

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

Alan Poole, '67
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“Till there are only two...”

I was first introduced to AMA in the summer of 1961 when my father had seen an advertisement for Augusta Military Academy at the back of a magazine. Dad sent away for a catalog and an application form and we then made a trip from our home in Cleveland, Ohio to Ft. Defiance, Virginia to check out the school that summer.

A stop in Woodbury, Pennsylvania was made to visit relatives and to pick up my cousin who came along for the ride. I remember we stopped for lunch in Winchester, Virginia at a place called “Duff’s Rebel Restaurant”. This stop would become a tradition with us each year when we would either return or leave the Valley.

We arrived in Ft. Defiance that summer at an empty campus and after a brief look around we returned home where a decision was made for me to attend AMA and give it a try for one year.

So, in September of 1961, there I stood in many long lines in the gymnasium waiting for either the issuing of uniform items or getting classroom assignments. Since I was in the Lower School my first room was located on the lower level of “Dean’s Castle”. I remember those being large rooms that I think had four bunk beds in it with eight cadets being roommates.

With in-processing being done, my father wanted to talk with **General Roller** about something. We were escorted to his office where we awaited his arrival. I remember sitting in his office looking at the pictures, trophies and other memorabilia in it, including the large portrait of him over his desk that sent my knees shaking!

The screen door swung open and all I saw was this shiny silver star on his shoulder. My Dad and I got to our feet right away where he greeted us, then sat at his desk. I don’t remember what all was said while we were there, only when we got up to leave the General put his hand on my shoulder that had this enormous ring on it and he said to my Dad, “*Take this young man over to The Fort Mr. Poole and get him some proper shoes.*” We did without delay!

The first year, my seventh grade year, went by in a blur! The following year I returned and was now an old cadet. That year, on March 16th, 1963, The General passed away. I remember I was leaving the Big Room following the movie, if memory serves me right, when the news spread through the barracks and across campus.

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

I had the distinction to serve on his Honor Guard for his funeral. I remember standing at attention outside White Hall during a rainy, overcast day that was supposed to be a sunny day. We were brought to attention, and present arms when his casket was brought out and put into the hearse where we preceded it up Rt. 11 to the Old Stone Church, where his Corps paid it's final tribute to a man we called "**The Big Boy**".

I have a lot of other outstanding memories of Augusta, one of which was finally beating S.M.A. in football in 1964 after 22 years, Sunday dinners at Brook's Restaurant in Verona, Saturday trips into town, and walking up Rt. 11 to The Fort to use the phone booth...

In my senior year, 1967, the Roller Rifles, Color Guard, and Band Co. went to Alexandria Va. for the George Washington Birthday Parade. The awards were being presented at one of the local Hotels where they announced the winners of the parade: "First Place, Drill Team, Augusta Military Academy"; "First Place, Color Guard, Augusta Military Academy"; "First Place, Marching Band,..... You guessed it! Augusta Military Academy"!

We returned to Ft. Defiance carrying three first place trophies! The next day, when it was announced in the Mess Hall, I thought the roof was going to come off that building!

I also recall an experience I am willing to bet you may have had as well. I noticed that during and after each graduation ceremonies, while standing on the Black Top, I saw Cadets hugging one another with tears in their eyes while Auld Lang Syne was played by the Band. I wondered, "*What's going on here?*" I was only anxious to get the last of my stuff packed and put in the car, into civilian clothes, and out the front gate!

Then my senior year came and as the Band played Auld Land Syne, it was my turn to have those tears I saw so many others have before me. I was the Training Officer that year and stood with the Battalion Staff, **Col. Livick** came through our ranks and shook our hands and congratulated us and wished us well. My father took a picture of that moment that I still have today.

So, did some of you have the same experience or feelings I did on the Black Top on your last day?..... I bet so. The years have passed, and the school we once called home has long since closed it's doors, and sadly, the sun does set on an empty barracks. But we still come together in a small town called Ft. Defiance to be with old friends and classmates, to make new friends and to share our present lives with former dedicated Teachers and Faculty!

Post Script: I consider myself very fortunate in that I still share a bond and camaraderie with

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

many people from my years at Augusta, and today I am able to share that same bond with fellow Fire Fighters. Not long ago, I celebrated my 25th year with the Minot Fire Department here in Minot, North Dakota, as a Senior Fire Fighter, Lead Driver/Pump Operator.

Many miles separate me from Ft. Defiance Virginia and it is not always possible for me to return to the Valley as often as I would like, and not a good excuse either, I might add, but when I do, it is always a real treat!!

I like to think that AMA, and it's Teachers and Faculty, have given me something to meet the challenges that I face when I report for duty each day. My Engine Co. was on duty on September 11th, 2001 and even though we are many miles away we still felt the loss of 343 brother Firefighters.....and so it is today that anyone who even wore an AMA uniform will feel a loss for a brother AMA Cadet, Teacher or Faculty member.

When the subject of schools comes up, it is hard to try and explain to people, that even though AMA has long since closed its doors that we have our own Museum, a "fantastic" News Letter that reaches former Cadets, Teachers and Faculty all across the country and the world, and a Website that helps hold many former Cadets, faculty and friends together to this day, along with a small, Army of dedicated volunteers to keep it all running for all to enjoy! And a Scholarship program to aid in the education of our own young students, as well as others.

The reaction I get is one of disbelief that all this takes place from a school that is no longer in existence. I don't think there are too many schools, open or closed, that can boast those accomplishments and it is something we can all be very proud of. Thank you for taking the time to read this and maybe it brought back some memories of your own.....

“ Till there are only two “

You can view the 1967 RECALL online heer:
<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall1967/>