

**GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III**  
**SUPERINTENDENT**  
**Remarks to the Class of 1965**  
**24 April 2015**

Members of the Class of 1965, 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 the 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 feels very privileged to share it with you.

In fact, this is the season of a number of anniversaries important in the history of the Virginia Military Institute. Last year, about this time, 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 last month 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.

We perhaps were not fully aware of it at the time, but the early 1960s were to prove to be another highly significant time in the history of our nation. Developments in world affairs, in society, and in science and technology were bringing about fundamental changes and setting new directions for the future. The conflict in Southeast Asia, the Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War, space exploration and many other remarkable developments in science and technology saw VMI graduates playing an active ... often a leading ... role. And you, as graduates of the Class of 1965, were clearly among those players.

In January 1961, eight months before your arrival at VMI, President John F. Kennedy succeeded Dwight Eisenhower as the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, ushering in what seemed at the time a new political era characterized as "The New Frontier." Soon after, the Peace Corps was established, the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba took place, and Freedom Riders began riding buses into the South.

In February of 1962, Colonel John H. Glenn, Jr., became the first U.S. astronaut to orbit the Earth in the Mercury-Atlas "Friendship 7". 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 1962, 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 third 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. I'm sure you will always remember where you were a year later, on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963, when President Kennedy was assassinated at the end of the first semester of your second class year.

February of 1964 saw the beginning of the British invasion when the Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. In July, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In March of 1965, the first American combat troops arrived in Vietnam, while 40 men at the University of California, Berkeley, burned their draft cards. And, as you were about to graduate, the first anti-Vietnam "teach-in" was held around the Pentagon.

September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1961 -- a Friday -- was the day you matriculated at VMI. It marked the beginning of VMI's 122<sup>nd</sup> 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.

Many of you were probably influenced in your expectations of life at VMI by the 1957 movie *Mardi Gras*, starring Pat Boone. The reality was far different. In short order you had to learn to think, speak, and walk in new ways. You now talked in terms of CCQ, FEI, SMI, RQ, and many other foreign terms that were in your ever present Rat Bible.

Life at VMI was conducted under the watchful eye of the Commandant of Cadets, Colonel Jeffrey G. Smith, VMI Class of 1943, and later by Colonel George H. Simpson, VMI Class of 1940. When you arrived, Colonel Smith was in his second year. The Superintendent, too, was new. Recently arrived from command of Camp Lejeune, Marine Brigadier General George R. E. Shell, VMI Class of 1931 was the Institute's 9<sup>th</sup> superintendent. Under General Shell and Colonel Smith, many of the day-to-day systems and requirements, including

Rat Restrictions, were transformed, often to the chagrin of cadets. Shell and Smith were new leaders for a new decade.

Your class historian noted of your Rat year that,...**{quote}**...“Doing their best to make the whole Rat year unpleasant, the Rat Disciplinary Committee marshaled us back and forth between the fifth, fourth and third stoops with amazing regularity, a floor show being provided at both ends.” **{end quote}** You became the Class of 1965 in the spring of 1962, the night before Spring Hike, an event followed by traditional Old Yells around the sentinel box.

The Barracks that you entered were very much like today’s Barracks, although they consisted only of Old and New Barracks. 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. A 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 Library and on the new administration building, officially known as Smith Hall.

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.

These were good times for many of VMI athletic teams, especially its football team under Coach John McKenna. In 1962, the “Big Red” team won the Southern Conference Championship, 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 second class year included the centennial celebration of the Battle of New Market and the dedication of the new George C. Marshall Research 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.

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1965, the traditional New Market Day ceremony was held as well as the dedication of the new Francis H. Smith Hall – the administration building. The principal speaker for the day was Senator Harry F. Byrd. A month later, on Sunday, 13 June, Colonel John H. Glenn, Jr., delivered your graduation address and 229 of you received a VMI diploma. Eventually, 242 classmates earned diplomas. Your Brother Rat John McClelland Marshall was chosen valedictorian. In those days, Finals extended over three days, with the first day devoted to military and athletic awards and the Finals Ball; the second day was Alumni Day, commissioning ceremonies, and the graduation parade; and the third day was graduation. Until Cameron Hall was built, graduation ceremonies were normally held in front of Preston Library, weather permitting.

It was during your first class year, according to your historian..., **{quote}** “You brought about a series of changes in policy and attempted to orient the class system in a direction such that it might approach the system that seems to have been so ideal twenty years before. It was a difficult road and mistakes were made, but overall we have succeeded in realigning the image and possibilities of the barracks under an extremely efficient class system.” **{end quote}** Leading your class were: Lou Siegel, president; Paul Shu, vice-president; and, Greg Robertson, historian. When you graduated, you felt that you had made solid contributions to the development of VMI, and you were ready to make your mark beyond the limits of the Institute.

What a record it has been. Of the total of 346 individuals listed as matriculants in the Class of 1965, a very unscientific survey shows:

124 of you became businessmen, managers, investment professionals, bankers, or CEOs; 25 entered the law; 24 became educators; 20 became engineers; 19 had government service careers; 15 chose military careers; 10 entered the health services; 2 were coaches and athletic directors; 7 were scientists; 5 were contractors; 3 each entered the clergy and law enforcement; 2 became professional pilots; and one a rancher. Of the total of matriculants, 337 served in the Armed Forces, with five rising to flag rank. This record of service is superb, and this evening the Institute acknowledges your achievements and offers our warmest congratulations.

But let us not spend our entire evening just looking back. Reunions are a time to “reconnect” with the Institute, learning where VMI is today and where it is heading. Despite the recent decade long 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 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.

Over the years, VMI has been fortunate in attracting “outstanding” men and women to its faculty and staff..., and the names of Turner, White, and Friske...your classmates...are testimony of that. 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, who reported last June, is BG Jeff Smith, VMI Class of 1979. GEN Smith completed a splendid 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. 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 VMI Class of 1987 and succeeds Colonel Thomas Trumps, VMI Class of 1979, who had been, since 2007, 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. This month two of our faculty, among thirteen from colleges state-wide, received recognition awards as the outstanding instructors in the Commonwealth. Jim Turner, Head of the Biology Department, was one of those. Under his leadership, the Biology program, at the Institute, is thriving.

*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. 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 2014 matriculating cadets – Class of 2018 -- had over 2160 applications. Admissions numbers grow each year... and in quality. This past August, we matriculated 500 cadets from 37 states and the District of Columbia and 7 foreign countries. This is one of the largest matriculating classes in VMI’s history. Of these new cadets, 59% percent were from Virginia; 73 were females – a record number for a VMI entering class. Ninety-five were recruited NCAA athletes; 59% percent are majoring in math, science, and engineering, and 41 percent in the more pure liberal arts. That incoming class had a grade point average of 3.7. With the addition of Third Barracks, the Corps, at the start of the current academic year numbered 1700 cadets at census date with an annual rolling average of 1677 over the past three years. 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 exceptionally well at the ROTC summer camps, consistently earning high marks and awards for their performance. Recently, 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 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. Eight schools, of which VMI was one, 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 a tribute to the leadership and example of the men and women comprising all of our ROTC departments. Fifty-two percent of the 1<sup>st</sup> Class graduating this May will earn a commission across all services...volunteering to serve in time of war....an improvement from 33% over the decade. This year, VMI is experiencing the lowest indiscipline and attrition in its history.

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 was a solid home for VMI athletics for ten years. VMI won the Big South sportsmanship award eight of those years. Recently, VMI was invited to return to the Southern Conference. The Board of Visitors accepted the invitation, and that move took place 1 July 2014. We were fortunate to hire Dr. David L. Diles as our new Athletic Director, who took the place of retiring Coach Donny White, who had done a truly outstanding job “with great class”, leading our athletic program over so many years for the Institute in the toughest athletic environment 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 team or individually ranked in lacrosse, rugby and power-lifting...and our boxing team upset Michigan to win the national collegiate boxing championship among 28 colleges last week.

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. On 11 November 2013, we rededicated the New Science Building, as Maury-Brooke Hall, a \$19.6 million full modernization that gives us the very best technologically enhanced classrooms and labs. We 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 of its kind on the eastern seaboard. These three projects “transform” our South Post, facilitate training (particularly in bitter weather) thru-out the academic year, and also aesthetically enhances the principal entrance to Lexington...all the while promoting Corps fitness, discipline, confidence, and NCAA athletics.

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 comprehensive 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 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. At the end of February, we had received more than \$205 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. Your “commitment” at parade tomorrow is treasured and we are most grateful.

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 middle and 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.

Welcome back and congratulations, Class of 1965.

Best wishes for a rewarding and enjoyable reunion...and please return with regularity.