

GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III
SUPERINTENDENT

Superintendent's Remarks at Commencement
16 May 2016

Senator Kaine, Mr. Ramsey, Members of the VMI Board of Visitors, Members of the Academic Board, Faculty and Staff, families and friends of today's graduating cadets, and member 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 2016.

I have the great pleasure as we begin this morning's ceremony to welcome back to VMI Senator Tim Kaine. He will be "formally" introduced in a few moments by the First Class President; however, I want to take this opportunity to extend my personal welcome to him and express, on the part of the entire VMI community, our sincere appreciation for being with us today. This is, in fact, Senator Kaine's seventh visit to the Institute, which began in 2006 shortly after he was elected Governor of the Commonwealth. Senator Kaine, you are always welcome here, and we look forward to your remarks this morning.

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 the parents to please stand and receive our thanks...., and now grandparents would you please stand. This is certainly a proud day for you.

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 and physical aspects make for a "full and complete" education. Please join me in expressing thanks to the Institute's faculty.

The Class of 2016 matriculated in August 2012 with a strength of 508 ... and today will graduate 302 cadets. Adding graduates from other classes, today's ceremony will see 330 cross the stage and receive a VMI diploma.

By the end of this summer, a total of 163 members of the Class of 2016, 54% are projected to be commissioned in the Armed Forces. Some took their commissioning oath yesterday and received the rank of second lieutenant or ensign; others will soon be commissioned upon completion of summer training or the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. Those numbers are especially

commendable and reinforce VMI's historic mission of producing Citizen-Soldiers. Many VMI cadets, staff, and faculty have been called to active duty in support of this long current war on terror, thus placing their lives and cadetships temporarily on hold. In fact, last week I met with and fare-welled eight cadets called to active duty in the Virginia National Guard for duty in the Gulf-Middle East. In addition, there are parents and family members – and others in the audience this morning – who have served. Would all of you – “patriots” – veterans and those currently serving please stand and receive our appreciation for your service.

I want to thank the Class of 2016 for your leadership over the four years of your cadetship. That work began almost from the start of your cadetship by unifying for a noble cause. As Rats, you raised greater than \$25,000.00 for wounded veterans.

You were especially successful in organizing and conducting this year's Rat Line which challenged the New Cadets to reach the high standards you set for them. Had it not been for the excellent example and professionalism you set and your support as provided by the Dyke system, no doubt many more Rats might have succumbed to the challenges of VMI. Instead, attrition of this Rat Class was historically at one of our lowest levels. The Rat Mass Breakout in bitter single digit, dangerous weather conditions in February demonstrated the very best of your planning, maturity, and leadership. You organized and carried out a Ring Figure that brought credit and admiration to your Class.

As a Class, you were present during the years that saw significant anniversaries and celebrations 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, and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, in which 1,800 VMI alumni served. You marched in the second Inaugural of President Obama and in the Inaugural Parade for Governor McAuliffe.

And, what a contemporary list of activities you performed: community service; active in all of the local schools with our “Character Counts” program; hosting of Special Olympics; succeeding and winning nationally and internationally in club sports --- rugby, lacrosse, boxing, wrestling, and power lifting among others, and wonderful participation in a broad set of academic and other activities. And clearly with this 1st Class leadership, and good coaching, our NCAA teams are moving in a most positive direction and a one Corps - one Team approach. In sum, you advanced professionalism, civility, and spirit.

According to your Secretary to the General Committee, Cadet Zachary Hale Turek, “None of [the accomplishment of the Class of 2016] would have been possible without the support from parents and other family members who have been backing 2016 all the way....” “We started as kids,” he has written, “but with their encouragement we have stood the test of VMI and will make the Institute proud after moving into the next phase of life.”

It's been said many times, but it deserves repeating: today represents a passage from **preparation** to **fulfillment**. Such turning points come rarely in one's life ... so grasp its potential and hold yourself ever-open to its many possibilities.

Just by selecting VMI as your pathway to the future reveals your determination... your resolve. All higher education is demanding and challenging, but a VMI education tests you on all levels. You have met the test... your individual resolve has paid off. And we congratulate you. As you now move forward with your lives, build on your individuality and what makes you distinctive, but also remember the importance of community and your role within it. Community provides the environment, structure, and systems in which it is possible to be "what you resolve to be."

Hold onto the concept of honor that is the foundation stone – the very bedrock – of VMI. Be "on parade" 24/7; care "bone deep" about people; and lead from the front. Your role insuring strong families is terribly important. Use your talents to their utmost... and strive to develop new talents, new knowledge, and new directions. 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 the diploma. Embrace it as the heritage that has now been passed on to you by former graduating classes, and strive always to preserve and enhance it.

Press on ... the open road awaits you. And Godspeed!

It is now my pleasure to introduce the Valedictorian for the Class of 2016... Cadet Zachary McKee Heard, from Boca Raton, Florida. The Valedictorian at VMI is "peer elected" by classmates...and is truly a high honor. Mr. Heard majored in Mechanical Engineering. He will be commissioned in the U.S. Army at the end of ROTC Camp this summer. Ladies and Gentlemen...the Valedictorian for the Class of 2016.