

GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III
SUPERINTENDENT

Remarks at Commencement

Cameron Hall
16 May 2018

Good morning!

Secretary Tillerson, members of the VMI Board of Visitors, members of the Academic Board, faculty and staff, families and friends of today's graduating cadets, and members of the Corps of Cadets. Welcome to this Commencement Ceremony...the climax of four years of diligent study and hard work by the Class of 2018.

I have the great pleasure as we begin this morning's ceremony to welcome The Honorable Rex Tillerson, our Commencement speaker, who with GEN George C. Marshall is the second former Secretary of State to address the graduating cadets of this Institute. He will be "formally" introduced in a few moments by the First Class President, but I take this opportunity to welcome him and extend our highest regard for his service to the nation, and for his remarkable career on the international stage as Chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil, a giant in the world's economy, and for his service to the youth of America as past "national" President of the Boy Scouts of America. His record of service resonates so well with this community where our goal is to educate young men and women to serve their nation and their community whether in uniform or in civilian life. Sir..., Welcome to the Virginia Military Institute....and thank you for your example of the best of leadership.

Graduation from VMI is a great personal achievement, but it is an achievement that cannot be reached alone. Many others have contributed to the success of today's graduates: parents and grandparents, guardians, brothers and sisters, friends, Brother Rats, faculty, staff, coaches, and host families, to name but a few. VMI is "particularly" grateful to parents and grandparents for encouraging and sustaining their sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, throughout these cadet years. May I ask parents & grandparents to please stand and receive our thanks.... This is certainly a proud day for you. ***[Lead Applause]***

Universities and colleges are many things to many people, but at the heart of any great institution of higher education is its faculty. They are the ones who teach, guide, counsel, and encourage young people on a day-to-day

basis. I include, in this group, our military staff and those who coach our athletes..., for at VMI we believe that the academic, disciplined military structure, and physical aspects make for a “full and complete” education. Please join me in expressing thanks to the Institute’s faculty. ***[Lead Applause]***

The Class of 2018 matriculated in August 2014 with a strength of 500 ... and today will graduate 355 cadets. Thirteen (13) members of this class graduated early, in 2016 and 2017, and we acknowledge them today as well. Adding graduates from other classes, today’s ceremony will see 373 cross the stage and receive a VMI diploma. The Class of 2018 is the largest graduating class in VMI’s history.

Counting 193 of this class who were commissioned yesterday, by the end of this summer a total of 213 members of the Class of 2018 will have been commissioned. This means that 60% of the graduating class have met or will meet the high requirements for commissioning in the Armed Forces. Others will also be commissioned upon completion of the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. These numbers are especially commendable and reinforce VMI’s historic mission of producing Citizen-Soldiers. A number of VMI cadets, staff, and faculty have been called to active duty in support of the current and long war on terror, thus placing their lives and cadetships temporarily on hold. In addition, there are parents and family members – and others in the audience this morning – who are currently serving or have served. Would all of you – “patriots” --- you “Veterans” -- please rise and receive our appreciation for your service. ***[Lead Applause]***

As the Class of 2018, you were present during years that saw significant anniversaries for the Institute and for the nation. You were present in the year that marked the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Institute, the 150th anniversary of the Battle of New Market, the 100th anniversary of the beginning of America’s entry into the First World War and now, in this year, the 100th anniversary of the end of that war. As First Classmen, you planned and led the Corps thru a very successful year, which included participating as the largest marching unit in two inaugural parades...one for President Trump and the other for Governor Northam. You were diligent in professionally running the Rat Line; the military, class and honor systems; and your class was most proficient in the classroom, performing with academic excellence. The Class of 2018 now goes into the VMI history book with demonstrated pride in its faithfulness to the Institute’s high ideals and a splendid reputation.

VMI is a forward-looking institution, dedicated to producing intelligent and useful citizens, but it is also steeped in history and tradition. We march into the future, but we are ever mindful of the rich legacy of our past. There

will be important remnants of this life you have lived that will follow you into the future. Some quite serious, like a reputation for honor, persistence, dependability..., and some a little humorous or quirky, as when you explain in the future to your children why you arrange your books on a bookshelf by height or why you hang your clothes in order of color or length. There is probably more of VMI that has rubbed off on you than you realize.

So.... as you depart the Institute today and begin your new careers: work hard in fulfilling your dreams; be creative; master the art of listening; appreciate the many sides of life; be civil and grow in wisdom. Provide the best of leadership for your family, your community and our nation.

Each graduating class has heard me say this over the past 15 years at this ceremony..., “hold onto the concept of honor – the very bedrock -- of VMI.” People will hold you to a higher standard because you are a VMI graduate. This high expectation cannot be avoided...; it comes with the ring and with the diploma. Embrace it as the heritage that has now been passed on to you, and strive always to preserve and enhance it. **The open road now awaits you....Godspeed! Warmest congratulations from all of the Institute family!**

It is now my pleasure to introduce the Valedictorian for the Class of 2018., Cadet Thomas Schmitt, from Geneva, New York. The Valedictorian at VMI is “peer-elected” by his classmates and is truly a high honor. Mr. Schmitt double majored in Applied Mathematics and Physics. He served as President of the Officer of the Guard Association this year, providing high character and principled leadership to his responsibilities and duties. A Distinguished Naval Graduate, he was commissioned yesterday in the United States Marine Corps. Mr. Schmitt...

The President of the First Class, Mr. Joseph Brown, will provide short farewell remarks to his Class and introduce our Commencement Speaker. Mr. Brown.