

# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

July, 2020

Dear Parents:

These are clearly unprecedented times in which we are living. The 2019-20 academic year ended quickly and in a manner that no one could have foreseen. Not since World War II or the Korean Conflict has the Corps of Cadets been away from post for such duration. Since the day the Corps left in March, we have been preparing and anxiously awaiting for their safe return to the Institute. The planning process has been no small task, and this pandemic and our response to it impacts every facet of cadet life. Nevertheless, we are excited for the Corps to return and some semblance of normal with cadets in residence, beginning in August.

By now, you have seen on the VMI web our *Fall 2020 Return to Post and In-Person Classes Operations Plan*. If you have not, I recommend you familiarize yourself with it and its complexities. It will be updated with regularity throughout the semester. As an institution of higher education with a military mission, we face a unique set of challenges. Unlike many other institutions, we cannot deliver on our mission through an online environment or an optional daily calendar. Though we did portions of that last semester, we must now persevere through in-residence attendance and adversity, and mitigate risk to provide our cadets with the VMI experience they desire and for which they enrolled. We have learned that our system requires time to execute our unique programs, and truncated semester options will not accommodate the full cadet experience. This is particularly true as we respond to the changing virus threat and the need for flexibility. There will be more institutional centralized control in terms of directives and standards to safeguard health and safety. As the fall unfolds, Corps operations will become more “centric” at the battalion and company levels, versus regimental, in terms of execution. There will be emphasis on civility and consideration of others in the way we live our daily lives, with courage by all of us to make corrections and enforce standards to maximize well-being across the VMI community.

Providing this experience in an environment where COVID-19 exists is not without its challenges. Because of our “One Corps” and “commonality of purpose” philosophy, your cadet will live in close proximity with brother rats and roommates in our historic barracks, participate in military formations, continue physical activity and ROTC training, and learn in small classroom settings. The Institute will follow the most recent local, state, and federal guidance to

mitigate risks to your cadet; many of these activities will be adjusted. Cadets will be required to follow strict protocols on face coverings, social distancing, and personal hygiene. Their movements will be restricted, and they will be required to conduct a daily self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms. We have established protocols for isolation (COVID-19 positive) and quarantine (COVID-19 exposed). We are confident in our plan, but it will require compliance and enforcement on everyone's part. We will commence with very conservative approaches and, based on careful assessment, will open (or close) the post and the Corps access to external activities. We cannot bring this virus into the Corps and our faculty and continue the "essence" of the experience.

For parents, the biggest change for the coming semester will be the Institute and cadet schedule. Large-scale events and ceremonies have been a staple of the VMI parent's life. Some events, such as the new cadet oath at New Market Battlefield, will not occur this year as there is no way to ensure social distance standards while moving the entire rat class via bus transportation, nor their integration with parents and large visiting crowds. Rather, I will swear in these new cadets on their Matriculation day. Others, such as Parents Weekend, football tailgates, class reunions, open houses, and Ring Figure remain under study and are tentative. Our intention and planning effort is to have a full NCAA athletic program this fall that will see certain adjustments to attendance and seating parameters. Decisions on all these events will be made on a rolling basis, a minimum 30 days in advance and based on the latest guidance from our health and government partners and Institute assessments of the health and readiness of the Corps. Matriculation will be spread out over the course of two days on 15 and 16 August to reduce overcrowding and accommodate the safety of families and officials associated with the event. The new rat mass will not "meet their cadre" until the following week. The time in between matriculation and "meet the cadre" will be a "soft opening" necessary to complete a myriad of administrative functions, uniform issue, haircuts, significant COVID-19 education, healthy assimilation, and introduction to many other activities--procedures normally presented in the following weeks and months.

Our planning has been guided by two principles: 1.) Maintaining the health and well-being of our cadets, faculty, staff, and local community, and 2.) Executing a superb academic program. The academic offerings will be considerably different from those we've offered in the past. The emphasis will continue to be on providing traditional, in-person instruction; however, some courses will be in an online environment or in a hybrid in-person /online manner. There will be Saturday morning ROTC and commandant instruction. This is necessary in order to free up classrooms, maintain social distancing, and protect those faculty members who might be considered high risk if they are exposed to the virus. While there will be academic learning combinations, cadets will still receive the overall in-residence experience of this unique

education. In fact, the environment may be more disciplined and equip the Corps with greater leadership opportunities with different learning experiences than in past years. In sum, I believe it will require greater listening, maturity, and understanding by all of us.

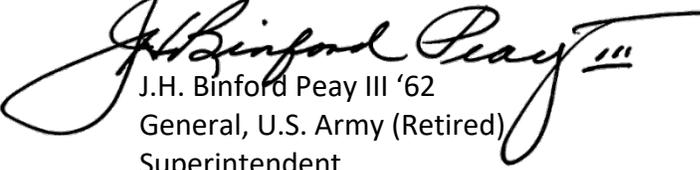
The pandemic has also necessitated changes to the academic calendar for the fall 2020 semester. While the Old Corps reporting date is 25 and 26 August, classes will start on 31 August, nearly a week later than expected, for we have much to brief and cover with the Corps due to these circumstances. As it stands, cadets may not be afforded the traditional Thanksgiving furlough. Though they will not have classes on Thanksgiving Day or the Friday after, we may keep the Corps on post to reduce the risk of cadets (en masse) bringing back the virus to post upon their return from furlough, and we may need this flexibility to address deficient Corps training that was impacted earlier due to virus conditions. I understand that this condition will be difficult for many cadets and families, but it is not unprecedented. We continue to plan for an exceptional semester. Many splendid speakers and leaders are scheduled to be on post. Though it's likely that these events will be closed to the public, I am pleased that we will be able to provide these leadership learning opportunities for our cadets. Additionally, we are committed to properly celebrating the Class of 2020 at our December commencement ceremony.

Alumni and visitors to post these past several months have witnessed construction at every corner. The pandemic has afforded our contractors an opportunity to advance these significant projects at a faster pace than they could if the Institute had been on a full operational posture. Scott Shipp Hall, Preston Library, the Post Police Building, and many post infrastructure projects are now well ahead of schedule. Though traffic patterns have changed temporarily, it is all for progress and safety. These facilities offer enormous growth in capability and enhanced standards of excellence.

VMI is rich in tradition. This pandemic, along with the current social and political climate, provides VMI with the opportunity to reflect on our traditions and learn from these challenges. We have the opportunity to grow as an institution and to become a better organization that is uniquely equipped to produce the leaders of tomorrow and the citizen-soldiers who will lead our nation, communities, and society. Many continue to focus on our past. While where we've been is important, it pales in comparison to where we're going. VMI will emerge from this time a stronger institution, committed to leading and doing what is right. As the fall unfolds, I plan to use that opportunity to listen to the Corps, faculty, staff, and our alumni. I will address the Institute family shortly in a more substantive way, building on my thoughts today.

The VMI experience is not easy. It is a four-year journey, and your support and understanding is an important component to our cadets' success. I look forward to the start of academic year 2020-21, welcoming the Corps back to post, and seeing you at the many Corps activities. My thanks for committing your sons and daughters to our care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J.H. Binford Peay III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J.H. Binford Peay III '62  
General, U.S. Army (Retired)  
Superintendent