

**GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III  
SUPERINTENDENT**

**REMARKS FOR McKENNA WEEKEND COCKTAIL PARTY  
31 October 2014**

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this evening's special gathering to celebrate the legacy of Coach John McKenna and the publication by Roland Lazenby and Mike Ashley of their book, "*Best Regrets, VMI's John McKenna and the Lost Age of College Football*", which tells the story of Coach McKenna's 14 years at VMI, 13 as head football coach. Coach McKenna's 62 wins are the most of any coach in VMI Keydet football history.

We are especially pleased to welcome Roland Lazenby and Mike Ashley here tonight. Roland, as you may know, is a 1974 graduate of the Institute and a highly regarded sportswriter and educator. He has written more than a dozen nonfiction books, mainly about basketball and football, and has contributed articles to many magazines and newspapers. His book, "*Bull Run*", The story of the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls, was named Sports Book of the Year for 1997 by the Independent Publishers Association...and his recent books on the legends Jerry West and Michael Jordan are receiving nationally the best of reviews. He earned the MA degree from Hollins University and has served in Virginia Tech's Department of Communication and Radford University's School of Communication. Mike Ashley lives in the Washington D.C. area and covers the University of Maryland athletic program and college sports for a variety of publications.

Mike and Roland were immeasurably assisted in their research by Col. Mike Strickler, VMI Class 1971, who previously served as VMI Sports Information Director, later as VMI's Public Relations Officer, and Executive Officer to the Superintendent and Secretary to the Board of Visitors.

After the text of the book was completed, finding a publisher was the next task. On behalf of the Institute, I thank the Keydet Club for assisting in financing this venture and assisting with this weekend. Athletics are integral to who we are and what we do at VMI. Certainly, this book confirms that vision.

I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce to you Dr. David Diles, our Athletic Director, whom many of you may not have met. He graduated from Ohio University and holds a doctorate in education from the University of Michigan. Before coming to VMI in October of 2013, he was the

Director of Athletics and Professor and Chair of the Department of Physical Education, Recreation, and Athletics at NCAA Division II member Case Western Reserve University. Before that, he was the Athletic Director at two Division I schools – St. Bonaventure and Eastern Michigan.

And, how great it is this evening to have the McKenna children here: Kathleen, Mary, Margaret, and Stephen. VMI thanks all of you for coming back this weekend.

The idea for Lazenby's and Ashley's book came from two of Coach McKenna's former players, both from the Class of 1960 and both retired U.S. Air Force Officers: Tom Daniel and Howard Moss. It has been in the making since 2006. It is ironic that it, "*Best Regrets*", is being published in the year of VMI's return to the Southern Conference, the league in which Coach McKenna and his Keydet teams had so much success. When we determined to return to the Southern Conference, effective 1 July of this year, VMI made a commitment to position the Institute with the ability to "stand tall" in that conference. We started the journey several years ago, focusing particularly on securing the private endowment support needed to advance the Institute's mission, while continuing to massively enhance our facilities for the Corps and our NCAA athletes.

I think Coach McKenna would be pleased with our return to the Southern Conference, as we were among its early members. Coach McKenna led our teams to four Southern Conference Championships, six Virginia State Championships, six consecutive winning seasons, and an undefeated season in 1957, when at one point, the '57 Team was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation. In the "Golden Years" of 1957 to 1962, VMI won 42 and lost 13. He was three times Southern Conference Coach of the Year, in 1957, 1959, and 1962 – the only coach so honored to that time – and was Chairman of the Southern Conference Football Committee from 1957 to 1960.

His tenure at VMI was a time of the true student-athlete. Perhaps one platoon football contributed to that as players competed both ways and had to be capable across the spectrum. Coach McKenna demanded performance academically, militarily, and ethically, as well as on the gridiron. In October of 2005, two years before he died, we were privileged, and many of you were here, to welcome Coach McKenna back to VMI for a reunion dinner and to dedicate a plaque to his honor. We wish he were with us tonight to receive the accolades, again, that he so richly deserves, and to receive this testament to his skill, leadership, and commitment to the development of those who played for him.

Now it is my pleasure to welcome Roland Lazenby to speak briefly to you this evening. I hope you will enjoy this gathering tonight, the parade in the morning, the Keydet Club luncheon...and the "victory" over Furman on Alumni Field. Thanks for returning to the Institute.