courtyard Guard Box as red as possible and if we could get into the Mess Hall, to paint Big Boy's bell also.

I bought the red paint in Staunton and snuck it by the guard into the barracks and others got the brushes. We planned to paint the thing at 3 a.m.

Came the big night and four of the painters chickened out. **Allen Penney** and I did not use the same good sense. We painted the Guard House and tried to clean up so as not to leave a trail.

I was up at daybreak and to my horror, red tracks ran right up to both of our rooms and our door knobs were red. I got Penney up and found rags and lighter fluid and we cleaned that mess up.

I went out to the burn box behind the barracks to destroy the bad evidence. Who should walk out of the CW Barracks -- and stare at me - but **Hal Walters**, Captain of the CW Company. He went back inside without a comment.

The surprise to the Cadet Corps was complete -- blue sky overhead, white snow on the ground and that red structure ... patriotic!

By the cadet grapevine, everybody in the Cadet Corps knew who had done the dirty deed. Hal Walters never said a word, though. The case was broken when **Bill Parnell** went down and

# Augusta Military Academy

## *Oral History*

confessed to being the painter -- loyalty of a high degree -- to save Al Penney, his roomie, from punishment.

That blew the lid. Both Penney and I went to the Big Boy's office and confessed. Big Boy was furious. He reduced both of us to the ranks, took away all privileges and honors ... plus sentencing us to 500 hours of hard labor with the threat that if we did not complete the 500, we would not graduate the coming June.

Penney and I completed the hours by working everyday and finally all night decorating the Gym for graduation. Moral to the story: dream about big stunts, but do not carry them out.

~ Jimmie Chezem, Class of 1948

*(Ed. Note: The red gloves used to paint the guard house are now in the AMA Museum along with the Special Orders reducing Penney and Chezem for misconduct.)*

*P.S. As a direct result of Major McCue's Physics Class, Jim Chezem has proposed a new Scientific Scale to quantify Gravitational Force (Gf) to be named The Armstrong Scale in honor of Neil Armstrong, first man to set foot on an extraterrestrial body. There is also a Gf meter which measures intensities of Gf in Real Time. Our government scientists are still bothering at the Math and Pysics, so approval will be slow. A copy is available at the AMA Museum.*

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