

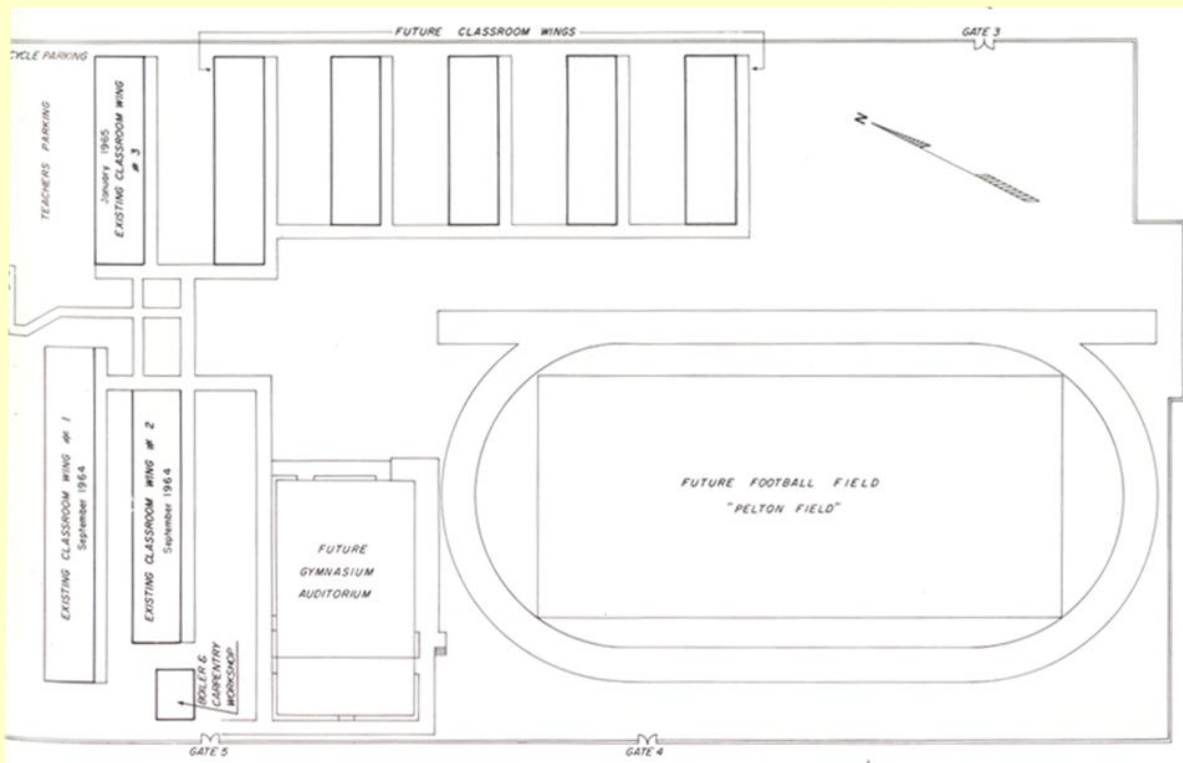


Oil Companies School (OCS) A Brief History

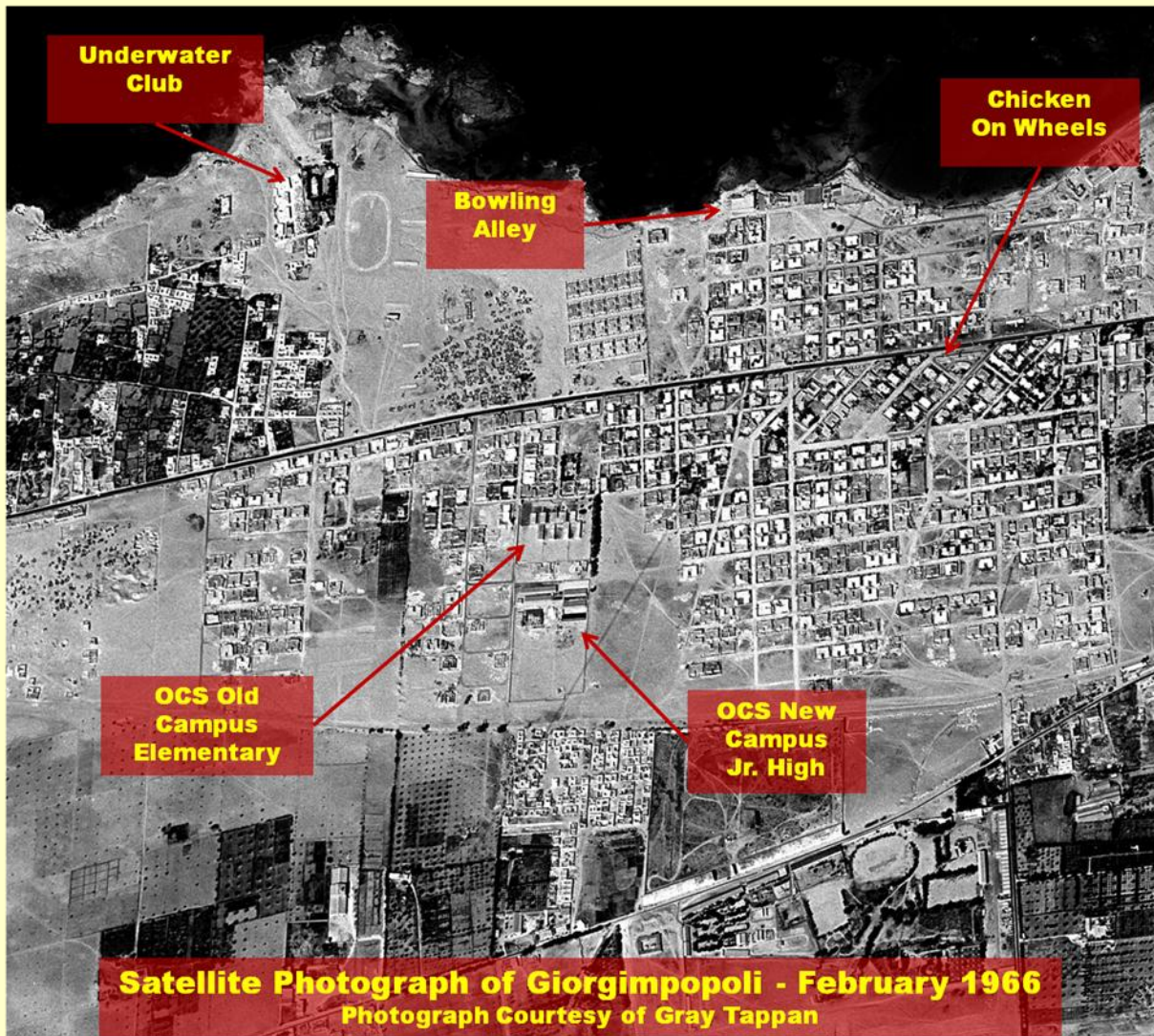
The Oil Companies School (OCS) was established in 1958. In its first year of operation it was housed in a villa in Giorgimpopoli, an expanding suburb west of Tripoli, Libya. The initial mandate of OCS was to provide an American style educational program to the children of oil company, medical, & consular employees, within a rapidly expanding Libyan oil industry. There were 50 children attending OCS in this inaugural year. Within a year the students & faculty were moved to a complex of classrooms and offices located approximately 1 block

north of the current OCS campus. All grades at OCS were taught from these classrooms until the spring of 1964. The school's first Principal was Mr. Robert Waldum (from 1958-1964). Mr. Waldum became the first Superintendent of OCS, holding the post from 1964-1974. "OCS was modeled after a typical American public school with a superintendent, principals, and a school board comprised of representatives from five major oil companies: Oasis, Occidental, Amoseas, Mobil, and Esso." (Andrews p.12). It was under Mr. Waldum's tutelage that OCS developed from a one villa schoolhouse into a sprawling complex of classrooms, offices, & athletic facilities, and became a highly accredited American overseas school.

In the 1962 to 1963 school year there were a total of 13 classes of elementary students, 118 Jr. High students with a graduating class of 35 Grade 9 students. During the 1963 and 1964 school years, student enrollment rose to 450 students and then to 750 students. This rapid enrollment increase prompted the School Board to plan and implement the construction of a new school complex of classrooms and facilities, thus creating a new OCS campus.



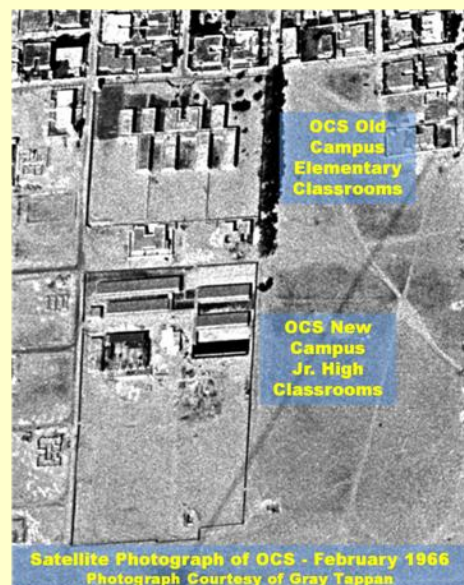
OCS Expansion Plan 1965 – Source *OCS Ambassador 1965*



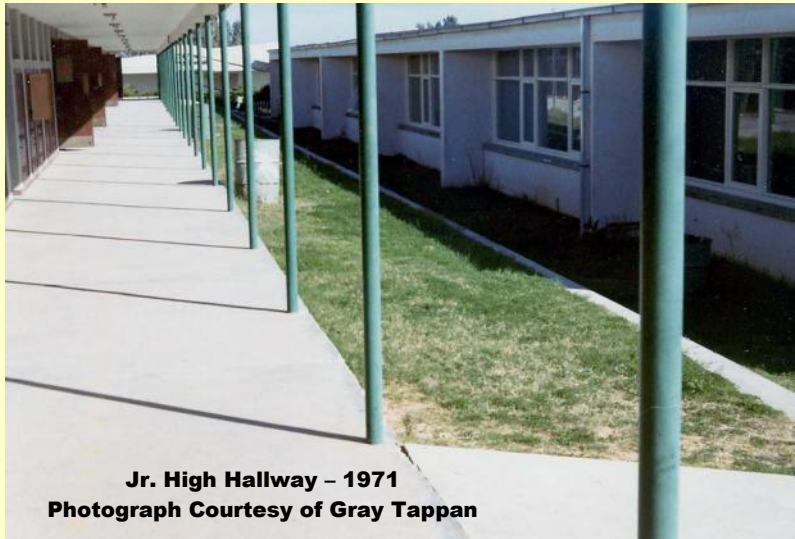
Construction of the new OCS campus was started in 1963 and was sufficiently completed by the spring of 1964 to house the Jr. High students. By 1967 the single story elementary school wings and the gymnasium complex were also completed. By 1969/1970 a two story classroom building was added to the elementary school.

An OCS teacher, recounts: "The physical plant of the school consisted of seven single story rectangular wings and a two story elementary building, all arranged in a giant "L." Each wing had five rooms, all opening to the outdoors and connected by a covered sidewalk. Off by itself stood a large gymnasium and beside it, an athletic field. A parking lot completed the complex. The whole campus was enclosed by a concrete block wall ... The building exteriors were neat, clean, and freshly painted in pale blue. The grounds sported one of the best crops of precious grass in Tripoli." (Andrews p.12)

These construction projects, the addition of faculty, and the availability of newer expanded facilities allowed for the broadening of academic, scholastic, athletic & recreational programs used by the student body & faculty.



The 1964 *Ambassador* records that a typical classroom day for a Jr. High school student was: “seven, forty-five minute classes a day, from 8 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. Lunch break is from 12 - 12:55 P.M.” By the



Jr. High Hallway - 1971
Photograph Courtesy of Gray Tappan

late 1960s, the school day was extended from 7:45 A.M. to 3:30 P.M., Monday to Thursday and from 8:00 A.M. to noon on Fridays. OCS operated from early September to early June each year with approximately 3 months off in the summers.

In 1967, the Tripoli Little League was formed and at one time boasted to be the largest American Little League outside the United States. By the late 1960s there were 18 baseball teams spread across 3 divisions: Minor, Major, & Babe Ruth.

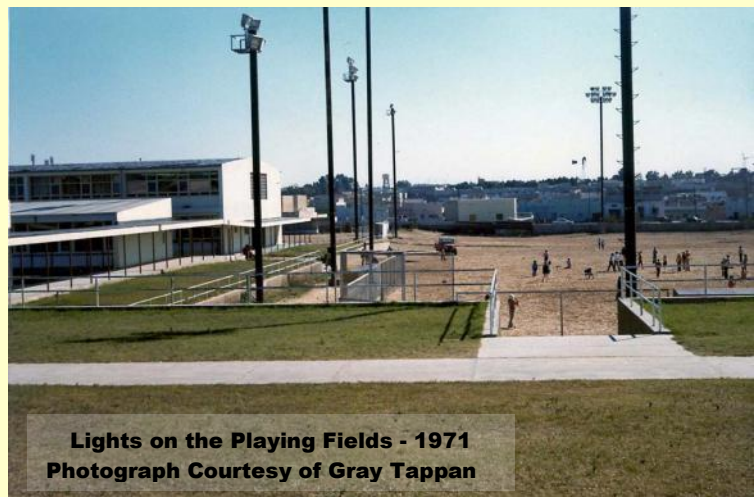
Also in 1967 the Teen Club began operations as an extension of the OCS community. During the school year the Teen Club operated as the location for weekly dances and as a weekend recreational facility complete with beach, swimming, tennis courts, snack bar, and BBQs. During the summer months it is where all the OCS Jr. High & visiting Sr. High school kids hung out. It was much better than the mall.



During the 1960s and 1970s organized athletics were a significant part of OCS life. There was the formation of the Girls Athletic Association, the boys Varsity Basketball team, and the cheerleading squads. Intramural sport leagues and teams for boys & girls soccer, football, softball, volleyball, basketball, and field hockey were developed making full use of the gymnasium and playing fields. These organized sports, along with track & field competitions provided opportunity for OCS athletes to excel and become members of the Lettermen's Club.

By 1970 there were more than 900 students attending kindergarten through to grade 9, with over 60 teachers, administrative and support staff. In addition to academic & athletic programs, sizable and accomplished Drama, Art, Band, Choir and Journalism programs developed. The numerous plays, concerts, and displays became a major part of life and entertainment at OCS for student, faculty and parents. By this time the school also housed a sizable library for research and general reading.

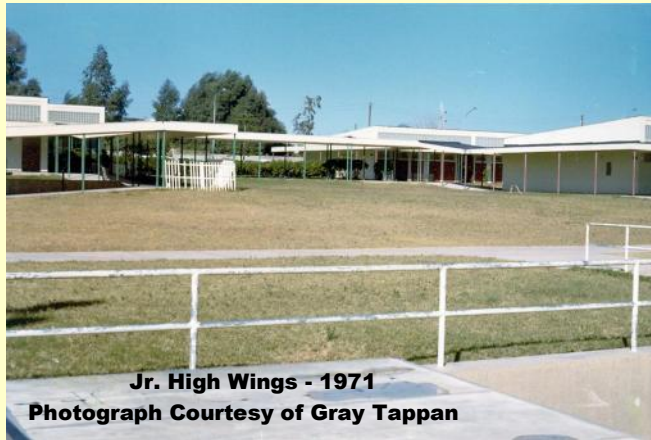
In 1971 a lighting system for the playing fields was constructed and installed, marshalling in a new era of athletics at OCS. The lights were attached to welded frames, and were in turn welded to oil well casing pipe (an additional contribution by the oil companies). Tripoli Little League games were now scheduled for Thursday & Friday evenings in addition to the Friday afternoon and weekend games. The first night game took place on April 1, 1971. In addition, adult softball leagues sprang up with the increased availability of playing time under the lights.



Lights on the Playing Fields - 1971
Photograph Courtesy of Gray Tappan

1971 brought the departure of some of our good friends whose parents were in the employ of Esso. The compound that Esso built in Marsa Brega, became operational and had its own school.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, OCS was a predominately expatriate student population, and during the period from 1958 until the mid 1970s the majority of students were American. However, by 1975 this had



Jr. High Wings - 1971
Photograph Courtesy of Gray Tappan

changed and according to the 1975 *Ambassador* "At one time, Americans comprised over 90% of the school's population. That percentage is nearer 50 now. A more cosmopolitan atmosphere prevails which allows for a wider range of opportunities." As a result of this, an ESL (English as a Second Language) program was also implemented.

In the 1974-1975 school year Home Economics was added to the curriculum, lunch was moved to the gym, a 9 period class schedule introduced, and a girls' dress code was implemented. I suspect the latter change was not well received in the student body.

The 1981/1982 school year proved to be one of the most significant and easily the most turbulent year for OCS. In December 1981, the U.S. government ordered all U.S. citizens to leave Libya in advance of pending embargos and sanctions. As a result, a significant portion of the student population and a majority of faculty left at this time. The remaining administration reacted quickly, backfilled the faculty with Canadian teachers and administrators, and switched the school to a Canadian based curriculum. Excerpts from the 1982 *Ambassador* best describe the impact the events had on students and staff alike.

"A Farewell Message

Dear teachers,

We have finished the 1982 school year at last. It has been a long road, full of obstacles, disappointments, and sadness. Our new teachers have done their best, picking up where you left off, but it is not easy to replace years of friendship, understanding and love in a few short months. We are grateful to these people who arrived full of good will and enthusiasm, and who overcame serious difficulties of all kinds to help us finish the academic year. Although we welcomed them and really tried to adapt quickly, it was so hard to get used to different ideas, different methods, and a different relationship with different people. Our time together at OCS is gone forever, but our memories will always be a part of us. Even now, we remember our "family" with fondness, and we look upon our years together as the best ever. You have given us a part of yourselves and a path to follow in our lives. Our wish for you all is one of happiness and success. We miss you.

With love, Your students"

This was followed up by a message from the Canadian Superintendent:

"As I look out at our graduates, I am mindful of the fact that those of us who came from Canada just a few short months ago have quickly come to appreciate these fine young people. Our thoughts must go to the great host of American teachers who, over the years, have made a very significant contribution to this school. They pioneered the development of OCS, built it, gave it spirit, traditions, strength, and its uniqueness. We appreciate the heritage of those American teachers who are still represented here by such people as Gloria Weber, Skender and Carol Brame, and Barbara Bishr. I wish to pay tribute tonight to those teachers of the past who have had such an influence on our graduating class. I know they will be thinking of you tonight, and wishing they could be here. I have received a telegram from former Superintendent John Monson, and his wife 'The very best wishes to you, now and in your future. We miss you, the other students, faculty, parents and OCS very much.'"

The 1980s brought significant change to OCS. Sal Elkadiki who attended OCS 1982-1985 penned the following:

“... I attended OCS from 1982 until 1985. The only major event I witnessed was the transition of OCS from an American to a Canadian system. In 1981, Reagan ordered all US workers in Libya to leave the country and as a result we saw all of our American friends and teachers leave in exodus and suddenly (1982) all the teachers were Canadian. I recall it was difficult for everyone. Some teachers had been at OCS for a very long time with their kids born and raised in Libya.

In 1984, OCS started offering 10th grade and I was one of the first students to study in this program. The 1984-85 year was a lot of fun as the 9th and 10th graders were all one gang.

I visited the OCS campus in 1995 and found that everything was still the same, the class rooms, the gym (rebuilt in 1982), the lockers, even the water fountains by the junior-high washrooms were still there. I asked about the gate keeper known as "Mohammed" and was told that he had passed away in 1993. Most of you probably remember Mohammed as he has been guarding the OCS gates for decades.” (Elkadiki)



Gym Complex
Source - Rien

From 1985-1995 OCS likely continued to operate under a Canadian school curriculum. However, in 1986 the school was renamed College of US Aggression Martyrs (CUSAM). At present there is little other information available of this time period, or about any of the significant events that may have occurred affecting the lives of the OCS student body and faculty.

In 1995 the school chose to switch to an Irish Leaving Certificate program, complying with the same rules and regulations as Irish schools, with some compromises, such as students being allowed to take Arabic instead of Gaelic. Instruction in English continued to prevail.

In 2005, excerpts from Internet blogs and short news stories in the *Irish Times* newspaper gives us a glimpse of OCS/ISM operations in this year.

In June 2005, a blogger writes (referencing a June 6, 2005 *Irish Times* report):

“Forty-five students at the International School in Tripoli, Libya, will sit the Leaving Certificate this June. Under the desert sun, they will apply themselves to the very same papers as the 60,000 or so youngsters who will take the exams here in Ireland ... We have students from 52 countries studying at our school,” said Donna McPhee, principal of the International School ... The Irish Leaving Certificate programme offered us the kind of academic standard and subject spread that we were looking for. As a Canadian myself, I consider the Irish secondary education curriculum to be far superior to the Canadian, US or UK models ... McPhee contends that the Irish exam system maintains rigorous academic standards and serves stronger students well ... Tripoli is the only location outside the Irish state where the Leaving Cert is held on an annual basis, and the school is charged with complying with the same rules and regulations as Irish schools, with some compromises. For example, students are allowed to take Arabic instead of Irish ... The 45 candidates in Tripoli will take their papers at exactly the same time as their Irish counterparts and completed exam scripts will be returned to the State Examinations Commission in Athlone for marking.” (Rien)

The Blog continues with the following statistics about the school:

“Situated on a five-acre campus, the Martyrs School consists of 11 buildings, 47 classrooms, a 14,000 volume library, 2 science labs, a computer lab, auditorium, infirmary, gymnasium, and tennis courts. Students are grouped according to their abilities, with an accelerated study program available for gifted students. The school year lasts from September to June ... In

addition to its traditional curriculum, the Martyrs School offers an extracurricular program that includes gymnastics, computers, yearbook, school newspaper, field trips, drama, student council, soccer, tennis, floor hockey, basketball, softball, volleyball, and numerous social clubs.” (Rien)

In 1994, CUSAM was renamed to International School of Martyrs (ISM).

In February 2011 Mary Fitzgerald, a reporter of the *Irish Times* writes:

“One of the quirker facets of the relationship between Libya and Ireland is the fact students at the ISM international school in Tripoli sit the Leaving Cert ... In 1995, school officials settled on the Irish exam system as the best option for their multinational student body.” (Fitzgerald – *Irish Times*)

In 2011, the website for the ISM International School, Tripoli, indicates that the school is still in operation and offers instruction for ages 4-19, still in English, with a faculty of 48 full time teachers. Enrollment is reported to be 250 boys and 200 girls, although it is not clear if these are target numbers or actual enrollment figures. (ISM 5)



Satellite View of the OCS/CUSAM/ISM Campus, August 2010 – Source Google Earth

Superintendents:

Robert Waldum 1964-1974
John McCuan 1974-1976
John Monson 1976-1982
Len Sampson 1982
Mohammed Badr 1982-198x

Principals:

Robert Waldum 1958-1965
Donna McPhee 1995
Brendan Coffey 1990-1998

Jr. High Principals:

Assistant Principal Spencer Lewis 1964-1965
Robert Engebretson 1965-1966
Sam Whipple 1966-1970
Jim Everingham 1970-1974
William Matthais 1974-1975
John Monson 1975-1976
Michael Corcoran 1976-1978
Russell Larsen 1978-1981
John Ovens 1981-1982
W.R.B. Church 1982-1983

Elementary Principals:

Assistant Principal Earl Cartland 1964-1965
Spencer Loomis 1965-1966
John Monson 1966-1970
Herbert Hylbert 1970-1972
John McCuan 1973-1977
Charles Marino 1977-1980
Donald Shoemaker 1980-1982
Niall Nelson 1981-82
Rob Kruse 1982-198x

An OCS Chronology

- 1958 OCS established – operates from a villa
- 1959 OCS moves into first classroom complex
- 1961 First school newspaper rolls off the press
- 1963 OCS Alma Mater penned by Lynne Birney, music by Catherine Fornari
- 1963/64
 - Student Newspaper renamed and starts publishing as *The Pipeline*
 - First Yearbook published
 - Girls Athletic Association (GAA) formed
 - Founding of the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) and first inductees
 - Intramural, Journalism, Drama, Glee Club & Band programs formalized
 - First cheerleader squad
 - First Varsity Basketball Team
- 1964 Jr. High moves into classrooms wings on the new OCS campus
- 1965 Lettermen's Club established
- 1966 Safety Patrol founded
- 1967 Tripoli Little League formed
- 1967 Gym and elementary wings completed
- 1967 Teen Club begins operations
- 1969/70 Addition of 2 - double story classroom wings for elementary
- 1971 Lights erected on playing fields
- 1975 student population hits 50% American, 50% other expatriate and Libyan
- 1980 Gymnasium destroyed by fire on Dec 12th
- 1981 Gymnasium re-opens
- 1981 Ronald Reagan orders Americans to leave Libya
- 1982 OCS moves to a Canadian based curriculum and staffed predominately with Canadian faculty
- 1984 Grade 10 added
- 1986 OCS renamed to CUSAM (College of US Aggression Martyrs)
- 1994 school renamed to ISM (International School of Martyrs)
- 1995 switched from the Canadian Curriculum to the Irish Leaving Certificate program
- 1995-present Still in operation ... the mailing address is still PO Box 860, Tripoli, Libya

Sources

1. Andrews, Eleanor F. *Letters From Tripoli - And Stops Along the Way*, 2003.
2. Elkadiki, Sal OCS Website, 2011.
3. Fitzgerald, Mary *Trade one of our many links with Libyans - Irish Times*, February 22, 2011.
4. Google Earth, 2011.
5. ISM International School, Tripoli, Libya Website, 2011.
6. OCS *Ambassador*, 1963-1966, 1967, 1969, 1971-1983.
7. Rien *Globetrotting: A Voyage to the Unkown*, Internet Blogpost , 2006.
8. Tappan, Gray OCS Photographs - Circa 1971.
9. Tappan, Gray Satellite Photograph - February 1966.