



Part I: Wherein the author sits in the trunk room late at night and writes

It's dark and lonely. This whole space is full of bizarre sounds: a clunking compression and expansion cycle in the air ducts, taps and gongs coming through the water pipes, wind whistling through cracks in the insulation, etc, etc. There could be any of a thousand creatures living in the darkened corners; there could be dozens of eyes watching me. No matter how firmly rooted my disbelief in the paranormal, in circumstances like these anything is possible.

Part II: Wherein stories are heard and recorded

Old buildings and bad circumstances are two of the most common sources of specters; both abound onboard the academy, so many stories should exist. Unfortunately, a military environment is not the most ideal place for ghost stories to proliferate. Questions of mental stability and the threat of psychological evaluations will quickly smother spooky tales. No names will be mentioned in this article, it was not requested by the storytellers but is instead something I have chosen. That said, you might be surprised at how many people believe they have seen ghosts.

These articles deal with folklore, not paranormal investigation. The following stories are taken from interviews conducted with past and current cadets. Some were experienced personally; most are retold secondhand. All of these originated as belief stories, that is, all of them were, at least in their inception, believed to have actually occurred. I was told of five different ghosts that share Chase Hall with cadets.

Parade Restless *"The Ghost of First Deck"*

It's appropriate that the most formally dressed ghost would be seen on the quarterdeck. The hub of cadet professionalism is home to a dark figure, typically seen late at night standing at parade rest in Full Dress Blue (Parade Dress). Perhaps also appropriate to the quarterdeck, this ghost does little other than stand around and follow cadets; the only other action associated with it was a single instance wherein it followed a frightened cadet back to his room. The cadet, on a late night trip to the head, ran in, slammed and locked the door, and found no trace of anyone in the morning.

Fabled Suicides *"The Trunk Room Ghost"*

If the stories are true, two cadets committed suicide in the trunk room. One cadet supposedly hung himself from the cupola tower and another is said to have shot himself with the issued rifle made lethal by a firing pin and bullet naively sent from home. I have heard the latter story used as the explanation for why our rifles (now "pieces") are filled with lead.

The result of these tragedies is a poltergeist-like spirit who inhabits the trunk room. Poltergeists, from the German phrase for "noisy ghosts," are invisible manifestations of psychological trauma visited upon the outside world in the form of moving furniture, self-propelled projectiles, and loud bangs and other noises. Multiple cadets have reported hearing trunks moving around and footsteps at times when the trunk room was almost certainly abandoned. Some were scared into flight; others were scared into sleeping in the same room together (the entire men's basketball team, or so the story goes).

The Ghost of Accountability "Golf Company's Spectral OOD"

From 2002-03, Golf Company held the title of Honor Company. Some former members attribute its standing to a ghostly Officer of the Day that paced the halls late at night or early in the morning. This ghost, so devoted to its former cadet duties (or perhaps unsatisfied with past performance), was usually heard and not seen. One cadet who did see it told me that it wore tropical blue long with a combination cover and a clipboard.



Same Story, Different Backdrop "Charlie Company's Haunted Room"

I was told that the two suicides in the trunk room may have actually occurred in a cadet stateroom, either in Charlie Company (room 2052, to be specific) or Alfa Company. The spirits of the cadets are said to remain; manifesting themselves in poltergeist-like ways. One cadet believes that a small figurine on his knick-knack shelf was knocked over by the poltergeist every time he left the room.

Dead History "The Haunted Rifles"

The most extensive ghost story is centered upon a single item. M1 Garand Rifles, relics of WWII, are issued to most cadets at the start of each semester. In 2003, three separate ghost sightings were logged – it was even reported to the RCDO (then the CCDO). The Hotel Company OOD believed that she saw someone locked in the furniture room, walking towards the rifle storage room. Further inspection revealed no bodies, dead or alive. Later that night, the Delta Company 1/c in charge of issuing and collecting rifles to and from the corps was approaching his room when he saw someone duck into it before him. Of course, no one was there when he ran in to check. A third 1/c, in charge of collecting rifles for his company, reported a similar happening. All three sightings took place around large stockpiles of the M1.

Part III: Wherein we examine the stories and their continued existence

There are several theories suggesting why ghosts haunt where and when they do. As popularized in the movie *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, people who die with unfinished business may end up sticking around to complete their tasks. The ghostly OOD and the quarterdeck ghost could both be the results of tortured souls seeking to bag one more cadet or be that pillar of military excellence just one more time. Poltergeists, on the other hand, are often the result of traumatic experience, especially in children and young adults (Cavendish). Suicides are the result of intense emotional disturbance, and hence could leave the same spiritual imprints with ghostly results later on. Whether the intense emotional impressions left by a suicidal cadet would be appropriately manifested by sliding trunks or toppling figurines is certainly questionable, but perhaps that's why they call it "paranormal." Items can be haunted, too. Some researchers have actually attempted to explain ghostly experiences with physical residual human energy; small particles known as "psychons," which are left over when people occupy a place or own a specific item (Cavendish). Our rifles have been passed down from cadet to cadet since the 1950's, if anything in Chase Hall were to be imprinted with psychic energy, it would probably be them.

A famous folklorist, William Bascom, claimed that the continued telling of folklore stories satisfied any of four purposes. They can validate practices, as with the lead filled rifles explained by a suicide. They can integrate a population, as when the entire basketball team was brought together by fears of a trunk room ghost. They can act as compensation, providing excitement for an otherwise dull (cadet) life; sometimes a spectral figure at our backs on the trip from the head to the room is just what is needed for a boost of wakefulness before a paper. Finally, stories can promote an institutional objective. Like the curse on King Tut's Tomb, the trunk room ghosts encourage cadets to stay out of there late at night, a wise suggestion in light of conduct expectations (Leeming).

Part IV: Wherein we examine our heads and talk science

We are told regularly that we are the best and the brightest, but our minds are even more powerful than we give them credit for. The brain is an amazing pattern-recognition device, often so powerful that it will see patterns where none exist (Dess). A late night transition from brightly lit computer monitor to darkened passageway, combined with a distant lit bulb or clock LED, can easily result in the image of a face in the glass. Peripheral vision detects movement, but not shape or color: it's easy for shadowy figures to loom out of the corner of an eye, the brain will fill in the rest, whether it be facial features or the perceived intent to sneak into a room full of rifles.

Humans are susceptible to hallucination for any of a number of reasons ranging from physiology to geomagnetism. Cadets, due to the nature of our existence, are even more at risk for these agents of mental misfire. Vitamin deficiency, sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, and high stress levels have all been linked to increased hallucinatory activity (Klemperer). Environmental factors have an effect, too. Very low sound levels have been shown to cause disorientation, paranoia, and other adverse affects in people, even though we can't hear them. Electromagnetic fields may also influence perception, causing us to feel presences when in fact we are alone (Williams).

Part V: Wherein we strive for deeper meaning

After two hours hunched over a computer keyboard, a trip out into the passageway and a glimpse of a reflection in a piece of glass can be more than enough to inspire thoughts of restless spirits. Despite our extreme focus on the real and the academic, the unique combination of stress and tradition and late nights that we're subject to make hallucination significantly more likely. From there, it just becomes a matter of reporting. Cadets have seen ghosts – the stories had to come from somewhere - but the majority of perceived sightings are not passed on due to fear of questioning.

It seems that the only people who want ghosts as neighbors are misanthropic hermits in old Scooby Doo cartoons. That's not entirely true; proprietors of bed and breakfasts have been known to invent hauntings to attract business. Ghosts bring a sense of age, of permanence to any spot they choose to make their own. I don't believe in ghosts, but I tell ghost stories. I tell them to pass the time, I tell them to scare the fourth class, and I tell them because, whether Chase Hall is haunted or not, passing on the stories helps to build its foundations stronger than any granite.

References

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