

CARROL DILLON-WINTHROP AIR CADET

Anyone who was associated with Winthrop College in the years 1943 and 1944 easily remembers the Army Aviation Cadets who lived in Bancroft dormitory, were enrolled in classes taught by Winthrop professors and learned the basics of flying at Roddey Field outside town.

We knew there were more than 300 of them and their last names either started with a "D" or "M.". The college provided entertainment for both groups—free movies, use of sports equipment, dances with the famed all-girl band called the Swanks playing, picnics in the amphitheater, etc. They ate in McBride hall, but at separate tables from the girls.

There were strict rules for each group. But in spite of that, there were many opportunities to socialize and when the cadets were shipped out they kept in touch through letters and after the war was over some of them married the girl they first met on the Winthrop campus.

A cadet who was in the first group that arrived on campus in March 1943, Carrol F. Dillon, has written a book about his wartime experiences, including two chapters on his time at Winthrop. The title of the book is "The Crooked Road to Combat—An Autobiographical History of the Trials and Tribulations of an Aircrew Trainee in World War II."

Dillon writes that he had never heard of Rock Hill (he was from Indiana). He says that when he saw the college and found that there were 1540 girls and not a single male student, he thought he was in heaven.

The president of the college was Dr. Shelton Phelps. When the college had agreed to be a training base, Phelps thought that service women of either the WACS or WAVES would be coming. But what the air force had was 93,000 volunteers and not enough facilities to house and train them. So, the backlog of aircrew trainees were sent to colleges all over the nation for basic training and instruction.

Winthrop, needing the money, signed to house 320 cadets. Winthrop authorities and the military officers agreed that there would have to be strict rules. The first ten days the cadets were under restriction, One of the rules was that they "could not get closer to a Winthrop girl than twenty paces."

The first Sunday, restriction was lifted for those cadets who wished to attend religious services. Needless to say, many of the cadets went to church hoping to meet the girls. And they did. Also, girls going to science classes had to pass by "Fort Bancroft." Dillon writes that the girls knew the 20 paces rule and "Generally they stood on the opposite side of the street but twenty paces is hard to measure and as time passed, they edged closer and closer to the middle."

Besides the girls, Dillon, calling himself a Yankee, was fascinated by Southern customs. "When we passed the girls on the campus, they looked in our direction, smiled and called out, "Hey!" We looked around puzzled and said, "What?" We didn't know what they were calling our attention to. But the mystery

soon cleared up. . . . Southerners in South Carolina used 'Hey!' as a greeting, just as we used 'Hi!' in the North."

Dillon thought the meals were excellent and was impressed with the white tablecloths, china and crystal. Milk and homemade butter came from the college farm. More than 60 years later he recalls the southern foods he ate for the first time: "black-eye peas, eggs scrambled with pure cream, grits, pecan pie, fried squash and other southern dishes. The food was superb. There wasn't a cadet on the campus that didn't think so. There was nothing army about it. I never had another military mess hall like the one at Winthrop."

But, said Dillon, the students did complain about the food. "Whenever they could the girls went over to the Goode Shoppe for milk shakes and sandwiches."

Carrol Dillon met Bee White of the Camden area who enrolled in the Winthrop summer school just after graduation from high school. Bee was only 15 and Carrol had just graduated from Indiana University. Carrol decided that Bee was the girl he was going to marry. They married just before he was shipped overseas.

The Dillons will most likely return to Winthrop for Bee's 60th class reunion.