## Museum of Augusta Military Academy News

Visit our Website

# Ad Astra Per Aspera

## MUSEUM OF AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

# November - 2023

## Chairman's Message

November 2, 2023

Dear Alumni and friends,

AMA as we all know, had a long and storied history. Those of us that were fortunate to have attended there, have fond and not so fond memories of our time in Ft Defiance. Yet, the lessons we learned molded us into who we evolved into over the many decades after we were dismissed from our last formation on the Blacktop.

Our schooling was comprised of traditional classroom work where our teachers instructed us in a college preparatory curriculum that was required to earn a high school diploma. We also studied Military Science and practiced and lived a military lifestyle. Life on campus taught us teamwork and collaboration with our fellow cadets and eventually, after endless hours of dedication and hard work, we were molded into leaders and good citizens. Lifelong friendships were borne, and decades later, we still stayed in touch with our fellow AMA brethren.

AMA experienced a tectonic event when the school closed in December of 1983. The shock of that event affected us all in different ways and at different levels, yet we continued to reach out to our AMA brothers, held reunions in and away from Staunton, and by doing so, we kept the AMA spirit alive.

In 1999 a museum was formed at our old library, also known as Maggie Bell's home. When we first set foot in that beautifully restored little building, memories came flooding back to all of us and we realized that even though the rest of the campus buildings were unoccupied and even in disrepair, we all had a home to visit in Ft Defiance!

Over the next 10 to 14 years, our museum was manned by loyal alumni and former instructors who labored as volunteers to keep our house open and ready to greet and receive all visitors.

As the years went by, our volunteers passed on or moved away and the Alumni Foundation was forced to staff the house with paid personnel. To tell the truth, the folks that have been caring for our museum for the past seven years, not only get the AMA way, they embrace it pretty much the way we do even though they never spent a night in Big Barracks!

Unfortunately, the tectonic plates that our campus sits on, have once again shifted. Beginning November 1, 2023, our museum will enter into the sunset phase of its existence. This is actually not such a bad thing, as so many of us have come to realize that the “sunset” stage of our lives can actually be pretty spectacular! That is what I imagine and hope the next five years will be like at the AMA Museum. Chris and Rich will continue to discover new pieces of our history and will gladly share it with our alumni and visitors. We will continue to be that “Gem” of a museum in the Shenandoah Valley and we will keep the lights on steady and bright!

When we eventually turn off the lights for the last time in that old house, we will have transformed our humble little museum which today can only display and tell the story of only 5% of our collection, into a spectacular space on a World Wide Web cloud, where practically every scintilla of

our story will be available to explore and enjoy. That, in my opinion is exciting!
So, my fellow alumni, it seems appropriate that I end this letter with our motto, which even today rings so true.

**AD ASTRA PER ASPERA**

Douglas W. Pennock
Chairman
AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc.

Amy Hensley was hired as the AMA Museum Administrator in December of 2019. At the time that she was hired, I had been the Chairman of the AMA Alumni Foundation for about eight months. From the moment I took the reins of our Foundation, I suspected that

there was something amiss in the administrative team and unfortunately, I was proven correct since we very quickly identified a myriad of problems that could have been the downfall of our museum. At the least, we would have lost our 501c3 designation due to poor oversight by the museum leadership and the Board of Directors.

The Museum Administrator was soon summarily dismissed, and we appointed Rich van Breemen as interim Museum administrator in June 2019. We hired new outside bookkeepers and changed our insurance provider. We discovered numerous government reporting discrepancies, paid thousands of dollars in penalties and interest charges including taxes that had never been paid. We pretty much went into survival reaction mode for the following six months.

Rich had made it clear that he was not interested in continuing as Museum administrator past 2019, so after an extensive search and interview process, The Executive board hired Amy to relieve Rich and take over the Administrator duties at the museum late in 2019.

As in any small nonprofit corporation, the Chairman and in our case, the Treasurer, work very closely with the Administrator.

Over the next four years, Amy performed her duties with energy, initiative and leadership. I probably spoke, emailed or texted with her a half dozen times a week over the last four years so there was never a moment in time that we were not engaged in the business of the AMA Museum which included reunions, festivals, guest speakers, music

events and even the Augusta County Chamber of Commerce. So, I can attest that Amy performed her job at a level that really bode well for our organization.
The changes that were made at the Museum this past week was the most difficult decision that the Board and I have made in the last four years. Unfortunately, our financial realities gave us no other option if we wanted to keep our museum open for another five years.
Amy Hensley was a terrific Administrator and will be remembered as one of the outstanding employees that the AMA Foundation has had the pleasure to share our museum with.
I wish Amy Godspeed and I am confident that she has and will continue to have the support and admiration of all of us.
Thank you, Amy!

# Fall Festival 2023

This year's Fall festival and Cruise in was a resounding Success. We were fortunate that the planets were well aligned because the weather was beautiful, cloudless skies and 80 degrees in the Fall! Additionally, there were no other car shows or Cruise In's in the Valley so we had a huge turnout of about 90 classic cars visit and park on the campus. The black top filled up and many of the cars were stretched out along the bowl road.

At one time there were over 100 visitor cars parked on the front field, so for a short span of time, the AMA Campus was buzzing with activity!

**L-R Karen Ramsey, Evelyn Gomez**

WICKED
Happy

HAPPY HALLOWEEN

**Karen Ramsey giving out candy at the Trunk or Treat**

Nominations are being sought for the Class of 2024 AMA Sports Hall of Fame (SHOF). You may nominate an individual athlete, coach, team or anyone that you feel contributed in a significant way to AMA sports. Personnel / Team(s) selected will be recognized during Annual Reunion in September 2024.

Please email your nomination to **John Arthur '75** email: john.arthur@cdg-1.com AND Rich VanBreeman, the Museum Curator, email: amacurator@gmail.com. John can be reached at 757-650-6309 for any questions.

All nominations must be received no later than FRIDAY, February 23, 2024.

# Museum News

**Thomas J. Reid** visited on October 13, 2023. He was Best New Cadet as a 5th grader in 1973. While living in Taiwan, where his father was stationed, Thomas got interested in AMA from ads in *National Geographic*. When his dad transferred to the Pentagon, Thomas wanted to visit, and he's pretty sure the Sunday parade sold him on attending. More military transfers had him graduate high school and college in southern California. He became a Marine artillery officer, serving 11 years active duty and 16 in the reserves, retiring in 2012. While in the reserves, he had a 22-year career as a corrections officer with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. He now lives in Iowa. He credits **Don Studer** with part of his career, because the practice he got on AMA's rifle range led him

to become the Officer in Charge of the Marine Reserve Rifle Team and the Marksmanship Training Unit.

**A monthly pledge from everyone that reads this newsletter means that the future of the Museum will be assured.**

**SET UP YOUR MONTHLY DONATION HERE**

## MUSEUM DOCENT DUTY

***THANK YOU!***

**To those who volunteered in September**

**Brian Miller '67**

**Charlie Pascale '69**
**IT Support**

**Visitors in September**

AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY

AD ASTRA PER ASPERA

1865

125

***Museum Volunteer***

***Be*** **a Volunteer Docent for a weekend...**

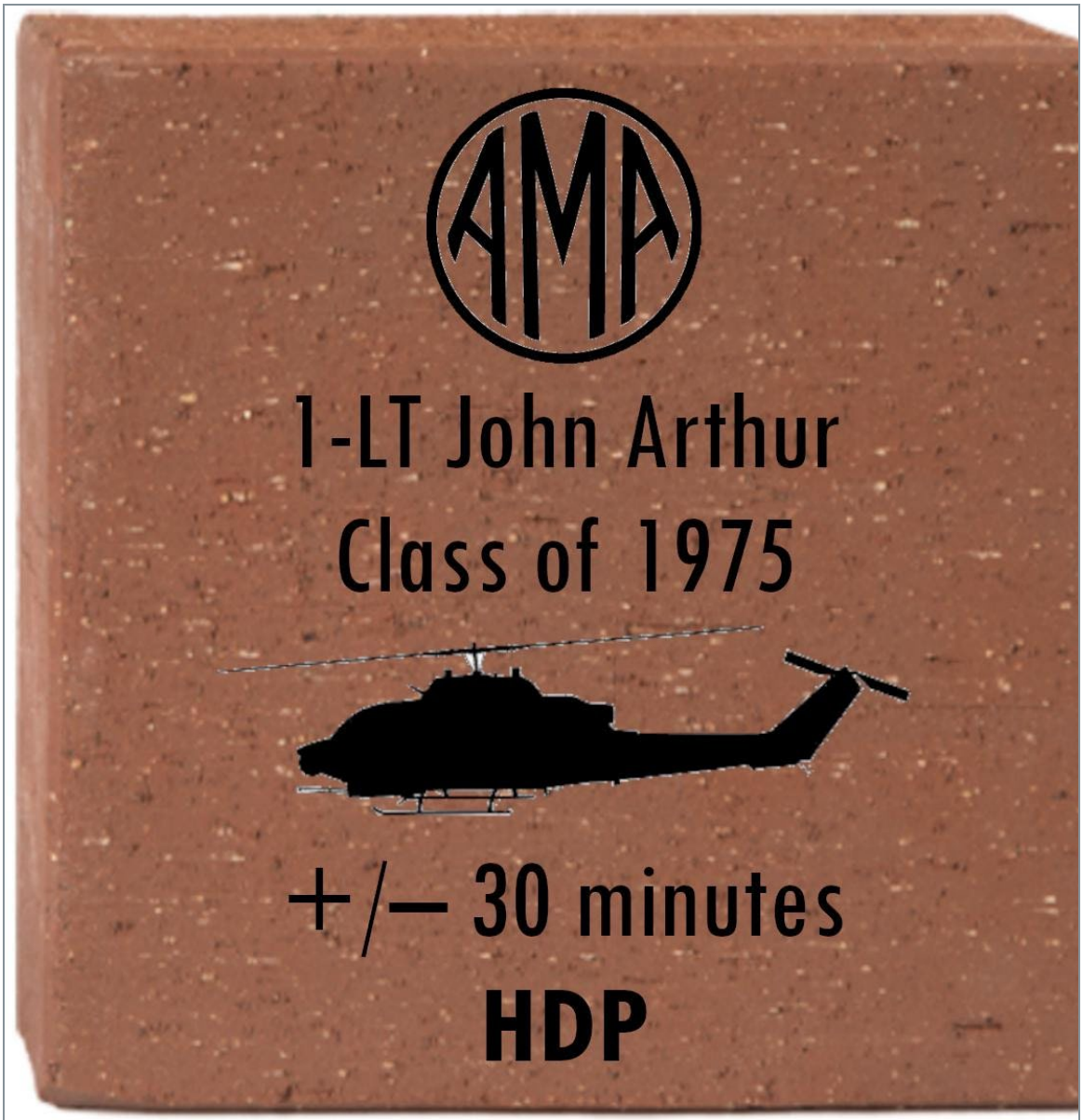
**Purchasing a Paver Brick allows you to recognize anyone you knew while attending AMA**

**All Paver Bricks are placed in a permanent location along the sidewalk running East of the Museum**

**Visit the Brick virtual map HERE**

**Please order yours TODAY!**

**Brick Order Form**




## Shop at the PX

## Important Notice!

**The AMA Alumni Foundation would like to clarify that all of the profits of the merchandise**

**that is sold through our Museum PX store, the official AMA Facebook page or the AMA webpage, go exclusively to help offset Museum operation costs.**

**AMA branded merchandise that is sold outside the Museum PX store, an unsanctioned Facebook page or unsanctioned eBay account has no connection or benefit to the AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc. or the AMA Alumni Museum.**

AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY

AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY

AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY

Augusta Military Academy

AUGUSTA MILITARY ACADEMY
AD ASTRA PER ASPERA
1865

## 17 oz. Mug

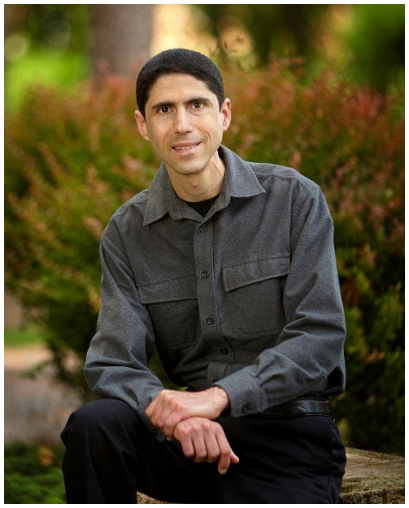
**Only $12.00 plus tax and shipping**

**To order items from the PX, call the Museum at 540-248-2007**

# Beautiful Wendell August Forge metal serving tray

**$50.00**

**(Limited quantity)**



# Chris's Corner

**Chris Correa, Museum Historian**

November 2, 2023

For all the time I spend searching for AMA's history, some of the best discoveries just walk in the door.

Durwood Lam and his wife, Deborah, visited on October 8. Mr. Lam's last time on campus was in 1984, shortly after being shocked by the news that his job as AMA's carpenter was over.

Durwood was born at home in Elkton on October 3, 1947. He was not quite 17 when he started carpentry as a day laborer for AB Torrence. Each morning started with a 5-mile walk to Route 33 to get picked up with the other workers and delivered to wherever the work was that day.

In the mid-70s, his friend and fellow Elktonian, Maj. Maxwell Hutton, asked Durwood to bring his skills to AMA. Durwood describes Max, who died in 2004, "as a great worker, honest man. An all around good guy with lots of friends and lots of respect."

Durwood's workshop handled every type of job, but doors and windows needed constant attention. He noted that cadets, to put it mildly, were hard on the infrastructure. For example, after

walking away from one door he'd just rehung in the barracks, Durwood heard loud banging behind him. When he went back to investigate, he found the door newly penetrated by a bayonet. Now, as we walked around the west side of the barracks, he could still spot which window frames were his work. Among the wide range of his other tasks, he built some of the barracks bookcases. He installed the drop ceiling in the Big Room – though he couldn't understand why anyone wanted to cover those beautiful rafters. He helped Sam Wales mount his bird house. He stripped decades of wax off wood floors…and then there was mowing.

Maintenance was his specialty, but his most prominent and meaningful legacy is a unique piece that he made from scratch.

While talking outside, I mentioned that Trigger was buried just south of the bowl. Durwood remembered making a gravestone for one of the campus dogs, but he didn't remember the name.

That's how a piece of history practically fell out of the sky and into place, completing a story that I'd never realized was unfinished.

I quickly brought Durwood back inside to show him the stone he'd last seen 44 years ago. I'd always assumed it had been made by cadets. So much for assumptions, but I never had any lead. Neither did the cadets. At age 19, Trigger died on June 4, 1979, two days after **Finals**. Summer session didn't begin for another 3 weeks. Carlos Bonnelly's **obituary** for Trigger, in the November *Bayonet*, mentions the stone's location but not its maker.

It was Max's idea for Trigger to have a gravestone. Durwood, who'd always liked the collie, first made a wooden frame, constructed an interior metal fence for strength, and poured the concrete. He drew in the name and years of likely the longest-lived unofficial mascot of AMA. He finished the piece with a hat pin and belt buckle. Durwood had already laid Trigger in a footlocker and buried him next to his favorite napping spot. Standing under that tree, he said he originally planted the stone facing toward campus, just beyond the tree's roots. He'd worried that it would've disappeared in the decades since.

Instead, alumni and Rich and I had moved it into the museum last year to preserve it. In its place, there is a new stone, donated by Jeff Wenzel '70, which reads:

TRIGGER
AMA DOG
1960-1979
A GOOD FRIEND TO SO MANY

Well and simply said.

Well and simply said.

**Durwood Lam**

Durwood was as blindsided as anyone by the school's closure. He knew nothing until he picked up his weekly paycheck…which then bounced. He never saw the money, but he pivoted to carpentry for Nielson Contractors. After nearly 25 years there, he retired in 2011. He still lives in Elkton. He enjoys his coffee group at the Elkton 7/11 and loves playing pool with friends, but his best time is spent with Debbie either sightseeing or just being at home with their 2 pet geese, Twinkie & Tweety.

Durwood Lam and the rest of the staff were necessary for the corps' daily life but not part of it. As the culture, economy, and wear and tear turned against the academy, they struggled to keep it functional, but they couldn't have the same relationships that faculty had with students. They didn't teach or coach. They didn't have rank. They didn't live with the cadets. You saw them and their work, but rarely could you get to know them. Col. Savedge's assistant, Elaine Huffman, may be widely remembered, but many more are probably only a first name (**Roscoe**) or a nickname ("**Benny the Barber**"). These three at least got mentioned in the *Recalls*, but for others, like the original "stew bums" of the Great Depression, there is no record.

We had nothing on Durwood. I've shown his work to countless visitors as I told Trigger's story. We'd stand around that gravestone appreciating his work, admiring the kindness behind it, while never knowing who to thank.

Now I know, but only by luck. History just walked in the door. It's the same good fortune that happens whenever any of AMA's people tell me their story. They might think it's unremarkable common knowledge, but they might be the only

person who ever returns to share it, or the only person left alive who knows it.

There are countless more stories like Durwood's waiting to be told, but first someone must realize that these stories matter. Trigger and the stone mattered to Durwood, not finally getting credit, so he just came to look around, not tell his story. I had to bring it up, after a long conversation, before he even mentioned his role. Durwood's name and history are valuable because the story of AMA is nothing if not a story about people (and dogs). That story isn't complete until we know what they all did here, how life brought them here, and where it took them.

My next big discovery for this story might be a document or a photo, but it's more likely to be a memory of something with no tangible record, only what you recall. That's priceless, but it's also fragile and temporary. The only way to preserve it is to share it, so write, call, or visit. Tell me what you remember.

Thanks for reading.
Chris

**vanBreemen's Expressions**

**November 2, 2023**

# Whatchamacallit or Treasure?

*By Rich vanBreemen*

As is so often the case, the topic of this month's rambling was discovered quite by accident. I was looking for some information on General Roller's Great War service in our database. I knew we had some of his original equipment (helmet and gasmask bag) and was curious if one of the uniform tunics was his. I started by doing a query in the database on WORLD WAR 1 collections (yes we have a category for that). This search turned up several very interesting items – one of which I will cover in a future news article. However, for today I want to discuss this:

*Item # 1100.13362.28t*

The description in our database was “Cloth patch of unknown design or origin. Suspect it to be military or Boy Scout related.” The location given was one of our boxes in the offsite storage facility. As you can imagine, I was intrigued – the ambiguity of the record could not be allowed to stand.
I will admit, the design was unfamiliar to me, as was my predecessor. However, we now have certain online tools that were previously unavailable, and I put them to use to quickly solve the mystery and start another one. Using GOOGLE visual search, I uploaded this very photo and was instantly rewarded with answers and examples of same/similar patches!

What I discovered is that this is the patch of the US Army's 89th Division in World War 1. The cross at the bottom was a designator for division members assigned to a medical detachment. WAIT….. WHAT? Wasn't General (then Captain) Roller in a medical unit in World War 1? Why yes Virginia, he was. In fact, the description of the photo in the Maggie Bell parlor of Gen. Roller in his WW1 uniform clearly states he was in the 89th Division.

The photo is relatively small, and he is standing at an angle, but if you turn your head just right, squint a lot and clamp down on your jaw, you can just make out this patch on his tunic's left sleeve.

CSR Jr., Feb 1919

So I guess, my search was, in a round about way, fruitful. I can think of no other reason for this patch to be at AMA than for it to have been part of his WW1 uniform that was saved and eventually put into our collection. It is no longer “lost” in an

obscure box in the storage unit. It will play a part in an upgraded Gen. Roller display for 2024.

When I shared this information with Chris, he exclaimed, “Do you think we have his canteen as well?” “Why in the world would that be interesting?” I thought. Chris explained that, as the story goes, the General kept his original issue canteen on his desk and that it contained water from the Meuse River in France. Whenever he was feeling nostalgic or perhaps a little down, he would pick it up, shake it and listen to the water slosh about. Unfortunately, that item does seem to be lost to history.

We can only guess what he was thinking, but it is at this time of year – Veteran’s Day that countless other veterans pick up their canteen equivalent and hold it tight in remembrance of friends both living and who have gone before. Small trinkets, such as a canteen or patch, have little value in and of themselves. However, they act as a portal to events, places, and people from our past. It is for that reason, these items are priceless to those who are connected and why we place such a high value on our little museum.

## Doug Pennock's Viewpoint

November 2, 2023

Dear Readers,

To say that I am a little dejected would quite frankly be an understatement.

When I joined the AMA Alumni Board of Directors in 2017, my intention was to work hard at the daunting task to revitalize and rescue this organization from what seemed to be an inevitable dead-end journey.

I honestly feel that since I was elected Chairman of the Board in April of 2019, over four and a half years ago, we have explored every possible way to perpetuate our AMA legacy by enhancing our museum experience and engaging the Augusta County community. This experiment was very successful on many levels, except one. All of our events, open houses, festivals, Cruise in's, speakers, and music entertainment created an abundance of smiles and good will which is great, but it brought zero dollars to the organization.

As has been our history, the vast majority of our income was and continues to be provided by generous alumni! I am proud and thankful for your support!

I am particularly proud to have the opportunity to work with a group of men on this board that have never let me down or turned down even one of my many requests at any juncture of my Chairmanship.

I am at peace with the decision to reorganize the museum administrative structure that we made in September, and continue to be very optimistic about what the future will bring. The creation of a “Virtual” AMA Museum is the way that we will secure the AMA legacy in perpetuity. Our story and rich history will be available to anyone on this planet that owns a smartphone! The fact that we decided to commence the transition with a very comfortable timeline is a clear demonstration that the Board of Directors has and continues to

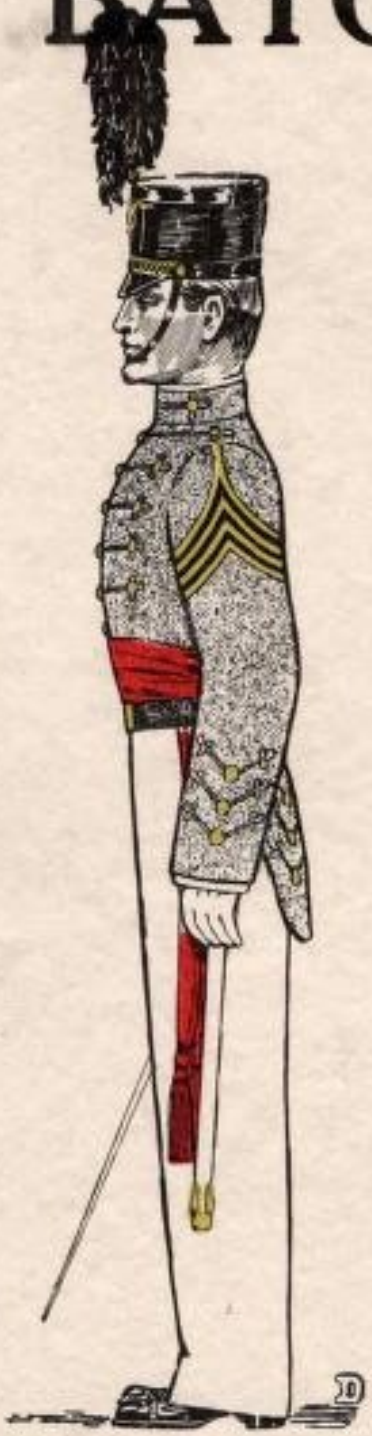
be hard at work protecting and preserving what is so dear to all of us former Cadets.
I look forward to continue working diligently on the AMA Alumni Foundation as long as I feel your support is present.
Please come and visit the museum when you're in the neighborhood driving up and down US 81, and start attending reunions. They are invigorating and relaxing at the same time!
OK, so I got that off my chest. Now that I did, my opening comment should be ignored because I'm actually getting stoked thinking about our future!

Doug out

**Editor's Note:**
**The following expressions are mine alone. I look forward to your feedback. You may contact me directly at:**
chairman.amafoundation@amaalumni.org

HAROLD O. SMITH JR.

# THE BAYONET



**MARCH, 1918**

HAROLD O. SMITH JR

# 105 YEARS AGO

## Read the October 1918 Bayonet
**HERE**

# The Bayonet Gallery
**HERE**

The Museum Newsletter is written and prepared by Doug Pennock and edited by Trudy Pennock

**MISSION STATEMENT "To preserve the traditions of the Augusta Military Academy and to honor the memory of the life and times of its alumni, faculty, staff, and supporting families through permanent and temporary exhibits and diligent conservation the museum's collections of artifacts, archives and photographs."**

**The AMA MUSEUM is operated by the AMA Alumni Foundation, which is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization. The museum is manned by a paid staff. Former cadets volunteer their time and talent most every month. Funding for the museum is totally dependent on tax-exempt financial gifts and donations made by the alumni, former faculty, and friends of Augusta Military Academy, as well as the community and visitors to the museum.**

Augusta Military Academy Museum | 540-248-3007
| **Museum@AMAalumni.org** | **http://www.amaalumni.org**
1640 Lee Highway
P.O. Box 101
Fort Defiance, VA 24437