



Carlisle & Camden

A CENTENNIAL HISTORY

Chapter Three

CAMDEN ACADEMY

The story of Carlisle and Camden would have never unfolded had it not been for a few individuals whose vision of the future swept aside difficult present realities at critical moments in the schools' histories. Professor Guilds was the first, taking over a failed institution in 1911 and seeing beyond the sad stillness of its abandoned buildings a campus fully restored, a school so filled with new life that its then empty facilities would not contain it. James Risher was the second, who, over a period of ten years, nursed back to health a sick, debt-ridden school, overcoming all difficulties with unflinching patience, courage, wisdom and love.

Both of these men are familiar figures in the story being told. The third is not. He stepped into this history and then out again so quickly that even those who are most closely connected to the schools may never have heard his name. And yet if it had not been for his vision and for his decisive action in its service, this history would have ended in 1977 with the closing of Carlisle. Without him, there would have been no Camden connection.

He was Colonel John F. Wall, a retired U.S. Army cavalry officer who came to live in Camden shortly before World War II. Like another Colonel in this story, Colonel Wall was small but dynamic. A West Point graduate, he had served in the cavalry for over thirty years, had written several books on horses, and was considered an authority in the field of horse breeding. A native of the Pee Dee area of South Carolina, Colonel Wall returned to his home state upon retirement. He was first attracted to Camden by its association with fine horses, but once here, his interests and energies extended in other directions as well.

After World War II, (he had returned to service for its duration), his attention was attracted to the abandoned facilities of the Southern Aviation School, a privately-owned primary flight school located just outside of Camden at Woodward Airfield. From early 1941 through August 1944, the Southern Aviation School had provided primary flight instruction to over 6,000 Army Air Corps



Colonel John F. Wall was instrumental in establishing a military academy in Camden.

cadets. The school's facilities were designed to accommodate about 250 students and included five barracks, a classroom building, a mess hall, an administration building, an infirmary, a recreation hall and a swimming pool. The 27-acre campus had been well planned and attractively situated. Its wooden buildings, covered with asbestos siding and painted white, were of a simple military-base design, neat in appearance, and solidly constructed. Since its closing in August 1944, the facility had sat empty except for a short period in 1945 when it had housed German POW's working on nearby farms and in the local timber industry. When the SAS campus first caught Colonel Wall's eye, its oldest buildings were only six years old and several were more recent than that.

What he saw on the outskirts of this pleasant Southern town was a school—not the old Southern Aviation School, but a new school, a boys' school whose approach to education would be shaped by the nature of the facility itself. He saw in this simple arrangement of buildings a setting that would be ideal for the development of the virtues of simplicity, self-discipline, moderation, and decency.

Others in town had thought of the possibility of establishing a school here, but no one had pursued the idea beyond the realization of the difficulties involved, not the least of which would be the release by the government of the property for private use. As a retired cavalryman, Colonel Wall had encountered orneriness in all forms: he was not one to be intimidated or shuffled aside by a mere government bureaucracy.

Former South Carolina governor, John Carl West, then a young lawyer in Camden, remembers how Colonel Wall “literally badgered” West, along with Camden attorney John deLoach and Mayor Henry Savage, to join him in the project and to drive with him down to Atlanta to meet with Lt. General Robert Littlejohn, a South Carolina native who had served under Wall before World War II and was then the Director of War Assets Administration. West tells how at the meeting General Littlejohn “immediately began citing a list of problems. Colonel Wall got up, shook his finger and said, ‘John, damn it, cut through the red tape and give us the property!’”

That was in 1947. General Littlejohn responded quickly to his former superior's request and soon got a release from the government. The property, however, was transferred not directly to the private group wishing to start a school but to Kershaw County and the City of Camden with certain conditions and restrictions attached that prevented them from immediately turning the campus over to the school planners. It took another two years, until June 1949, for legal arrangements to be completed that allowed the sale of the property by the county and city to the school group.

Meanwhile, by January 1949, Colonel Wall was encouraged enough by the progress being made to push ahead to the next phase. At a meeting held at the American Legion hall, he got together his group of interested citizens, now expanded to include David R. Williams, a wealthy oil pipeline engineer who

had a home in Camden; Stanley Llewellyn, a local ironworks manufacturer; and Reuben Pitts, Sr., owner of the Hermitage Cotton Mills. General Littlejohn, who was also at the meeting, pledged his assistance in completing the transfer of the property. On the strength of his assurances, the group began making plans to raise money to purchase the facility from the county and city governments.

By the time the release was effected at the end of June, the group had grown to include Camden businessmen Henry Beard, Roland Goodale, Frank Montgomery, Carl Schlosburg, Julian Burns, and several others. They, along with the men already mentioned, were the original investors in the school. Over the next few months, the group, now functioning as a formal committee, filed a petition to form a corporation and issued five hundred shares of stock at \$100 a share. Twenty-two thousand dollars would go to the purchase of the property; the remainder of the \$50,000 would be used for the start-up and operation of the school.

Colonel Wall continued for some time to be a participant in the organization of the new school, but he had already asked John deLoach to take his place as chairman of the committee and, now that his plans were progressing satisfactorily, he stepped aside to let younger men take the lead. Although he was to serve as an officer of the corporation that established the school, he did not serve on the school's first board. Colonel Wall had entered the story just long enough to accomplish the essential step of turning his vision of a school into a reality.

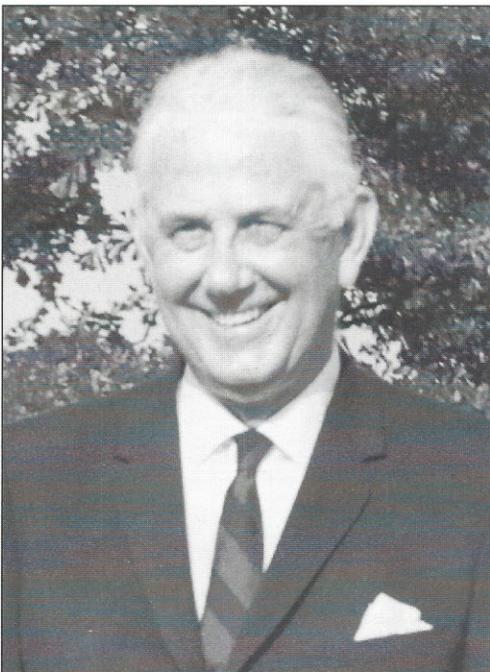
In October, deLoach told a meeting of about fifteen investors that the new school planned to open its doors the following fall. Ads placed in military service journals were producing a number of applications for headmaster and instructors, and two students had already applied. Although there had been some initial discussion of a junior college, by this time, the planning committee had decided that the school would be a semi-military preparatory high school for boys.

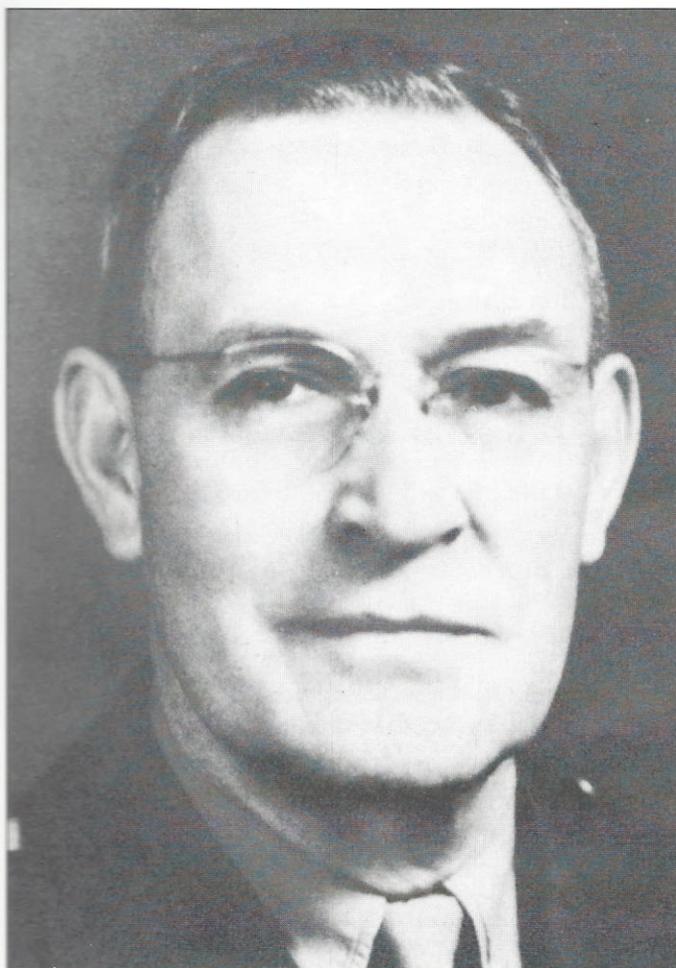
At a meeting on November 21, 1949, "The Camden Academy" was chosen as the name of the new school, and John K. deLoach was elected as president of the newly formed corporation to operate the school. Colonel Wall was elected vice president and John Carl West, secretary-treasurer. By this time, forty-three individuals and local businesses had subscribed to the venture, for a total of \$40,000.

It soon became apparent that more money would be needed to get the new school off to a good start. A drive to raise an additional \$40,000 was carried out during the spring of 1950, with volunteers calling upon potential investors throughout the county. The appeal went out to "make Camden Academy Camden's own." Meanwhile, the property had been purchased (\$18,600 for nine buildings on 27 acres, two buildings to remain the property of the local governments) and a headmaster hired, though his identity was not being made public until sufficient funds were raised to assure the opening of the school.

The week of Sunday, March 26, through Saturday, April 1, was declared "Camden Academy Week" by Mayor Savage, and the public was invited to an Open House of the facility on that

Camden attorney John K. deLoach was president of the school corporation and the chairman of the board of trustees during the entirety of Camden Academy's existence.





Colonel Turner F. Garner headed Camden Academy from its opening in 1950 until the fall of 1954.

Sunday afternoon. "We want our school to be owned by several hundred men and women locally," announced deLoach in an article appearing in the *Camden Chronicle*. "This will mean consistent personal interest in the school by every stockholder."

By the end of the week, eighty new stockholders had signed up, and a week later the number had increased to over a hundred. Although the goal of an additional \$40,000 had not yet been reached, the officers were sufficiently confident to introduce the newly hired head of the school to the community in an announcement on April 14. He was Colonel Turner F. Garner, head of academics at Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia.

Colonel Garner was a graduate of Cumberland University in Tennessee and held M.A. and M. Ed. degrees from Harvard. He had attended a military academy himself as a boy in Tennessee and in his career had held top administrative posts at two other Tennessee military schools before going to Riverside. Although he had originally intended to remain at Riverside until the end of the school year, he decided to leave a month early in order to get a sufficient start on the work necessary for the opening of Camden in September. He arrived with

his family at the end of April to begin his new duties on May 1.

At the same time the corporation declared that its fund-raising goal had been met and no further sale of stock by the Academy was planned.

After a month in Camden, Colonel Garner announced the opening of the first term for September 15, 1950, for boys in grades 7-12. By then he had prepared a school catalog and had placed ads for applications in several regional newspapers. He also made it known that two other Riverside faculty members would be joining him at Camden: Colonel Thomas L. Alexander, a graduate of The Citadel and a retired Army officer who was the science head at Riverside and would serve as the Academy's first commandant; and Major Purvis Collins, a native of Winnsboro, a graduate of the University of South Carolina, and a World War II Naval officer, who would be in charge of athletics at Camden. All three men would teach as well as handle their administrative duties.

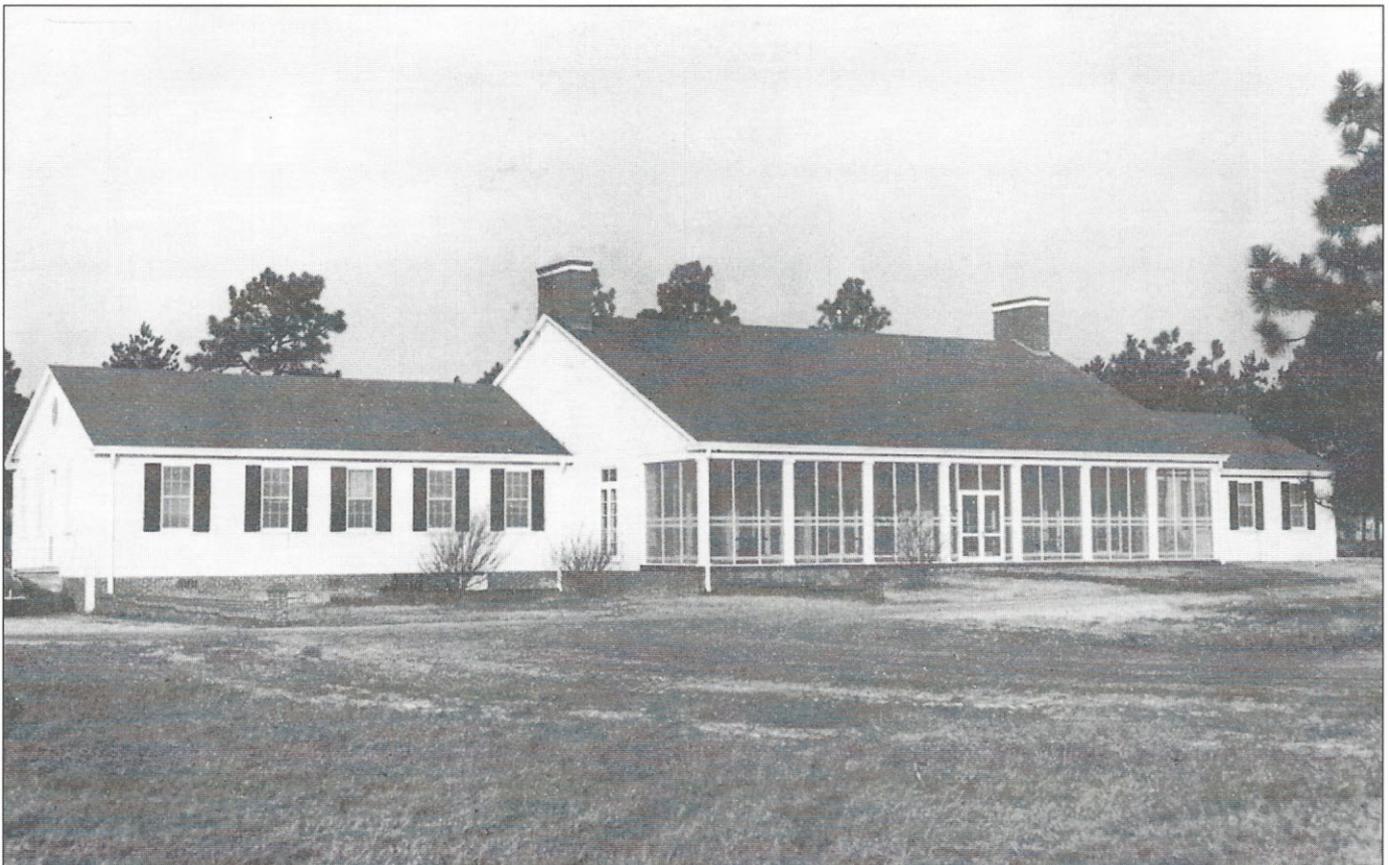
That summer was a busy one on the campus of the newly established school. Buildings that had stood vacant for several years had to be readied for occupancy, faculty and staff hired, students recruited and enrolled, and a detailed plan of operation developed for the coming year.

School officials announced that although the facilities were sufficient for

300 students or more, enrollment would be “limited to 100 boys.” One of the first steps, then, was to make a plan for the use of the campus. It was decided that only half of the buildings would be needed for the first year. The SAS recreation hall, the most impressive building on campus—with a large screened porch across the front and a tiled patio at the rear adjoining the pool—would be used as the Academy’s administration building. The north wing would house the school offices; the large center room, with its paneled walls, high beamed ceilings and matching fireplaces, would be used for formal and informal gatherings; and the building’s south wing would contain the canteen. Classes would be held in the original SAS classroom building, which probably needed only clean-up and minor repairs to prepare it for use. The SAS dining hall and kitchen, located at the northern edge of the campus and designated Kershaw Hall by the Academy planners, was also being cleaned, painted, and equipped for use. The SAS infirmary was converted into staff apartments, one occupied by Colonel Garner and his family and another by Colonel Alexander and his family. (This building is CMA’s Henry House, now extensively remodeled and still being used as faculty apartments.) As the summer continued, it became apparent that the projected enrollment of 100 would not be reached. Consequently, only one of the five barracks was readied for use: Colonial Hall (now Beckham Hall, CMA’s second classroom building) with room for about 45 boys.

The new Academy’s administration building was the most impressive building on campus. It had been the recreation hall for the Southern Aviation School.

Meanwhile, faculty and staff were being hired and students actively recruited. Only two instructors were needed in addition to Colonel Garner, who would teach English, Colonel Alexander, who would teach science, and Major Collins,





A newly renovated room in Colonial Hall (now Beckham Hall). The Academy opened one dormitory its first year.

enrolled transferred from Riverside, a group that included Tommy Greer, who became the Academy's first cadet commander. Purvis Collins, following up a lead from the northeast corner of North Carolina, signed up the next student, Richard Gibbs, who lived in Engelhard, a little town on Pamlico Sound. When Collins went looking for him, he was told that Richard was out on a boat, dumping surplus potatoes into the sound. Ogden Babson, another of the Academy's first cadets, remembers that he was painting the ceiling in his family's living room one morning that summer when he happened to look down at the newspapers spread below him and caught sight of a small notice on a page of the *Raleigh News & Observer*, stating that Camden Academy was opening in the fall. Ogden, who had just completed his sophomore year of high school, was bored with life in his hometown and, without his parents' knowledge, wrote for an application. A couple of weeks later, he was sleeping late one morning when his mother burst into his room. "What have you gotten yourself into?" she hissed at him. "There's a *Colonel Garner* in the living room and he wants to see you!" Garner was a very persuasive man who did not take long to convince Ogden's parents that Camden Academy was the place for their son.

Slowly the number of applicants grew. At an Open House held for the community on Sunday afternoon, September 10, Colonel Garner announced that at least 40 boys would arrive for the school opening on September 18. This figure was less than half of what school officials had originally hoped for, but there was no turning back now. The staff would make the best of the situation by taking advantage of the small numbers to test their policies and procedures during this shake-down year.

Actually 42 cadets, coming in from the two Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, New York and New Jersey, showed up on opening day. The first to arrive was Captain Tommy Greer of Greenville, "a high ranking military student and senior," as he was described in the *Chronicle*. By week's end, the school had picked up another student, and the year was underway.

who would teach social studies. The Academy hired Lt. Wayne Barton, a former Naval officer and a graduate of the University of Florida, to teach the younger cadets; and Captain Fred Bagwell, a graduate of Presbyterian College, to direct the military program and teach the remaining courses. Mrs. Martha Kirk of Camden was hired as the school's first secretary.

No matter what else they were doing, the three men working that summer—Garner, Alexander, and Collins—kept a close watch on the stack of student applications and inquiries that were slowly accumulating on Colonel Garner's desk. The first few students who

“I like it here,” reported John Bigby, 14, of Hartsville, at the end of that first week. He and other cadets had just been taken to a Camden High football game and afterwards to a Tri-Gamma sorority dance at the Episcopal church parish house. The boys had also been measured for uniforms, which were expected soon.

From the beginning, school planners had said that the Academy would conduct a “semi-military” program. Rejecting the “strictly military” system of most other military schools, Colonel Garner explained in the Academy’s catalog that Camden would follow a modified plan that included military uniforms, a cadet chain of command, and regular military drill, but would avoid excessive drill, numerous military classes, Sunday parades, and too much polishing of brass and shoes. Full military training, he explained, was better left to Senior ROTC programs in colleges and universities and to the military services themselves.

Garner went on to write that the Academy’s purposes were to practice democracy in school life, to develop poise and personality, to master the fundamentals of studying, to nurture physical and social development, and to promote growth of character. All of these goals are best achieved, he continued, not through “shifting a rifle from shoulder to shoulder and in mechanical drills—repeated over and over for days and months to the point of stark boredom,” but through the experiences of “obedience, performance, and the leadership of others” that characterize the essence of military training.

Varsity basketball and baseball teams were organized that first year, both coached by Purvis Collins. In addition, an extensive intramural athletic pro-

Camden Academy cadet officers on the terrace of the administration building, 1952: Richard Gibbs, Marion Scurry, Dick Angel, John Bookter, David Keller, Ogden Babson, Lewis Dellinger, Clifford Day.



gram encouraged the participation of all cadets in touch football, volleyball, basketball, and baseball. Colonel Garner explained that “organized athletics will be partly subordinated to individual activities such as tennis and golf.”

To engage the boys further in their spare time, a mechanic shop was set up in the large amphitheater-type classroom at the east end of the classroom building. An old automobile engine and an aircraft engine, found in the aircraft “graveyard” at one end of the property, were brought in for the cadets to practice on.

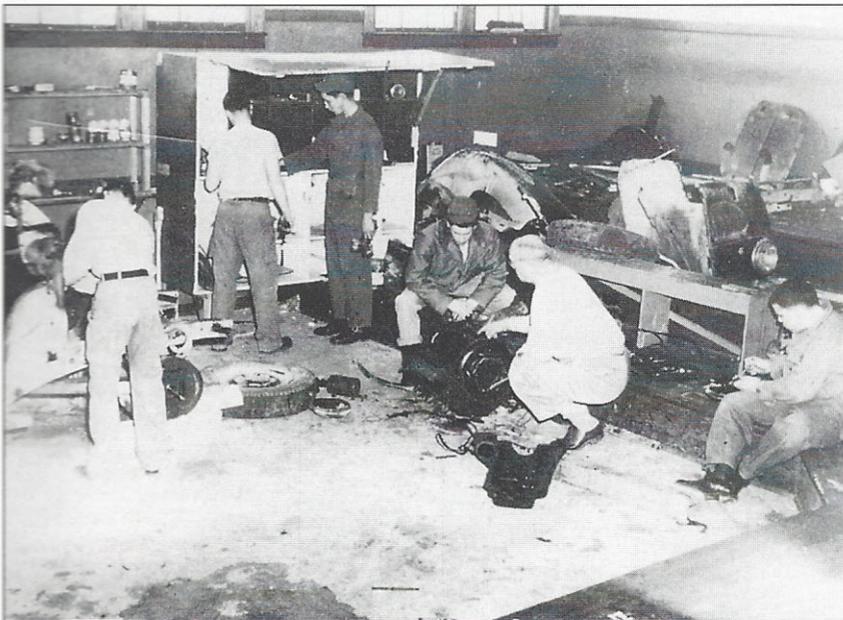
In spite of the disappointing enrollment, a spirit of optimism and even celebration surrounded that first year of Camden Academy. Churches and other groups welcomed the new cadets into the life of the community, and officials at the school kept the townspeople informed through newspaper articles about happenings on campus. The Kiwanis Club held a catfish stew for cadets and faculty out at Creed’s Lake in October. In November cadets were invited to join the Junior Cotillion Club, hosted by Mrs. Kent Miller at Cool Springs plantation. On Saturday, December 2, the Academy invited the townspeople to attend formal opening ceremonies, including the dedication of a large bell donated by Mrs. Richard Kirk from the farm home of her late husband and mounted at the east end of the classroom building to call cadets to class and other daily events. That evening a large number of Camden girls attended a formal dance on campus. Local volunteers drove the girls to the dance and brought them home afterwards. Both the school and the community were displaying a real effort to make “Camden Academy Camden’s own,” as John deLoach had urged the previous spring.

Mr. deLoach was now serving as president of the Academy’s board of directors, a position that he held throughout the life of the school. Other board members that first year were Henry G. Carrison, Sr., John Carl West, Henry E. Beard, Jr., Usher N. Myers, Wilson L. Mills, Henry Savage, Jr., Frank Montgomery, Harold W. Funderburke, and Colonel Garner.

In the opinion of those who worked with him, Colonel Garner was an excellent schoolman. Garner, according to Purvis Collins, “believed in academics,

had a forceful personality, was a great recruiter, and was very dedicated to the job he was doing.” From the cadets’ point of view, there was no question about who ran the school. Colonel Garner seemed to be aware of everything that was going on, including those things that cadets preferred to keep from him. There was a half-believed notion among them that the Colonel must have some sort of eavesdropping device to help keep him informed about life in the barracks. Mrs. Garner was also a strong presence on campus. Though rather formal in her dealings with cadets, she was liked and respected by them for her quick intel-

To engage cadets’ interest in their spare time, the school set up varied activities, including a mechanics shop at the east end of the classroom building.



A Christmas dance in the reception hall of the administration building. Like Carlisle, the Academy had a close relationship with the town, including many of the local girls who came out for the school's social events.



ligence and lively interest in everything around her, characteristics that she maintained until her death at age 104 in 1996.

Enrollment held steady for the second semester, and in February, Colonel Garner added Major Leslie F. Young to the staff. Major Young was a graduate of the University of Southern California, a retired Army officer and an accomplished horseman, who as a youngster and an adult had spent years in Mexico and South America.

As the first school year continued into the spring, school officials began looking toward the coming year with growing optimism. With only four students graduating and with re-enrollments, inquiries and new applications coming in at an encouraging rate, plans were announced at the end of April to open a second dormitory for the coming year. This was Carolina Hall, a two-story building that would accommodate about 75 additional students.

Meanwhile, other small campus improvements were being made. Cadets had earlier begun planting pine trees along the fence in front of the school, and in the summer an impressive Colonial brick gateway was built for the drive leading to the administration building. The Academy, always interested in establishing its links to Camden, reported that the brick had come from the recently demolished birthplace of Bernard Baruch on Broad Street.

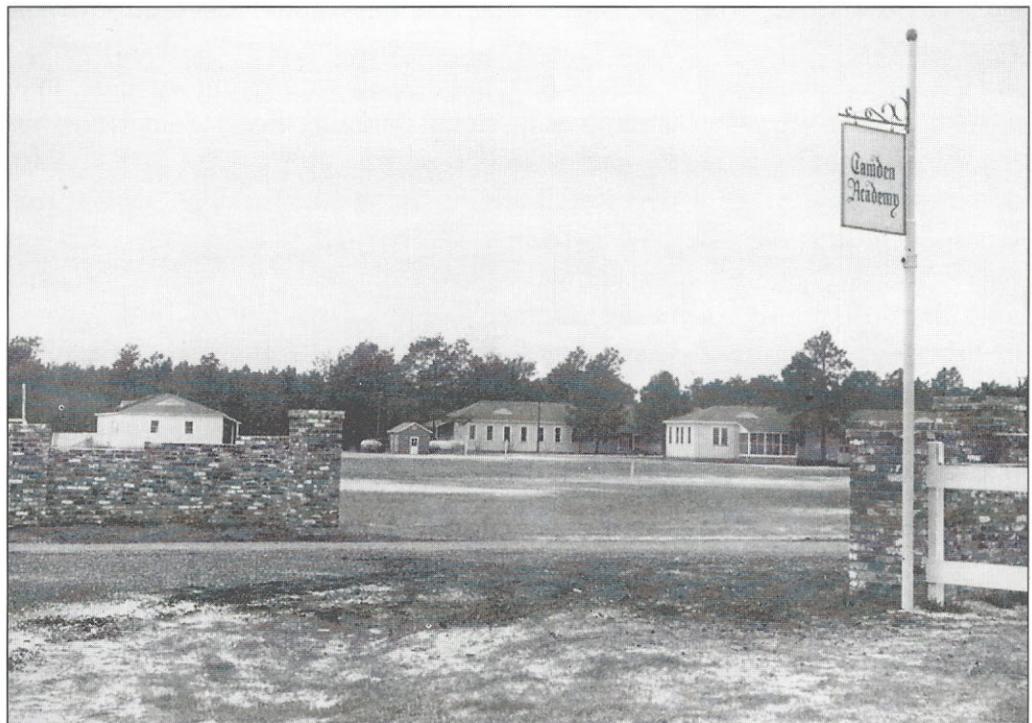
A few months later, in December 1951, school officials established another link with the local community when they wrote and received permission from the Marquis Camden in Kent, England, for use of the family's coat of arms as the emblem of Camden Academy. The marquis was a direct descendent of Lord Camden, a supporter of the American colonists in whose honor the town had been named. The next school catalog featured a handsome reproduction of the Camden crest on its cover.

One new staff member had been added for the second year, 1951-1952, in anticipation of the increased enrollment. Eugene Anderson, the Garners' son-in-law, joined the staff as headmaster. (Administrative titles were distributed rather freely at the school. Colonel Garner was sometimes referred to as president and at other times as superintendent. Colonel Alexander had been named associate superintendent when Major Young came in as commandant. The title of headmaster, first given to Major Anderson, was new. Exactly how the administrative duties were divided among these positions is not clear.)

Mrs. Mildred McGahey also joined the staff for 1951-1952, replacing Mrs. Kirk as school secretary. Mrs. McGahey came to Camden from Atlanta with her daughter Patricia, then a rising high school senior, and the two moved into an apartment in the recently opened infirmary building. When the time came to enroll Patricia in school, she and her mother decided that their best choice would be the Academy itself. The school had previously accepted girl day students for its first summer session and readily admitted Patricia as a day student for the regular term. She was a bright, personable young lady who contributed a great deal to the academic and campus life of the school. During her year at Camden, Pat tutored several other students, taught a class in typing, and helped Major Collins in the canteen. She graduated at the top of her class (there were fourteen seniors that year), an honor she shared with Woody Middleton from Charlotte, who was the top-ranked cadet.

Enrollment during this second year reached the school's original goal of about one hundred students, with a 90% return rate of eligible students from the first year. It must have seemed to those involved that the school had passed an important test by surviving its opening year and bringing its enrollment up to expectations in the second year. The Academy's inclusive charge of about \$1200 was in line with many of the established boarding schools at the time, (although

The entrance to the school drive was built in the summer of 1951 out of bricks from the Camden birthplace of Bernard Baruch.





Colonel Thomas L. Alexander, was a member of the Academy's original staff. He later returned to join the faculty of Camden Military Academy.

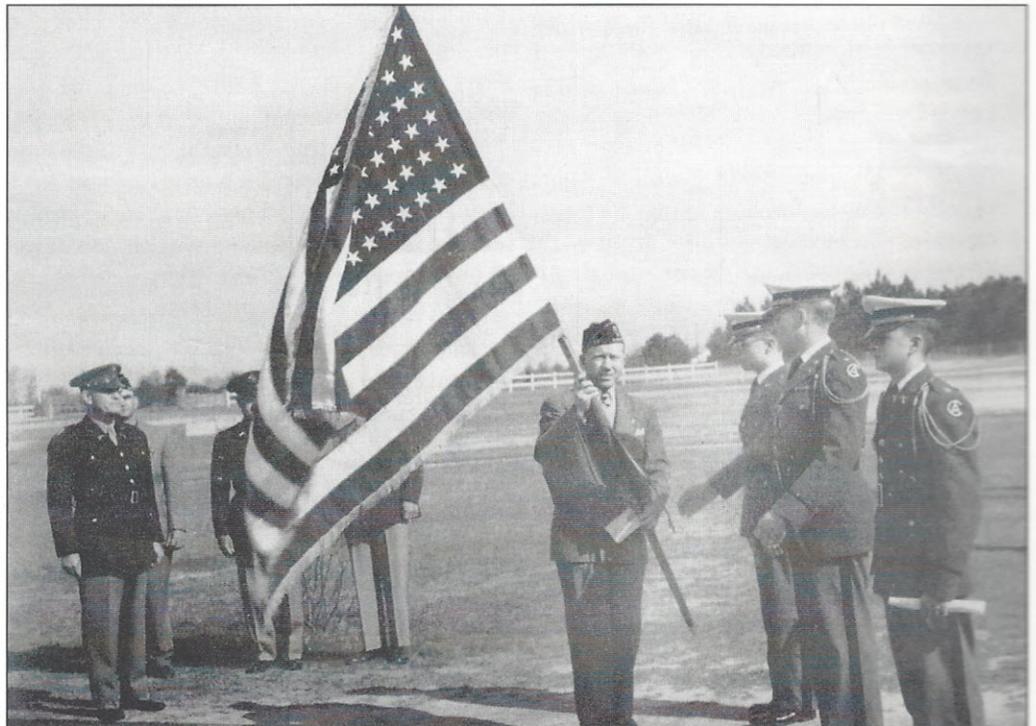
it was far higher than the \$700-\$800 charged by Carlisle.) With the small enrollment, however, these charges were not enough to cover the costs of operation. Officials expressed confidence that the school would continue to grow and, in spite of the financial squeeze, the word was that Camden Academy was successfully launched and on its way.

During the second year, Major Collins again coached the varsity basketball and baseball teams as part of a general sports program emphasizing broad participation. None of the players on the first year's basketball team had had previous varsity experience. Even so, the team had won a respectable number of games, mostly against nearby rural high schools. By the third year, however, Collins coached his basketball team through a 19-1 season. The *State* newspaper called the 1952-1953 Camden basketball team the best prep school team in South Carolina.

As good as the basketball team was, it was overshadowed the following fall by the introduction of football. Whether it was planned that way or not, Camden Academy soon became known for its football team. Even now, if you talk to someone who knows of Camden Academy, chances are that football will become a part of the conversation. Not all of the comments will be complimentary. Some will say that the Academy bought itself a football team. Not only did the school offer football scholarships but it also enrolled several "post-graduates" each year, boys on their way to promising college football careers who, for academic or other reasons, needed to delay their entry into college.

It would be a mistake, however, to credit the school's football success solely to a bunch of hired guns. Take, for example, the record of Camden's first

Camden Academy received its first American flag as a gift from the Camden American Legion. Presenting the flag is Clyde Walton, who later became superintendent of Kershaw County Schools.



My Junior and Senior Years at Camden Academy

By Ogden S. Babson,
Camden Academy, 1950-52

I entered Camden Academy as a junior in September 1950. That was the Academy's first year in existence. Enrollment totaled 45 students in grades 8 through 12. That spring the first graduation class had only four members.

Adjusting to life at Camden Academy came easy. I did not have any difficulty with the daily routine or the military discipline. The academic phase was challenging, but the teachers were equally helpful. My grades were average and sometimes better. There was not any hazing. I do not remember any students or teachers being arrogant.

I will always have a great big soft spot in my heart for the people of Camden. Beginning with my first weekend as a cadet, these wonderful people opened their hearts, their homes and their churches to us. I remember two beautiful Camden High girls I dated. And I have always remembered the Sunday sermons of Reverend A. Douglas McArn, pastor of Bethesda Presbyterian Church. True Southern hospitality was at its peak when we ate Sunday dinner in the homes of those wonderful people.

To teach military "etiquette" to those of us who had never worn more than a Boy Scout uniform was the task of six or seven cadets who had attended other military schools. Lewis Dellinger of Kings Mountain, North Carolina, taught me how to salute, to execute a smart about face, etc. Joe Grady of Kinston, North Carolina, taught me the art of making my bunk and how to make a hospital fold. Tommy Greer of Greenville, South Carolina, the ranking cadet officer that fall, was the sharpest looking cadet on campus. I wanted to look as sharp in my uniform as he did in his. Lewis, Joe, Tommy and I have remained good friends since those embryonic years at the Academy.

By today's standards, life on campus was certainly spartan. Our dorm, Colonial Hall, is today's Beckham Hall. The furnace burned coal. Believe me, there were many winter mornings when there was little difference between the indoor and the outdoor temperatures. Many mornings we showered in cold water. The fall and spring months were extremely hot, and we did not have air conditioning. Would you believe that the nearest air conditioner was in the Little Theater in beautiful downtown Camden?

I made the basketball team my junior and senior years. A



Ogden, 1951

picture of Camden Academy's first basketball team, 1950-51, is currently displayed in the trophy case in the foyer of the dining hall. We practiced and played our home games in what was then the National Guard Armory on US 1, south of downtown Camden. I remember playing McBee, Bethune and Pageland. I scored 24 points one night against Bethune! Twice during my senior year we played Carlisle Military School, and twice Carlisle prevailed. Most of their players spoke Spanish!

The administration building, which sat on the east side of the pool where the Carlisle House is now located, was the most beautiful building on campus. In that building were the canteen, the administrative offices and a beautiful ballroom—wood paneling, beautiful chandeliers, tall casement windows, the works. Our Saturday night dances, chapel services, and graduation ceremonies were held in the ballroom. In 1954, two years after I graduated, that building burned, destroying my high school transcript and the transcripts of everyone else who had attended Camden Academy. I still have my diploma, however, and my high school record is included on my college transcript.

During my junior year, I attended my first Carolina Cup. I was like Andy Griffith at his first football game. That was an experience I have never forgotten. Beautiful horses ridden by men of small stature identified as jockeys, beautiful ladies everywhere, men in bright jackets, pants and hats, and bountiful amounts of food—all surrounded by an air of friendliness.

During my two years at the Academy, the uniform issue consisted of a dark blue blouse, a garrison cap, an overseas cap, neckties, long-sleeve grey cotton shirts, grey wool trousers, grey cotton trousers, an overcoat-raincoat, and a black utility jacket.

That first year at the Academy was challenging, educational, and a lot of fun. I made many life-long friends. Contrary to the beliefs of the uninformed experts about military schools, we did not have any juvenile delinquents. Certainly, we all got our share of demerits for such benign offenses as shoes not being shined, dirty belt buckles, etc., but on campus or in town there were not any acts that offended society.

I will always remember the weekend thrill of eating in the locally-owned Waffle Shop on DeKalb Street, down a few doors from the Sarsfield Hotel. Another thrill was going to the air-conditioned Little Theater for the latest Hollywood thriller in black and white.

Riding the city bus between the Academy and downtown Camden was always as exciting as the driver's history lessons. The bus driver had been a security guard at Woodward Field during World War II, the site of the Academy. He told us never-ending tales about the British and American student pilots, the German POW's who worked the nearby farms, and about their all-night party their last night before being returned to Germany.

I have vivid memories of finding posters and duty rosters in German on the walls of the three buildings that are now the dining hall, Thompson Barracks, and Grimes Barracks. Those discoveries always frustrated me because I was told the German POW's occupied the two-story barracks that burned in 1962. I never thought of saving those posters and rosters for the Academy's archives.

Once an Air Force B-26 bomber made an emergency landing at the airport. To our surprise, the plane was left unguarded. For the week that the plane remained parked on the ramp, the common stock of Eastman Kodak must have skyrocketed because of all the pictures we took of ourselves on and in that plane.

In the fall of 1951 the Korean War was at its peak. Apparently, that war caused the US Air Force to deem Kershaw County a target because we awoke one morning to find tents, radar antennas, and about fifty airmen in the area that is now the terminal for the airport. They were friendly and enjoyed showing us their "space age" radar screens and all kinds of related gadgets. The enemy bombers never came, so after about three months, they folded their tents and left!

Our teachers were all wonderful people, all role models to us. One very special person my first year was Mrs. Richard Singleton (Martha) Kirk of Camden. She was the headmaster's secretary during 1950-51, a truly beautiful Southern lady of charm and poise. Just her smile and the sparkle in her eyes could cure a near fatal case of homesickness or any other of the dread diseases that plague teenage boys. On my honeymoon in 1958, my bride—now of 40 years—and I visited Mrs. Kirk one evening in her Charleston home.

Colonel Turner Flowers Garner was the headmaster during my two years at the Academy. I'll never forget the day he appeared at my home in response to my letter written without the knowledge of my parents. In short order, Colonel Garner impressed my parents and they consented for me to go away to school at the tender age of 16. He was a tower of authority and a strong leader who was just as compassionate as he was impatient when we failed to meet his high standards. He taught English and introduced me to British poetry and prose, a course too abstract for me—even in college.

Colonel Thomas L. Alexander, "Colonel Alex," was a teacher we all loved. He taught math and physics and a lot about life. He instilled in us the notion to always "take stock" of ourselves and the situation before we acted. Colonel Alex motivated us with his warm smile and his silent stare.

Major Purvis W. Collins was my basketball coach, a man's man, youthful, confident, and a real gentleman. He was a role model for all of us. From just watching him eat in the dining hall and in restaurants, I polished my table manners. I am confident that his perpetual optimism would have overwhelmed Dale Carnegie, and that, too, helped me learn to smile in the face of adversity.

Major Leslie F. Young was the commandant of cadets and my Spanish teacher for *dos años*. Because I could never

roll my *r*'s as he did and wanted us to do, my grades seldom rose above a C. A true officer and gentleman of the "old army" officer corps, he effectively drew from the experiences of his army years and his many years with an American oil company in Venezuela to mold us into young leaders.

In retrospect, we had an unusually highly qualified faculty during those first two years of the Academy's history. Because of those gentlemen and their wives, I am confident that those of us who graduated in 1951 and 1952 have been better citizens, more productive and more successful in our lives.

Discipline in an atmosphere other than my home during my junior and senior years may have been my most meaningful experience while at Camden Academy. Because of my parents' high standards for me, all underwritten by love, the transition to military discipline and to new authority was not too radical. However, discipline at the Academy, administered by men experienced in dealing with teenage boys, was helpful to me. While I never cast these men in a parental role, they did demonstrate compassion and understanding sufficient to guide us to more worthy and rewarding goals.

The educational atmosphere was just what I needed. Most classes had ten students or less. Equally important, I received individual help and encouragement. There just wasn't any place to hide. The teachers always had us in their sights. I probably spent as many nights in the compulsory study hall as any other student; however, that environment led me to develop good study habits that helped me to graduate from college.

During my senior year, John Bookter of Columbia, South Carolina, and I were appointed cadet officers and placed in charge of the junior school barracks on the first floor of Carolina Hall. That was a wonderful and enriching experience. The satisfaction of helping those young boys tie their shoe laces and neckties and helping them with their spelling and math was most rewarding. I am sure I was a better father to my daughter and son because of that experience.

On rare occasions a few of us seniors camped out on Saturday nights in the wooded area where the running track and football field now lie. Somewhere in that area rests a buried 1952 Camden Academy class ring—mine!

I graduated from Camden Academy on May 31, 1952. There were thirteen boys and one girl, Pat McGahey, in our class. Pat was the daughter of Mrs. Mildred McGahey, the headmaster's secretary in 1951-52. She did not wear a uniform or drill with us and she lived in her mother's apartment on campus. Today, Pat is a college professor with a Ph.D. in anthropology.

I am very proud to be a 1952 graduate of Camden Academy. Today, when I turn off of US 1 onto the campus, my chest swells with pride. I am confident that I am a better 64-year-old man because of my junior and senior years at Camden Academy.

Ogden is the executive director of the South Carolina Asphalt Pavement Association.

The Academy's first basketball team, 1950-51. Coach Purvis Collins developed one of the top prep school teams in the state.



season, in the fall of 1953. That team had eighteen players, nine of whom had never played high school ball. And, far from needing special academic help, the team had a collective average higher than the rest of the school. None of the players were failing, and all but two were making 80s and 90s. Although the schedule for that first season included several small Class B schools like Buford and Flat Creek, Camden also played stronger teams from schools like Irmo, Porter Military School, and Carlisle. With no home field advantage (Camden did not get its own football field until the 1960s) and with fewer practice sessions than their opponents (the team practiced on a vacant lot, near where Camden's City Hall now stands), the 1953 Cadets compiled a 9-0 season record and won the state prep school title. The team attracted so much local attention that the last game of the season, against Porter, was rescheduled for a Saturday night in Camden's Zemp Stadium so that townspeople could come out and see the new Academy team in action.

What, then, could account for the instant success of the 1953 team as well as for a significant part of the success of later Camden teams? There is no doubt that Camden had some outstanding players who completely outclassed many of their opponents, but behind those excellent athletes stood an excellent coach, a young man who during his three years at Camden would amply demonstrate again and again that he knew the game of football as well as he knew how to motivate players. His name was Billy Seigler, and according to some, he was the best high school coach in the state.

In spite of his small size, Seigler was a fine player himself as a high school student in Augusta and later as a fullback at Newberry College, where he graduated in 1950.

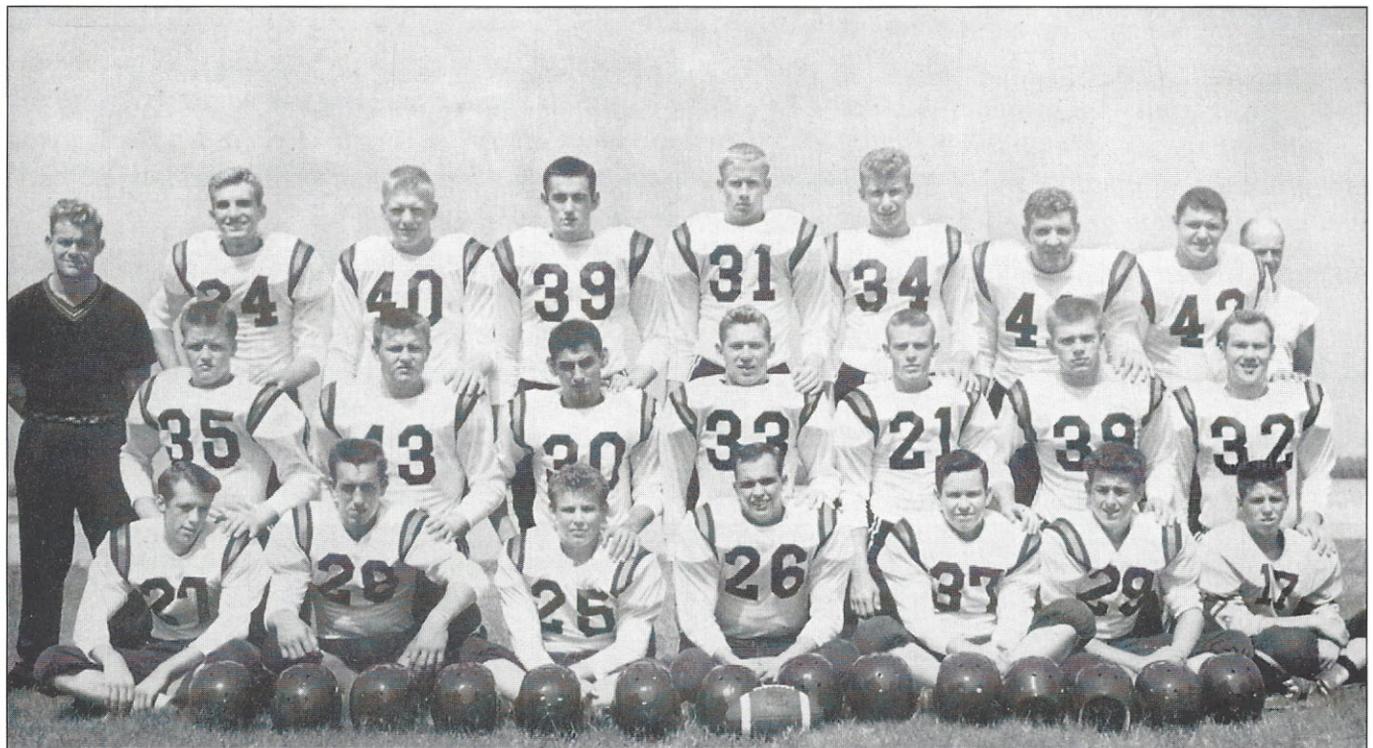
Just how good Billy Seigler was as a coach at Camden is indicated by the team's record for the 1954 season, which he missed when he returned to Augusta to coach

in the city's recreation league. The Cadets managed to win only one game that year, in spite of a recruiting program that was by then beginning to bring in more post-graduate and other scholarship players. It is true that the 1954 schedule was more demanding than the previous year's: the Class B schools refused to play Camden a second time around, and the Cadets found themselves facing such powerhouses as New Hanover High School in Wilmington, North Carolina—with 4,000 students, the biggest high school in the state—and Georgia Military College. But, as we will see, these same schools, and others like them, posed no problem in subsequent years after Seigler returned to coach at Camden.

Meanwhile, other important events were occurring at the school. In August 1954, just a couple of weeks before the opening of school, the administration building burned to the ground. Thought to have been started by lightning, the fire was discovered on an early Saturday morning by arriving workers. Although the Camden Fire Department quickly reached the scene, the building collapsed within fifteen minutes of their arrival. With its graceful lines and spacious interior, the administration building had been the centerpiece of the campus. It had also housed all of the school records, including student files. All of these were lost. Fortunately, the building itself was not essential to the operation of the school, and after moving the administrative offices to the middle apartment in the infirmary building, Colonel Garner began the school year as scheduled.

That, however, was not to be the only blow to the school's operation that

Coach Billy Seigler and the 1955 Camden Academy football squad. Seigler and the Cadets compiled a three-year 35-1 record.



First Row: Bill Smith, Sonny Ford, Miles Ram, L. C. Coates, Henry Williams, Nick Atria, Charles Yearty. Second Row: Bob Smith, Wimpy Odom, Frank Marino, Mickey Blair, Ken Willoughby, Metz Looper, Kelton Hill. Standing: Coach Billy Seigler, Ed Emory, Leon McLemore, Rhuel Edwards, Ed Redman, John Lawrence, James Bourbeau, Assistant Coach Jack Lyon.



Major Purvis Collins became the head of the Academy in 1954 after the resignation of Colonel Garner.

year. In early October, after serving as head of the school for four years, Colonel Garner unexpectedly resigned and returned to a position at Riverside. Garner had been the dominant figure at Camden since the school's establishment and had been responsible more than anyone else for shaping the school's policies and guiding its development. According to Purvis Collins, who succeeded him as head of the school, Colonel Garner had done an admirable job of leading Camden Academy during its opening years. Most other men under similar circumstances, Collins thought, would have run the school into the ground in a year or two. But in spite of the Colonel's careful management and experienced leadership, the school was not growing as expected. Though enrollment in previous years had reached over a hundred, in the fall of 1954 it dropped back down to about sixty. Enrollment would rise again, and the school's fate was not yet determined, but there is little doubt that the loss of Colonel Garner and the long-range stability that he could have provided was a setback.

Major Collins, however, was a good choice as his replacement. Except for a year when he returned to Winnsboro to open a business, he had been at the school since its beginning. He was thoroughly familiar with the operation and clearly had the support of the board, the faculty, and the cadets. Except for Collins, all of the original members of the school's faculty and staff had by this time moved on. Collins, Richard Ballentine and Eugene Anderson were the only returning faculty members that year. Mrs. Tommie Pylant, who had moved to Camden from Miami, was beginning her third year as the school's secretary, and her son Johnny was a seventh-grade cadet.

Although the football team slipped in its performance the year that Seigler was away, the basketball team, still coached by Purvis Collins, did very well. Its schedule included preliminary matches against the freshman teams of USC, Clemson, and The Citadel, these games being played before the college varsity teams took the floor. Though Camden was not quite up to the level of the college players, the Cadets did defeat the USC freshmen in their second match-up. Over a period of three seasons, the Camden basketball teams compiled a 60-10 record. Like the football team, they lacked on-campus facilities, practicing and playing their home games at Camden's National Guard armory.

Billy Seigler returned to Camden in February 1955 and coached that spring's baseball team through a 12-4 season.

By the beginning of the 1955-1956 school year, enrollment was up again, several new faculty members had been hired—bringing the total faculty to nine—and the second floor of Carolina Hall was opened for the first time to accommodate the additional cadets. These developments were exciting news for those involved in the school, but the biggest excitement in the local commu-

nity centered on the football team and its prospects for a new season under Coach Seigler.

The team would be facing a tough schedule against large public high schools and challenging prep school teams. All eleven games were scheduled for out of town. As the weeks went by, the victories poured in: New Hanover, 31-0; Darlington School, 45-6; Blue Ridge, 60-6; Rock Hill, 54-11. By November, the team had achieved a 9-0 record, with two season games left to play. People in town had been following the season through weekly reports in the *Chronicle*, and local interest was such that one of the Academy games had already been re-scheduled for play at Zemp Stadium. Now, the Camden Kiwanis Club arranged a charity fund-raising match for Thanksgiving Day, pitting the Cadets against West Georgia Junior College, that year's leader in the Georgia Junior College Conference.

In the last two weeks of the season, Camden went on to defeat Winyah High 20-0 and Columbia Military Academy, the Mid-South Conference champion, 24-0. On Thanksgiving Day, the West Georgia Junior College team and their supporters rolled into town in three Greyhound buses. By this point, Seigler had honed his team down to about twenty players. The event proved a fitting climax for a flawless season: the Cadets packed the visitors back into their Greyhounds to nurse a 61-21 defeat all the way home to Georgia.

For that 1955 season, Camden scored 372 points against their opponents' 59, and twelve Camden players received college football scholarships.

Purvis Collins resigned his position at the end of 1955-1956 to return to Winnsboro to his business and a position there as principal of the Mt. Zion Institute. Later he entered the state legislature, held several positions in state government and at this writing is director of the state retirement system. The year he left Camden, the school turned its first small profit. Given his abilities, he might have been able to pull Camden Academy through to a more stable period, but as it turned out, the school had but one more year to live.

Dr. Boylston Green was appointed the new head of the school in the summer of 1956. Dr. Green was a graduate of the University of South Carolina and

Carolina Hall was opened in the second year to accommodate the Academy's increased enrollment. It burned in 1962.



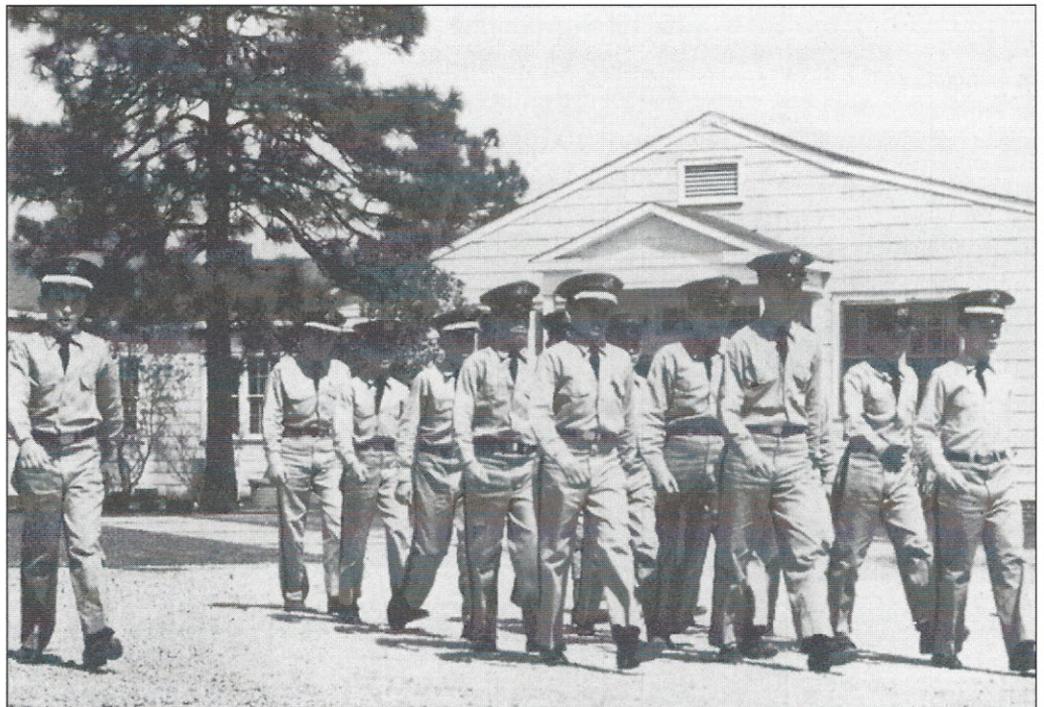
had earned a Ph.D. degree from Yale. Fifty-one years old, he had held teaching and administrative positions at several colleges, including the University of South Carolina, Middlebury College in Vermont, and the University of the South at Sewanee. Green immediately began sending multiple releases to the Camden and Columbia newspapers, indicating that the school, which had just been issued a new charter as a non-profit, eleemosynary institution, was launching a new academic program emphasizing “fundamentals, not frills.” A special focus, he indicated, would be placed on science and mathematics, with the intent of preparing students for entry into college engineering programs.

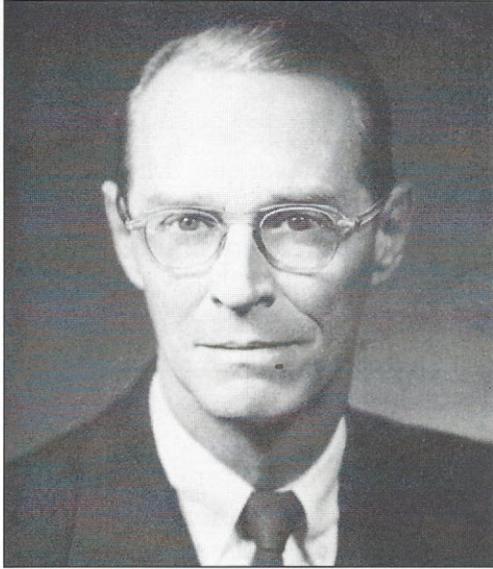
The year began with about 125 students, an increase over the previous year, but it did not progress smoothly. Multiple discipline problems, expulsions, and early withdrawals plagued the school throughout its last year. In one incident, for example, reported in the *State* newspaper, five cadets went AWOL, stole a car in Charlotte, and were later arrested in Knoxville—because, they said, they had been “framed” by the school on the charge of burning a cross in front of Dr. Green’s apartment. A former staff member asserts that if it had not been for Mrs. Pylant keeping things running in the office and smoothing the feelings of the frustrated faculty, the school would have ceased functioning before the year was out.

One of the few bright spots was again provided by the football team. With Seigler as their coach, the Cadets continued the uninterrupted romp through the ranks of their opponents. They defeated Georgia Military College 39-6, Wingate College 40-7, Ferrum Junior College 24-0. It wasn’t until the last game of the season that Seigler and the Cadets finally met defeat—and that by one point, 7-6, at the hands of Staunton Military Academy. During his three years at Camden, Billy Seigler had compiled a 35-1 record.

Seigler’s time at Camden Academy, however, was over. As soon as the

The Academy included a Junior School, made up of 7th and 8th graders who were housed separately from the older students.





Dr. Boylston Green was headmaster for the last year of the Academy's existence.

season ended, the school announced that no more athletic scholarships would be awarded. The days of big-time, powerhouse football at Camden were gone. Seigler promptly announced his resignation, effective at the end of the school year, and an era that had barely begun came quickly to an end. The school, in effect, was admitting that its use of football to attract students and to build support had been a mistake. Too many of its "post-graduates" were simply here to play ball. In a typical year about half would leave at the end of the football season. Some had not done enough work in class to earn any academic credit. The effect on school morale and discipline is not hard to imagine.

Seigler went the next year to Hartsville High where he coached championship teams for ten years before moving to a coaching position at Hanahan High School in Charleston. There he took a team that had not had a winning season in years and compiled a four-year 38-6-1 record. In 1972, the year before he died at age 47, he was named Coach of the Year by the Palmetto Touchdown Club. "In order to play football for me," he had said on one occasion, "a boy must love the game, not just like it. Otherwise, he couldn't weather what we do." Seigler had brought that tough love of the game to Camden and inspired many Camden players to climb to his own high level of dedication.

As the 1956-1957 school year continued, it became increasingly known in the community that the Academy was experiencing difficulties. At a special meeting of community leaders held at the Sarsfield Hotel in March, Dr. Green made an appeal to his audience for support by reminding them of the economic benefits of the Academy to the town. He pointed out that the school contributed about \$70,000 a year to the local economy, the same as an industry employing 30 persons at \$75 a week.

In response, the Chamber of Commerce in April announced that it, along with several of the local civic clubs, would conduct a \$35,000 fund drive to improve the facilities at the Academy. It was hoped that the money would be raised in time to make the improvements over the summer. A short time later, Dr. Green told the *Chronicle* that the school was planning a major change for the coming year: the military program would be discontinued.

These efforts to improve and redirect the school were interrupted in May when, just a week before graduation, fire broke out in the kitchen and totally destroyed the dining hall. The fire was discovered at about 2:30 on a Sunday morning by a cook who slept in a room near the kitchen. The building, which was only partially insured, was one of two that were owned by the city and informally leased to the Academy. With no way to provide meals for the cadets, school officials had no choice but to close school a week early and send students home without taking their final exams or going through commencement. They made a point of announcing, however, that summer school would begin as scheduled on June 10 and that no changes were anticipated in the fall opening.

By the end of June, the work on campus improvements was getting under-

way. The Camden JayCees had taken the lead in these efforts and were soliciting donations for paint, tools, and building materials. The project was called Operation Fresh Start.

A couple of weeks later, however, in mid-July, the JayCees called a halt to their clean-up campaign: word had gotten out that the Academy would not be opening in the fall. When Chairman of the Board John deLoach was asked to confirm this information, he replied that there was a “great possibility” that the school would close. The JayCees voted to give the opened paint cans, used brushes, rollers, and other materials to some other worthy organization, and officially ended Operation Fresh Start. A week later, Dr. Green announced his resignation from the Academy and his intention to join the English Department at Wofford College. Camden Academy was no more.

In spite of its short life, Camden Academy left its distinctive mark on the lives and memories of quite a few men and women who look back now nearly fifty years ago to the time when they were students or staff members on this campus. They have a genuine fondness for the Academy and for those who shared this time and place with them. They seem especially pleased to talk about Camden Academy, in part, perhaps, because of the realization that the special qualities of their school were later submerged under the rising fortunes of a new institution. For make no mistake, Camden Academy had its own distinctive personality. There was a certain panache, a flair, a hint of cavalier offhandedness in its approach to the serious business of life and schooling. There was a sense of men of the world taking their young charges, also destined to become men of the world, under their friendly, affectionate tutelage. “*Military? Yes, but let’s not be too serious about it. After all, first we are gentlemen.*” Colonel and Mrs. Garner were wonderful models at the top, aristocratic in bearing, proper in every detail, often stern in demeanor, but clearly and personally concerned with the lives of the young men in their care. Colonel Alex and Mrs. Wrennie were softer, warmer versions of a similar model, every young cadet’s ideal grandparents. Major Collins was full of youth and manly good humor but always correct in manner and attire. Heavy-lidded Major Young provided a different variation, with his neatly trimmed mustache, his cavalry jodhpurs and polished riding boots, the whiff of foreign parts and casual dissipations lingering about him like cigar smoke.

The place, in other words, was as much a large family—with its various, colorful members all bearing the family resemblance—as it was an institution. Boys were invited to become a part of the family, young distant cousins who through daily proximity would absorb the family ways. The impression is in the school catalog, it is in the memories of alumni, it’s even in the official student transcripts. Can you imagine the record of a Carlisle or CMA student including a comment written with the lively insouciance of the following:

A cheerful, cooperative cadet, not yet in prime academic condition and rendered somewhat distracted by two handsome, brilliant older brothers, a martinet father, and a cheerfully alcoholic mother. Scotch-Italian, the boy

had the best qualities of both groups, with the inherent self-contradictions of the two temperaments.

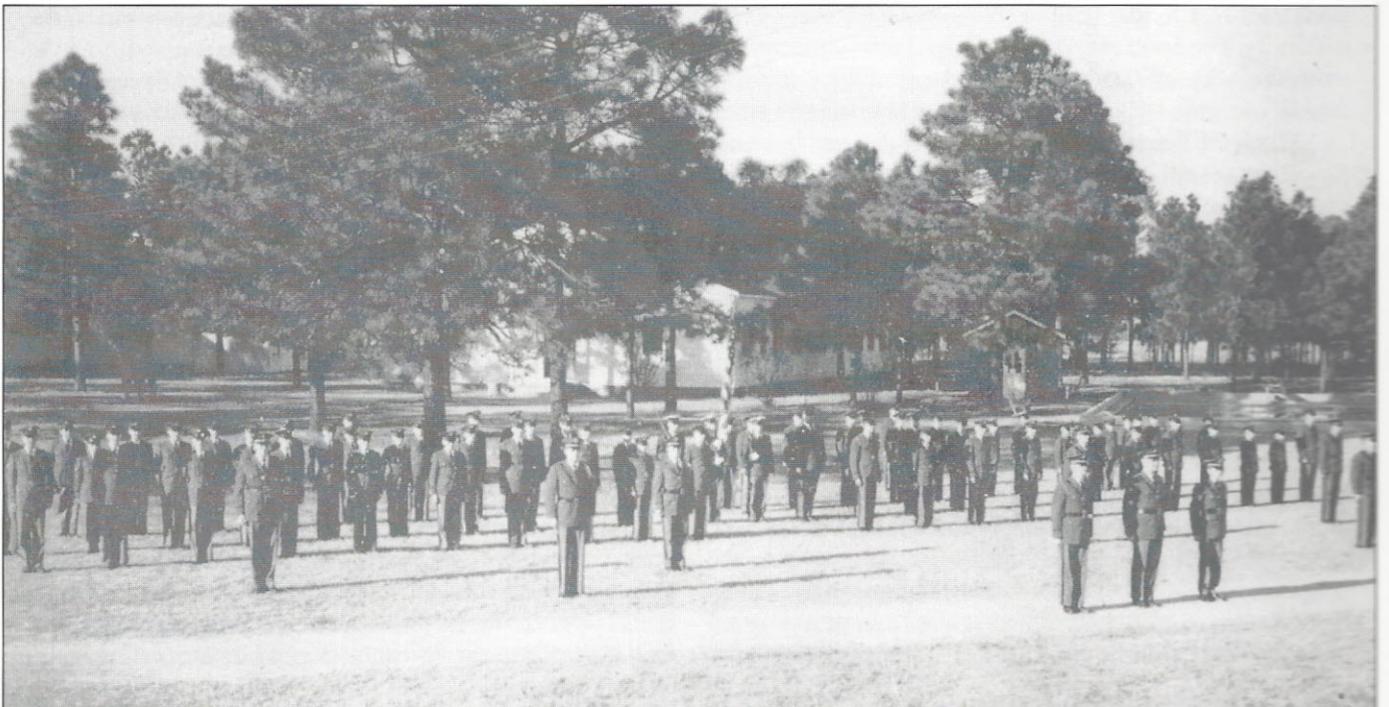
Yes, Camden Academy had its own personality. Though it provided the essential link connecting Carlisle and Camden Military Academy, and though today we have gathered all three schools under a single banner, Camden Academy has a right to be remembered for its own unique qualities and for the special influence it exerted on the lives of several hundred alumni who remember their Academy days with pride and affection.

It fell to John deLoach to deal with the unpleasant problems left by the closing of the school. For the next several months, he and other members of the board attempted to find a buyer for the property and to conclude some settlement with the school's unsecured creditors. There were two mortgages on the school, the first for \$19,000 and a second for \$52,000. By the end of January 1958, deLoach thought that he had found a buyer and in a letter to the creditors wrote that he hoped to be able to offer them a 50% repayment of their accounts over a period of eight years.

The sale did not go through, however, and in May, deLoach again wrote to the unsecured creditors to tell them that the property would be put up for auction on June 2 and that "there will be something for the creditors which will be distributed as soon as the sale at public auction is consummated."

By this time, however, the Rishers had been brought into the story, and the time has come to leave Camden Academy and turn the page to a new school and a new beginning.

Camden Academy corps of cadets in formation for the Camden Merchants Parade.



The Southern Aviation School

Now that the administration building has been rebuilt, the last relatively untouched vestige of a by-gone era has passed beneath the surface of the Camden campus. Still hiding, however, behind the brick facades and refashioned interiors of most of the school's buildings, in a pattern more or less traceable in the memories of old men who once, in ten short weeks, passed into manhood here, lie the original barracks, classrooms, and other facilities of a hub of wartime activity and energy known as the Southern Aviation School.

In the three-and-a-half years of its operation, from March 1941 to August 1944, over six thousand cadets learned—or in some cases attempted to learn—to fly here.

The Army considered it one of the finest primary flight schools in the country. For many of the young men who first soloed here, SAS marked one of the happiest times of their lives.

The Southern Aviation School—designated officially as the 64th Army Air Forces Training Detachment—was one of over sixty privately managed schools contracted by the Army, beginning in 1940, to train military pilots in the eventuality of U.S. involvement in the war.

The school was a subsidiary of Southern Airways, and two of Southern's executives, Frank Hulse and Ike Jones, moved to Camden from Savannah in December 1940 to direct the construction and operation of the new school. The site was chosen partly because of the availability of Woodward Airfield, built in 1926 by F. L. Woodward, a wealthy winter resident of Camden, and later given by him to the city. The Southern Aviation School leased the airfield from the City of Camden and constructed its training facility in a grove of pine trees along its southeastern edge.

When the first class of about forty cadets arrived from pre-flight school in March 1941, there was a small but adequate campus ready for them: a barracks, a mess hall, a classroom building, an administration building, two hangars, and a flight operations building. The runways of the airfield had been reinforced and extended, a group of civilian flight instructors had been assembled, and about two dozen blue and yellow PT-17s—an open cockpit biplane with a 220-horsepower radial engine—were lined up and waiting on the concrete apron.

During most of its short period of operation, the Southern Aviation School, in response to the country's rapidly accelerating war needs, remained in a continual state of expansion. By 1943, 250 new cadets were entering the program each month, and the facility had grown to include five barracks, a mess hall tripled in size, a large recreation building, a swimming pool, and a 25-bed dispensary.

In addition, the school was by then operating three satellite airfields within a five to fifteen mile range of the main base at Woodward Field. Buses ferried cadets to and from these outlying fields to relieve the crowded runways and airspace over Woodward.

When the school reached its maximum capacity, over 100 civilian flight instructors were required to put the young cadets through their paces, while a maintenance department of nearly 250, many of them women, worked literally around the clock to keep the fleet of 100 PT-17s in the air.

Even at a distance of over fifty years and for someone too young to remember, it is still easy to catch the excitement of those heady times. To be young and away from home for the first time; to feel the pressure of such rigorous training crammed into a few short weeks and intensified by the fear of "washing out"; to be encushioned on weekends by such warm small-town Southern cordiality, so many smiling mothers, so many pretty daughters; to feel the energy of the country's great war effort surging through your own brain and marrow; to climb into an open cockpit and fly every day—many felt that there was not much else life had to offer that could exceed such a convergence.

The operation of SAS was fast-paced, tightly managed, and well disciplined. Although the administrative officers, instructors and office staff, mechanics and most of the other employees were civilian, the school was operated as a military base. A small staff of Army personnel supervised the daily routine, kept check on the quality of instruction, maintained military discipline, and provided physical training.

Day began with reveille and ended with taps. There were tactical officers, OD's and OG's. Cadets who ran afoul of regulations during the week walked off their tours on the weekends while the others enjoyed the hospitality of Camden. The area was surrounded by a tall chainlink fence and regularly patrolled by civilian guards. (For a few weeks after Pearl Harbor, soldiers dug foxholes and mounted machine guns around the periphery, but they were soon needed elsewhere.) No one could enter or leave except by the guarded front gate. Once a general, arriving for an inspection, was denied entrance until he had produced the proper identification. He was so impressed by the guard's vigilance that he skipped the inspection.



Photo courtesy of John Benedict

The school's schedule was carefully planned to make optimum use of its facilities. A new class arrived from pre-flight school every five weeks. These "underclassmen" spent their mornings in the air, getting in their first hours of flight instruction. In the afternoons they attended ground school, studying such basics as the theory of flight, aircraft engines, meteorology and navigation. Meanwhile, the "upperclassmen"—the class who had already completed the first weeks of their training—were following the reverse schedule, going to classes in the morning and flying in the afternoon.

Each flight instructor worked with a group of four or five cadets. Some instructors were soft-spoken and patient; most were not. All were determined to let no one get through the course who was not fully qualified to fly. These men had been gathered from the ranks of civilian pilots, many of whom had gotten their flying experience in the wild early barnstorming days of flight. They were not inclined to ease their young pupils gradually into the intricacies of maneuvering an aircraft. On their very first day of instruction, newly arrived cadets found themselves at the controls of the obstreperous PT-17, trying to keep her straight and level while simultaneously attempting, over the unaccustomed roar of the engine, to decipher and implement the commands and admonishments crackling through their headphones from the instructor in the front cockpit. Instructors used a rearview mirror to add the emphasis of eye contact at crucial moments.

Cadets were expected to solo after eight to twelve hours of instruction. To be the first in your class to solo was the highest honor primary flight school could offer. To solo for the first time, regardless of your order in the class, could be an unbelievably exhilarating—or sometimes terrifying—experience. It typically came without warning: the instructor might simply clamber over the side of the aircraft after the cadet had brought it in for a landing and yell up through the roar, "*OK, now you take her around!*" One cadet recalls that once airborne on his solo flight he shouted to himself as loud as he could, "*I'm fine, I'm alone, and I'm flying!*" He was 17 years old. He, like many others, remembers soloing in the PT-17 as one of the peak experiences of his life.

Once cadets had soloed, they accumulated an additional fifty or so hours of flying time before graduating and moving on to basic flight school at another location. During clear flying days the skies over Kershaw County were seldom quiet as the Army trainers crisscrossed and circled overhead. Once released from the constraints of an instructor in the front seat, cadets looked for ways to enliven their flight time and test their developing skills. In spite of clear and emphatic prohibitions, soloing cadets buzzed the traffic on the Wateree River bridge and divebombed the Wateree dam with Coke bottles. One irate farmer drove up to the school's gate to show the commanding officer several aircraft starter cranks that he had picked up in his pasture. Cadets had

appropriated them from their cockpits to strafe enemy cows.

In spite of the urgent haste with which the training was conducted, there were few serious accidents or injuries. Most cadets went on to achieve commendable military records as pilots of fighter planes, bombers, and transports over Europe, Africa, and the Pacific. Some flew jets during the Korean and Vietnam wars. And, of course, many continued their flying careers as commercial pilots for the burgeoning flight industry.

The school was host to a special group of cadets who came through during the second half of 1941. After the blitz began over England, several classes of British cadets were brought to America to receive their primary flight training. In all, during the six months prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, about 300 Royal Air Force flyers were trained at Camden. The people in town, who enthusiastically opened the doors of their community and homes for all of the cadets, made an extra effort to make the young Brits feel welcome. Many of these remember arriving in Camden well after midnight after a weary train ride from Canada and finding the platform lined with smiling townspeople who had waited up to drive the young men out to the school in their automobiles. On Friday and Saturday nights, dances and parties brought cadets and young ladies together. On Sundays members of the town's churches folded the visitors into their arms and took them home for Sunday dinner. During that summer, families invited cadets out to swim at their cottages on Hermitage Pond and organized picnics at nearby Adams Pond. The school's only training fatality was British Cadet George James Pritchard of Ashford, Kent, England. His funeral was conducted by fellow Englishman, Dr. Maurice Clark, rector of Camden's Grace Episcopal Church. Pritchard was buried in Camden's Quaker Cemetery.

The hospitality of the people of Camden toward all of SAS cadets, American and British, is one of the most prominent and endearing memories that graduates of the school still hold. Several cadets married local girls, and at least four of those returned here after the war to make their home. Hundreds of others, including several former RAF pilots, have passed through over the years to look up old acquaintances and renew friendships. Two reunions of SAS cadets and staff have been held in recent years, one in 1991, on the fiftieth anniversary of the school's opening, and another in 1993. Both brought in returnees from around the country.

Although the features of Southern Aviation School now lie obscured within the facilities of Camden Military Academy, those who were here back then can still trace their former steps from barracks to mess hall, from classroom to airfield, and can still recapture the excitement of those moments, now a lifetime ago, when they flew for the first time and felt the thrill and wonder of their young lives opening before them.



Alma Mater

*Mighty Camden, we salute thee now
And may this be our eternal vow,
That the truths held dear
By thy code austere
Shall thunder in our ear.
In adversity
Let us steadfast be,
And face life's trials without fear.
May love of God and love of man
Freedom, truth, and duty to our land
Forge a bond between us,
Man to man.*

By Colonel Lanning P. Risher, 1962

Cadet Prayer

*Heavenly Father,
we beseech Thee to behold with Thy favor
this, our academy, that, through the care
and instruction of the young men committed to it,
Thy Name may be glorified.
Be Thou guide to those upon whom rests
its government; enlighten with wisdom those who
teach;
and grant that we who learn may be blessed
in our studies, and our characters so
molded that we may evermore stand fast in
Thy truth and abide in Thy love.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
AMEN.*

By The Right Reverend Albert S. Thomas, 1962