

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

Steve Pearson, '72
July 10, 2001



Wow, AMA! I so remember that fearful first day. When that car pulled away and drove through the trees lining the driveway, I never felt so alone. It was within 48 hours I was on the phone, begging to come home.

The only thing I really remember about that first day was standing in the big line in the gym, getting uniforms. My parents were with me and my mother felt the need to inspect each item closely. I was so embarrassed. Rage finally hit when the person issuing uniform components says "One Dike." My mother immediately grabs it and says "what's this?" Being 12 and having no idea, I grabbed it from her and stuffed it quickly into the laundry bag, I was sure it must have been some form of athletic supporter from what I had seen in the torn package and didn't want my mother holding it up in the crowd. I was rather disheartened that day to find they were not going to give me a saber that day :)

I was in the eighth grade, so I was in big barracks. They issued me a rifle, an M1. I was all of 4 foot 6 inches and weighed about 75 pounds. They handed me this rifle that came to my shoulder and weighed 1/10th of my body weight at this time. I struggled with it the first day of drill, proud of it as it swung me side to side like a 50 pound bail of hay each time I went from left to right shoulder. Soon it was replaced with an O3 and things were more manageable. Everyone was envious of my O3. Number one, It was half the weight, number two, the only others with them were Roller Rifles and number three. It had a plugged barrel so it did not have to be cleaned shiny for inspection.

At the end of that year I accidentally discovered that in fact it was plugged, but not intentionally, It was plugged by a number of failed Queen Anne Salutes by the previous owner. The barrel packed with grass and dirt. I got it all cleaned out one inspection at the end of the year, but the barrel was so pitted, I stuffed spitballs down the barrel to reseal it.

Speaking of rifles, I believe that It was that first year of mine (1968) that **Ron Naggi** (sp?) had purchased an M1 bolt with firing pin and used to go up on the back hill for target practice. I never knew if It was true, but a story went around about a pissed off farmer and a dead cow that spring.

When my parents brought me back after Christmas, I persuaded them to let me buy some fireworks on the trip there. I had one of those huge rolls of Blackcat firecrackers and a number of M 80s. I was never good at keeping a secret and soon a number of "mid level management" sergeants and lieutenants would come by to mooch some explosives for a revenge prank or something.

It seemed like everyone in the company knew I had them - too late by then to be concerned. I hid them in the bottom of my locker. At the bottom of the part where you could hang cloths, someone had pried up the boards so you could stash stuff under the locker in th elevated concrete base. I

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

had all the fireworks stuffed way under there, almost to the other side. Stupid me, I never nailed the boards down, just forced them back in place.

Along comes an honor inspection of the rooms and in walks (I think) John Henderson. With a stern look, he glances around the room, picks up a few things and then goes right for the base of the locker. It felt like I had a tennis ball in my throat and I know my face was a glowing red. He flips up the boards like he knew they were there and feels under the edge. Then he drops to his knees and sticks his whole arm up to the elbow under the locker. I know he has his hands on all of the fireworks since his arms were about a foot longer than mine. He pulls out his arm, puts the boards back, walks around the room, looks at me and walks out. I almost fainted, this would have been the first time I was in trouble had he acknowledged he found them.

Later I decided that some of the “middle management” must have told him of them, or even previously taken some for him for one of his pranks, and I was being “played” for the fun of it. I think I gave the whole batch to someone else after that.

I think It was my second year that I had hooked up with **Bill Adomite** who lives somewhere in Nevada now. Bill was very German and proud of It. His claim to fame was that his father was the driver of the third lead tank at the Battle of the Bulge. He had a German helmet he would wear around, I believe there is a photo of him with it in the yearbook.

Bill and I made bombs and rockets. We would spend a whole Friday night packing match heads into containers and then lighting them off. We had small cannons that shot BB gun darts right through a door. Almost every weekend for a while was a project.

Well, Bill got real good at it and later that year was seen walking up the back hill, German Helmet on and a big tube slung over his shoulder. It seems he had used an Esties rocket motor and a collection of “stuff” (match head scrapings or gun powder) and had built himself a “Panzerfust” (sp) or bazooka. Later I heard he was able to launch it from his shoulder and take out a small tree.

That year also, my previous roommate, **Joe Ireland**, was filling in for a couple weeks firing the cannon at assembly. Knowing my “interest” in explosives, he brought me a shotgun shell from the cannon that had a bad primer and failed to fire. I showed such appreciation, by the end of the two weeks I had about five of the shotgun blanks that went into many a small explosive device.

Somehow it got out that I had these empty casings (why I didn't throw them out I will never know), and sure enough four of the five had undented primers.... Busted! Spent the night in the tower where I surely cried like a baby sure that I was going to be thrown out. The next day it was **Col. Livick's** office.

They busted Ireland (I was already at too low a rank to bust) and Col. Livick claimed he was going to “Tie a knot in my tail.” I know I wound up with more tours than I expected, but It was a bum rap! Col. Livick was convinced that I had blown up the incinerator out by the PX a couple weeks

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

before. I knew that was not me, I know everything I blew up and was proud of it, but kept my mouth shut figuring the hammer was already falling, why bring anyone else into it.

I think that at the time, most [cadets] had a love-hate relationship with AMA and still do. I remember that I started there in 1968, “the summer of love”. Newspapers were becoming more anti-military, the times they were a-changin’.

I remember well, 13, standing in a phone booth crying my eyes out, begging to come home. Every phone booth echoed the same conversations with home. How, at the end of each year, the Vietnam anthem “*We Gotta Get Outta this Place*” echoed through the barracks as we all dreamt of no drill, no uniforms, no assembly and no rank. God, I hated shining shoes. Each year it got louder as we neared that final year. I guess I was ready to go, I guess it was not something I cared for, the drills and military and uniforms and parades. Maybe it was the times, but more likely it was being young and in an environment of control.

But each year, returning was a thrill. Nothing to do with the military end or even the education end, but for the friendships. Living in close quarters with 300 other young guys, in a society within those walls, where what your father did, or where you lived, or what kind of car the family had, meant nothing. It was a class-less society, friendships were built on respect, humor and survival, not on status.

So looking back at AMA as AMA the building and the system, would I consider going back? No, I really didn’t fit. But looking back at the people, the faculty, the friends, brothers, trust, warmth, respect, learning about people, and understanding the meaning of lasting friendship, I would jump at the chance. Those are the great values of life, the precious gems that you pick up with time that only you can possess. They can’t be bought or bartered for, they are only acquired by living; they are yours alone and they can’t be lost or taken.

That’s what the Alumni Association is, all that I just mentioned. The building, the system, the tears, they are all just the iron that branded us all, the common binding factor.

But it was the learning of independence, responsibility, self reliance and belief that you could handle it. That was the character building that so many people remember and refer to as a “defining” period in their lives. I found myself so far ahead in strength of self over my friends at home, when I left AMA, it was incredible. I knew how to set goals, achieve results and respond to crisis. Mom never handled that for me, I learned to do it myself.

But that is in the past. Today, AMA is about friendship, brotherhood, about being a member of a small group of guys who went through an experience together that only very few can relate to. Its about Doctors standing next to house painters at a reunion and suddenly being as equal and without status, as they were while at Augusta. Its called Brotherhood and carries no strings, only acceptance.

Augusta Military Academy

Oral History

We usually had some important Christmas present that we wanted (that year it was a TV for me), but then there was also the usual necessities like crackers and spreads and canned goods and snacks to make the trip back to AMA.

I would look like a homeless kid when I boarded that plane back with all my loot – would not take it through security nowadays :)

I don't remember if it was Thanksgiving or Christmas, but one return trip around 1970, the Piedmont flight from DC to Weyers Cave, got snowed in for the night.

I guess there were about five of us, and we boldly made a decision -- we booked ourselves on the late afternoon flight the next day, pooled our funds and all packed into a hotel room.

The next day we took a cab to the Smithsonian and a couple other places. I remember going through the Museum of Technology, staring in amazement at the wonderful machines. It was a super day, sunny and cool, a batch of young AMA guys (14-15?) wandering around seeing the great sights of D.C.

We made it back to the airport, excited from our adventure and independence, finally arriving that evening at the front arch, full of spirit.

Colonel Livick greeted us with a hearty, "*Where in the Hell have you guys been? We have been searching for you all day!*" We explained about the canceled flight and the wonderful trip to DC and the Smithsonian. I think Colonel Livick's response was something like, "*Why didn't you take a bus when the flight was canceled?*"

I had never considered such a logical alternative. Guess my vision was clouded by visions of a great adventure!