Charles Patton Echols

- Born 6 September 1867
- 12 June 1891: graduated USMA and promoted to Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers
- Sep 1891-June 1894: served at Engineer School of Application at Willet's Point, New York
- Aug 1895-Aug 1897: Instructor on Mathematics, USMA
- Aug 1897-May 1898: Assistant Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- May 1898-Sep 1898: Commander, Engineer Company A in the Philippines Expedition
- Dec 1898-Jul 1904: Associate Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Jul 1904-Jun 1918: Professor of Mathematics, Head of Mathematics Department, USMA
- Jun 1918-Sep 1918: detached service as military observer with Allied Armies in France
- Sep 1918-Sep 1931: Professor of Mathematics, Head of Mathematics Department, USMA
- 21 May 1940: brutally murdered in Bryant Park, New York City, age 72

Charles Patton Echols was born in Huntsville, Alabama on 6 September 1867. His father, Colonel William H. Echols, graduated from USMA in 1858 and fought with the South in the Civil War. After completing grammar school in Huntsville, Charles Echols attended the Episcopal High School of Alexandria, Virginia where he won medals in mathematics, Latin and Greek and debating. He spent two years at the University of Virginia before entering West Point in 1887.

At the Military Academy Echols captured high academic honors as he was rated a distinguished cadet for four successive years. He demonstrated exceptional mathematical ability. Echols was a very popular individual who was an excellent singer and actor. He played on the class football and baseball teams. His military accomplishments as a cadet were equally impressive. He held successive appointments of Color Corporal, Sergeant Major, and the coveted position of Cadet Adjutant. Cadet Echols graduated third in a class of sixty-five on 12 June 1891. Upon graduation, he was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers.

After graduation from USMA, Lieutenant Echols served at the Engineer School of Application at Willet's Point, New York for four years. In August 1895, he returned to USMA as an Instructor of Mathematics. This started as era of forty-one years of service to the Academy interrupted briefly on three occasions. In August 1897, Lieutenant Echols was selected to be as Assistant Professor of Mathematics. He remained in this position until May 1898 when he was assigned as the Engineer Officer, Department of the East, Governors Island and then as an Engineer Company Commander in the Philippines expedition.

In September of the same year, with the results of the Spanish-American War well in hand, Captain Echols returned to USMA as an Associate Professor of Mathematics. In July 1904, Lieutenant Colonel Echols was selected as Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Mathematics Department, USMA. In an effort to analyze and critique different teaching techniques and environments in Europe, Lieutenant Colonel Echols visited a variety of schools in Europe from July 1905 until July 1906. Upon his return, he resumed his duties as Head of the Mathematics Department. As World War I came to a close, Colonel Echols was asked to participate as a
military observer with the Allied Armies in France. He agreed to this request and spent from June until September 1918 on "detached service" from West Point. Once again, upon his return to USMA, he resumed his duties as Head of the Mathematics Department; the duties he performed until his retirement on 30 September 1931.

Upon his retirement, Colonel Echols had completed forty-one years of active duty service, twenty-seven of which were as Head of the Mathematics Department. This tenure of eventful service in guiding the department is second only to Professor Albert Church's forty-one years. Colonel Echols was known to two generations of Army graduates as "P" Echols. He was remembered for his insistence on thorough and rigorous mathematics instruction. Stories of his idiosyncrasies became legend at the Academy. Not only was he revered by cadets and former students, but by his peers and superiors alike. Major General William Smith, the Superintendent of USMA when Colonel Echols retired described his departure as "...the severance of a strong link between the old and new West Point, and the removal of a great influence that has been exerted throughout many years, always in the best interests of the Academy." Until his retirement, Colonel Echols was the senior member of the Academic Board. "His keen, analytical mind, his frank, outspoken opinion, and his blunt honesty tempered with a sense of proportion and fairness, made his counsel on the Board both respected and valued." Colonel Echols was a modest individual who refused to let himself become the center of attention. He did not allow the Corps of Cadets to honor him with a parade review, as was the tradition when he retired, nor did he allow his colleagues to commemorate his service with a dinner and dance upon his departure from the Academy.

Following his retirement in 1931, Colonel Echols resided in Englewood, New Jersey, but he spent much of his time in New York City. He was a devotee of the opera, a member of several clubs, and fond of bridge and chess. On 21 May 1940, at the age of 72, Charles Patton Echols was brutally murdered in Bryant Park, New York City.

References:

Cullum's Register, Volume IV, page 509.

Extract from the Proceedings of the Academic Board, 2 July 1940.

Newburgh News, 28 September 1931.

New York Herald Tribune, 22 May 1940.

New York Herald Tribune, 27 September 1940.

New York Times, 22 May 1940.

Pointer, Volume 9, September 1931.

West Point General Orders announcing retirement, 29 September 1931.