SHARPE ‘CORPSMAN!

Jimmy Sharpe tries to joke about it. His laugh, though, is hollow and brief. Very brief. The surgeon, he says, "made a lot of money on our knees last Winter." It is a very reference to the dominant factor involved in the sidelined of a dozen Virginia Tech gladiators from this Spring's football practice.

That number only includes those not participating. There has been a dozen temporarily out of action. Blacksburg has turned into a battleground. "If the tape holds out, we'll make it," says Sharpe, whose conversation trips from high to low are faster than the speed of light.

"Each year (in these Spring drills), we've gotten better. We're further along than we were a year ago. For one thing, the players are ours now. They know our terminology and drills. They've grown up with us and, yes, the coaches have grown up, too."

In his three Springs with the Gobbler, the native Alabaman has "learned about myself, too. I've learned how to organize better — that goes for everything. More specifically on the positive side, he is enthused about his corps of running backs and about what is developing into a two-man contest at quarterback.

Experience-wise, David Lamie should have the nod. He, at least either rushed or passed a total of 15 times last year, when the Gobblers went 6-5. Meanwhile his freshman classmate, Don LaRue, was confined to duties in the secondary. Nevertheless, the quest for the starting spot looms as if long-lasting one. So far, asserts Sharpe, "I'm pleased with both."

The main objective this Spring, says Sharpe, "is to find winners at every spot. Right now, we're so thin, we're not getting into the scrimmaging we need."

"For example, the Gobbler's confused in short, 'It's a lary man's way of practicing,' " says Sharpe, who hardly conjures the image of lazziness.

As a result, that day "we were trying for a good teaching session." Saturday, what the Gobblers tried for was a "good scrimmaging." With, among other things, only one center available, the odds against such developments were pretty strong.

As the situation at center would indicate, Sharpe's major fears are concentrated in the line, both on offense and defense. "We need depth there badly," he concedes. It is no wonder he says of his incoming freshmen, "I won't at this juncture consider any of them as starter, but well call on a lot of them to play early."

Again, the need for numbers in the line crops up when he talks of his wealth in the backfield. Skipping lightly over the irrepressible Roscoe Coles and going to Billy King — he's had an exceptional Spring — and springing greats Dennis Scott, Larry Pallen and Ken Lewis (a hurdler), Sharpe says "we've got some folks to work with. Now we've got to find some more to block for them."

He has also instituted some personnel shifts. Most noteworthy would include moving running back Dick Holway to fullback, along with safety Dennis Scott to the same spot. Also shifted is Ellis Savage from running back to split end and Dale Babione, a wide receiver who worked in the secondary, is back catching passes.

Still, the list of the missing is haunting: includes the likes of stellar linebacker Rich Razzano, safety Henry Bradley, defensive tackle Tom Brasley, lineman Bill Houserligh and all-purpose running back. "We're nursing knees, others broken leg, mononucleosis or something," and one sprained an ankle playing basketball. It's been that kind of Spring.