

FINAL

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

**Remarks at Commencement
16 May 2017**

Good morning!

General Jumper, members of the VMI Board of Visitors, members of the Academic Board, faculty and staff, families and friends of today's graduating cadets, and members 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 2017.

I have the great pleasure as we begin this morning's ceremony to welcome General John Jumper, not only as President of the VMI Board of Visitors, but as our Commencement speaker this morning. General Jumper, a 1966 graduate of the Institute, is completing eight years of service on the Board. He will be "formally" introduced in a few moments by the First Class President, but I take this opportunity to extend to him and his family my high regard for his years of service to the nation and the Institute..., as well as the appreciation of his colleagues on the Board of Visitors and of the entire VMI community. General Jumper..., our admiration...and sincerest thanks.

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

parents & grandparents to please stand and receive our thanks.... This is certainly a proud day for you. ***[Lead Applause]***

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, disciplined military structure, and physical aspects make for a “full and complete” education. Please join me in expressing thanks to the Institute’s faculty. ***[Lead Applause]***

The Class of 2017 matriculated in August 2013 with a strength of 503 ... and today will graduate 302 cadets. Adding graduates from other classes, today’s ceremony will see 319 cross the stage and receive a VMI diploma.

By the end of this summer, a total of 172 members of the Class of 2017, 54%... are projected to be commissioned in the Armed Forces. Many 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 through the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. These numbers are especially commendable and reinforce VMI’s historic mission of producing Citizen-Soldiers. A number of VMI cadets, staff, and faculty have been called to active duty in support of the current and long war on terror, thus placing their lives and cadetships temporarily on hold. In addition, there are parents and family members – and others in the audience this morning – who are serving or have served. Would all of you – “patriots” --- you “Veterans” -- please rise and receive our appreciation for your service. ***[Lead Applause]***

As a class, you were present during years that saw significant anniversaries 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 and America’s entry into the First World War. As First Classmen,

you led the Corps through months of diversified and intense activities, executed the Corps impressive participation in the 2017 Presidential Inaugural Parade, and you superbly transitioned a Rat Mass into a 4th Class, fostering Brother Rat Spirit, standards, honor, and civility. A particular “well done” to Mr. Beddoes; Mr. Davison; and Mr. Inman. They served VMI and your class superbly in their important duties as Class President; Regimental Commander and Honor Court President.

VMI is a forward-looking institution, dedicated to producing intelligent and useful citizens, but it is also steeped in history and tradition. We march into the future, but we are ever mindful of the rich legacy of our past. This class...your class...understood that...and did “just that”...and with great style.

All across this nation at this time of the year, college students are preparing to receive their diplomas and launch themselves into satisfying and productive careers. For many – and I am sure for you -- it will be a time of nostalgia for the life-changing experience of four – or in some cases five – years of academic work, athletics, social life, and establishing life-long friends and mentors. At the same time, it is an exciting new beginning, filled with determination, hope, and -- yes -- a measure of uncertainty. 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.

As you depart the Institute and begin your new careers, no matter your major or specialty, stay informed; stay clear-headed, and be inquisitive. Stay informed about the challenges facing whatever community you live in. Stay informed about the challenges to all the “systems” in which we live. Analyze the information you encounter day by day and test it for accuracy, reliability, and importance. Nourish the ability to think logically and to organize, weigh, and prioritize the blizzard of information that comes at you from all directions. Where possible, do science -- not traditional laboratory science, but the science of everyday life. Work with others to solve problems, be they technical or

human. Dream, create, innovate...be civil and appreciate all sides of life. There is a wonderful descriptor of people I like (leaders like you) and respect...and it is named "Quiet Excellence". I think these approaches will insure "wisdom"...so important to your families, leadership in our communities, and to our nation.

The Corps of Cadets (and you) have heard me say this at every graduation --- "hold onto the concept of honor that is the foundation stone -- the very bedrock -- of VMI." 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, and strive always to preserve and enhance it. **The open road now awaits you....Godspeed! Warmest congratulations from all of the Institute family!**

It is now my pleasure to introduce the Valedictorian for the Class of 2017... Cadet Charles Drew Borinstein, from Shelbyville, Indiana. Drew earned a major in Applied Mathematics, with a minor in Business. He served as E (Echo) Company Commander, as a prosecutor on the Honor Court, and participated in the Cadet Analytics Consulting Group. He commissioned in the United States Marine Corps yesterday. Drew.....congratulations on a splendid cadetship and for the respect your Class has for you representative by their choice of you as their Valedictorian on this special graduation day....quite an honor. Mr. Borinstein.....