We Have Come A Long Way Baby....

Thirteen cadets, who started their careers here at Camden Military Academy either in the 8th or 9th grades, are preparing to graduate and to continue their lives’ journeys to the next level. Each of them is a unique young man from different places and with different plans. However, they all agree on basic elements of their experience at CMA. Each of them agrees that their four or five year experience is fundamentally different from those students attending the Academy for a semester, a year or even a couple of years. They all share dramatically improved relationships with their respective families. Additionally, each of these cadets has formed friendships which transcend mere classroom acquaintances. They all also express a deep belief that CMA has prepared them for their futures and has imbued them with a profound sense of self-confidence. These cadets all described unequivocal improvements in their relationships with their parents. They said they are now more trusted than they ever have been. Furthermore, communication between them and their families has been strengthened.

Cadet 1LT Ray Gradwell, of Cape May, New Jersey, has been attending CMA since the 9th grade. He said of his relationship with his family, “It’s a lot better. Obviously my good grades make my parents happy, but they trust me more to make the right decisions, and my dad and I have more conversations because I’m more honest with him now.”

“CMA taught me to respect my elders and to try to help them out when they need help. It taught me to listen to them, because I now understand they know more than me,” said Cadet 2LT Malik McGill. McGill is from Kingstree, South Carolina and has attended the Academy since his 8th grade year.

As well as enhanced relationships with their families, these four and five-year cadets also point out that, because of the extended time and the fact they have been boarded together for years, they have formed extremely close bonds. These cadets have marched together, roomed together, learned together and played together more than kids at regular schools ever could.

“Being here for four years with the same roommate (McGill) has led to much stronger bonding in terms of our friendship,” said Cadet CPT Matthew Zimmerman, a cadet at CMA since the 9th grade. His family background is of military service, and he has lived in many places. In addition to improving character and fostering lifelong bonds of friendship, CMA also readies “long run” cadets for the future through leadership training and building self-confidence.

“I’ve learned to dress myself like a professional. I’ve learned to be there on time, and I’ve learned to be respectful and respectable,” said Cadet 1LT Breon Spencer. Spencer has been at CMA since his freshman year and hails from Dayton, Ohio. Cadet 1SG Christopher Whittar, of Augusta, Georgia, has also been at the school since his freshman year. He said of his CMA experience, “When I first came here, I wasn’t at all sure if I was going to college. Now it’s not a matter of if I’m going to college, but which one.”

“My name is Davis Lord and I’ve been a cadet at Camden Military Academy since 9th grade. I entered this school with a negative attitude and a chance to change my life. I was a procrastinator with academic assignments and this school quickly changed that with a structured study hall to help me get my work done. This school has also shaped me into a leader instead of follower. I’m a 1st Lieutenant on the Battalion staff, and everything I do and say influences the 275 cadets in the Corps of Cadets. Of the many opportunities to excel, there are three that stand out among the rest. Parades have taught me that personal appearance is very important when performing in front of alumni, past graduates, or even people just visiting the campus. In addition, athletics has not only improved my baseball skills but also my leadership on and off the field. As a member of the color guard, I was able to meet South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham at the state Democratic Party Convention. This was a highlight of my experience at Camden Military Academy. These activities have shaped me into a better person and leader. I’ll use these life lessons when I go into the Army after college. My experiences at Camden Military Academy will help guide me in the right direction now and into the future.” Davis Lord of Charlotte, North Carolina.

“My name is Ray Gradwell and I was fortunate to come to Camden Military Academy in the 8th Grade. When I first came CMA, I had a really bad attitude toward my school work. As soon as I was introduced to the strict way that study hall was done, I learned to manage my time and actually get my homework done. In addition to CMA expanding my opportunities in the areas of academics and athletics, because of the coaches here at Camden, I have received a Lacrosse Athletic Scholarship to Belmont Abbey College which is located in Charlotte, North Carolina. While there, I will be majoring in business and continue to expand my horizons.” Ray Gradwell of Cape May, New Jersey.

“My first impression of Camden Military Academy was that the school seemed “OK”. My parents emphasized to me however that one can not do things just for the immediate time, because the future is far important than the “now.” When I arrived at Camden in 2010, I was introduced to my Tactical Officer, CSM Wilder, who demanded compliance with a no nonsense style and excuses were not acceptable. I learned a lot at CMA which included the following rules: maintaining perfect order in one’s room, self-discipline, accountability and the idea that knowledge is power. Cadets also learn that whatever happens to them good or bad, it is the result of their own action. Currently, I’ve applied to ten tier-one colleges and received 9 acceptances and I am on 1 wait-list. (I’m working on that wait list). It may sound arrogant, but if I would have continued in the public school system, I doubt any of this would have happened for me.

To my teachers, CSM Wilder, CMA administration and fellow cadets, thank you for all your help and support. Now, all of us in the 2015 graduating class will be moving in different directions and no matter what they may be, performance and success are completely up to us.” Michael Donovan of Clearwater, Florida.
"When I first came to CMA I did not know what to expect. It is not your typical high school experience. If anything it is more stressful and more demanding than any other school that I have been to. When I first arrived at CMA I was assigned to Bravo Company. My TAC was CSM Irtenkauf. He was a very intimidating and strict man. He taught me many things but the most important is how to lead from the front and get respect from the people you lead. I quickly went through the ranks as I became a better leader. When I was a junior I enlisted into the U.S. Army and went to Fort Jackson, Georgia the following summer. Now I am a senior and I am going to graduate as a captain. I can say that I am ahead of all of my friends at CMA and at home. Being at Camden Military has made me more of a man. It has made me smarter, stronger, more of a leader, and I have met a lot of people that will remember for the rest of my life." Jace Bagwell of Grovetown, Georgia.

"My name is Chris Chamberlain and I am from Fishers, Indiana. I have had the privilege of attending Camden Military Academy since the 8th grade. At first, the stay here at CMA was not very desirable or exciting like I thought it would have been. Once I got structured I could honestly see how CMA was teaching me life skills that would help me throughout my life. Not only have I built friendships, but I have formed a brotherhood with many cadets that shall last a lifetime. Without this, I would have possibly had a future that did not exist. I would like to give special thanks to Papa John Heflin, Coach Rice, Speedy Johnson, Mama Hartley, and CSM Brooks. All of these people had a positive influence on me and shaped me to be who I am. For that, I am very grateful and glad that I came to Camden Military Academy." Chris Chamberlain of Fishers, Indiana.

"My freshman year of high school, Camden Military Academy became my home. It changed me into the man I am today. Without Camden, I don’t know where I would have gotten academically with my high school career. I do know I wouldn’t have been as far as I have gotten with the help of Camden and its faculty." Jennings Stein of Lexington, South Carolina.

"I have been at Camden Military School since the 8th grade. Currently, I am a senior who will graduate and walk across the stage with all the friends that I have made. CMA has really helped me straighten out my life and become the person I am. Without CMA, I would not be going anywhere in life and for that I am very grateful!" Jake McGuire of Indian Land, South Carolina.

"My experience at Camden Military Academy has benefited my life in some very positive ways. I have come in contact with a lot of challenges that have given me the opportunity to grow and learn some life lessons. I am also grateful to undergo what an average teenager would not have experienced and that within itself has made a big difference in my maturity." Ryan Figlow of Atlanta, Georgia.

"It has been a bumpy ride during the past 4 years that I have been here. It seemed like it was a lot on my plate when I had to juggle between academics, sports, and leadership roles all at once. Overall, I learned the art and science of time management while making a lot of great friends who will last a lifetime. Last but not least, I am very proud to say that I will be graduating in May and attending the Citadel in the fall." Cody Auburger of Folly Beach, South Carolina.

"I have had fun being here a Camden Military Academy since the 9th grade. Even though this place has had some good and bad times and I wanted to go back home, it became easier once I made friends. Some of the guys here will be life-long friends of mine because of the special bond that I have formed with them. This school has also done so much for me by helping me with school work, athletics, and getting me prepared for college. Before I came here I did not think I was going to be accepted to college. Currently, I have the chance to chose the college I want to attend. I am glad I earned the chance to come to this school and so many doors have opened up for me which makes me very thankful." Chris Withhar of Grovetown, Georgia.

"My four years at Camden Military Academy have been a very important experience for me. CMA has taught me many things from the proper way to eat at the table to being a leader and not a follower. The experience here is something that a public school student would not likely receive. Above all, I am also grateful for the 4 years of ROTC which will allow me to have more rank going in the army. I am very glad I came to Camden and I am thankful for everything." Matthew Zimmerman of Cabin John, Maryland.

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"I started at Camden Military Academy in 2010 for a summer camp just before my 8th grade year. To my surprise, I would have never thought that I would have attended CMA for the upcoming school year. At first, I had second thoughts about coming. As soon as I got over my homesickness, things started to come together. I really tried hard in all of my classes and listened to my leaders. With time, I eventually became a SFC and a platoon leader in charge of the 1st platoon. CMA has done an excellent job of teaching me the basics of life and how to be successful. I am glad that I made the choice to finish school here and I enjoyed every opportunity that I was afforded." Malike McGill of Kingstree, South Carolina.