

**For Benedictine Cadets and Alumni, December 7th is not referred to as Pearl Harbor Day. Rather, it is known as Gannam Day.** On December 7, 1941, Sgt. George K. Gannam – a 1938 graduate of Benedictine, was the first Savannahian killed in World War II during the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. News of Gannam’s death and his heroic actions reached Savannah on December 11<sup>th</sup>. The following day the city joined the monks, faculty, and students of Benedictine to pay tribute to Sgt. Gannam at a requiem Mass held at Sacred Heart Church on Bull Street.

Several weeks later, buglers from the senior class of Benedictine – accompanied by a detail of Cadets, participated in a flag raising ceremony at the Gannam Residence on the corner of W. 35<sup>th</sup> and Hopkins Street which was attended by monks of Sacred Heart priory and Benedictine faculty. A new flagpole – recently erected by George’s father, was dedicated as part of a memorial garden planted by the family. This small intimate ceremony – repeated at the Gannam home on the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor for several years, would eventually evolve into what is now known as Gannam Day.

Throughout World War II many Benedictine graduates as well as current students, volunteered for service in the armed forces. It was not uncommon for the local paper to include articles detailing these events, such as the article in the October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1942 issue of the Savannah Evening News, which included a captioned photo of Fr. Gregory, O.S.B. – Principal of Benedictine, as he bid farewell to four alumni and two current seniors as they boarded a train heading to Atlanta to enlist. Tragically, news accounts of those Cadets that were later killed in action – referred to in the local papers as “BC heroes”, were also common during this time.

By 1945 more than two dozen Benedictine graduates and recent students had joined Sgt. Gannam in the ranks of “B.C. Heroes” and plans were made to erect a memorial on the Benedictine campus to honor their memory and sacrifice to their country. Clearly influenced by the Gannam memorial garden, the memorial was to take the form of a paved campus – or drill ground, with a limestone monument

surrounding the base of the campus flagpole with the names of all of the fallen cadets inscribed on a granite plaque.

What might be considered the first fully realized Gannam Day ceremony was held at the Gannam Home in 1945 on the fourth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. On this occasion, the entire B.C. Corp of Cadets was in attendance for the first time along with the newly formed George K. Gannam American Legion Post 184. As always, a memorial wreath was placed at the base of the flagpole followed by the playing of taps.

In 1946 the war memorial at Benedictine's Bull street campus was completed in time for the fifth anniversary of the Attack on Pearl Harbor and the memorial ceremonies were held at Benedictine for the first time. The monument included two granite plaques – the ones you see here imbedded as part of our current WW II Memorial – with one of the plaques being inscribed with the names of the thirty cadets who gave their lives defending their country. The tradition of giving the flag used in the days ceremony to the Gannam Family was begun at this time – today the Gannam Family gives the flag back to the school for use throughout the year. The Gannam Day ceremony was observed at the Bull Street campus until 1963, when the school moved to its new campus here on Seawright Drive.

While the World War II memorial at the Bull Street campus was tailored to the existing facility – Benedictine's Seawright Drive campus was clearly designed around it – with the WW II memorial intended as the ceremonial center of Cadet life. As such, the Armory-Gymnasium was designed to represent the military heritage of the then 60 year old school, serving both as a World War II memorial and as a multi-use facility for sports as well military and religious ceremonies and school functions. The ramped concrete podium pavilion in front of the building, together with the flagpole situated directly in front of the two granite memorial plaques imbedded in the center of the building's façade, was intended to serve as a focal point for daily military exercises and solemn religious ceremonies. On Gannam Day, however, this memorial pavilion attains its highest expression and

purpose – to honor the ultimate sacrifice of the 30 young men for which it was designed.