

There are a lot of things you can do in a six-year period. If you're in college, you can earn a bachelor's degree and a masters degree. But in the last six years of my life, I prepared my future and became molded into the man I am today. I went from barely getting by in school to wearing a uniform, passing all of my classes and marching into success. My name is John Puhl. I am from Deltona, Florida, and I have attended Camden Military Academy for six years. If it weren't for Camden Military Academy, I probably wouldn't even be at home. I honestly couldn't tell you where I would be. But I can tell you where I'll be next year: at a four-year college, earning my degree, thanks to CMA. I came to Camden Military Academy with less than outstanding grades, but since I've been at the Academy, I've maintained a steady B average for my entire time here. I have been on the Honors and Deans lists the majority of my time at the Academy. At home, my focus was not on school. I'd get into fights and arguments, and I would always skip math and make up flimsy excuses as to why I didn't do my homework. I lied to my parents every day after school, saying I didn't have any homework to do that night. I got away with it until after football season ended. I thought I could get away with anything. I thought I was sick. But I had lost the trust of the two most important people in my life, my parents. One night, after dinner, my parents sat down to talk to me. They pulled out a pamphlet with a picture of the color guard. It read at the top, "Camden Military Academy: March into Success." My eyes opened up wide. I looked up at my dad, and he began to explain it to me; that maybe it was time for me to better myself and improve my life. The following summer, we took a road trip to Camden, SC. When I first arrived, there were their cars already here. I remember Casey Robinson talking to us in the chapel and Mr. Heflin giving us a tour. I'm pretty sure my parents' decision was already made, but after the tour, mine was too. We were headed back to the car and my dad said, "So, what do you think?" Look at me now. You can plainly see what decision I made. I was placed in Alpha Company under the tutelage of CSM Brooks, who took me under his wing from day one. I can remember my first formation for breakfast. Hearing the staff march up and former Battalion Commander Elijah Kitts take charge, I knew from that very moment, that's what I wanted to be, the Battalion Commander. CSM Brooks always made sure I was doing the right thing and always looked out for me. Heck, my parents even gave him permission to knock some sense into me if he had to. He became my mentor and a father figure to me. He molded me into the leader I am today, teaching me the Six P's: Prior Planning Prevents Piss-Poor Performance. I was just a PFC in the seventh grade. Then, in the eighth, I was a corporal and guidon bearer. In the ninth grade, it was time for me to get into leadership positions. I was a sergeant and an assistant squad leader. I was even a platoon leader for the homecoming parade that year. In the following summer, going into my freshman year, my parents kept me at the dinner table again and asked me if I wanted to continue at Camden Military Academy. Of course, I said yes. The reason why was because of the relationships I had made and the success I had experienced. Sophomore year I became a SSG and a full squad leader, eventually becoming a platoon sergeant. I told CSM Brooks that I wanted to become the Battalion Commander my senior year and that I wanted to know everything I could do to achieve that goal. In that same conversation, he told me that he planned on making me his first sergeant in my junior year. I had never been so excited about anything in my life. At the end of the year, with the General Order, I was promoted to 1SG. The following year, I continued to work hard while also playing football. I did everything I could in order to become the Battalion Commander. It had been my dream since day one. When the General Order came out at the end of my junior year, I was very anxious. The biggest achievement of my life was coming at any minute. As you can see now, as I stand before all of you now, I am the Battalion Commander of the graduation Class of 2014. Camden Military Academy is more than just a school. It's a life-style. My parents and family are so proud of everything I've accomplished at the Academy. I have never felt so proud of myself in my life. I want to give special thanks to everyone who had faith in me and my ability to lead and succeed.

John Puhl of Deltona, Florida

