

# Augusta Military Academy

## Oral History

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### A Different Kind of Tour

When we talk about a “tour” today, we normally think of an organized vacation complete with guides, information about a (generally unknown) area that we are going to visit and instructions and direction. My “tour” at AMA, from 1975 to 1979, however, was a different kind of tour, although with some similarities to our travel tours. It was without a doubt one of the most important and unforgettable periods of my life.

I remember well my arrival at Augusta Military Academy in 1975 – an unwilling participant in my parents’ experiment to “fix our son” – after an unsuccessful stint at a Northern Virginia High School. I had been rudely awakened one morning and told that I was to pack for an extended stay at a boarding school. Two days later, we left for AMA.

I was not a very promising cadet, I suppose, when we drove onto the campus: me with my hair to my shoulders, a miserable academic record and absolutely no direction. But all that was to change radically.

First things first: the hair had to go and it went. Next, being assigned to a room and, what? A roommate?! Then there was the uniform, going to sleep at a certain hour, Reveille at a certain hour ...

Wow! was it ever cold for those morning formations in November... Walking down the stoop to the sinks for a shower, hair freezing on the way back to my room... Memories of limited “tasty” food ... Rank? A private ... Study Hall formations, bed making, tie tying, shoe shining, parade marching, the rifle range and ... **Colonel Hoover**.

What else could an aspiring young hooligan desire? Direction? AMA gave direction – they were judges, jury and, sometimes, executioners – **Livick, Savedge, Studer, Mannasmith, Hoover** and all the others, working to direct us, the hooligans.

A month after school started, my parents arrived for a Sunday visit and they walked directly past me during the service in the Old Stone Church – they did not recognize me! For that matter, neither did I! In a month I had begun to realize that commitment, performance, loyalty and discipline were the keys to success at AMA. For the first time, I had direction.

This may sound slightly strange, but it is necessary to look at my background before coming to Augusta. I had grown up living a privileged and lucky life. I had been adopted at birth by two very loving and caring parents. My father was a senior level U.S. diplomat who relocated the family, including my adopted sister, to the Soviet Union in the midst of the Cold War.

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In the USSR we lived in six different cities, visited countless others and viewed the U.S. astronauts' landing on the moon on a black and white TV in a Leningrad hotel. After the astronauts returned, one of the moon rocks was entrusted to my father's organization for display. During the months that followed, this nine-year-old was responsible for carrying the encased moon rock, complete with guards, to a safe off-premise site.

True to the form of my parents' vision, I was educated in Soviet schools, as my father believed in learning the language and understanding a nation's culture from the native's point of view. You may imagine, then, my coming back to the United States after those interesting and trying times and searching for my identity among American school students. I was lost!

We went back overseas to Slovakia, Yugoslavia and, finally, Bulgaria. I felt at home in the world of diplomacy, privileged and somehow special. When we returned to the U.S. and I was enrolled in a public school, complete with all the entrapments that the mid-seventies provided, you can realize that I was having a hard time adjusting. That's why my parents decided that Augusta Military Academy was just the place for me.

My years there – 1975 to 1979 – were memorable years. Some of you may recall the great music of the time – AC/DC, Boston, Lynyrd Skynyrd, ZZ Top and the rest could be heard blaring out of our rooms on Saturdays in the Spring... Beer runs and the back field ... we thought we were clever. In reality, we were growing. As we became inventive and creative, we learned the ropes of life and an understanding of rules, ramifications and accountability.

I was having a "tour" that was incredible. Where else could someone play multiple sports in one season? As an accomplished soccer player, I played that sport; I kicked briefly on the football team; fenced; played baseball and did whatever else was available.

AMA created the need to be involved and that commitment sticks with me to this day...Honor Roll, Roller Rifles, cotillions, town leave, marksmanship, Pfc, Corporal and Lieutenant; squads, platoons, companies and the battalion.

As I grow older, I become more appreciative of the lessons and experiences of life and the fortunes that have been afforded me. How fortunate to have a family, when none existed; to have a school where the commitment to the students was paramount and where there are thousands of unspoken thanks.

AMA will always live in my mind. To The Stars...with difficulty, maybe, but to the stars, nonetheless! Thank you Augusta Military Academy for this truly unique and memorable "Tour"!