Museum of Augusta Military Academy News

NEWSLETTER

December - 2024

AMA - November 16, 2024

VMI November 16, 2024

Chairman’s Message

December 1, 2024

Dear Friends,

Happy Holiday season to everyone! I hope you spent Thanksgiving with loved ones and I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Tom Del Valle and I travelled to Staunton on November 14 – 17 to begin the preliminary planning process of what we hope will become the Augusta Military Academy Memorial. Marc Aronson drove to Staunton from Pittsburgh, PA Thursday afternoon to join Tom and me for our Friday Meeting.

Architect Ramon Irizarry from the San Juan, Puerto Rico office of Marvel Architects, met with Tom, Chris Correa, Marc and I at the AMA Museum on Friday at 1015 hrs. Ramon was given a full museum tour by Chris. After Chris finished his tour, we all walked around the campus and also inspected the inside of the Big Room, Hoover Hall and the Gymnasium.

After lunch, we visited with Pastor Stan Farthing at the Old Stone Church where we identified two possible sites where the Memorial could be erected. Pastor Stan then took us on a full tour of the historical church where he even pointed out old Civil War graffiti that had been carved into the stones at the eastern face of the church. I had never heard of the graffiti's existence back when I was a Cadet! I suppose it was kept a secret so that we Cadets did not get any additional graffiti carving ideas...

Architect Irizarry was very impressed and pleased with the visit, and told us that he came away with more than enough information to prepare a set of preliminary renderings of what the memorial could look and flow like. I hope to have that information ready to share with

the AMA Foundation Board at our January 11, 2025 meeting in Staunton.

Tom and I spent the rest of the weekend relaxing at the Museum and late in the morning Saturday, we decided to visit The Virginia Military Institute in Lexington Virginia. I had visited VMI many times during my 6 years at AMA because we fenced the VMI "B" Fencing team every year. To my surprise, Tom had never been to VMI. We spent about an hour and a half at the very impressive VMI Museum and adjacent Chapel. Tom and I were both struck by the visual messages that is displayed by all of the architectural components of the VMI campus. In my opinion, those visual messages are of serenity, symmetry and profound seriousness. The young men and women that are privileged to attend VMI, are most likely motivated by living in the midst of such an inspiring campus.

It is not surprising that Charles S. Roller (The Professor), Colonel Tom Roller and Charles S. Roller II, (Big Boy), VMI ‘1901 modeled the AMA Big Barracks and subsequent stone buildings on the campus in the specter of the VMI campus.

Beginning with Professor Charles Summerville Roller’s decision to start The Augusta Male Academy in 1874 on the grounds of the Augusta Presbyterian Stone Church to teach young Civil War Veterans the three W’s. He later bought property next to the church, built a home and continued to grow the school including a

military format which was renamed The Augusta Military Academy in 1890.

The AMA Corps of Cadets grew steadily in size over the following decades. The school leadership would change
from time to time, but in one way or another, the school was always directly or indirectly connected to a member of the Roller family, such as The Professor, Maggie Bell, Col. Tom, The “Big Boy” and finally Col. Mal Livick’s wife, Linda Roller.

(Please read Bob Bradford's, AMA ’50 history of AMA)

HERE

Today, the AMA story is about to come full circle. The AMA Alumni Association was formed in 1970 and was retired in 2023, paving the way for the AMA Alumni Foundation which was formed in 1999, to be the sole organization charged with the preservation of the AMA history and legacy. Our 30-year lease agreement with the United Pentecostal Church for the building the AMA Museum is currently housed in, expires on October 30, 2028.

It seems fitting, proper and respectful that we are now in the midst of planning the construction of a permanent AMA Memorial which will be erected on the same church property where our beloved school was founded so many years ago.

Cordially,

Douglas W. Pennock
Chairman

L-R
Doug Pennock '72, Chris Correa AMA Museum Historian and Tom Del Valle '73 - November 2024

Alumni News

Important Reminder

Below, you will find a breakdown of the AMA Museum's current operational expenses. It is of vital importance that everyone understand the AMA Foundation Board intention moving forward, is that the Museums operating cash flow and the proposed AMA Memorial project construction costs will be funded independently from each other.

We currently have $40,000 pledged by eight Board Members to specifically underwrite the Memorial project construction costs, and there are several other possible significant similarly specifically targeted gifts from Alumni which will be placed in a restricted AMA Memorial Construction Fund account. Sometime in the near future, we will be announcing the "Capital Campaign" phase of the Memorial project.

Please continue to support the Museum's day to day operation. Perhaps you will commit to covering specific overhead expenses that are highlighted below.

Thank you for your continued generous support!

Doug Pennock

AMA Alumni Foundation Overhead Sponsorship 2024-2025

Line item	Estimated Annual cost	Estimated Monthly cost	Monthly Sponsorship
House Repairs and Maintenance 4 Sponsors	**$5,000**	**$417**	**$104**
Museum Rent 1 Sponsor	**$1,200**	**$100**	**$100**
Electric & Bulk Gas 4 Sponsors	**$5,000**	**$417**	**$104**
Phone and Internet 4 Sponsors	**$5,800**	**$483**	**$121**
Insurance/ Liability / Workmans Comp 2 Sponsors	**$3,000**	**$250**	**$125**
Legal - Tax prep - Bookkeeping 10 Sponsors	**$12,000**	**$1,200**	**$120**
Office Postage/shipping/& handling 3 Sponsors	**$3,500**	**$292**	**$100**
Payroll 20 Sponsors	**$48,500**	**$4,042**	**$202**
Total Museum overhead excluding Reunion	**$84,000**	**$6,783**	

We can cover 100% of our museums overhead (excluding payroll) if only 28 individuals pledge to sponsor one or more of the direct overhead costs listed above.

NOVEMBER MUSEUM VISITORS

While relaxing on the Museum's porch Saturday morning, I had the opportunity and pleasure to chat with our most active Alumni Museum Docent, Brian Miller '67. Brian who is a native of the Charlottesville VA area, attended AMA for only one year, 1966-67, where he earned his AMA Diploma.

I often wonder why some Alumni that attended the school for only one year, are still today very much involved in things AMA. I posed that question to Brian, and he sent me his reply in an email a few days after I had returned home.

-Doug Pennock-

Doug

Thanks for the e-mail. I did not get your address before you left last Saturday.

Being an AMA grad is being part of an exclusive family that began almost 160 years ago. I appreciate the Roller family involvement in the school and I enjoyed interacting with the family members.
Our faculty was very dedicated and we received individual attention. Many of the staff members were there for many years and had families that were involved in the school as well. Many of our instructors were coaches as well and they were demanding but we realize they cared about us and were trying to bring out the best in us. We also had access to many sports not available in public schools.

The military aspect definitely developed discipline, leadership, responsibility and the ability to work with others on a daily basis. Meeting other cadets from other parts of the world expanded my understanding of other cultures.

There is a real sense of belonging when I get together with other AMA Alumni. We all can relate to similar experiences and many of the same faculty members. Performing with the Roller Rifles from 2005-11 also gave me a sense of belonging.

As I have aged I have realized the discipline instilled in me at AMA has helped me my entire life. This is not available in public schools.

In the years I have serves as docent I have learned so much more about AMA and the Roller family which has deepened my appreciation of the school. I enjoy sharing our history with visitors and I am impressed by the interest they show in our school.

When I am at AMA I see the school very much as it was when I graduated in '67. I miss those days.

It was great seeing you all last week and hope you have a Happy Thanksgiving.

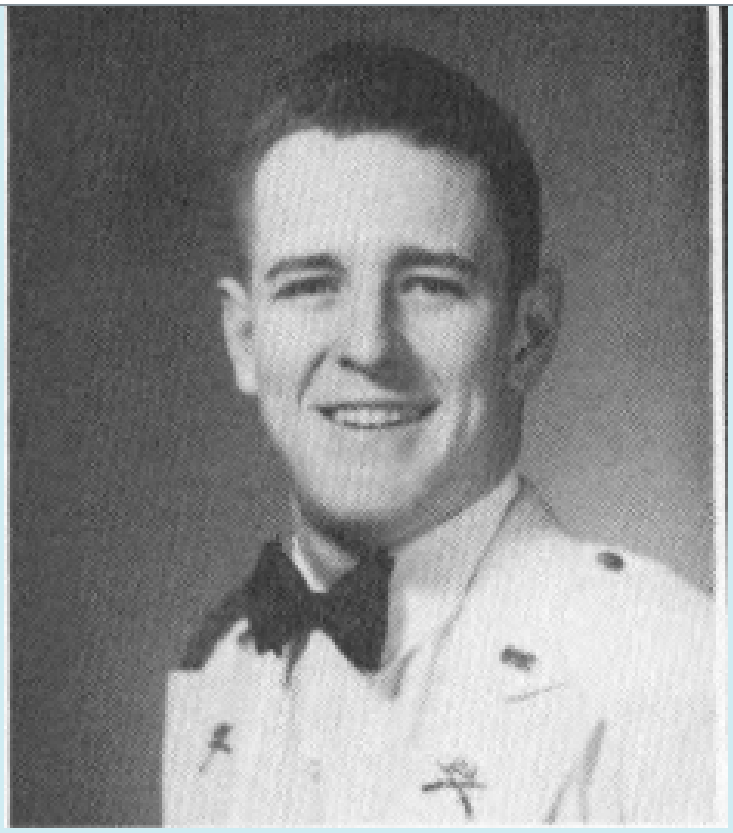
Brian

On November 26, AMA museum curator Rich van Breemen and historian Chris Correa were invited back to the Rocktown History Museum in Dayton to share more AMA stories for the Rocktown History Coffee Mill series. It was a cozy, informal Q&A with members of the public curious about the academy's history.

Joining them were AMA alumni Jay Fulk (1968-69) and Terry Barkley (faculty 1978-83). Terry is also a published historian

who spoke at the AMA museum this summer for our Noble Legends speaker series. Thanks to Rocktown's Andrea Early for the invitation and the photo.

Captain Terry Barkley



Cadet Jay Fulk

Augusta Military Academy Alumni Foundation Scholarships

THE DEADLINE HAS BEEN EXTENDED

The NEW "postmark" deadline for receiving the AMA Scholarship applications for this year is

April 30th, 2025

Don’t wait, get your applications in the mail early!

This year we are offering:

- **Two (2) $2,000 AMA Legacy Scholarships**
- **One (1) $1,000 McVey – Leonard Scholarship *(Louise McVey Leonard - Robert P. Leonard Memorial Scholarship)**

Below, find links to open and print the criteria letter, which are the official rules and requirements as well as the application for each Scholarship offered

AMA Legacy Scholarship Letter & Applications

Legacy Scholarship Letter

Legacy Scholarship Application

McVey-Leonard Scholarship Letter & Application

Louise McVey Leonard - Robert P. Leonard Memorial Scholarship

McVey Scholarship Letter

McVey Scholarship Application

Scholarship Scoring Rubric

Applicants – Make yourself familiar with the SSR (Scholarship Scoring Rubric) Understand what the judges are looking for and how best to model your application

Need more information?

Click the link below to go to the AMA Alumni Website, find the Scholarship tab and you'll discover all the necessary details

https://amaalumni.org/scholarships/

Nominations are being sought for the Class of 2025 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 2025.

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 21, 2025.

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!

Visitors in November

63

Museum Volunteers

Brian Miller '67
Victor Gomez '69
Doug Pennock '72
Tom Del Valle '73

Elizabeth Andrews
Professor Charles S. Roller's Great-great Granddaughter

***B*e 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

Brick Order Form

SHOP HERE

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, go exclusively to help offset Museum operation costs.

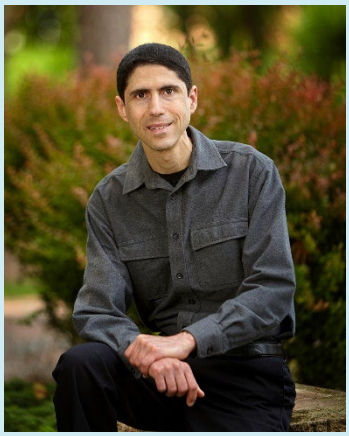
AMA "Knock off" branded merchandise that is sold outside the Museum PX store, an unsanctioned Facebook page or unsanctioned eBay account has no connection or benefit to the AMA Alumni Foundation, Inc. or the AMA Alumni Museum.

17 oz. Mug
Only $14.00 (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



Chris's Corner

Chris Correa, Museum Historian

December 1, 2024

Prolog: Can't Prove a Negative

"History is provisional," said my history professor, Ken Kurz. It's the story of what happened until we prove it's not. Then we correct the story – until we find something else. History is written in clay: it holds up only until new facts reshape it.

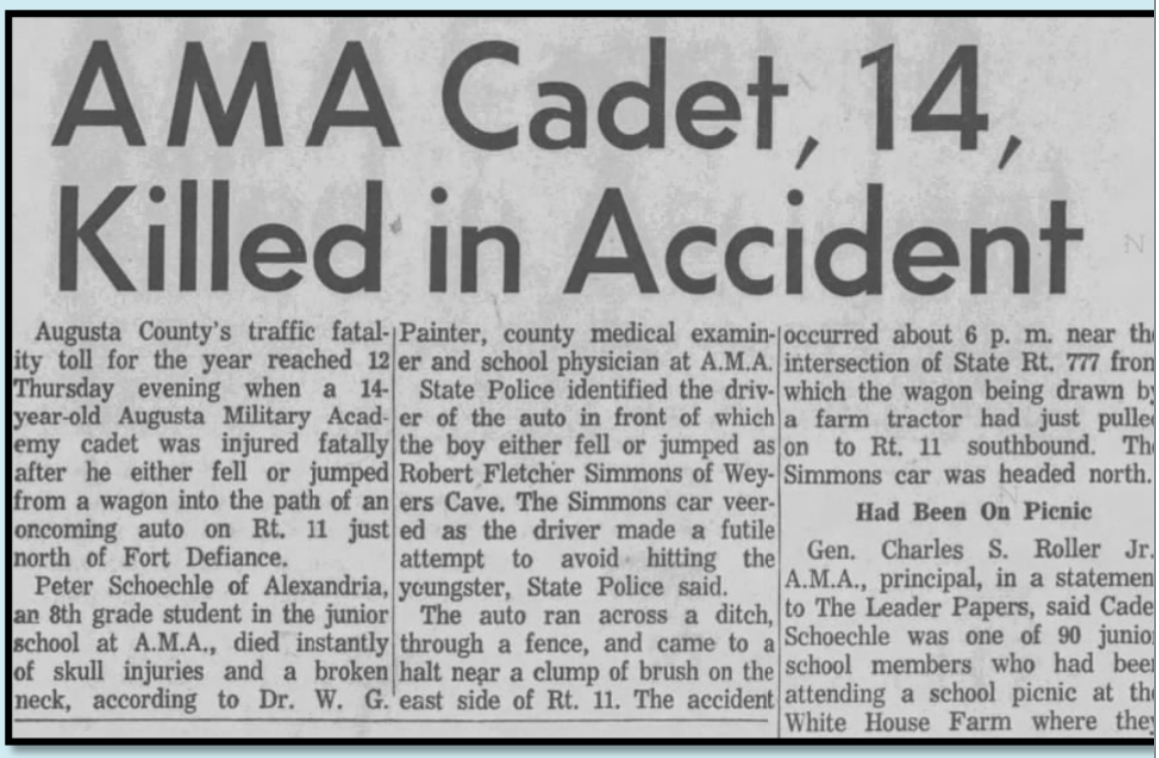
Since you often don't know what is unknown – what narrative-shifting evidence lies in wait – calling something "historical fact" is always a little risky. New discoveries can make you wrong when you least expect it. The easiest error is assuming that **a lack of evidence *is* evidence**, e.g. I've never seen evidence of X, thus X never happened.

With AMA history, I try to avoid this error by saying, "there's no evidence of…." For example, there's no evidence of a devil-worshipping cult at AMA. I can't rule out what any cadet after taps might have prayed in the privacy of his own mind. I can't guarantee that a satanic-themed personal journal won't pop up on eBay, but regardless of what MTV says, no one as of December 2024 has documented the existence of any such activity on campus at any time in the academy's history. I've learned that telling history stories requires a certain kind of precision to cover your historical bacon.

I admit I wasn't always so careful. As I confessed two months ago, I used to say, "I can't believe nobody

died.” Peter Schoechle forced a revision to “…died on campus”:

The Staunton Leader, November 10, 1961



AMA Cadet, 14, Killed in Accident

Augusta County's traffic fatality toll for the year reached 12 Thursday evening when a 14-year-old Augusta Military Academy cadet was injured fatally after he either fell or jumped from a wagon into the path of an oncoming auto on Rt. 11 just north of Fort Defiance.

Peter Schoechle of Alexandria, an 8th grade student in the junior school at A.M.A., died instantly of skull injuries and a broken neck, according to Dr. W. G. Painter, county medical examiner and school physician at A.M.A.

State Police identified the driver of the auto in front of which the boy either fell or jumped as Robert Fletcher Simmons of Weyers Cave. The Simmons car veered as the driver made a futile attempt to avoid hitting the youngster, State Police said.

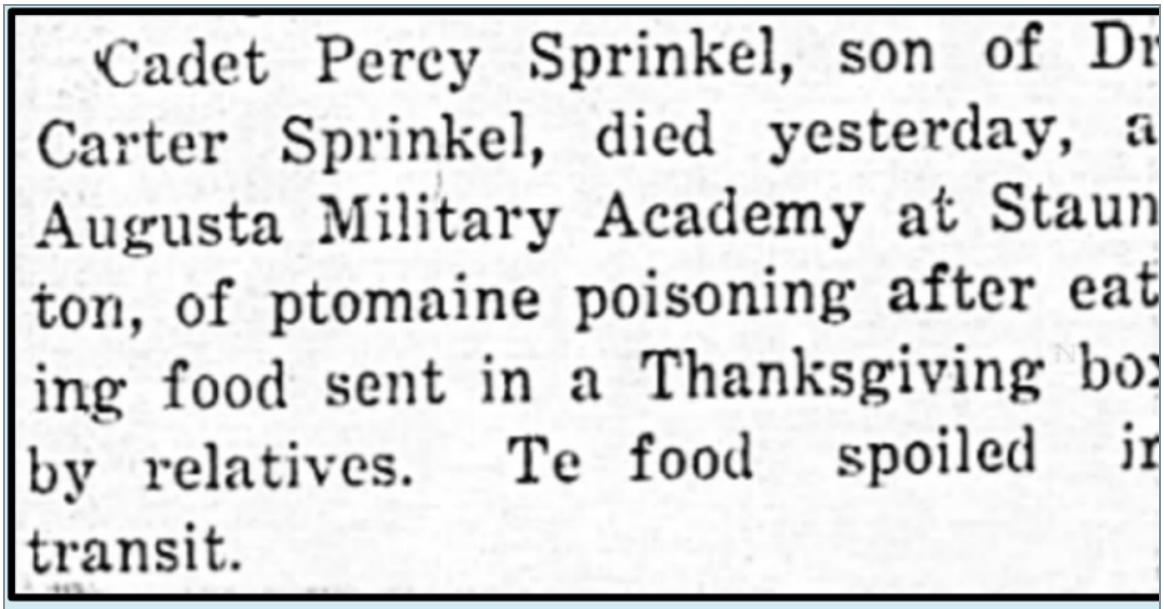
The auto ran across a ditch, through a fence, and came to a halt near a clump of brush on the east side of Rt. 11. The accident occurred about 6 p. m. near the intersection of State Rt. 777 from which the wagon being drawn by a farm tractor had just pulled on to Rt. 11 southbound. The Simmons car was headed north.

Had Been On Picnic

Gen. Charles S. Roller Jr. A.M.A., principal, in a statement to The Leader Papers, said Cadet Schoechle was one of 90 junior school members who had been attending a school picnic at the White House Farm where they

Then I found Percy and had to abandon the statement altogether:

Staunton *Daily Leader*, December 8, 1916



Cadet Percy Sprinkel, son of Dr
Carter Sprinkel, died yesterday, a
Augusta Military Academy at Staun
ton, of ptomaine poisoning after eat
ing food sent in a Thanksgiving box
by relatives. Te food spoiled in
transit.

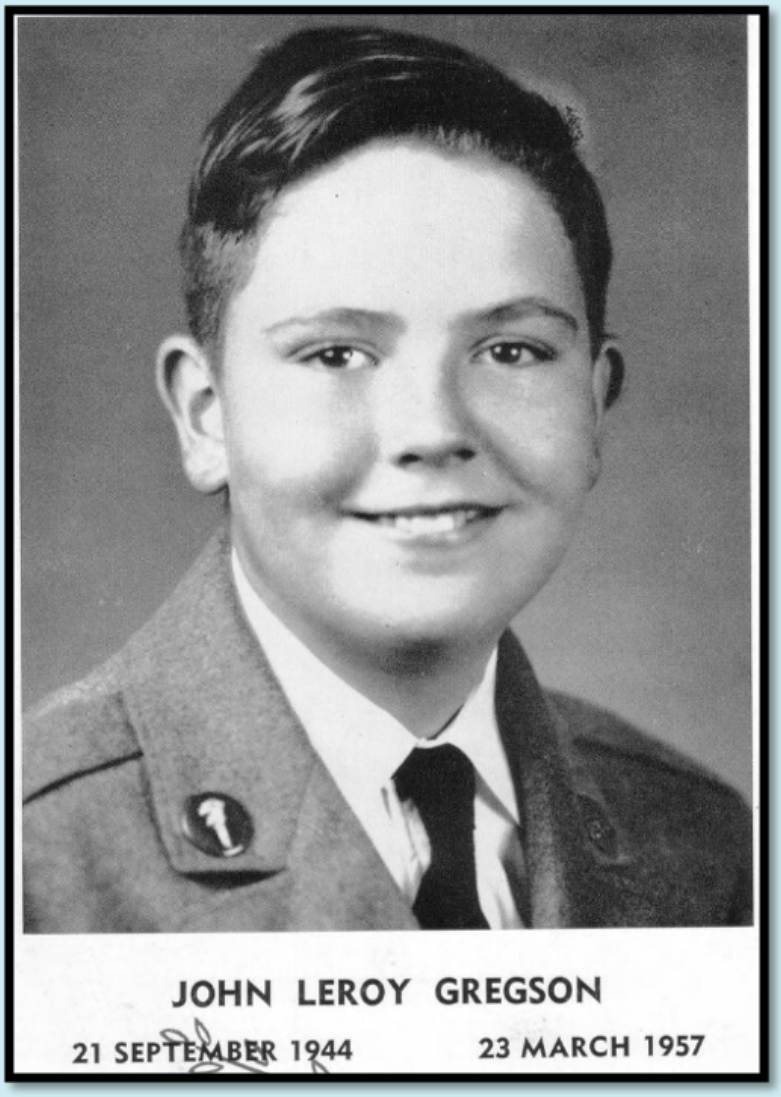
Where I'd still felt safe was in the claim, "we have no evidence of a homicide on campus."

Except, now we do. It's the greatest tragedy I know of on these grounds, and I have no evidence that it was ever treated that way. If you examined the school's publications, you'd barely know about it. Eleventh grader Tom Richmond (1956-57) was at school when it happened and is confident there was no open acknowledgement, but this wasn't because of a policy on how the school handled death. While the school didn't appear to have a standard operating procedure, there are similarities among losses that occurred before and afterward suggesting that what happened this time was different, and the academy decided it had to be handled differently.

Over the next three articles, I'll detail what we know and don't know, what accounts sync and don't, and what consequences were never reported.

Part One: March 23, 1957

It was Tom's museum visit in September that put me on this search. I was updating his record in our database and went through the *Recall* looking for his picture. That's how I found John:

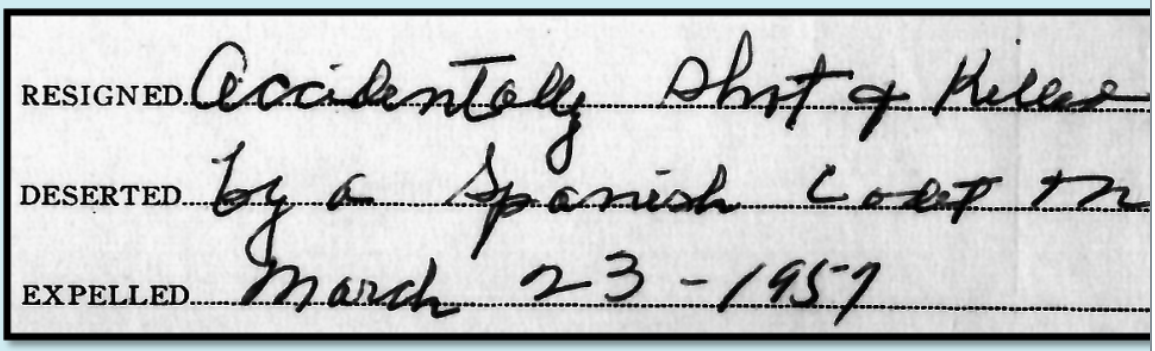


The *Recall* had few words and even less to say. The caption under this picture reads:

"Our sorrow could hardly be greater. Our sympathy could not be more heartfelt for all those who knew John – his kindness, his friendliness, his devotion, his sense of humor. There will always be a place of memory for John who 'fled like a wisp away.'"

To me, this felt suspiciously generic. If “have a great summer” is what you write in the yearbook of a classmate you barely know, this caption is what you’d say at his funeral. It reads like the writer had no information on his subject or details of the death.

As with Percy Sprinkel, John’s grade sheet had the answer, and it was a shock:


RESIGNED Accidentally Shot & Killed
DESERTED by a Spanish Cadet in
EXPELLED March 23 - 1957

For a long time, I stared frozen at the screen with my mouth open. John hadn’t “fled like a wisp away.” He was gunned down. Now, the missing details were even more urgent. Where? How? Why? And why were these details not considered necessary for the grade sheet, but the shooter’s nationality was?

It made the papers, but when and where is notable. The most complete account of the killing appeared 3 days later in Staunton’s *News-Leader*

AMA Death Is Ruled Accidental

FORT DEFIANCE, March 25 —Cadet John L. Gregson, 12, in his first year at Augusta Military Academy, was shot to death accidentally early Saturday morning when a small-bore rifle in the hands of another cadet was fired.

Colonel Charles S. Roller Jr., principal of the school, described the events leading up to the tragedy as follows:

The cadet corps this morning started its nine-day rest period, or spring vacation, and most of the students were preparing to return to their homes.

Cadet Jerome L. Griffin, 14, Arlington, had been sent a 22-calibre short target rifle, which customarily was held in the school armory. Since he was going home, he obtained it from the armory sergeant to take home. It was lying on the top bunk in Griffin's room.

Gregson entered Griffin's room and sat on a radiator about 12 feet from the bunk. _____, 14, of Caracas, Venezuela*, picked up the rifle and began looking at it. Accidentally, he pulled the trigger, and the slug struck Gregson in the chest, apparently penetrating or clipping the heart. Gregson smiled and collapsed on the floor.

At first it was thought that he was just pretending to be hurt. Other cadets outside heard the shot and entered the room, reporting also to Majors Wales and Lucas, who were some 50 yards away.

Their examination indicated the boy was dead; a diagnosis which was confirmed by Dr. Painter, who said the lad must have died instantly.

Sheriff Kent said that while no charges probably would be placed, his investigation was being continued.

It's worth noting a story on the crowded front page of this edition:

Bicycle Struck By Automobile; Youth Treated

A Staunton youth required medical treatment for abrasions of the left hand, left ankle, and left hip he received when the bicycle on which he was riding was struck by an automobile at the intersection of Skymont Rd. and Vinson St., Monday.

Injured in the mishap, which occurred at 3:50 p.m., was Lacy T. King Jr., of 801 Selma Blvd.

According to reports, the boy was riding his bicycle south on Vinson St. and failed to stop for the stop sign at the intersection and his bicycle was struck by a 1951 Studebaker, being driven by Wilma Marlene Tutwiler, of Rt. 5. The car was not damaged.

I was surprised that a far less consequential story of an injured cyclist got more exposure, and much sooner, than the fatal shooting of one child by another at a local boarding school. Meanwhile, in Charlottesville, the afternoon edition of the *Daily Progress* had it on the front page just hours after it happened:

AMA Cadet Killed By Rifle Discharge

STAUNTON (AP) — A 13-year-old freshman cadet at Augusta Military Academy was killed early this morning when a small bore target rifle accidentally discharged in the hands of another cadet.

Academy officials identified the victims as John L. Gregson, son of Mr. and Mrs. John G. Gregson of Rt. 4, Richmond.

Altogether, AMA's nearest broadsheet was scooped by 8 Virginia papers and 1 in North Carolina (his parents' home state). Three ran the news on page one, but in the *News Leader*, it was slotted in with the obituaries on page nine.

Memories of the tragedy passed down unevenly for decades. Tom Richmond was on campus that day. He vaguely remembers only "a bunch of activity" on the south side of barracks, "but nothing was ever said about it. I left for break shortly thereafter and never heard anything when I got back." Doug Pennock '72 and Tom Del Valle '73 heard nothing about a rifle fatality in the academy's past. Meanwhile, Frank Berg '80 remembered a story circulating of a weapon once taking a life when an AMA Springfield was fitted with a thumbtack to replace a filed-down firing pin.

Besides the way oral tradition tends to distort details, some rumors could've come from inaccurate reporting in 1957. This seems especially plausible after talking to Jerome Lee Griffin (1956-57), whom Rich and I welcomed to the museum on October 15. Jerry admits that certain details have faded 67 years after being named in that article, but what he does recall differs from what the public read. Those differences and how that day impacted him over the next seven decades are what you'll learn about next month.

Thanks for reading.

* Note: I've omitted the name of the shooter in this story. Yes, it's always been public information. You can find it at the library or newspapers.com, but I doubt the name of these minors, other than the victim, would be broadcast today given the circumstances. Mr. Griffin's name is retained with his permission.

Doug Pennock's Viewpoint

December 1, 2024

The final weeks of December 1971 was my last Christmas break while attending AMA.

Let me walk you through what the round-trip from Weyers Cave International (SHD) to San Juan International (SJU) looked like:

0600 - Reveille the Cadet Corps would wake up to the sound of "Leaving on a Jet Plane" by John Denver.
0630 - Soupy. I would usually pack my bag between Soupy and the bus ride to the airport, a habit I continue today which drives my wife crazy!
0730 - We would jump on the "Blue Bomb" bus that took us to the Shenandoah Valley International Airport (SHD). In 1971 you were issued a paper ticket book by the airlines or travel

agent. The ticket book had two copies of each leg of your trip, one for the ticket counter when you checked in, the other was for you to keep. My ticket book was pretty thick every time I flew back to Puerto Rico.

0900 - This leg of the trip was what I would refer to as the "milk run"... (SHD) Board a Piedmont Airlines twin radial engine Martin 4-0-4. There were no assigned seats on those Piedmont flights, so all cadets on the flight naturally sat in a group. The milk run ran the following route: From Shenandoah Valley International Airport - SHD to Charlottesville - CHO to Richmond - RIC to our final destination, Washington - National - DCA.

Side note: On that 2-hour nightmare of flying, 50% of all passengers would throw up while we were navigating through the turbulent mountain air. Each back seat pocket held at least a dozen barf bags… Also, the moment the airplane was airborne 90% of the passengers lit a cigarette!

1100 - (DCA) I would grab a snack and a Coke in the terminal, then walk to the Eastern Airlines Shuttle gate. Eastern Airlines ran a very successful shuttle program that did not require a reservation. The service was offered from Washington - National to: Newark NJ, La Guardia NYC or Boston MA. Flights left every half hour and you would pay the flight attendant the $30.00 fee after take-off. Once again, no assigned seat. Right after takeoff most passengers would light up a cigarette.

1230 - (DCA) Catch the eastern Shuttle Douglas DC-9 to New York LaGuardia LGA. Smoke some more.

1345 - (LGA) Grab a taxi or bus to the iconic round Pan American Airways terminal building at JFK Airport, smoking cigarettes all the way.
1700 - (JFK) Take a brand new Pan American 747 clipper to San Juan International airport. Finally a reserved seat! You would choose your seat off a large seat map that was displayed behind the agent at the check-in counter. The agent would remove the sticker from the map with your chosen seat number, and stick it on the front of your ticket jacket. This sticker was all the evidence that you needed to board the airplane at the gate! How airline travel has changed over the past 53 years!
And of course more smoking and rum and coke..
2130 - Arrive SJU
2200 - Dad meets and drives me home. No smoking. I never lit up in front of my dad until after I left AMA.
2330 - Arrive home and remove my wetsuit…

Note: All Cadets were required to wear our uniform while travelling to and from home while school was in session. (September - June) In December, we were wearing wool pants and a wool blouse, when I arrived home to a balmy 85 degrees and 90% humidity and got off the airplane down the passenger boarding stairs,
(pre jet-bridge) my uniform stuck to me like a wetsuit…

The return flight to AMA was repeated in reverse order, so essentially, it would take me a full two days to travel to and from my home to AMA.

Fast forward to November of 2024:

The trip from San Juan to Staunton is not as time consuming in this modern digital age… My last trip to the Valley this past November began with reveille at **0530**.
0845 - I flew from San Juan to Charlotte, NC then connected to a flight to Richmond VA, rented a car and arrived in Staunton at **1530**. The return flight to San Juan was from RIC to Miami International - MIA (the zoo) So yes, 53 years later, it still takes me two days of travel to visit Ft. Defiance, but I still enjoy the trip!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to everyone!
(Feliz Navidad y un Prospero Año Nuevo para todos!)

Doug out

The Museum Newsletter is written and prepared by Doug Pennock
and edited by Trudy Pennock and Marc Aronson '68

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