

# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

9 April 2020

***Members of the VMI Corps of Cadets, Staff and Faculty, the Classified Team, Parents and Families, and our Communities:***

I hope this communication finds you well. As these events unfold throughout our Commonwealth, nation, and the world, my thoughts and prayers are with all those who are facing hardship or suffering during this time.

We have spent much time pondering a path forward for the Institute these past few weeks. Front and center in every decision made has been the Mission of the Institute.

*The mission of the Virginia Military Institute is to produce educated, honorable men and women prepared for the varied work of civil life, imbued with love of learning, confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership, possessing a high sense of public service, advocates of the American Democracy and free enterprise system, and ready as citizen-soldiers to defend their country in time of national peril.*

Our Pandemic Task Force has been working tirelessly and I've been challenging them at every turn. Similarly, our Governor, U.S. Senators and State Legislators, the Virginia Secretary of Education, University, College and Community College Presidents, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and the Virginia Higher Education Business Council have been conferencing with regularity sharing thoughts and best practices while coordinating efforts. The information contained in this communication is meant to provide a "roadmap" forward based on the information we have right now and the credible predictions of how this crisis may play out over the next few months. We must make decisions on the Institute's significant events to allow time for appropriate planning and preparation on Post, as well as provide lead time for our families and cadets across the nation to react in this dynamic environment. The enclosed dates are tentative and subject to change, but are provided to demonstrate current planning at the Institute. Rolling, timely decision points and "no later than" dates will facilitate actions. We must also set in place, now, plans for the long term (through the Fall 2020 semester) in order to maintain our unique military system, provide solid academics, and to fulfill our Mission for our cadets and the nation.

Many of these plans are contingent on the course that the virus takes. As such, Institute staff have developed multiple courses of action so that we are prepared for most eventualities. Communications will be key during this time and VMI is committed to providing our cadets, faculty, employees, and local community with the most relevant information at the earliest possible time. I hope that some of these courses of action never come to pass. We need to be

flexible but we will not sacrifice our storied system that has shaped so many leaders for our nation.

### ***Barracks Clearance***

The stay-at-home orders in Virginia and throughout the country has necessitated the delay in clearing barracks. This was an important decision for the health and well-being of the Corps, VMI staff, and the local community. However, the Institute is unable to return to normal operations unless the barracks is cleared in a timely manner to ensure a “reset” with appropriate maintenance, hygiene, and replacement furniture for returning classes.

We will continue to watch the messaging and guidance over the coming weeks for an opportunity to get cadets back to gather their personal belongings. Virginia’s “Stay-at-Home” Executive Order expires on 10 June and assuming no slippage in movement restrictions, our current planning tentatively envisions the Corps returning on a scheduled basis during the period from 12 through 20 June to retrieve their personal effects and clear their rooms. Depending on state and federal rules and regulations governing movement nearer to 12 June, we will publish a sign-up roster allowing for the safe and orderly return of cadets. Although getting all the cadets back to clear barracks is important to barracks preparation for the new academic year, the priority will be given to cadets requiring their personal and service uniform items to attend summer service training, reporting for service related active duty, and for those graduates and cadets headed immediately toward new employment and internships during the summer. For any requests prior to the scheduled cadet clearance period, cadets and new graduates with extenuating circumstances may make an individual request to clear their barracks rooms through LTC Faust, [faustkl@vmi.edu](mailto:faustkl@vmi.edu).

In the meantime, VMI staff have begun collecting uniform items from individual rooms and from NCAA locker rooms. This allows the items to be laundered and tailored so that they are ready for cadet return in August. Any items found in uniform items such as collars, cuffs, cuff links, or other personal items will be bagged according to cadet laundry number and made available for pickup in cadet laundry bins upon their return.

### ***Rank Announcements***

Though circumstances have scattered the VMI community, the business of the Institute continues. Rank announcements for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class were made on Tuesday 7 April via the Institute’s Facebook page. 2020-21 Regimental Commander Troy Smith made the announcement virtually from his living room for the first time in VMI history. While not ideal, this approach shows the resilience and ingenuity of the VMI spirit. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Class rank interviews are under way now and rank announcements will be made in a similar manner in the future after cadet chain of command and Commandant office decisions.

***Final Exams / Degrees / Transcripts***

Final exams for the Spring 2020 semester are scheduled for 6 – 11 May. In keeping with VMI's tradition of academic excellence, these final exams will be graded and counted toward a cadet's semester grade in accordance with the course syllabus. May 2020 degree candidate grades are due 0900 on 12 May.

For those scheduled to graduate in May, degree certification will be conducted by the Academic Board and the Registrar's office on the regular schedule. Diplomas will be mailed to the home address of record around mid-May. Transcripts will be updated at that time for cadets and graduates to use for employment and other purposes.

***Board of Visitors / Budget Issues***

The VMI Board of Visitors is tentatively scheduled to meet on 10 June 2020 to discuss matters related to the pandemic, consider the budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year, and to set tuition and fees for the next academic year. (In accordance with state law, the VMI community will be notified at least 30-days in advance of the meeting with a range of options for 2020-21 tuition and fees.) These past weeks have created a great deal of uncertainty concerning the Commonwealth of Virginia's biennial budget. The General Assembly is scheduled to reconvene later this month at which time they may make significant reductions to the biennial budget that was enacted earlier in the year.

VMI's accounting staff is currently in the process of reviewing each cadet's account and applying the [previously announced credit](#) for room and board. There are many factors that go into the amount of any refund after the credit has been applied to each account not the least of which is institutional and private aid. Every cadet account is unique and must be reviewed individually. We hope to complete this process in the next six weeks.

***Commissioning and ROTC Summer Training***

The Army and Naval ROTC detachments are planning for virtual commissioning ceremonies to be held on 15 May for all those completing their degrees this semester. Details will be forthcoming from the respective detachments on time, technology, and how to participate virtually. This will allow our future officers to commission, on time, in the presence of family and friends at dispersed locations. By keeping to our original 15 May schedule, the officers will then be available to move to their assigned destinations in accordance with their respective active-duty or reserve component orders. When those who have commissioned return to Post to collect their personal belongings, we will support photo opportunities in their service uniforms as desired.

Air Force commissioning will be conducted on an individual basis and coordinated through the VMI's Air Force ROTC staff.

The current events are also affecting many of the ROTC summer training and camps scheduled to start shortly after the end of the semester. Currently, planning is underway at U.S. Army Cadet Command for a modified Advanced Camp at Fort Knox as well as evaluating what summer training opportunities will need to be cancelled. Training dates that begin in May have been cancelled, but training later in the summer is still under consideration and pending forthcoming decisions. Any specific questions should be directed to the Army ROTC department.

Air Force ROTC is still conducting Field training at Maxwell AFB. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, there will be only 5 training classes instead of 6 and will run June to August instead of May to August.

Naval ROTC Phase 0 cruises have been cancelled and will be redistributed to Phase 1-3. Decisions regarding other summer training programs and schools will be made beginning early next month.

### ***Summer Programs***

VMI has already announced that Summer Session I will be conducted 19 May – 19 June in an online learning environment. Additionally, all VMI-sponsored summer study abroad programs are canceled. Instead, online credit classes will be offered for many of the summer study abroad programs. A decision concerning Summer Session II, the Summer Transition Program (STP), Project Global Officer Arabic / Chinese, and the College Orientation Workshop will be made no later than 1 May 2020.

All of these summer programs are designed to fulfill certain aspects of the academic and military mission of the Institute. Staff are exploring many different options to ensure that these experiences are available to our cadets, cadet-athletes, and incoming rats. There are many moving parts. Among the options being considered:

- Summer Session II and STP start 29 June or 6 July instead of 22 June;
- The two Project Global Officer programs to be conducted in a special immersive environment on Post;
- The Summer Undergraduate Research Institute and other cadet independent study may be a hybrid online / in-person learning approach;
- Summer Session II may be conducted in-person but without access to barracks if time is needed to reset barracks;

These are just a few of the many courses of action that are being staffed. No decisions are being communicated today; however, we will communicate them as soon as we have decided

on the most prudent course of action that advances our mission while protecting the health and well-being of our community.

### ***Cadre Arrival***

Much of the team building, training, preparation, and planning that traditionally occurs during the final six weeks of the school year have been lost to current circumstances. In order to maintain the professionalism and standards that are required and expected of our cadet leaders, it will be necessary to bring back most corporals, sergeants, and lieutenants an additional four to seven days prior to the standard seven-day Cadre Week training period. Cadre should tentatively plan on returning to Post as early as 2 August, with specific names and dates provided in a future published order. More details on the cadre training period will be provided as the spring and summer progress.

The extended Cadre Week will be used to make up for the loss of the New Leader Retreat preparation that has generally occurred each spring. At the same time, our new corporals and sergeants will attend an NCO Academy to ensure understanding and compliance with published standards, while being provided time to rehearse and refine all of the drill blocks and classes that they will be instructing to the incoming Rat Class.

With an academic year that ended so abruptly, there was little opportunity to conduct any on-the-job training, a handoff of responsibilities from the graduating leaders to the rising 1<sup>st</sup> Class leadership, nor was there any time to anticipate future challenges. Many details and standards will need to be addressed with the returning cadets. We have an incredible opportunity to reinforce some of our very best procedures, eliminate many of the bad habits, and knock the rust off of those things we haven't done in a while. I fully expect the additional training time to be highly productive, team-building in nature, and demanding in our standards. It will be a time well spent.

Details regarding the important EMT training will be forthcoming and may be dependent upon the availability of barracks over the summer. It is likely that some of this training will be conducted in an online environment through a certified program while the required hands-on training could be completed once Post is open or during Cadre Week. Having our EMTs trained and embedded in the Corps is an invaluable asset to the safety, health and well-being of the Institute.

### ***Cadet-Athletes***

The NCAA landscape is shifting quickly and dramatically. The athletic department continues to track the ever-changing NCAA policies and procedures in an effort to best serve our cadet-athletes. From virtual coaching time to temporary recruiting legislative changes, the department is assessing ways to optimize our operations. The final quarter of the fiscal year

has introduced unexpected, financial challenges as a result of significantly reduced NCAA supplements; however, I am confident in our athletics staff and our collective resolve to do what is in the best interest of our cadets while working more efficiently. Our foundational pieces of cadet athlete educational achievement, superb coaching, ethical program management and sportsmanship, in all areas of our operations remain.

Although our athletic academic support staff and athletic trainers have adapted their services to an online environment, there's no question that our cadet-athletes have suffered from current events. I fully recognize that summer is an important time for cadet-athletes to make strides in academics, training, skills, and recovery. These are important factors in our future decisions regarding the Institute's summer programs and the need for athletes to be on Post.

The department has developed plans to support a variety of potential return dates, and appreciate the various levels of review that this decision requires. As of today, below are noted the tentative report dates for fall sports:

- Women's Soccer – 3 August 2020
- Football – 6 August 2020
- Men's Soccer – 11 August 2020
- Cross Country – 17 August 2020

### ***Fall Activities***

This fall will be particularly busy as we attempt to reschedule the many events that were canceled this spring. We will find a way to do many of them even if in a format that was not originally planned. We will ensure that pertinent cadet training and leadership development programs are rescheduled. This also includes numerous reunion weekends. The change of command ceremony traditionally held on 14 May at Finals will be replaced with an assumption of command ceremony for new Class of 2021 cadet leaders. Additionally, we will find ways to recognize our 2020 retirees, honor graduates from all wars who were killed in action, and celebrate the departing Class of 2020 at a December commencement ceremony. Obviously, we will continue to celebrate our Founders Day, host speakers of high regard, and enjoy parades and athletic festivities.

### ***Fall Semester***

I want nothing more than for VMI to be in full business as usual mode come August 2020. We are an institution that requires our cadets to be present on Post in order to experience our unique adversarial and leader system of training. However, I am not confident that this pandemic will be in our rearview mirror by then or, if it is, that it is not lurking around the corner waiting to threaten our Corps of Cadets and VMI family again. We are assessing all options for the possibility of a truncated Fall semester whether it be truncated on the front end or the back.

This would be a very delicate dance as there are many factors to consider not the least of which are maintaining the Institute's high academic standards and accreditation while ensuring that the Class of 2021+3 receives the appropriate training necessary to instill honor, character, and integrity demanded of a VMI cadet.

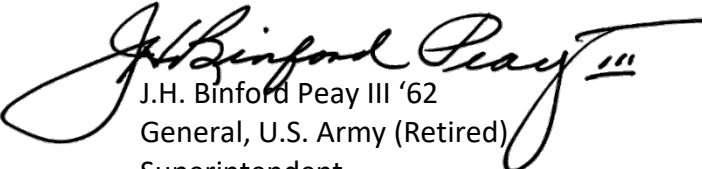
A truncated term would mean sacrifice. But, then again, no VMI cadetship has gone without such sacrifice and, as I have said before, great opportunity. Our history is replete with varied academic approaches... and, in every instance, we still accomplished our Mission.

### ***December Commencement***

I am excited to celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2020. While I wish that we could do that through the typical May traditions and ceremonies, I am committed to ensuring that our December commencement ceremony will be no less important than what May had in store for our graduates. In addition to the pageantry of a December commencement attended by the Corps of Cadets, the VMI community, and family and friends, the 1<sup>st</sup> Class (2020) will be honored with the prestigious awards traditionally bestowed at graduation and will select, as is usually the case, a valedictorian from among their ranks. More details on that process will be forthcoming from the class president and the Commandant's office.

We find ourselves in historic times. VMI was and is in a strong position to weather such a storm; however, none of us could have predicted the magnitude and complexity of this situation. As we move forward, we are governed by the unique Mission of Virginia Military Institute. We will stay true to that Mission but we must and will find ways to achieve it without compromising our principles. Together, we will do just that.

Sincerely,



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