

**GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III**  
**SUPERINTENDENT**  
**Remarks to the Reunion Class of 1990**  
**11 September 2015**

Members of the Class of 1990, spouses, and friends. Good evening -- the Institute welcomes you back to VMI.

It's been 29 years since 423 of you signed the Matriculation Book and became VMI cadets. It was August 20, 1986, a dark and gloomy day according to reports, and the beginning of VMI's 147<sup>th</sup> year. It was also the start of a 5-day "New Cadet Orientation and Training Period," better known as "Cadre." At the end of that strenuous week, the Old Corps returned and you were introduced to the Rat Line by the RDC. From that day forward, you were known to the rest of the Corps as "The Mass of 1987." It would be some very long months of testing before you became "The Fourth Class" or the "Class of 1990."

As I researched the archives, the VMI recorded history of your Class was revealing....

Perhaps it sounded good to you when the upperclassmen announced that you would be having a "Big Party." But the reality was quite different. Your historian, Andy England, described the event as follows: "Our big party was like nothing any other school could or would want to imagine. In place of alcohol, we had sweat. In place of women, we had a bunch of mean upperclassmen... In place of real music we had motivational music...." All of this was conducted under the watchful eye of the Commandant of Cadets, COL David V. Harbach '61. (I was a Rat when he was a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Corporal if that is helpful). Colonel Harbach, the last active duty Commandant at VMI, would remain until the start of your First Class year, when he was succeeded by COL William H. Dabney, Jr. '61. The Superintendent when you arrived was GEN Sam S. Walker '45, who also remained until your First Class year, when he was succeeded by MG John W. Knapp '54, who had served as Dean of the Faculty.

The experience of your Rat year is probably a blur to many of you. It was filled with academic classes, a chaotic orientation session at New Market, Rat Training every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, a run up House Mountain, numerous sweat parties, stoop runs, and rifle runs, Thursday evening Pep Rallies, athletic events, and much more. Some claimed that your rat line was the hardest in a decade. Again quoting your historian, "Not all that tried could make it. As our group grew smaller, the unity became more intense. A love and brotherhood

between our co-matriculants spread, and the true meaning of “Brother Rat” was discovered by those who stayed.” Finally, on March 18, 1987, you entered a week known as “Resurrection” and then successfully climbed Breakout Hill.” The rat mass known as “87 plus 3” had become the “Class of 1990.”

The Barracks that you entered was much like today’s Barracks, although it consisted only of Old and New Barracks. The large number of cadets in the Corps caused over-crowding in the tight barracks space. Across the Parade Ground, work was underway on a new science building. In addition, work was being done on VMI’s athletic facilities: renovations to Son Read Memorial Track, a new baseball diamond at Patchin Field, new fields for soccer and lacrosse, a new football dressing room complex, and a new press box. A major change took place in the Commandant’s Office and the Guard Room when a computer system was installed to replace the old practice of “signing in and signing out” on sheets of paper. This was soon to be followed by an electrical system upgrade in Barracks and the controversial introduction of new modular furniture in cadet rooms (much to the dislike of many tradition-minded cadets). The fact that the plain furniture had been constructed in Virginia prisons made the furniture a little more acceptable to some diehard cadets. And, of course, this was the last year for the old “Sinks.”

The start of your Third Class year brought new privileges and responsibilities. For some it meant the rank of cadet corporal, and for others it meant leadership positions in cadet committees, clubs, and athletic teams. According to your historian, “We were allowed to take weekends and leave post. We were able to take advantage of permits allowing us to attend mixers at other colleges. We were even allowed to have hair.” You also helped to administer the Rat Line, but that system was undergoing changes that disturbed upperclassmen. Issues over the conduct of the Rat Line and Barracks governance slowly heated up and the **CADET** newspaper was filled with protests from Cadets and opinion polls.

In your Third Class year, you discovered that VMI had a second Rat Line -- the so-called “Academic Rat Line.” Otherwise, the year was much like most others: Barracks life, military training, parades, physical training, FTX, athletic events, Hops, Zollman’s, Spanky’s, and Estill’s. The excitement of the start of the academic year, the Oyster Bowl in Norfolk, the drudgery of the Dark Ages, the final arrival of Spring, New Market Day, and Finals filled the year. Standing out in your memory, however, was the arrival of the “Plague” in October, when it was estimated that 80 percent of the Corps became sick. But it soon passed and by February the “woolies” were burned and many cadets headed for Spring Break. Later, Joe DiMaggio came to VMI to dedicate the new

baseball diamond at Patchin Field and signed baseballs for many fans. These were trying times for most of VMI's athletic teams, but there were some notable victories that brought pride and excitement to the Corps.

On another level, policies and practices of VMI were coming under serious scrutiny. Next door, Washington and Lee University went co-ed, and the VMI Cadet newspaper asked: "Is V.M.I. Next?" In fact, near the end of your second class year, in April of 1989, VMI received a letter from the U.S. Department of Justice asking VMI to respond to allegations of sexual discrimination over its male-only admissions policy. This was the beginning of a long court battle to preserve VMI policy, which was eventually struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

This was the time, as well, that the Saturday academic schedule -- "Saturday Classes" -- was replaced with other activities, and the age-old practice of forming on the bricks and marching to class with section marchers was abolished, thus saving about 10 lost minutes in each class period. In addition, a major change took place with VMI's mandatory commissioning policy. Studies of the policy by the VMI Board of Visitors continued for several years with opinions by the Corps divided for and against. The final decision, which was made in February of 1990, rescinded the mandatory commissioning policy and, thereafter, cadets would be commissioned on a voluntary basis.

Early in your Second Class year, General Walker announced his retirement. He resigned in December of 1989 and was replaced by the new Superintendent, BG John W. Knapp. General Walker past away last month at his home in Pinehurst, North Carolina -- a great soldier and great American. And will be buried October 12<sup>th</sup> in the USMA, West Point Cemetery.

The highlight of your Second Class year was Ring Figure, an event that ranks in importance with Breakout and Graduation. Your Ring Figure took place on November 18, 1988; the ring presentation ceremony took place in J. M. Hall where you were addressed by COL Charles Caudill, the very popular Chaplain to the Corps of Cadets, and COL Harbach, the honored speaker. Each of you received your ring from General Walker. That evening, the traditional Ring Figure ball was held in Cocke Hall. And, of course, your ring was painted by the cannonball committee.

During your cadetship, important changes in the Corps structure and governance systems were taking place, changes that were not universally appreciated by the Corps. A third Battalion was in place consisting of Golf, Hotel, and India companies. This was done to facilitate administration, create more responsive command and control

within the Corps structure, and to increase leadership positions and opportunities. Dissatisfaction over changes to the Rat Line continued until, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1988, the first class announced that it had “relieved the administration of control of Barracks” by relieving the designated guard team. This action led to several months of meetings and negotiations between class leaders and administration officials. After some time, Corps leaders and Acting Superintendent MG John Knapp worked out a solution to the dispute and life returned to a semblance of normal.

In January of 1989, VMI sent a contingent to the Inaugural Parade of President-elect George H. W. Bush. In the wider world, all eyes were on the Soviet Union as Mikhail Gorbachev relieved the Old Guard and advocated “Glasnost” and “Perestroika,” which soon led to the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The Academic Year 1989-1990, your First Class year, contained the 11 November celebration of VMI Sesquicentennial: 150 Years of producing Citizen-Soldiers. Guests from nearby colleges and a French delegation attended the ceremony, which included the official dedication of the New Science Building. It was during this year that VMI created the position of full-time Commandant, Mandatory Commissioning was rescinded, the Department of Justice put VMI on notice, and VMI cadets marched in the inauguration of Governor Douglas Wilder, Virginia’s first African-American Governor.

Governor Wilder was the speaker at your graduation on May 19, 1990. Cadet Peter A. Tunnard was your Valedictorian. In the 1990 BOMB, the “closing paragraph” about your class reads: “The Class of 1990 has set the standards for future classes. These standards must be upheld to keep VMI’s stature undiminished.” Your class then dispersed to join the legions of alumni.

But let us not spend our entire evening just looking back. Reunions are also time to “reconnect” with the Institute, learning where VMI is today and where it is heading. Despite the recent economic downturn and other national challenges, I can report that the Institute is flourishing, its reputation is strong, its academic program has never been better, and our facilities across the entire post provide an enhanced environment for learning and development.

Last year we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of New Market. In November, we celebrated the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Institute. We also observed the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the First World War and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of World War II. And we observed the anniversary of the end

of the American Civil War. VMI graduates have played influential roles in every aspect of American history since 1839, but their service in the three conflicts I have just mentioned did much to define the Institute and earn it a prominent place in the nation's history. From this vantage point, we can look back on a rich history, but we can also look forward to a bright future.

Vision 2039" continues to be our roadmap; it is a statement of ambitious goals. It is a plan to improve cadets' education and personal development and to enhance the post's facilities. Since its inception in 2003, this long-range plan has addressed the academic curriculum, military and athletic training programs, and the environment and culture of the Institute..., seeking a more "common purpose" and greater "civility" in all that we do. The vision emphasizes leader development... synchronized and integrated across the Institute in every classroom, in every athletic program, in the regimental system, and in the barracks. Above all, it is a plan to ensure that VMI remains a state and national treasure at its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2039. All the initiatives of "Vision 2039" are aimed at ensuring that VMI can meet the future needs of its graduates in a dynamic world environment.

The Institute's future depends heavily, as it always has, upon the quality of its cadets. I am pleased to report that the entering class of New Cadets – the Class of 2019 – consists of 495 outstanding men and women. Of this number, 302 are in-state matriculants and 193 are out-of-state and foreign. Men number 442 and women number 53. Forty-four percent (44%) of the entering class ranked in the top quarter of their high school classes and their mean SAT composite score is 1151. Of curriculum choices, 155 have selected engineering, 115 have selected math and science (including computer science), and the rest selected liberal arts, with International Studies leading with 74. In sum, approximately 60% Virginians – 40% out-of-state, with greater than 50% in the STEM degrees and the GPA of 3.6.

VMI continues to send educated and honorable graduates into the ranks of the alumni, into the military, and into the varied work of civil life. On 16 May, 303 members of the Class of 2015 graduated. Adding graduates from other classes, the ceremony saw 324 cross the stage and receive a VMI diploma. By this early fall, greater than 50% will commission in the Armed Forces. That number is especially commendable and reinforces VMI's historic mission of producing Citizen-Soldiers.

Over the years, VMI has been fortunate in attracting outstanding men and women to its faculty and staff, and today is no different. Over the past year, have selected a new Dean of the Faculty, a new

Commandant of Cadets, a new Director of VMI's Center for Leadership and Ethics, and a new Athletic Director, about whom I will speak later.

The new Dean, who reported last June, is BG Jeff Smith '79, son of the Commandant in the 1960s. GEN Smith completed a thirty-three (33) year Army career, principally in the Army's Signal Corps, with the latter portion of his career focused on cyber-warfare. He has a Ph.D. degree in English from Princeton and double majored at VMI in Biology and English. General Schneiter (as Dean Emeritus) has returned to teaching in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Our new Commandant is Colonel William J. Wanovich, who had been the Army Professor of Military Science since 2010. He is a graduate of the Class of 1987 and succeeds Colonel Thomas Trumps, Class of 1979, who had been, since 2007, now the longest serving Commandant in modern times. And the new Director of the Center for Leadership and Ethics is Colonel David R. Gray, who comes to us after a 30-year Army career as an infantryman with significant senior leadership in Afghanistan. He has a Ph.D. in Military History from Ohio State. The Institute will be well served with their senior leadership for years to come.

Some of the most exciting developments at the Institute today are taking place in the academic program. Initiatives currently being implemented, with the goal of promoting greater vitality in the core curriculum and meeting "right-sizing" objectives among the different disciplines and departments, include strengthening the writing and fine arts programs, and much more, in the Department of English and Fine Arts -- now known as the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies -- and incorporating into that department the current philosophy curriculum. Other initiatives include adding Mandarin Chinese in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, resulting now in foreign language offerings of Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and French; the renaming and focus of our Math degree to Applied Math; and, the creation of a new Department of Computer and Information Sciences. In the academic areas, as with all areas of the Institute, we must look deep into the future if we are to remain strong and vibrant and meet the needs of a changing world. Our faculty are truly high performing. Recently, two of our faculty, among thirteen from colleges state-wide, received recognition awards as the outstanding instructors in the Commonwealth.

*Princeton Review, Forbes, U.S. News and World Report, Atlantic Monthly, Money,* and others have ranked VMI "well up" in the upper quartile of all national colleges – public and private. *Money*, for example, has ranked VMI second among public schools in Virginia and third among all schools in Virginia in return on investment: the amount of money a student is likely to earn with a degree minus the net cost of

attending the school. But it is also “word of mouth” and our ultimate “credential” ... *the graduate* ... that favorably affects the reputation of the Institute.

VMI cadets (across all services) continue to do exceptionally well at the ROTC summer camps, consistently earning high marks and awards for their performance. In 2014, U.S. Army Cadet Command and the General Douglas McArthur Foundation announced that the VMI Army ROTC Department had won the McArthur Award as the year’s Outstanding Program in competition with the nation’s six Senior Military Colleges and five of the Military Junior Colleges of their 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

As you know, VMI was one of the first members of the Southern Conference, starting in 1924, and remained in that conference until 2003 when we entered the Big South Conference. VMI won the Big South sportsmanship award eight of the past nine years. Recently, VMI was invited to return to the Southern Conference. In June, the Board of Visitors accepted the invitation, and that move took place 1 July 2014. We have been fortunate to hire Dr. David L. Diles as our new Athletic Director, who takes the place of retiring Coach Donny White, who had done an outstanding job with “great class” over so many years for the Institute in the toughest athletic director’s job in our country. Dr. Diles has a Doctorate in Education from the University of Michigan...and most recently was the athletic director at NCAA Division III member Case Western Reserve. Before that, he was the AD at two Division I schools...Eastern Michigan and St. Bonaventure. As happens periodically with faculty and in the coaching profession, VMI is currently experiencing a significant number of head coaching changes. We feel that our NCAA athletic future is “promising” across all sports. Our club sports programs are nationally, internationally, and individually ranked in lacrosse, rugby, and power-lifting ... and last academic year our boxing team upset Michigan to win the national collegiate boxing championship among 28 colleges.

As we start a new football season with a new head coach, Scott Wachenheim, and a staff of new and retained assistants began practices in early August with more than 90 players, including 27 incoming fourth classmen. We opened the season on 3 September very competitively against Ball State and we look forward to tomorrow’s victory at Alumni Field. We are improved! The future is bright as our Coaches use VMI’s adversarial educational approach to help them win.

Creating an environment to facilitate and encourage the major goals of “Vision 2039”, by necessity, has meant improving, updating, and expanding our physical facilities. This has been, perhaps, the most visible aspect of “Vision 2039,” with major changes to North, Main, and

South Posts. We have fully updated academic buildings all along Letcher avenue. On 11 November 2013, we rededicated the New Science Building, a \$19.6 full modernization that gives us the very best technologically enhanced classrooms and labs, as “Maury-Brooke Hall.” We have secured state resources of \$120 million to build or modernize three separate Corps Indoor Training Facilities: this entails programming \$20 million for a major rebuild of Cormack Hall (you knew that as “The Pit”) as the new home of the Physical Education Department with its popular new minor in Exercise Science, and includes the new Thunder-dome for NCAA cadet wrestling; modifying Cocke Hall (last renovated in 1923) at \$20 million as a Corps support building with a modernized massive Corps weight room, new locker rooms, basketball courts, enhancements for Hops, and much more; and, a new \$80 million Corps Physical Training Facility, located on Route 11 adjacent to Cameron Hall, which provides an indoor facility for Corps fitness, drill, confidence courses, high rope courses, rock climbing, endurance training, rappelling, coaches offices, and a world class adjustable-banked Olympic indoor track. Construction on this project has commenced, and when completed in 2016, this facility will be one of the most outstanding on the eastern seaboard. These three projects “transform” our South Post, facilitate training (particularly in bitter weather) throughout the academic year, and also aesthetically enhance the principal entrance to Lexington...all the while promoting Corps fitness, discipline, confidence, and NCAA athletics. Construction also continues on North Post with a new Leadership Reaction Course.

After a decade of state financial cuts to higher education across the Commonwealth, state support this year approximates 16 percent of our total operational budget. No college president in the country is happy with the cost of education as exemplified by rising tuition and fees. We offset these costs with financial aid, merit aid, ROTC scholarships, and other directed donor support. A major source of new funding for the Institute will come from our new major fundraising campaign, whose theme is “An Uncommon Purpose: A Glorious Past, a Brilliant Future.” The Campaign Cabinet is chaired by Mr. Don Wilkinson’ 61, and the goal, which was increased from the initial figure, is to raise \$225 million to support all aspects of the Institute. The “public phase” of this ambitious campaign was officially announced at the VMI Foundation’s Institute Society Dinner celebrating VMI’s 175<sup>th</sup> year this past November. To date, we have received more than \$227 million in gifts and commitments from more than 12,000 alumni and friends. These gifts will make the academic program stronger and bolster the co-curricular programs that prepare every cadet for lives of service and leadership.

By any measure, the Institute has been and continues to be fully engaged in meeting the challenges of the present and immediate future.



We are also looking out on a 5-year horizon in order to plan our directions, activities, building, and improvements. For sure, it is a changing and challenging world, and we must insure that the Institute meets those challenges. So, as we look forward, we see:

(1) Maturing, adjusting, and completing actions from the Academic Core Curriculum and right sizing study decisions that ensure the right subjects for the future and small class rooms.

(2) The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Reaffirmation in 2017 – also known as the Ten-Year Self Study...and Reaccreditation.

(3) The VMI Foundation’s “Comprehensive” Campaign

(4) Addressing the Rising costs of education infrastructure, and athletics – and stabilizing the budget.

(5) Sensitivity to the NCAA reorganization and the new requirements resulting from re-joining the Southern Conference.

(6) Completing the Three Corps Physical Training Facilities

(7) Actioning maintenance, repair, and renovation across the Post

(8) Advancing the opportunities in Active, Guard, and Reserve Forces as regards commissioning.

(9) The environment – addressing cultural, social, technological, and legal challenges, and VMI’s uniqueness.

(10) Our national reputation “continued”.

The Institute continues to stand on the bedrock of personal honor as described in VMI’s historic Honor Code. In its fundamental expectations and requirements..., the VMI Honor System and the Honor Court basically remain as you knew them. There have been slight “procedural” changes, but no changes in the standards or in the penalties. Education continues to be key to our success in countering the plague of cheating that is rampant in our high schools today. That education for our Rats and their transformation commences (literally) within 5 minutes of meeting their cadre on matriculation day..., and “continuing education” for the Old Corps is seen by our commitment to hosting national Honor Conferences and emphasis by all at VMI. The VMI Honor System is the most cherished of all our systems, and we work tirelessly to ensure its integrity and effectiveness. I am personally

involved, but allow and support the Honor Court in its administration of the system across the Corps.

Terrific things are happening every day at the Institute. I firmly believe that the future holds even greater things for our school and its graduates, and that its reputation will rise to even greater heights. I am confident that the Institute will continue to provide generations of informed, skilled, fit, confident, dependable men and women of the highest integrity for our state and nation.

Thank you for your continuing dedication to and support of the Institute. Welcome home Class of 1990!