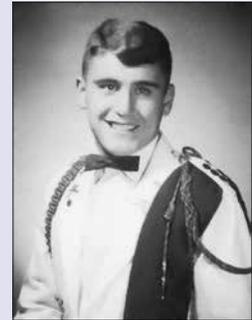


Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

NICK SYROPOULOS, '69
July 14, 2001



It was early September 1959. My father, godfather, family friend and I load up a trunk into a Cadillac and head West then South. We are leaving from Baltimore, Maryland. AMA is 200 miles away.

In 1959 we didn't have the Interstate, so I'm guessing that our trip took 5-6 hours. We went West on Route 40, South on 340, through Harper's Ferry, my first Civil War experience, Charlestown down to Berryville and across the mountains into the most beautiful valley on earth, the Shenandoah.

The ride itself was not memorable the first time out, hard for a seven-year-old to remember that. Although subsequent trips - ten years' worth - etched the journey in my memory.

First sight must have been impressive, the catalog didn't do it justice. All sorts of people milling around. Cadets, in various sorts of uniforms, parents and teachers. I didn't know who or what it was all about.

I was going to go to military school to get a uniform that didn't itch as bad as my brown wool suit. Boy, was I in for a big surprise! Well at least it didn't itch quite as bad as my brown suit.

I wouldn't know until later that week, as my uniform had to be tailored. Almost every new cadet had the same problem. This gave a curious look to the Cadet Corps that first night at retreat and suopie: Cadets in full uniform, others in blue jackets, grey shirt, black tie and pick your trousers.

Mine were part of my very itchy brown suit. I had again snuck my pajama bottoms on under them to prevent itching.

AMA in the Fall...

The Valley never looked prettier...We get to school in early September...Two weeks before the Corps if you play Varsity football, a few days before for New Cadets and Officers.

What excitement! Who will be coming back? Who will my roommates be? Where will I room? What company will I be in? What rank will I hold?

Who is the Battalion Commander? What new teachers will I have? Do I have Colonel Hoover for Geometry?

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

Everything looks so new - fresh paint makes it seem so. Did you see the new Science lab? Great new football uniforms, fancy "Blue Streaks" on the helmets. We'll beat S.M.A. this year - when is that game? Plans are made by the 'night raiders' to get the S.M.A. sign AGAIN!

The first few days the Corps looks a bit ragged - not everyone has their full uniforms. Some wear "Ike" jackets or Blue Jackets instead of what they are supposed to have. Can't put them on report yet as their uniform is getting tailored. Did you see the line in the gym, getting uniforms and measured?

Laundry bags full of all the Cadets' needs. Better get the lacquer off the brass right away, and spit-shine my new "clod hoppers" & combat boots. My body is shocked by the feel of WOOL - summer tans and wool don't mix well. Later, we, in the 60's, got Dacron lightweight pants and short sleeve gray shirts.

Boy, who taught you to tie a tie? No, your web belt goes the other way. You better learn to put that belt on without getting fingerprints all over the buckle.

Ah, DRILL.. Endless DRILL. Right face, left face, about face. How do my hands go at parade rest? Feet at the 45-degree angle, head up, chin in, chest out, eyes straight ahead. Get that squad lined up right or I will find somebody who can!

When do we get our M-1's, '03's? Better learn to march without them first. First Sunday parade... we march EVERY Sunday. People come from far and wide to see the AMA Corps of Cadets on Sunday. We ALWAYS put on a great show, no one is better.

Rain or shine we have Sunday PARADE. Hope we win the Parade. Sure we will we are the best! Wait until next week - we will pass in review by the flank - can't look like a snake, must be just one Cadet the M.S. Cadre sees in order to win the First Place ribbon.

What new girls are at Stuart Hall? When can we see them? Invite them to the first Parade, coordinate the first company dance. Got to beat the S.M.A. guys to the punch.

Home football game is a great thrill. Stuart Hall girls will be here. Big Barracks sheets hanging out of the windows telling the visiting team what we will do to them. Our Spirits are high and our cheers are loud and endless: "*Push them back, push them back, waaaaaay back!!!! 15 for team rah, rah, rah-rah-rah....*"

Augusta Military Academy

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Memories of The End of Term

May-June... Ah, the time of the year all Cadets dreamed of – getting out and going home for the Summer. But first, there were the invitations to choose from and mail. Line up a date for the Final Ball. Drill every night after supper for the Roller Rifles and squad, platoon and company competitions during Commencement Week.

I always saw the Pin-Up Queen Dance as the run down the home stretch...Color returned to the Valley and Spring sports were in full swing. All cadets looked forward to getting out and the seniors maybe thinking, “Hey this is it!”

We knew what lay ahead for Commencement Week. I couldn’t wait until my parents got there and I could drive and go out. Some of us even made some “trips” late at night for a few cold ones. We would hear about those getting caught, busted that last week of school and then reinstated for Graduation Day.

Tension rose as squads, platoons and companies marched out to strut their stuff to win the Cup. I will stop short of the last day or two of events, because there was a whole lot going on there. So I will end with, “*For the Last Time... Sir.*”

You can view the 1969 RECALL online here:
<https://galleries.amaalumni.org/Recalls/Recall1969/>