

**INSTITUTE SOCIETY DINNER
10 NOVEMBER 2017
MARSHALL HALL
VMI**

**Remarks by General J.H. Binford Peay III '62
Superintendent
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Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. It is hard to believe that it has been a little more than seven years since we were contemplating this major fundraising effort. Truth be told, I probably was not the most enthusiastic member at those early meetings. Thinking about such an investment in time and effort for a campaign to truly succeed, along with keeping the Institute thriving, was frankly daunting and really not at the top of my priorities at the turn of the last decade.

I have learned a lot since that time:

First: Excellence costs;

Second: Campaigns are hard work;

Third: As state support for all public higher education continues to decline, VMI will always need private support to sustain its excellence; and,

Fourth: VMI alumni and friends of the Institute are caring..., remarkably generous people.

Let me reflect on the hard work of this campaign. Campaigns require a well-conceived plan and discipline. However, they also require you to be nimble...and to listen. I believe a large part of our...and thus your...success was truly paying attention to you, our donors, and offering opportunities that matched your philanthropic desires, and especially your passionate desires for VMI. Sometimes I did not always hear what I wanted to hear in the process, but I always respected and now, in retrospect, I “treasure” the passion you expressed.

Campaigns also require leadership and the level and value of dedicated and collaborative leadership of this campaign cannot be overstated. I am absolutely certain a large part of our success was due to: (1) the extraordinary Campaign Cabinet we assembled superbly led by Don Wilkinson; (2) the critical support in resources and encouragement of our Honorary Cabinet, many here this evening; and (3) the enthusiastic and strategic thinking and incredible hard work of Brian Crockett, and the thoughtful VMI Foundation Board’s engagement led by Hugh Fain. In the midst of these leaders, and always available on a moment’s notice, was Dr. Pat House, Senior Vice President of Graham Pelton, who so professionally and competently guided the

effort and “forever” became a steadfast, respected member of the VMI family. And, of course, the day-in, day-out, “get-it-done” mentality that so many Foundation, Keydet Club, and Alumni Association staff and administrators exhibited was vital.

The next reflection is the important role private support plays in the long-term outlook for VMI. My many trips to Richmond...and in particular, to the State Legislature..., confirmed that view, and now I certainly have a greater respect for what campaigns do in building a culture of philanthropy that ensures the future in the face of so many unknowns and unplanned circumstances. While the Legislature has been most generous in supporting the “capital and bricks and mortar” requirements of our Vision 2039 Strategic Master Plan, we simply cannot rely on the Commonwealth to fund VMI’s advancement and operational needs. More than ever, I am convinced of the need to grow our endowment to levels that will provide consistent, substantial budgetary support that “ensures excellence” resulting in the best of graduates and a national reputation. I know that you, our closest advocates, realize that major funding needs will exist, even with this enormous \$344 million boost.

VMI, in 2039 and at its 200th Birthday, and with its very unique form of education, will continue to have a high price tag, and this campaign is a certain step in that direction. It also will require a much “broader” fundraising reach, and the Alumni Agencies and their new leadership will be called upon to collaborate and build engagement with parents, corporations, younger classes, and friends of VMI more than ever before.

BUT, I want us to focus tonight on what this campaign has accomplished -- what YOU have done – for VMI!

- Your expanded support of our faculty will mean that our academic program will remain strong and our cadets will continue to receive a first-class education.
- Gifts to our athletic program will benefit our cadet-athletes who give so much to represent VMI in intercollegiate sports and the men and women who coach, support, and mentor them.
- Our Cadet Life programs -- centered on our military system, which provides a matchless school of leadership -- will be strengthened.
- Support also will improve our museum system through which VMI tells the remarkable and colorful story of its more than 175 years of dedicated service to the Commonwealth and the United States.

- The unrestricted support given during the campaign will give VMI's leadership the flexibility to address the Institute's most critical needs as well as seize every opportunity to improve all aspects of the VMI education.
- Finally, the gifts and commitments made to establish new scholarships and expand the endowments of existing ones will help perpetuate one of our noblest traditions: ensuring that financial considerations never come between a deserving young person and VMI's remarkable education.

Specific examples are:

- More than \$221 million dollars raised is in cash and cash pledges, with the balance to be realized through estate gifts;
- 187 new academic and athletic scholarships will be funded;
- \$58 million has been committed to funding academic operations and innovation;
- More than \$73 million is now committed to support NCAA athletics;
- Seven new Chairs and/or professorships will be endowed;
- Increased support to the Jackson-Hope Fund..., a critical source of "innovation", faculty development, recruiting, and undergraduate research;
- Capital improvements and legacy priorities such as: Saunders Fields and Leadership Valley on North Post; football, lacrosse, and drill fields; and the Stonewall Jackson House and endowment for the Museum Operations, will be funded with \$15 million;
- An endowment to "fully" support our Chaplain's Office and its operation is now in place to include administrative support and a new associate chaplain position that interfaces daily with members of the Corps;
- Funding for our nationally recognized Center for Leadership and Ethics...and much more.

Perhaps the most compelling testimony that a donor can offer to his or her deep belief in VMI's mission..., is to make an unrestricted gift. *The Uncommon Purpose* campaign has raised \$57 million in unrestricted dollars, a "transformative" amount that ensures all cadets will benefit from this uncommon education.

Finally... This campaign has given me the opportunity to get to know VMI alumni and friends that I had not met before..., and to learn even more about those I knew well. While I have always felt that the passion of the VMI Family for its Institute is “unmatched” by other colleges and universities..., I have witnessed in this campaign a level of commitment that has inspired and humbled me.

I have had occasions in the past to express my gratitude to many of you here this evening..., for your support of the Institute and love of VMI...and, frankly, for your support of me. However, as I look at those who are here – and am cognizant of those who were invited and could not join us this evening – I find myself feeling as if my thanks will never be enough for all you have done for the Institute.

For all the VMI families whose support has never wavered..., for all the individuals who “stretched” unselfishly to give their largest gifts to this campaign..., for all those over these many years who asked again and again..., “What else can I do for VMI?” – for all of you, the thanks can never be enough for how you have advanced the Institute and its Corps of Cadets.

You have sacrificed time with family, sacrificed resources, and even sacrificed health – all in service to this special place. My sincere hope is that while the gratitude may pale in the face of your incredible generosity, that your sense of fulfillment will be great in knowing and witnessing that your support of this campaign, with its theme: *“An Uncommon Purpose...a Glorious Past. A Brilliant Future. The Campaign for VMI”*... has advanced the Institute, and changed countless lives in the process. I know you have changed mine. For that, I am deeply indebted to you.

Stonewall Jackson proclaimed, “You may be whatever you resolve to be.” Thanks to the collective resolve of so many in the VMI Family – and especially those of you here tonight – VMI’s “brilliant future” is in front of us. I look forward to seeing it unfold with all of you in the days and months ahead. Thank you so very much! God bless the Virginia Military Institute...and the very best wishes and thanks to all of you here this evening.