

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

**Remarks to the Class of 1964 Reunion
25 April 2014
(as delivered)**

Members of the Class of 1964, spouses, and friends. Good evening and welcome back to VMI. Since graduating from the Institute, many of you have returned to celebrate class reunions five, ten, and twenty-five years out, but surely nothing can compare with returning for the fiftieth reunion. This anniversary comes at a time when most of you have achieved those high goals that you set for yourselves in those formative days here at VMI. Now, new goals and adventures -- perhaps not as pragmatic as the earlier ones -- beckon you forward. This is a special moment, and the Institute and I feel very privileged to share it with you.

Your reunion also falls in the year of the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Institute and the 150th anniversary of the Battle of New Market. A new feature film entitled "Field of Lost Shoes" was premiered in Richmond on the 13th of this month. The movie was filmed in Virginia last year and tells the story of seven VMI cadets who fought in the battle. It is currently being shown at independent film festivals with hope of national traction and distribution. Your award today further celebrates that event, and your class. On Founders Day, 11 November, we will celebrate the establishment of VMI in 1839 and its contributions to the state and the nation.

We perhaps were not fully aware of it at the time, but the early 1960s, was a significant time in the history of our nation. Developments in world affairs, science, and in society were bringing about fundamental changes and setting new directions for the future. Large computers were around, even at VMI, but slide rules and hand calculators still dominated. The thought of personal computers, much less cell phones, smart phones, GPS, night vision goggles and all the other technological marvels we now enjoy were the stuff of science fiction.

In February of 1962, Colonel John H. Glenn, Jr., became the first U.S. astronaut to orbit the Earth. During that year, James D. Watson, Frances Crick, and Maurice Wilkins received the Nobel Prize for the discovery of the molecular structure of DNA. In the spring of that year, United States forces were ordered to Laos, and President Kennedy announced that U.S. advisors in Vietnam would fire if fired upon. In September, 1962, as you began your second class year, the U.S. Circuit Court ordered the University of Mississippi to admit African American student James H. Meredith. One month later, President Kennedy announced that the Soviet Union was building offensive weapons bases in Cuba and ordered a naval and air quarantine of offensive military equipment. Conflict over the Cuban Missile Crisis was avoided when Russia agreed to halt construction, dismantle, and remove its rockets, and a

long but difficult winding down of the Cold War began. I'm sure you will always remember where you were a year later, on November 22nd, 1963, when President Kennedy was assassinated at the end of the first semester of your first class year. Two days after the assassination, the evening gun was fired every half hour from Reveille to Retreat in honor of the slain president.

September 7, 1960, the day 330 of you matriculated, marked the beginning of VMI's 121st year. On that day, you began a 5-day "New Cadet Orientation and Training Period," better known as "Cadre," at the end of which the Old Corps returned and you were taken into the Rat Line. From listening to cadets for five days instruct you to "right face, left face," things changed to hearing "Whoa, Rat!" "What's for dinner, mister?" "You're Sent Up." And you discovered that TAC officers could be creative in their "bones," which resulted in walking PTs and confinement. In fact, the archives of your classmates reveal that some of the "bones" from your years were memorable. For example: "hayroll rolled counter clockwise;" "improperly rolled toothpaste tube;" "excess miscellaneous items in miscellaneous box;" "unshined light switch," and "allowing two young ladies dressed in cadet uniforms to march to the Mess Hall."

Many of you were probably influenced in your expectations of life at VMI by the 1957 movie, *Mardi Gras*, starring Pat Boone. In the 1964 *BOMB*, your historian wrote: "Many of us felt that 'Mardi Gras' had not developed the true picture." He continued: "Not only did we have to learn to walk and think differently, but we had to develop a completely new way of speaking. We now talked in terms of CCQ, FEI, SMI, RQ, and many other foreign terms that were in our ever present Rat Bible."

Life at VMI was conducted under the watchful eye of the new Commandant of Cadets, Colonel Jeffrey G. Smith '43. The Superintendent, too, was new. Recently arrived from command of Camp Lejeune, Brigadier General George R. E. Shell '31 became the Institute's 9th superintendent. Under General Shell and Col. Smith, many of the day-to-day systems and requirements, and definitely the appearance of VMI, were transformed. They were new leaders for a new decade.

Needless to say, some of the changes did not sit well with old cadets and led to strained relations between the Corps and the administration for your entire four years and even, in March 1961, to a Corps step-off. You became the Class of 1964 in the Spring of 1961, an event followed by traditional Old Yells around the sentinel box.

The Barracks that you entered was much like today's Barracks, although it consisted only of Old and New Barracks. New Barracks had been completed a decade before, but Old Barracks was undergoing extensive renovation. A population "explosion," linked to the Post-War Baby Boom, sent unusually high numbers of young people seeking a college education, and VMI was no exception. When you entered, enrollment in the Corps was at absolute capacity of the Barracks, with slightly more than 1050 cadets. To put this in context, in 1950, there were 814 cadets in the Corps, even with New Barracks; in the fall of

1959, there were 1,077 cadets. This large number of cadets in the Corps resulted in over-crowding in the tight barracks space. In September 1963, the entering class of 1967 won the distinction of being the largest 4th class to enter VMI, with 362 matriculants. As a result, 31 rooms on the first and second stoops were converted from 4-man rooms to 5-man rooms to accommodate the larger Corps.

In October 1962, work was well underway on the erection of stands at Alumni Field. In 1963, site work was begun on the new George C. Marshall Research Center and on the new administration building, officially known as Smith Hall but dubbed by cadets as “puzzle palace.” Interestingly enough, its basic design was submitted by a cadet. Annexes were being constructed for Maury-Brooke Hall and Nichols Engineering Building. Of special importance to cadets, the PX – located in the concourse – was completely renovated and expanded.

The VMI Corps of Cadets marched in the January, 1961, Inaugural Parade for President John Kennedy, a day in Washington of sub-freezing weather. Later, some members of your class went to Washington and met President Kennedy, gave him a picture representing the cadets at New Market, and received amnesty for all members of the Corps serving on confinement and penalty tours.

There were many distinguished visitors to the Institute during your cadetship, but of great interest to the Corps were the nationally-known musicians who came to entertain the Corps, including Bo Diddley, Fats Domino, The Lettermen, The Coasters, Clyde McPhatter, and the Drifters. This was the early ‘60s, and the Twist was the dance style for VMI Hops. As a result, cadets were allowed to wear class sweaters instead of formal dress, which gave birth to the designation “twisting dyke.” And, as if we needed a reminder, 1964 was the year the Beatles arrived and ushered in the so-called “British Invasion.”

These were good times for many of VMI’s athletic teams, especially its football team under Coach John McKenna. In 1959, VMI won the Southern Conference and the Big Five Championship, and Coach McKenna was named Southern Conference Coach of the Year. The same achievement was made the next year, the second straight year by “Big Red’ to win the Southern Conference Championship. And in 1962, the team did it again, the fourth title in six years. In 1964, the Keydet basketball team won the Southern Conference Tournament with players like Bill Blair and Charlie Schmaus.

Your first class year included the centennial celebration of the Battle of New Market, and the dedication of the new George C. Marshall Library and Museum building. Present that day were President Lyndon Johnson and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, along with many other state and national dignitaries. The New Market Medal was awarded posthumously to General Marshall and presented to Mrs. Marshall. Soon after, graduation arrived for 203 of your Brother Rats. Your speaker was Virginia Governor Albertis Harrison.

What a record you have achieved since those cadet days. I have the results here of a quick and very unscientific study of the accomplishments of member of your class. Taking them in order: 87 of you became businessmen, managers, investment professionals, bankers, or CEOs; 22 made the military a career; 22 became attorneys; 17 entered health services; 15 made government service a career; 15 became engineers; 13 became educators; 6 entered the clergy; 5 became scientists; 4 became contractors; 2 each entered law enforcement or coaching; and one each became farmers or ranchers, journalists, or pilots. Of your class, 182 served in the armed forces, with 137 in the Army, 3 in the Navy; 13 in the Marine Corps; 28 in the Air Force, and 1 in the Coast Guard. Two members of your class were killed in Vietnam (Major Richard Butt and journalist Frank Frosch). Yours is an outstanding record for a VMI class, and this evening I want to acknowledge your contributions to the Institute, to our state, and to the nation. Congratulations!

But let us not spend our entire evening just looking back. Reunion is also time to “reconnect” with the Institute, learning about 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 are in solid shape.

“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 200th 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.

Over the years, VMI has been fortunate in attracting outstanding men and women to its faculty and staff, and today is no different. We have recently 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, reporting 1 June, is BG Jeff Smith ‘79, who just completed a thirty-three (33) year 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) will return to teaching in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Our new Commandant is Colonel William J. Wanovich, who has 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 has been, since 2007, now the longest serving Commandant in modern times. And the new Director of the Leadership 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.

Some of the most exciting developments at the Institute today are taking place in the academic program. Upon the completion of our highly successful ten year Accreditation-Reaffirmation in 2007, and responding to new requirements of our Quality Enhancement Plan, the Institute's academic leadership undertook a full review of the academic core-curriculum. The Dean and faculty proposed to the Board of Visitors a series of Academic Program Initiatives for study. Those initiatives are 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. These academic initiatives 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 to meet the needs of a changing world.

Princeton Review, Forbes, U.S. News and World Report, Atlantic Monthly, and others have ranked VMI "well" in the upper quartile of all colleges – public and private. But it is also "word of mouth" and our ultimate "credential" ... *the graduate* ... that favorably affects the reputation of the Institute.

Our reputation continues to attract growing numbers of well-qualified and talented young men and women. The 2013 matriculating cadets – Class of 2017 -- had over 2000 applications. Admissions numbers grow each year... and in quality. In early August, we matriculated 502 cadets from 35 states and the District of Columbia and four foreign countries. This is among the three largest matriculating classes in VMI's history. Of these new cadets, 55.4 percent were from Virginia; 61 were females -- a record number for a VMI entering class. 103 were recruited NCAA athletes; 59 percent are majoring in math, science, and engineering, and 41 percent in the liberal arts. That incoming class (2013) had a grade point average of 3.6. With the addition of Third Barracks, the Corps (in August 2013) numbered 1675 cadets with an annual rolling average of 1610 over the past several years. The class of 2018, matriculating in August 2014, will surpass this Class of 2017 in applications and quality. I firmly believe that parents and many of America's youth want the unique VMI challenge and education...one that provides a value based

education resulting in honorable citizens and outstanding leaders for our nation and communities.

VMI cadets (across all services) continue to do well at the ROTC summer camps, consistently earning high marks and awards for their performance. Several weeks ago, the 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 2014 Outstanding Program in competition with the nation's six Senior Military Colleges and five of the Military Junior Colleges of their 1st Brigade. Eight schools were selected among 275 senior programs across the country. This award is based on a combination of the school's commissioning mission, its cadets' performance on the National Order of Merit list and its cadet retention rate. This is also a tribute to the leadership and example of the men and women comprising our ROTC departments. Greater than 50% of this current 1st Class will take a commission at graduation.

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. The Big South has been a solid home for VMI athletics for the past ten years. VMI has won the Big South sportsmanship award seven of the past eight years. Recently, VMI was invited to return to the Southern Conference. In June, the Board of Visitors accepted the invitation, and that move will take place 31 May 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 has done an outstanding job over many years for the Institute. Dr. Diles 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.

VMI hosted and won the exciting Military Basketball Classic (Citadel, AF, Army, VMI) in early November, and had a good run in the CIT Tournament before losing in the semi-finals. Our baseball team defeated Virginia when they were ranked #1 in the country and also Kentucky in the early baseball season. And, our lacrosse team, for the first time, defeated the U.S. Air Force Academy. That same weekend, our Women's Water Polo Team won four of five matches in a VMI-hosted tournament at King Hall.

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." 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" on Founders Day, 11 November 2013.

We have just 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 know that as "The Pit") as the new home of the Physical Education Department with its new minor in Exercise Science, and includes the relocation of the 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, courts, enhancements for Hops, and much more; and a new \$80 million indoor training facility, located on Route 11 next to Cameron Hall, for Corps fitness, drill, confidence courses, high rope courses, endurance training, coaches offices, and a world class Olympic indoor track. Construction will commence summer 2014, and when completed in 2016, this facility will be one of the best and most capable speed tracks on the eastern seaboard. These three projects transform our south post and also aesthetically and significantly enhance the entrance to Lexington.

After a decade of state financial cuts to higher education across the Commonwealth, state support stabilized this year at 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 can offset these costs with financial aid, merit and ROTC scholarships, and other donor support. We are now in the “quiet phase” of our next comprehensive fund raising campaign, and there is great excitement and considerable work ongoing as we organize for this endeavor, with public announcement of goals, organization, and plans in fall 2014. The Campaign Cabinet is chaired by Mr. Don Wilkinson’ 61.

The Institute continues to stand on the bedrock of personal honor as described in VMI’s historic Honor Code. And 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 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.

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. Thank you for your loyalty and continuing support. With all of us working together for the benefit of the cadet, 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.

Welcome back, Class of 1964.