Longview
By Chris Correa
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Part One
Make It Make Sense



At first glance, the only thing that could explain this picture is A.I. hallucination.

"Oh Great One, Chat GPT, create a worn black-and-white photo of Paul Vance Hoover coaching fencers at a military school. Make it look like it's taped into a scrapbook."

Okay, that's Paul Hoover. Those are fencers…

…and those are pigtails?! I know grooming standards loosened in the 70s, but there's no way that's a boy.

"Chat GPT, Excellency, begging your pardon. The school was never co-ed. Please, try again – at your convenience."

(If Humanity loses Armageddon to The Machines, I want them thinking well of me.)

Except this is a physical print, not a deep-fake digital image. So maybe that's not Hoover? Without a jacket on, I can't be sure the whitehaired man is in any kind of uniform. If I can't be sure who he is, then I can't be sure of where or when he is either. Maybe this only looks so strange because I'm making the wrong assumptions.

Context to the rescue. This is one of 50 prints that are unambiguously of AMA life: parades, sports, dances, etc. Judging by uniforms, dresses, and hair (look for one majestic beehive in the background of picture 4 below), I'm guessing late '60s through the '70s:

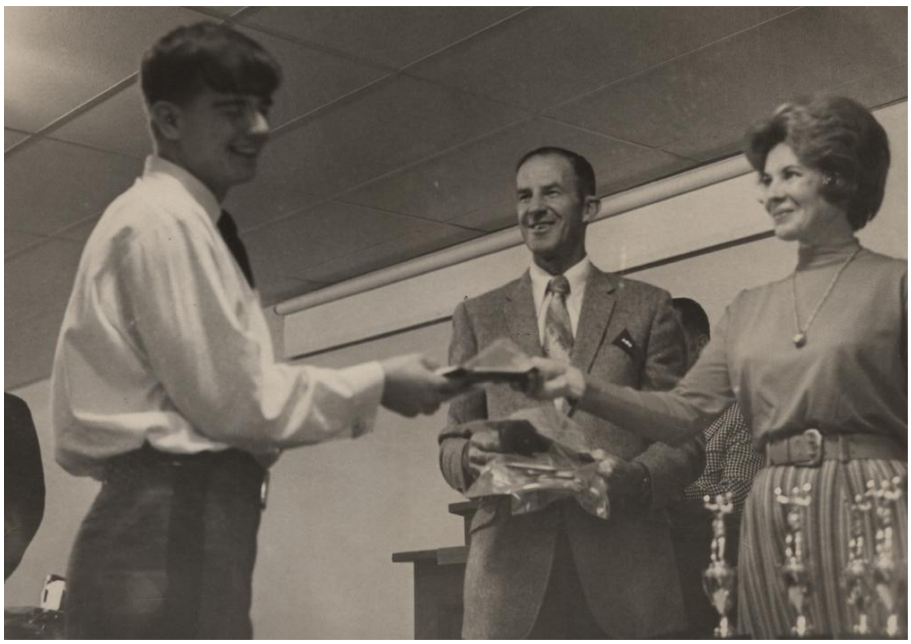




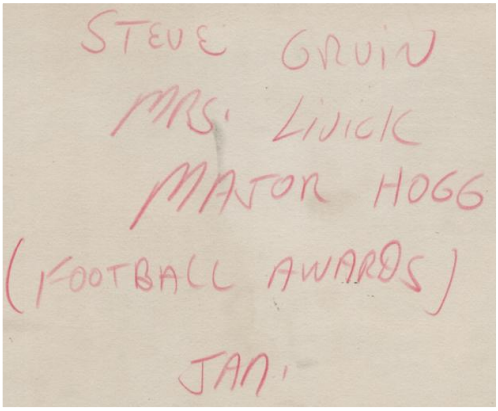




Progress, but even when I recognized Linda Livick and Major James Hogg…



…and carefully slicing the tape on 3 corners of every picture allowed me to find on the back Steve Gruin's name, the event, and the month…



…somebody neglected to provide the year!

As usual, the answer came when I was on an unrelated search months later. This picture in the mystery album had been especially puzzling:



- This could be the Big Room – or any number of church halls across America.
- Many, if not everyone, are in civies.
- Who's the young woman standing by herself?
- Who's at the piano?
- What's the occasion?

The back of this photo was blank. Dead end.

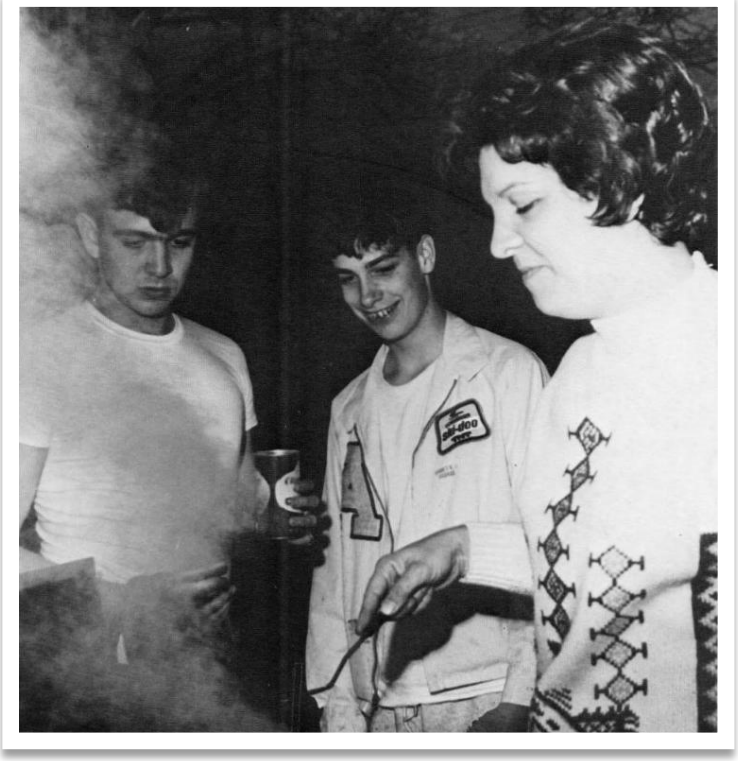
Then, I stumbled upon this picture in a yearbook and had my breakthrough:



LADIES AIDS. Mrs. Merlyn Wright and Mrs. David Trimble help whip the Christmas show into shape. Paul Cartwright checks to see that all goes well.
– Recall 1973 p.27

Good, I had a schoolyear, but I still only had the "Mrs. Husband" names, and the caption didn't tell me who was who in the picture. More searching.

Paydirt came 96 pages later:



Southern born Mrs. Sybil Wright charmed her students into performance. Playing the piano for the chorus, helping set up a cabaret scene, or cooking for the soccer men she was able to show her warmth for the students.
– Recall 1973 p.123

Finally, in one picture: first name + surname + piano reference = Wright positive ID, so the woman standing at the piano in the above picture had to be Trimble.

There's no other picture of Mrs. Trimble in the book, but more searching reeled in the line, "[f]ish nets are not usual at AMA, but on Saturday afternoon of Parents' Weekend, nets, strange containers, smells of baked cookies and cakes and Mrs. Betsy Trimble created an aura of perplexity among the parents and the cadets"(p14).

Betsy. I couldn't believe I'd missed this. She'd already told me. I met Betsy and David Trimble '60, below right, when they visited on April 18, 2024, with Millie and Bill McVey '60.



(See the May 2024 newsletter, pages 23-25 for details of that final visit. Betsy and David were married 63 years when David died on March 5, 2025.)

From here, I wanted to see what more I could learn, and that's how I found a story that made me gasp stunned expletives at my screen.

This happened once before, when I found John Gregson '57. Johnny's story was tragic and preventable, but it made sense. We now know just about everything necessary to understand the how and why.

This is different. This is the most bizarre and mysterious discovery I've made, but it was never secret. It made headlines for two years until the case was "solved" and closed. The newspapers moved on, yet there were no good answers then or now, 44 years later.

Also unlike Johnny's story, this has no apparent link to AMA. Is it still relevant?

That's debatable, but I say yes. I visualize the academy's story like a giant tree, with the roots representing the many paths that drew people here and each branch where life sent them afterward. The massive trunk stands as the nexus, the one thing that connects every root and branch, the one chapter that's in every story. Without all three – root, trunk, branch – the tree, and the story, are incomplete. The stories of AMA people don't begin and end with their time in Fort Defiance.

Except I can't tell this story yet. I've found all the material I know how to find, enough to reconstruct the known timeline. That's a whole other major project, and I don't want to present the story unless I can finish it.

Full disclosure: a timeline, just an ordering of events, won't be enough. It won't answer the most important questions I know you'll have, but it's the most I know how to do with my skills and resources, and it's the least I *should* do to keep this story in living memory. I want you to know enough to have those

questions. You don't yet. Two months ago, I didn't either. Two months ago, I'd never have imagined a story like this.

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For now, much simpler questions closer to home – but how much closer? Look again:



I can't place this anywhere in Fort Defiance. Alternatives?

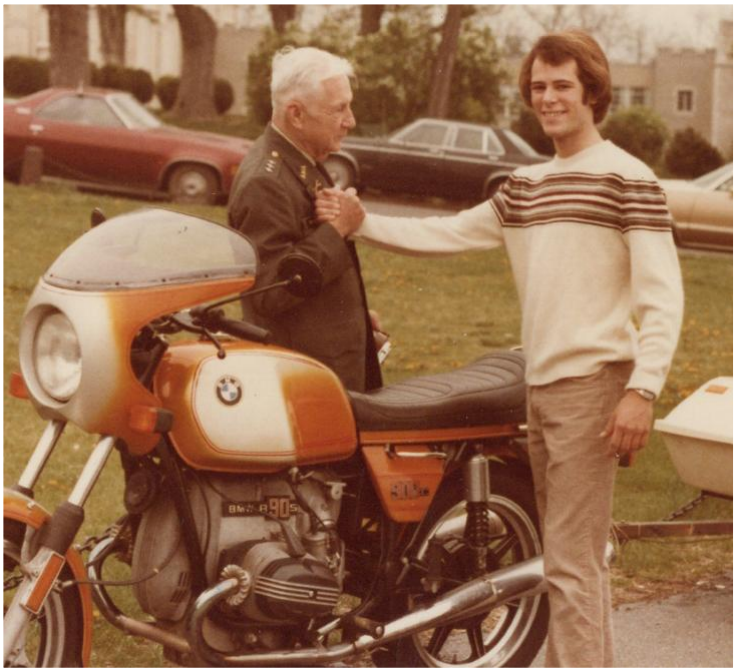
The Library of Virginia has a yearbook archive online, and I rejoiced at finding nearly all editions for Fairfax Hall, Mary Baldwin, and Lee High School (a longshot, but worth a look). I found no sign of fencing, but at least I could rule them out.

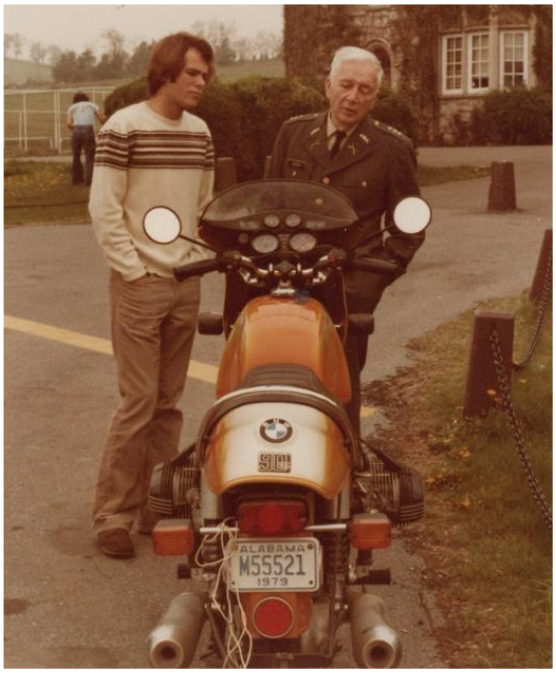
This leaves Stuart Hall. According to their website, fencing is a club sport now, but 53 years ago? Their yearbooks aren't online, so I called. I was put in contact with Dean of Advancement Katy Datz, who confirmed that fencing was available in the early 70s. She offered to help identify the girls in the photo if I e-mailed it to her. Excited, I complied right away and asked if she could add any context, preferably a story on *how in creation* Hoover became their fencing coach. It was dizzying to imagine how AMA's most Olympically profane instructor of boys must've censored himself to last 5 minutes on the property.

Here we hit a snag. Besides both girls being in masks that make identification impossible, Katy said she couldn't be sure the picture's unfocused background was any space on their campus. Stuart Hall is the simplest explanation for this image, but given the lack of corroboration from any AMA source and how much this picture deviates from Hoover's known profile, I want more than a plausible assumption.

Part Two
Motorheads

From a different collection, here's another shot begging for a caption, though here, we're in familiar territory. This is certainly AMA, and that's clearly Col. Hoover, characteristically close to a BMW R90S motorcycle. His ride? But who's the handsome young guy with the luxuriant tresses?





Again, context helps…some. The photo lab stamped the processing date of "April 1979" on the back of the print. The picture could've been shot any time before then, but not much earlier, since the picture below shows the license plate dated 1979 as well. Also, the plate is from Alabama, so this is probably not Hoover's Ultimate Driving Machine. *(Who took the pictures is unknown, but they ended up with the colonel's nephew, George William "Bill" Hoover, who sent them to Ed Click '50 in 2001.)*

The next images give us a plausible sketch of the occasion. The Visitor is towing a small two-wheel storage case. He and Hoover examine a map they've spread across it:





Okay, The Visitor is on a road trip, and he's stopped to see a fellow motorcycle fan, but that's as far as I get. Everything else is speculation. I can't even guarantee he'd been a cadet. For all I know, he could be another nephew, though I confirmed that he's too young to be the Bill Hoover (1933-2008) who sent these pictures.

For historians, Fire and Forgetfulness are the most destructive forces, but Common Knowledge is the most frustrating. It subtly impairs even the most committed record keepers, dissuading them from taking the simplest steps to preserve that record. The photographer knew this 2-person reunion was worth capturing, and everyone he could think of would know who was in the picture. It was common knowledge, so why write names on the back? "Come on, who on Earth wouldn't recognize Hoover?! And obviously, that's [Former Student Everybody Knows]. What, you think some random guy is gonna be looking at this in *47 years*?! Please, next you'll tell me he's just been born in California."

Oh, the things young people can't imagine. It never occurred to him that enough time may pass, and enough records and people could be lost, that this picture would end up in the hands of a stranger trying to reassemble the pieces.

Part 3
Even The Best in The Business

You don't really grasp the insidious power of Common Knowledge until you know it touched AMA's most passionate, inspirational, and visionary advocate for history, a figure so renowned, his guidance, for decades, was in demand across the country.

"This is a year of your life. It's yours to record or to let slip through your fingers."
– Charles Savedge
University of Maryland, June 1977

All of the black & white photos at the top, including the one of Hoover with the fencing girls, are from Doc's personal album. His name is nowhere on it, but the contents have multiple matches with the '73 *Recall*. Plus, there are negatives. With help from Elizabeth Andrews, I photographed the negatives and inverted the tones. Frame 2 has two men in shirt sleeves for warm weather. Look very closely at the man on the right to see a shoulder patch for the Muncie Police Department. Muncie, Indiana, is the home of Ball State University, where Col. Savedge taught classes every summer. It's circumstantial evidence, but I say, enough to beat reasonable doubt.



Even Charles Savedge failed to imagine the purpose his album could serve 53 years in the future. Of the 50 AMA prints, 32 have no information on the back. Many of the rest identify the event but omit names, or most of the name was lost when the print was trimmed to fit the page – and why not? Doc knew who they were, and this was his album: not as private as a diary, but not a mass-produced retrospective for posterity either. The knowledge only had to be common to him. The result is that the most baffling and intriguing picture of

Hoover has nothing to explain its existence. In that image, there's a story that I'll never know how to tell.

Maybe you do. If you know something about any of these mystery pictures, please write to me at volunteer@amaalumni.org.

Conclusion
The Job

Avoiding the same fallacy and its consequences drives how we learn, preserve, and share AMA's story. None of its details can be dismissed as obvious, irrelevant, or minutiae, because we can't think like people who already understand this place. We can't even think like people of Today or people as curious as we are. We have to imagine the questions of those not yet living. We have to accommodate the insatiable curiosity of those who aren't yet curious.

That was me. I spent my first 40 years of life with zero interest in military prep schools. Nothing about them seemed relatable to my experiences or interests until I joined the museum in 2019. Now, I'd sleep here if I could (though, are you kidding me, not in those bunks). The story keeps pulling me in, raising questions I never would've considered 7 years ago. If I can go from apathetic to fanatic, so can others, but only if they can access everything the museum has to offer. We want to leave them as much original information as we can, so they can get hooked like us and continue our work.

That's why our new top priorities are research and digital archiving. The Roller-Robinson House is likely the last *physical* place where the raw materials of AMA's history will be accessible to the public. As things stand now, that access ends in 27 months, but the *images* of these materials, organized on a reliable internet platform, could be a viable substitute. Whether those who come after us are alumni, family, or subject matter researchers, they'll be able to make their own discoveries by studying our online collections from anywhere in the world. That requires scanning, photographing, labeling, and explaining everything we have, then organizing all of these words and images into a user-friendly digital archive. Ideally, it'll be accessible long after there's no one left who can begin an AMA story by saying, "I remember…."

This is glacially slow work, making 27 months a narrow window, especially for albums and scrapbooks. They're often the deepest wells of information, representing more history than any studio portrait, uniform, or trophy, because so much can fit on just one of their many pages. Digitizing the album of Paul K. Long '51 took 1 day and generated 14 unique files, but the Sam Wales scrapbook was monumental. It took 44 days to generate 296 unique files, each including a vast array of photographs, souvenirs, wartime documents, letters, greeting cards, newspaper clippings, invitations, one unidentified lock of hair, and on and on. Sam was a meticulous chronicler. I have to be equally painstaking in preparing each digital capture of his work so that the images are as useful as the originals. Multiply that mandate by 70 albums and scrapbooks, plus untold thousands of internal documents, and you get a sense of the job. I don't know if there's time to preserve every deserving document, but we'll keep trying for as long as there's a place for us to work. Thanks for reading.