

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

Jim Towe, '60
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Because of some family circumstances, my parents were unable to bring me to AMA when the appointed Sunday arrived. Some friends of theirs dropped me off. I had never written a check before in my life, I had never placed a long distance phone call in my life, and I had never been as deathly ill from homesickness.

Sometimes I tell folks I cried when I got there and I cried when it was time to leave. The tears on arrival were private to be sure, because I wasn't going to let any other cadets see me crying. The tears when I left after graduation my PG year (I graduated in '59 and was a PG in '60) were open and proud.

Because of Virginia's Massive Resistance to court ordered school integration, the public schools in my hometown were closed rather than be integrated. This happened in a number of communities in those days. **Colonel Roller** never said "no" to any applicant and the result was probably the biggest glory days in the history of the Academy. It was just the opposite of what followed during Viet Nam when anything military was bad and the enrollment had shrunk to the level that they had to close the school at Christmas. We had four cadets to many rooms. Probably all new cadets had four to a room and many officers even did too.

We had some of the greatest teachers on earth. **Chuck Savedge**, who became a legend in the yearbook world was a great yearbook advisor, director of the Final Ball, Cotillion Club, and a fantastic friend and science teacher.

Major Kramer was a wonderful math teacher. He had been gassed during the Second World War. When he'd get excited, he would huff and puff and wheeze. If he got a little too exasperated with my – or anyone else's – lack of understanding of the mathematical principle he was imparting, he'd unceremoniously lift your desk with you in it and pitch you out in the hall.

Colonel Gardner was such a gentleman and great teacher of foreign languages.

Colonel Hoover had his bad eye. He taught and coached anything and everything. He loved the school like few others. He was such a friend to so many. I suspect he even assisted some with college, but I can not personally verify that.

He would give you the shirt off his back and he loved the school and so many of the cadets. I'm sure that some took advantage of him, but he never gave up on any of us. He used to have a motorcycle that he kept off campus. He would take some of his cycling cadet friends cycling on

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weekends.

Major Koogler was a great English teacher. He did everything from conjugating verbs to diagramming sentences.

Colonel McCue was another great gentleman. He was a science teacher and owned the hardware store in Verona. His son was a junior cadet when I was there. The boy became a great athlete and cadet leader academically and militarily. The Colonel smoked continuously during class (Pall Malls, I think). Unfortunately, lung cancer cut his life much too short. Savadge always had a cigarette going but he enjoyed a nice long life.

Colonel Roller used to give us regular spelling tests that always started with “separate”. He said it was the most misspelled word in the English language. He also used to give us general knowledge tests that covered all sorts of stuff that he thought we should know if we had gone to AMA.

He used to have this microphone he would use to talk to us at supper. Sometimes he would go on for 15 minutes. At the time I regarded it as an interruption of our meal. After I left AMA I realized it was just like a father talking to his children over the dinner table about stuff that needed to be talked about.

I sure missed him when I graduated. I was the Captain Adjutant my last year which was right under the First Captain. He knew my name well, but he called me “honey”. He would loan me his ole “Gray Ghost” thirties vintage Dodge with the shift on the floor to date in Staunton.

Mal Livick was a great coach and friend to many. I know it hurt him and Linda to have to close the school.

Some of the best friends I have are those from Augusta. We really had all kinds there. Just like in life in general. But the great things that stick out are what I remember the most.

Back when he was the football coach, I would never have imagined **Bill Ralph** finding God and becoming a preacher, but he did and he is a better preacher than he was a coach. He has the sweetest wife, **Rosie**.

For a point in my life I probably thought they were the worst four years of my life, but I have come to regard them as the best four years of my life. They truly prepared me for college and for life at Augusta.

Long Live AMA!

You can view the 1960 RECALL here:

<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall-1960/>