

**GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III**  
**SUPERINTENDENT**  
**Remarks to the Classes of 1940, 1945, 1950 A&B, 1955, 1960**  
**20-21 April 2015**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to VMI and to this reunion celebration. Represented in this room tonight are graduates from two of the most critical decades in recent American history, the 1940s and the 1950s. These two decades experienced the greatest Global War in modern history and the height of what came to be called the “Cold War.” These events gripped our nation for more than two decades and influenced almost every aspect of your lives. The period also saw remarkable social, scientific, and cultural developments that continue to shape our lives to this day. From the Classes of 1940 and 1945, members of which served in World War II, through the Classes of 1950 A&B, and 1955, some of whom had served in World War II and others in Korea, to the Class of 1960, whose members served in Vietnam, you experienced challenges that tested the strength and resolve of our nation. Through your service – in the military and as civilians – you extended the contributions and enhanced the reputation of the Virginia Military Institute. VMI and the nation owe you a deep debt of thanks.

Your years as cadets coincided with the administrations of three presidents: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. You served under four superintendents: MG John A. Lejeune; LTG Charles E. Kilbourne; LTG Richard J. Marshall, and MG William H. Milton, Jr. And your classes served under seven commandants: COL Withers A. Burress; COL John M. Fray; COL Oliver B. Bucher; COL Frank R. Pancake; LTC Henry C. Kerlin; LTC Gilbert E. Butler, and COL Glover S. Johns.

The time period represented by these classes can be sandwiched between two popular movies. The film *Brother Rat*, starring Ronald Reagan and released in 1937 while the Class of 1940 was still in Barracks, stands at one end. The film *Mardi Gras*, starring Pat Boone and filmed at VMI in 1958, stands at the other end. The evolution of the Institute can be seen clearly in comparing those popular film productions. Also as a sign of the changing times, horses made their last appearance at VMI and the Institute built Mallory Hall, the physics building, as the world entered the nuclear age.

The Class of 1940 matriculated 250 strong in September of 1937 and graduated 136 members in June 1940. The class entered while MG John A. Lejeune was Superintendent, but when he sustained a serious accident, he retired and was succeeded in 1938 by MG Charles E. Kilbourne. The Commandant was Major Withers A. Burress. There were two battalions. Six companies – A through F – containing infantry, cavalry, and artillery platoons. Horses were a prominent feature of the Corps, both at parades and on White’s Farm. Barracks in those years consisted only of “Old Barracks,” completed into a square, and old “Smith Hall” was located where New Barracks is now located. There were six academic departments and a military department, which only offered the Army ROTC program. Daily life at the Institute had not changed

much for several decades: there were the frequent bugle calls, drills, classes, after-taps escapades, and yelling in support of the Big Red Team. But all that was soon to change.

The Class of 1940 was not officially the VMI "Centennial" class, but it was present on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1939, the day that marked the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of VMI, and heard the words of President Roosevelt by telephone hookup from The White House. He had been scheduled to be present at the Institute for that event, but he cancelled his visit as war broke out in Europe. In his transmitted address, the president said: "The whole history of VMI is a triumphant chronicle of the part which the citizen-soldier can play in a democracy." Almost immediately after the start of the war in Europe, the number of cadets enrolled steadily declined as the wartime Draft and enlistments drew its members into the Armed Forces.

The class that entered a year later, the Class of 1945, matriculated 234 cadets (some records depict the number as 256), but by May of 1943, their brother rats had begun to depart two years early. By June of 1943, only 14 members of the class of 1945 were present for duty. Some brother rats returned later from the Army or as Army Specialized Training Cadets, but the number in the class continued to decline until there were only eleven cadets, mainly pre-med cadets, four civil engineers, and one electrical engineer. When the normally scheduled graduation ceremony was held on 9 June 1945, only two members of the class remained: Cadet Captain F. T. Dresser and Cadet Captain M. P. Echols, Jr. Both were distinguished graduates. The entire Corps was eventually reduced to about 250 cadets, mainly Fourth Classmen who were too young for the Draft.

Lieutenant General Charles E. Kilbourne, your tireless Superintendent in those momentous days, reported a shortage of rifles resulting from a requirement to turn in all serviceable weapons to the Army for use by the troops (so poorly prepared were we for the outbreak of war!). VMI received some old Springfield rifles that had been declared "unfit for use by combat units." Moreover, there was a shortage of gray cloth for uniforms and even metal for badges, belt buckles, and other uniform items. General Kilbourne addressed this shortage by calling on alumni to send in coatees, shakos, breast and belt plates, and other items that they might have retained upon their graduation. From some source, he was able to obtain 24 swords for cadet officers. But times were tough. At the Final Ball in June 1945, there were not enough dress uniforms at the Institute, so uniforms had to be borrowed from Staunton Military Academy and Augusta Military Academy to outfit the 30 cadets who participated in the ball.

Academic classes for VMI cadets at this time were accelerated so that what had taken four years to graduate now took two years and nine months, and a new class entered twice a year. Cadets had only one month off during the summer and ten days for Christmas.

After the end of the war, many former cadets whose education had been interrupted by the war began returning to the Institute. At one time, there were

seven classes in Barracks: 1948A and B; 1949A, B, and C, and 1950 A and B. these classes contained cadets, war veterans, and some commissioned officers, originally from the classes of 1944, 1945, 1946, and 1947. The presence of veterans, some commissioned officers, as members of the Corps led to the creation of Company G, a “home” for ex-officers who were ineligible for ROTC. Returning veterans who were married were allowed to live in town.

By the late 1940s, life at VMI had begun to “settle down” to its regular academic schedule. The Classes of 1950-A and 1950-B attended the Institute when it was operating under wartime conditions and finished just as life at the Institute was returning to normal. The Class of 1950-A was the last class to attend under the accelerated wartime program, matriculating 43 cadets on 4 March 1946, and by January 1950, the time you graduated, there were only 23 of you remaining in the Corps because of wartime demands. Your class was the last to enter under General Charles E. Kilbourne who, as superintendent emeritus, gave your graduation address.

The Class of 1950-B matriculated 354 cadets in September 1946, the largest entering class in VMI history up to that time. Although your class included Brother Rats of a number of earlier classes, it was the first post-war class to attend under the normal four-year schedule. During your time, horses were eliminated from the military instruction program at the Institute. The horses remained at VMI for a couple of years, but units of mounted cadets participated in ceremonies only on a volunteer basis. In 1950, the old Riding Hall was converted into an indoor basketball court (later known as “The Pit”) with an indoor track.

One hundred and seventy-six of you graduated in June of 1950. The superintendent at the time was General Richard J. Marshall, VMI’s seventh superintendent, and your graduation speaker was General George C. Marshall (VMI ’01). With overlapping classes, VMI must have been a complicated place for the administration and the Corps of Cadets, but no more baffling than for the Rats who entered at the time and faced two Third Classes.

Before the war, plans had been made to expand the VMI Barracks, but wartime conditions caused a delay in those plans. In 1948, the plans were revived and, in preparation for construction, the old Library Building was torn down and a portion of the parade ground was lowered. Construction on New Barracks began immediately, and the facility opened one year later, when VMI opened its 111<sup>th</sup> session with 800 cadets in the Corps. The New Barracks were designed to accommodate an eventual corps of 1050, and it included administrative offices, and the Office of the Superintendent. Major change were also made to the Rat Line. Pressure had been mounting among the faculty, staff, alumni, and in the Virginia General Assembly to eliminate or significantly change the VMI Rat Line. Your class tackled the problem and, after much effort, the major defects were corrected and the entire class system was revamped.

A year later, 418 young men of the Class of 1955 signed the VMI Matriculation Book, making your class then the largest class in VMI history.

About three months before you entered the Institute, Marshall Arch was dedicated in honor of General George C. Marshall '01, who was serving as Secretary of Defense at the time. General Marshall often visited VMI during your cadetship as he was elected President of the VMI Board of Visitors and Chairman of the Board of the VMI Foundation. Four years later, in 1955, 232 of you graduated with VMI diplomas and, for many, commissions in the Armed Forces.

During your cadetship, the Corps marched in the Presidential Inaugural Parade of General Eisenhower on 20 January 1953 (700 cadets in two battalions), and in the rain in January 1954 for the Inaugural Parade of Governor Thomas B. Stanley. In your First Class year, the VMI Glee Club, under the direction of COL Herbert Nash "Dodo" Dillard, sang for President Eisenhower in Washington, and then formed an honor guard for the President as he was introduced to each cadet. On "Turkey Day," 1953, VMI beat VPI by the score of 28-13 in Roanoke's Victory Stadium and won the Virginia Big-6 Football Championship; VMI had been picked to finish last by the sports writers!

During your Rat year, there was the last major "Step-Off" in recent history. Revisions to the Blue Book, made under COL Pancake's administration, led to an early Sunday morning protest in December 1951. The official history of VMI says that "Property was destroyed, windows, furniture, and lights were broken, and rooms flooded." When it was over, COL Pancake ordered the Corps to hike under full field equipment from 1 A.M. to 4 A.M. in what the newspapers referred to as "The Rebellion of Virginia Cadets" and what you called "the Midnight March."

In addition to the full occupation of New Barracks, there were several other important physical changes to VMI during your cadetship. Mallory Hall was completed in 1952 and the renovation and extension of Scott Shipp Hall was begun. On the Parade ground, an old landmark that had been around since the very first days of the Institute finally disappeared in 1954: the VMI Guard Tree, an old hickory that was then just a stump, was cut down and replaced with a permanent monument.

In September 1956, 337 of you signed the VMI Matriculation Book as the Class of 1960, marking the beginning of VMI's 117<sup>th</sup> year. You may recall the uneasy freedom your class experienced during two weeks under no class system. In the Spring of your Rat Year, according to the *Alumni Review*, [I quote], "taking issue with an Institute order issued by MG William H. Milton, Jr., VMI Superintendent, which banned resurrections in the Corps and was designed to curb other abuses in barracks discipline, the upper three classes voted to drop the Rat Line. The result: for two weeks Rats strolled the stoops free of the Rat Line and all cadets exercised mutual class privileges." The Rat Line was restored on 9 April.

May of 1957 saw a change in the "Spring Hike" as directed by COL Glover Johns, who became Commandant of Cades in the summer of 1957. The

“hike” became a four-day field training exercise considerably more strenuous than Spring hikes of prior years.

In the fall of 1957, during your Third Class Year, the Big Red Team went undefeated with 9 victories and one tie. The record represented the first undefeated season for VMI in 37 years. In compiling this record, the Keydets captured the Big Six Championship of Virginia and their first undisputed Southern Conference Championship, and at one point in the season were ranked 13<sup>th</sup> nationally by the Associated Press.

At the start of your Second Class year, 1958-1959 – the barracks population rose to 1030, near to its capacity of 1038. This marked the largest Cadet Corps in VMI history and the first time enrollment exceeded 1000. As you entered your First Class year, 1959-1960, General Milton and Colonel Johns announced that they would retire at Finals. A new Superintendent was selected, Marine General George R. E. Shell, VMI’s ninth superintendent in its 120 year history. And a new Commandant was selected; LTC Jeffrey G. Smith. At graduation, 177 members of your class received diplomas. The future looked bright. A new, young president was about to be elected. A new decade was about to begin. But hidden from most was the rising specter of war in Southeast Asia and the beginning of a transformative and at time violent decade that would change the nation.

As I prepared my remarks this evening, I had initially intended to mention several of your classmates and their significant contributions to VMI and to the nation. Frankly, the numbers are far too many. Your classes include former Board of Visitors members, a Superintendent, trustees of alumni agencies, staff and instructors here, highly decorated war veterans – many honored in this Hall of Valor – academic and corporate leaders, and significant donors to the Institute. Your record of service to the nation has been 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 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.

*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 has been a solid home for VMI athletics for the past ten years. VMI won the Big South sportsmanship award eight of the past nine 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 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 a truly outstanding job over many years for the Institute. 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 and individually ranked in lacrosse, rugby and power-lifting...and our boxing team upset Michigan to win the national boxing collegiate 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.” 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 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, 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 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) 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 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 this past November. At the end of February, we had received more than \$205 million in gifts and commitments from 12,496 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.

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.

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