



INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 51, Number 8, June 2023

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G. Gilmer Minor III

G. Gilmer “Gil” Minor III ’63 passed away May 4 at the age of 82, at home surrounded by family. He was described by Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins ’85 as a “titan of a VMI man.”

Minor graduated from VMI with a degree in history and went on to receive a master’s in business administration from the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business. His service to VMI was wide-ranging. Besides a term on the Keydet Club’s Board of Governors, he was a member of the VMI Foundation’s Board of Trustees from 1993 to 2000 and served as its president from 1997 to 2000. In 2000, he became a member of the Board of Visitors and, from 2005 through 2008, served as president.

He was a recipient of the VMI Distinguished Service Award on Founders Day 2008. He also received the Spirit of VMI Award, the Keydet Club’s highest honor recognizing outstanding support of VMI’s intercollegiate athletic programs. He was inducted as a member of the VMI Sports Hall of Fame in 2011. While a cadet, he was co-captain of the football team that won the 1962 Southern Conference Championship.

He was also co-captain of the baseball team and named All-Southern Conference as a catcher.

Wins went on to say, “By all accounts, Mr. Minor never let VMI stray from his thoughts after he graduated. He was a tireless advocate for VMI who never missed an opportunity to promote or support his alma mater. His generosity and encouragement toward cadets for generations show how much the Institute meant to him and how proud he was to be a VMI alumnus. We remain grateful for his very significant contributions.”

Gray-Minor Baseball Stadium was dedicated in the spring of 2007 at the first night home game in VMI history. The facility’s extensive renovations, including lights, better seating, press box, and new sound system, were made possible by the generosity of Minor, along with Sen. Elmon T. Gray ’46 and Bill Paulette ’69.

“Mr. Minor was a grand statesman—a giant in the Commonwealth of Virginia and valiant son to the Institute,” said Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark ’99, deputy superintendent for

finance, administration, and support. “He will be remembered fondly for the personal investment in all those he came to know. He was generous with friendship and with his time serving on many boards and commissions and retained a lifelong commitment to philanthropy. His passion for all aspects of VMI baseball was renowned.”

Minor was a leader in Virginia business. He joined the family business, Owens & Minor, a health care distribution and logistics company, in 1963 and served in numerous sales, management, and operations roles before becoming its president in 1981, its chief executive officer in 1984, and in May 1994, chairman.

Minor was active in many civic, charitable, and industry organizations including the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, Virginia Health Care Foundation, the University of Virginia’s School of Nursing, Virginia Commonwealth University’s Massey Cancer Center, VCU’s School of Business Foundation, Virginia Business Higher Education Council, and Virginia Business Council. ✪

Record Run Raises Funds for Operation Enduring Warrior

Starting at 9 a.m. May 11, Ethan Carpenter ’23 set out to do what only a few had done before him: run around the Parade Ground for 24 hours straight as a fundraiser in support of Operation Enduring Warrior, a nonprofit dedicated to helping wounded military and law enforcement veterans. The next morning, he completed that goal, logging 125 laps and more than 70 miles, while raising more than \$3,300 in the process. With that last lap, Carpenter, from Chesterfield County, Virginia, did more laps than any cadet who had done this 24-hour endeavor before him. Fellow cadets, his mom, and other dedicated supporters joined him on numerous laps. As he wrapped up, he thanked all those who supported him through running alongside him, social media comments, and donations. “It’s been amazing. I’ve learned a lot about myself and a lot about some amazing people,” he said. After a well-deserved nap, he prepared for his upcoming graduation with a degree in psychology and his commission as a second lieutenant into the U.S. Army.—VMI Photos by Lexie West.



INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 51, Number 8, June 2023

The Institute Report, VMI's news magazine, publishes eight issues during each academic year. Inquiries, suggestions, news items, and address changes should be directed to Editor, Institute Report, VMI Communications and Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450 0304; 540 464 7207; or VMIReport@vmi.edu.
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On the cover: James Masini '23 and Jakob Wabrek '23, along with other members of the Class of 2023 cheerfully walk across the Parade Ground after the change of command parade May 14.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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Phillips, a 'Beacon of Inspiration,' Retires

By Marianne Hause

Col. Robert "Bob" Phillips '87, chaplain, is retiring after seven years of encouraging the development of interpersonal faith, and providing spiritual and emotional guidance to the Corps of Cadets.

Phillips' journey with VMI began in 1983 as an incoming rat, a young man from Long Island, New York, without direction. He came to VMI because he wanted to be a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. He majored in economics and remembers his cadetship fondly. He credits VMI for changing his life, boosting his confidence, and giving him a sense of purpose and identity. "I was a good cadet, I held rank, and played on the lacrosse team, but I was a horrible student," he confessed.

He met and dated his wife, the former Tracy Barricks, during his cadetship, while she was attending Roanoke College. The two met at a statewide Baptist campus ministry retreat in Lynchburg. "My buddy invited me to the retreat, and I initially declined the offer. In those days, though, VMI had Saturday classes, and cadets who went on the retreat were excused from classes. So I went to the retreat, just to get out of class, and I sure am glad I went, because that's where I met Tracy," he mused.

The day after Phillips graduated in 1987, the two were married at Manly Memorial Baptist Church in Lexington and the reception was held in Moody Hall on post. He commissioned into the Army as a field artillery officer.

It wasn't until he was a lieutenant serving as platoon leader to 51 men that he felt the calling to go into ministry. "I had the platoon from hell," he lamented. "There were soldiers attempting suicide, domestic abusers, one guy sexually molested his daughter and is still serving time in Leavenworth, there were guys going AWOL, guys committing adultery, and I had no idea how to help them. But I had a great battalion chaplain, whom I was able to call and request that he visit and talk with these guys, and he would go and help them. I watched him make an impact on the lives of these men and their families, and for the first time in my life I was taking ownership of my own faith. One morning I was praying, and I got the sense of God telling me, 'I want you to become the chaplain who other lieutenants can call for help.'"

Phillips fought the calling for a long time, but finally surrendered to it as he prayed, "Lord if this is what you want, if you open the door, I will step through it." That was the most powerful prayer I ever prayed in my life, because after that, all kinds of crazy stuff started to happen," he shared. That crazy stuff included the Army discharging personnel early, allowing Phillips to leave without having to fulfill his obligation. He didn't have enough money to enroll in seminary school, but the same buddy who invited him to

the Baptist retreat years earlier, informed him of a scholarship VMI offered to alumni who wanted to go to seminary. "So VMI paid for my seminary education. Then, three families approached us separately and offered to sponsor us. Those three families faithfully sent us monthly checks for three years that paid for our rent while I was in seminary. But the real kicker is that one day before starting my first semester, there was a knock on the door. I opened it and there is a guy who said, 'Hi Bob, my name is Alan, I was just talking to your neighbor, and he told me you just got out of the Army and you're starting seminary, and you're interested in the chaplaincy program. I'm in the chaplaincy program too. Do you need a job?' So, Alan got me a job as an armed security guard, with full benefits and time off

for Reserve training. During an eight-hour shift, I could get in seven hours of studying. To this day, I'm the only person I've ever heard of who has had a complete stranger knock on his door and offer him a job. It was an incredibly affirming time for us and our faith," Phillips recollected.

In 1990, Phillips left active duty and successfully pursued a Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He returned to active duty as a chaplain in 1994. His military assignments include the 82nd Airborne Division; 1st Armored Division; 4th Psychological Operations Group; 1st Special Warfare Training Group; XVIII Airborne Corps; The Joint Readiness Training Center; and Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces Command. He was deployed with the 160th Signal Brigade in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. His awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service

Medal (four oak leaf clusters), the Army Commendation Medal (two oak leaf clusters), the Army Achievement Medal, and the Senior Parachutist Badge. He holds a master's degree in counseling from Columbus State University, and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

Phillips and Col. James Park, VMI chaplain for 22 years, established and maintained a relationship. Park had invited Phillips to return to post to speak on various occasions, including the Baccalaureate service one year, so he was aware of Park's plans to retire in 2016, and applied for the job.

Both Phillips and his wife were happy to get back to VMI. "I believe it is a calling from God to be with the cadets. I have always wanted to return and help in the shaping of young people. I love to watch the maturity process in cadets. Several during their rat year would come into my office regularly filled with self-doubts,



Col. Robert "Bob" Phillips '87 speaks at the Baccalaureate service May 14. —VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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VMI Institute Report

questioning themselves, not sure they had what it takes, and you watch them grow through the four years and they come back as 1st Class captains with significant leadership roles and responsibilities. It is such an encouragement to see how VMI can transform these young men and women into leaders who will commission and lead service men and women. One of the greatest rewards of this job is to watch that transformation from child to independent adults,” he shared.

Each spring furlough, Phillips and Lt. Col. John Casper '04, associate chaplain, took a group of cadets on a mission trip. In recent years, they have worked alongside Samaritan's Purse and their U.S. disaster relief ministry. In the spring of 2022, the group traveled to Mayfield, Kentucky, and assisted with clean up after the devastating tornado destroyed the town in December 2021. The group returned to Mayfield this past March to assist in the construction of 70 homes built by Samaritan's Purse. “We installed floors, put up siding and roofs, installed insulation, and painted,” he said.

The highlight of Phillips' tenure as VMI chaplain was hosting weekly “dine by invite” dinners and Bible studies each Thursday for the 1st Class cadets. “Anyone was welcome to come. We usually averaged 15 cadets, and we had such a wonderful time getting to know them. My wife worked so hard on Thursdays preparing the meal. She was on her feet all day,” he said.

Tracy also led a Bible study for the female cadets helping them find their faith and identity. She called it “G3: Girls with Grit and Grace.” During the coronavirus pandemic, Tracy prepared goodie bags for cadets quarantined off post. “I calculate that throughout the seven years here, Tracy has baked 20,000 chocolate chip cookies,” quipped Phillips.

Phillips' last sermon in Memorial Hall was April 23. He spoke before a full sanctuary including cadets, alumni, faculty and staff, friends, and family. He was presented with several gifts at the service. The 1st Class president, Cameron Cavanaugh '23, and regimental commander, Blake Smith '23, presented him with a VMI flag signed by the entire Corps of Cadets. Alexander Alvarado '17, who served as a cadet chaplain during his time at VMI, presented him with a memory book filled with cards and notes from all the cadet chaplains who served under Phillips. Casper and Mary Cannon, chaplain's office administrator, gave him a framed photograph of House Mountain. In addition, Tracy was presented with the Inaugural Volunteer Service Award for her selfless work. During his sermon, Phillips referenced the Bible verse which he has adopted as his life verse, II Timothy 4:7-8: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Phillips doesn't consider this season in his life a retirement, but more of a sabbatical. He and Tracy purchased an RV and will spend the next year to 18 months on the road visiting their five adult children, Robert, Timothy, Kathryn, Carolina, and Carly, and their seven grandchildren, who are spread out from Virginia to Kansas. “We are going to see things we haven't seen before: Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Tetons, the Badlands, the Great Salt Lake, the Grand Canyon. We are looking forward to it,” he stated.

Phillips doesn't know where they will finally settle, but believes they will plug into a ministry somewhere. He is on the governing

board of Officers' Christian Fellowship (OCF), a nonprofit headquartered in Englewood, Colorado, whose mission is to engage military leaders in Biblical fellowship and to equip them for Christ-like service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession. He hopes to further work within that organization.

Major Fick '23, a cadet chaplain who graduated in May said, “Chaplain Phillips has been a beacon of inspiration and guidance all four years of my cadetship. He has been a man of honor, truth, and character no matter the circumstances or conditions. I have personally been able to come to him with anything, and he has helped guide me. I count it as one of my highest honors to have served under his leadership.”

Another cadet chaplain and recent graduate, Cassidy Dufour '23 said, “The VMI experience is not easy, but Chaplain Phillips always makes sure every cadet knows they are not alone. He takes time to walk around barracks at night, popping into rooms, and just chatting with cadets. His faith is strong and through his example, cadets are able to deepen their own faith. Even for cadets who are not religious, his experience from the military provides valuable insight for all of us. His commitment to cadets and their future is unmatched and he will be missed at the Institute.”

Phillips' official retirement date is June 30. ❀

Cadets Win Multiple Awards at ASCE

Cadets in the VMI student chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) recently attended the regional student symposium hosted by Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. There they were recognized for many accomplishments and placed in numerous competitions including first place in the surveying competition, first place in a Jeopardy competition, first place in the innovation competition, first place in the construction competition, second place for in the Robert A. Marr Jr. Technical Paper competition, third place finish for the Hardy Cross technical presentation, and third place in the concrete canoe competition. In addition, the chapter earned a national student chapter award, and a member of the chapter was awarded one of only three Virginia Section ASCE scholarships.

According to Col. Matthew Swenty, professor of civil and environmental engineering, every year each of the approximately 400 national and international chapters must submit a report detailing their activities over the previous year, including outreach, community service, professional activities, networking, leadership training, student competitions, and ethics papers. “Our chapter scored in the top 5% of all chapters, which includes programs at large engineering schools in our region like Virginia Tech and Clemson, as well as small but highly ranked programs like Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute, Indiana, and California Polytechnic State University. Additional information may be found on the ASCE website at www.asce.org.—Photo Courtesy of Col. Matthew Swenty.



Faculty and Staff Enjoy Diversions Off Post

By Marianne Hause

VMI is indeed a military college that produces citizen-soldiers and leaders of character through a rigorous environment, and though most things on post are strictly regulated, it may come as a surprise to cadets that their instructors and commanding officers enjoy a wide variety of interests outside the Institute.

Col. John Brodie, a highly recognizable figure on post as the director of music, can also be spotted nearly every afternoon after work participating in his favorite sport—disc golf.

Brodie has been playing disc golf for five years, ever since his brother Chris introduced it to him.

“I am attracted to it because I can be outdoors and spend quality time with friends and family. It’s great exercise. I usually walk two miles in the hour it takes to play 18 holes. It is relaxing and engaging at the same time,” explained Brodie.

Disc golf, or frisbee golf, is a flying disc sport in which players throw a disc at a basket target. It is played using rules similar to golf. One throw (stroke) is counted each time the disc is thrown. The goal is to play each hole in the fewest strokes possible. The player with the lowest total strokes for the entire course wins. Most holes are par three, at a distance from the tee box of 350 feet, some are par four, a distance of 400 feet. The discs used are not ordinary frisbees, but are specially designed for the game.

Brodie plays wherever and whenever he can. “There are courses all over the place. I often play the course at Washington & Lee University in Lexington, there is a course at Montgomery Hall Park in Staunton, two in Harrisonburg, and many in the Charlottesville area. It’s an inexpensive recreation, and so much fun. It is a thrill when I or my companion ace a basket (hole in one). We always record the moment with a photograph,” he said.

He often takes the many music groups under his direction on the road for performances. Whenever he travels, he packs his discs. “Because they aren’t very big and don’t weigh much, they are very portable. I have played in New Zealand, Morocco, Puerto Rico, and Florida,” he said.

Since he often plays with cadets, Brodie has considered starting a disc golf club on post. “I think a great area for a disc golf course is McKethan Park,” he mused referring to the off-post property which is the site of the VMI observatory.

He shared an amusing story about playing on a winter day: “My discs had been in my car overnight when the temperature had dropped quite low. Being made of plastic, they are subject to brittleness when cold. While teeing off at the first hole, I threw a



Col. John Brodie takes a break during one of his many rounds of disc golf. —Photo courtesy of Col. John Brodie.

disc and unintentionally hit a tree three feet in front of me and the disc completely shattered. It was as if I had super strength and threw it with great force. Enjoying that moment was worth the price of replacing the disc,” he laughed.

Like Brodie, Col. M. Houston Johnson V, professor and department head of the Department of History, enjoys physical activity, but his is trekking with his father M. Houston “Mac” Johnson IV, who retired from Roanoke College after 35 years as a college administrator.

Mac has enjoyed hiking all his life, and imparted his fondness for the activity to his son. Since Houston was a child, the two have taken multiple treks all over the U.S. and to many international locations. They make annual trips to Mount Rogers, the highest natural point in Virginia, making this year’s trek their 32nd. “For us, it’s about spending time with family and getting outdoors. Traveling internationally has given us the opportunity to see many amazing places,” said Houston.

The Johnsons have trekked along Hadrian’s Wall, a 73-mile long fortification that stretches from the east coast to the west coast of England. They have hiked in Scotland, Italy, Norway, Iceland, Peru, and Nepal. In the U.S. they have hiked throughout the northeast, as well as areas in Colorado, Montana, and California. Each trip lasts one to two weeks.

Houston’s favorite trip was to Peru. “We went to a place called the Cordillera Huayhuash, which is in the Andes Mountains, at a very high altitude. We trekked for 11 days, and only came below 13,000 feet once. We didn’t pass through any towns, there were no shops to buy a meal, no hotels to sleep, we saw no other people outside of our group. We had a guide and a cook, and donkeys carried our camping gear. It was fun, and a really neat experience,” he exclaimed.

When the Johnsons decide where to travel, they consider places they want to go, and things they want to see. “For many of the trips, we chose places we have both wanted to go to for a long time. Most of my life I wanted to go to Nepal and see Mount Everest. Since the weather in Nepal limits trekking season to spring and fall, we were able to make that trip the semester I was on sabbatical,” explained Houston.

Houston’s usual workout routine involves running 25 to 30 miles each week. His father stays in shape by walking three miles every morning while carrying a 20-pound backpack, and by visiting the gym at least six days a week. Houston’s wife and 8-year-old son also enjoy hikes. On weekends they usually join Mac for a hike along the

Continued on next page

Blue Ridge Parkway or other local trail.

This year, Houston and Mac plan to trek the Azores, a group of islands off the coast of Portugal.

Lt. Col. Michael “Keystone” Rose, director of operations of the Air Force ROTC detachment, and pilot with over 1,200 combat flight hours, has a musical hobby. Growing up in Nashville, Tennessee, Rose was naturally exposed to

music. Being raised in the Music City may not necessarily guarantee proficiency in a musical instrument, but when your mother is also a piano teacher, it is almost assured.

Rose’s mother, an accomplished life-long piano player and instructor, taught all nine of her children, as well as neighborhood children. Rose began his lessons at the tender age of five, but like any typical piano student, as Rose reached his teenage years, sports, scouting, and other community organizations took time away from his piano studies. “From eighth grade through high school, I was really involved in athletics, so I wasn’t as dedicated to piano as I had been. However, I still continued to learn from my mom, memorize pieces, and even perform in public. Unfortunately, there was a period of about eight years after I left for college and through pilot training, that I rarely ever played,” he said.

Rose likes all music, especially if it lends itself to be played aggressively and passionately. “A lot of classical music can be played aggressively, and I enjoy that. I like a lot of rock too, to the extent that I can take a piece of rock music and create an arrangement of it for piano. That’s very satisfying to me. I like and appreciate a lot of different styles of music, as long as it has a thumping bass, a good beat, and movement. I love making my fingers move,” he explained. Rose is currently focusing a lot of study on boogie-woogie and jazz methods.

Rose has performed in bands in the past, and for 10 months, toured with the Air Force’s Las Vegas-style entertainment group called Tops in Blue. The group entertained troops and their families around the world. Now when Rose performs, he does so for community events or church meetings where they need a special musical number. “I often play pieces that I’ve written, or maybe a variation of a hymn. I sometimes accompany other musicians,” he said.

Rose has deployed many times throughout his military career, providing air support during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Operation Freedom Sentinel. “Sometimes I’d deploy and there wouldn’t be any available keyboard or piano, and I’d have to stop practicing for the length of my deployment. Other times I’d deploy and the morale center on base would have keyboards and other instruments on hand to play. I remember one deployment, every night after my work



Col. M. Houston Johnson V and his dad, Mac, pose at the West Highland Way in Scotland.—Photo courtesy of Col. M. Houston Johnson V.

shift, I would go back and play for a couple hours, and there was an entire band PA system set up in the room. Sometimes drummers would come in and play with me, sometimes guitarists would come in, sometimes I jumped on the drums. I would spend hours either practicing or playing with other musicians,” he reminisced fondly.

Rose confesses that he doesn’t

always have the time to practice while at home. With six school-age children, a full-time job, and other community obligations, he finds himself on the piano bench only a couple of times a week. He hopes to pass his passion of music on to his children. “They are into a lot of other things, and right now don’t appreciate music as much as I do. I’ve given them lessons for the past five years, and some of them are pretty good. They could be good musicians, if they kept at it, and if we had regular lessons. Instead, they are content to listen and sing along to their favorite songs on our Alexa,” he quipped.

Rose firmly believes in developing and sharing talents. “I try my best to share my talent with others, because music makes people happy—it speaks to people in ways that words sometimes can’t.”

To hear Rose’s rendition of “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” visit vmi.app.box.com/v/LtColRosePiano.

Faculty and staff members willing to share their outside interests should contact vmireport@vmi.edu. ✪



Lt. Col. Michael “Keystone” Rose plays piano when he was a member of the Air Force’s Las Vegas-style entertainment group, Tops in Blue.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Michael “Keystone” Rose.

History Made as Cadets Enter Six Military Services

By Marianne Hause

Approximately 170 cadets commissioned into the armed services in Cameron Hall May 15 in the annual Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) joint commissioning ceremony. The historic day marked the first time VMI cadets were sworn in to all six branches: the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard. The ceremony was livestreamed for family and friends who could not attend the event in person.

The five commissioning officers who administered the oath of office were Gen. Gary M. Brito, commander, Training and Doctrine Command, U.S. Army; Maj. Gen. William J. Bowers '90, commanding general, recruiting command, U.S. Marine Corps and VMI alumnus; Rear Adm. Brendan R. McLane, Naval Surface Force Atlantic, U.S. Navy; Lt. Gen. Philip A. Garratt, deputy chief of space operations, strategy, plans, programs and requirements, U.S. Space Force; and Adm. Steven D. Poulin, 33rd vice commandant, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, welcomed those in attendance and thanked the ROTC departments, faculty, staff, family members, and guests who supported and encouraged the cadets throughout their time at VMI. He noted that the ceremony was the culmination of four or more years of hard work on the part of each cadet, and a memorable moment in each of their lives, as well as the beginning of a life of service to the nation.

After Wins recognized veterans and current military members in the audience and thanked them for their service, he noted that over



Colin Butler '23 and Alex Feher '23 pose before the joint commissioning ceremony May 15.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

100 years ago, the United States entered World War I, and by the end of the war, 1,800 VMI alumni had served. "At the time, that conflict was referred to as 'the war to end all wars.' Sadly, that has not been the case. Conflicts continue, and since our founding, VMI graduates have stepped up to defend our nation each and every time. We must have a strong military led by highly educated and skilled

officers, men and women of character dedicated to defending the freedoms that we continue to enjoy. The traditional concept of the battlefield is no longer confined to specific geographical areas. The nature of warfare is expanding into cyberspace, professionals from all services now wage combat with drones, robotics, satellites and precision guided missiles from ships, planes, and remote locations. As technology accelerates, these weapons become increasingly sophisticated, which demands adaptability, competence, wisdom, and courage from the very best leaders. You have developed the foundation based on these skills during your years of study here at VMI," he said.

More than 35 years ago, Wins made the decision to commission. "And just like you, I was sworn in as a young officer and became part of a great team of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and service families. You too will come to cherish the same experience," he stated.

Wins congratulated each cadet on attaining their commission and told them the Institute could not be prouder. "The profession you have chosen will be challenging, but don't lose focus. Take heart knowing you are following in the footsteps of many alumni who have gone before you to live a life of service to our nation. Our country is fortunate to have citizen-soldiers and leaders like yourselves. Good luck to each of you in the years ahead and please stay in touch."

He introduced the five officers participating in the commissions by stating, "These five outstanding officers illustrate one of the great strengths of the United States military. Members of our professional offices come from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and universities from all across the country. We are honored by their presence and very grateful to welcome them to deliver the commissioning today.



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 addresses the commissioning cadets in Cameron Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Continued on next page



Janine H. Colantonio '23 marches alongside fellow cadets into Cameron Hall for the joint commissioning ceremony.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Army Gen. Brito Commissions 109

Brito was introduced by Col. Scott Brannon, professor and department head of military science at VMI. Brito opened his address by asking the future Army officers, “Are you ready to lead?” To which he received a loud and enthusiastic affirmative reply.

He started by thanking the cadre of the Army, Navy, and Air Force programs at VMI. “Your professionalism and commitment to deliver world-class training and leader development made today possible for all of our future officers.” He also thanked the families for entrusting their sons and daughters to VMI and to the military.

Brito shared with the cadets that the military exists to fight and win the nation’s wars all around the world. “The Army needs you to be the best you can be. It needs your energy, your passion, and your drive. It needs your commitment, and now more than ever, it needs you to lead, to be innovative and caring for the young men and women under your charge.”

He revealed that he has been in the Army for over 36 years and a lot has changed. “What has not and should never change is that the Army is in the people business. Even though the force has modernized at a rapid pace, people are still our greatest strength, the most important component of what makes the military successful and well respected.”

Brito highlighted that this year marks the 50th anniversary of an all-volunteer U.S. military, which is the envy of the world.

He closed by offering a few basic pieces of advice to the commissioning officers. “Every day, wake up and choose a ‘can-do attitude.’ Control your character, your reputation, and your fitness. Trust your noncommissioned officers and build relationships with them. Take care of your troops and they will take care of you. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Always seek self-improvement and never stop learning. Show respect and promote decency. Have fun and enjoy the journey. Maintain a health work/life balance.”

He then administered the oath of office to 109 cadets, commissioning them as second lieutenants.

According to Capt. Colin J. Reynolds, assistant professor of military science, four commissioning cadets stand out as exceptional leaders: Janine H. Colantonio '23, Austin R. Gonzalez '23, Garrett E. Petruskie '23, Richard “Brad” Wagner '23. “They are each a distinguished military graduate, a distinction reserved for the top 20% of all cadets in the nation, and they each excelled in academic, physical, and military proficiency,” said Reynolds.

Colantonio, from Berryville, Virginia, served as Company D commander, majored in psychology, and graduated with distinction. “I am very thankful for the Army department and the Ranger Challenge team who helped build me into the person I am today,” said Colantonio. She was pinned by her sisters, Kristin Colantonio and Jennifer Ager, and received her first salute from her rat, Susan Hickman '26. Colantonio reports to Fort Moore, Georgia, for Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course.

Gonzalez, who served as Company H commander, majored in international studies with a minor in Spanish, was this year’s recipient of the Colonel Thomas St. John Arnold Award, and was a distinguished graduate. He is from Haymarket, Virginia. “I do not believe there is any place on earth that could have better prepared me to enter the Army as a commissioned officer. I thank the Institute and the Army ROTC Blue Ridge Battalion for being some of the best teachers I have ever known,” said Gonzalez.



Garrett E. Petruskie '23 gets pinned by family members in Marshall Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

He was pinned by his parents, Michelle and retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Robert Gonzalez, and received his first salute from his father. In June he reports to Fort Novosel, formerly known as Fort Rucker in Dale County, Alabama, for Army Aviation Basic Officer Leader Course, followed by Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape school.

Petruskie, a civil engineering major from Colonial Beach, Virginia, served as regimental S7 captain, in charge of morale, welfare, and recreation. “VMI has given me the knowledge and the confidence to lead as a commissioned officer,” he said. His father Dr. Brian Petruskie who was a captain in the Texas National Guard

See Commissioning Ceremony, page 18

Class of 2023 Earns Diplomas

By Marianne Hause

Pride, honor, and dignity filled Cameron Hall as VMI held the commencement ceremony and conferred degrees on the Class of 2023 May 16. Thousands of family members, friends, and others were in attendance to witness the stirring ritual. Among the group of graduates was a chair set aside holding a brick representing the late Jamison Clark '23 who passed away tragically in November of their rat year. Clark's brother rats carried the brick effigy to all the significant ceremonies throughout their cadetship, and invited his family to the graduation.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, noted that the Class of 2023 matriculated on August 17, 2019, with a strength of 515 members. From that original group, 306 graduated, and 53% of them commissioned into the armed services May 15.

Wins used his time at the podium to reflect on the class's unique rat year. He lightheartedly recalled the football game when the Keydets scored 63 points, forcing the rats to do a record number of pushups after each touchdown. He reminded them of their Breakout on a cold, wet day in February, after which they formally became the Class of '23. "Every cadetship is unique and yours was unlike anything in recent memory. During 2019 there was fear



Cameron Cavanaugh '23, 1st Class president, shares memories of their cadetship before he introduces Gov. Glenn Youngkin at commencement in Cameron Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

about an ongoing viral outbreak plaguing college campuses—the measles. However, this became an afterthought after what you experienced shortly after breakout. COVID-19 arrived in the United States and our lives changed forever. You are one of the few classes at VMI to endure the full effects of the global pandemic. You finished your spring semester in a virtual setting,

and by the time you returned in August, none of us were quite sure what was in store," he lamented.

Wins noted that the class faced many challenges, including turmoil about the VMI culture imposed upon the entire Corps, but what mattered was how they responded. "You let people see you as who you are—cadets of character, who embody a code. Few others

can come close to living up to that code, you did magnificently. You understand the importance of integrity, you stand against intolerance and hate. You embody humility, and demonstrate a sense of humor. You have embraced the differences you arrived with, and molded them into the strength of your class," he said proudly.

The class was able to return to a more normal cadet experience with an in-person Ring Figure celebration and finished strong in the classroom, athletic field, and in military training. "Even your ring is engraved with 'through shared suffering,' a reference to the unique set of experiences your class endured," Wins commented.

Wins concluded his speech by congratulating the graduates and encouraging them to remember the important lessons they have learned. "The world needs and deserves principled leaders of character. I challenge you to serve the people around you. Become leaders in your family, your community, the commonwealth, and the nation."

Samuel H. Wolfe '23, peer-elected valedictorian of the Class of 2023, stated that he,



Samuel H. Wolfe '23, valedictorian, accepts the First Jackson-Hope Medal from Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Continued on next page

along with many others, was first drawn to VMI by the concepts of honor, courage, service, and a desire to be part of something bigger than himself. “However, after the countless parades, inspections, trainings, practices, the seemingly meaningless of military regulation, had our perspective of VMI become jaded?” he asked.

Wolfe conceded that VMI had been difficult for his class for many reasons. In addition to losing Clark, they lost others due to poor academic scores, loss of interest, financial struggles, and a few for less than honorable conditions. He lamented having to wake up each morning at 5:30 for physical training, followed by classes, long hours of studying, and other responsibilities demanding full attention. “But through the struggles, the Class of 2023 was transformed,” he said, and went on to mention many class accomplishments. “In a couple months one of us will become a Navy SEAL, another holds the third highest batting average in VMI baseball history, a couple continue hopeful journeys to professional sports, a couple were named the top Army ROTC cadets in the nation, one just completed a 24-hour run to raise funds for Operation Enduring Warrior, a handful of us will attend law school, a few of us are going to medical school, and a large number are going on to serve in the military.

“So, what’s the point? VMI teaches the one who will let it, to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. American theologian John Piper said, ‘You don’t have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world. But you do have to know the few great things that matter, perhaps just one, and then be willing to live for them and die for them.’ Too many people in our generation do not want their lives to make a difference, they only want to be liked and to have easy, carefree lives. That is a tragedy,” he argued.

Wolfe evoked Jonathan Daniels ’61, a VMI alumnus, who was murdered while shielding a young girl from a shotgun blast in 1965, and asked, “Was that a tragedy?”

He mentioned Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901, who lived his entire life under the constant pressure of innumerable responsibilities, and found little rest in life, and again asked, “Was that a tragedy? No! It would be a tragedy for us to not use the discipline we learned at VMI. John Quincy Adams said, ‘If your actions inspire others

to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.’ America needs principled warriors, officers, even fathers and mothers. Let us be willing then to be the leaders the nation so desperately needs. I wish you the joy of service and honor. I wish you the joy of making the choice to value others above yourself. God has surely blessed me with the joy of knowing you all. It’s been a pleasure and honor,” Wolfe concluded.

Wolfe, a biology major, graduated as a distinguished graduate with institute honors, with a GPA of 4.0. He held rank, served as a member of the S2 staff, which serves as academic advisors to the Corps of Cadets, for the 3rd Battalion, and was cadet in charge for the Navigators Bible study.

He is the son of Ted and Amy Wolfe. Wolfe commissioned into the Army and received a waiver to go directly into medical school at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine in Richmond. He will attend basic officer leader course (BOLC) at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.

President of the Class of 2023, Cameron Cavanaugh ’23, shared farewell remarks to his brother rats in the form of a poem that was at times humorous, tender, poignant, and fully heartfelt. He then introduced the commencement speaker, Gov. Glenn Youngkin, who challenged the cadets to ask themselves, “Who am I?”

He opened by sharing with his audience that the world is filled with unlimited opportunities, and real moments that will challenge them to the core of their being, and at every opportunity, choice, or challenge, they will stop and reflect, “Who am I?” He assured the graduates that they are fully equipped to answer that question with confidence, and reminded them of a few things.

“You do not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do,” quoting the VMI Honor Code. “In a complicated world, could there be any more inspiring

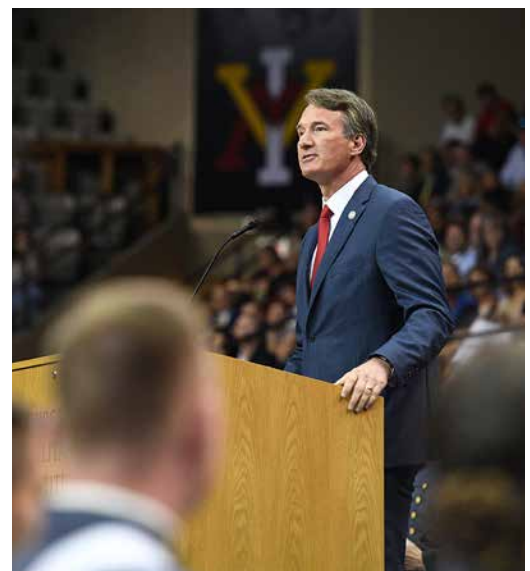


Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 presents the Second Jackson-Hope Medal to Philip M. Argauer '23.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

truth as men and women who live honorably? You live by a code that incorporates words like integrity, character, respect, and stands against prejudice, hate and oppression, that honors our great country, commonwealth, Corps, family, and friends.

“You have gratefulness in your heart. At a time when the expression of gratitude has been replaced with a culture of entitlement, two of the most powerful words in the English language are ‘thank you.’ You place honor above self, and are committed to being a servant leader.

See Commencement, page 12



Gov. Glenn Youngkin addresses the graduating Class of 2023 in Cameron Hall May 16.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

“You are graduating from an Institute whose mission is to produce exceptional men and women, like Jonathan Daniels, and



Ainsley Fritter '23 smiles at friends after receiving her diploma in Cameron Hall May 16.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

General George Marshall, and G. Gilmore Minor III, who captained the baseball and football teams at VMI, became CEO of his family’s business, served the commonwealth in many ways including leading the Council of Higher Education. Gil loved and served VMI.”

Youngkin marveled that the graduates will be whatever they resolve to be; from brave warriors in the armed services, to engineers, to teachers, to health care workers, to business leaders, to ministers. “Through all walks of life, you will forge a better, more perfect union because you are from VMI.”

To those who chose to enter the military he said, “Collectively, you will be part of the greatest armed service the world has ever seen. You

will dominate land, air, sea, and space—and, yes, remind us all that freedom is not free.”

Youngkin closed by saying, “You have worked hard, probably harder than any other students anywhere in the nation. Virginia is proud of you. Our nation needs you and will look up to you. The world will witness your



Members of the Class of 2023 toss their gloves in the air after being relieved of their duties at the close of commencement in Cameron Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

talents and successes. Class of 2023, when you ask yourself ‘Who am I?’ Stand tall, and answer confidently because you are a VMI graduate, and you will inspire the world.”

After receiving a standing ovation, Youngkin was presented with a saber from Cavanaugh on behalf of the Class of 2023.

Three awards are traditionally given at May commencement exercises. The First Jackson-Hope Medal for highest attainment in scholarship,

accompanied by the Commander Harry Millard Mason Academic Proficiency Award, went to Wolfe.

Receiving the Second Jackson-Hope Medal, for second highest attainment in scholarship, accompanied by the Colonel Sterling Murray Heflin 1916 Academic Proficiency Award, was Philip M. Argauer '23, an electrical and computer engineering major with a minor in mathematics.

Wolfe also received the Society of the Cincinnati Medal, for efficiency of service and excellence of character, accompanied by the Richard J. Marshall and Sumter L. Lowry Awards.

Commencement concluded with a benediction offered by Col. Bob Phillips '87, chaplain, followed by Mark L. Shelton II '24, the new regimental commander, relieving the Class of 2023 of their duties as they tossed their gloves in the air. 🇺🇸



Additional Photos from Graduation Week

The members of the Class of 2023 were celebrated and recognized throughout graduation week. Events included the Institute Awards, change of command parade, joint commissioning ceremony, Memorial Parade, and commencement.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, and Andrew Partridge '24.



Shelton Takes the Lead as New Regimental Commander

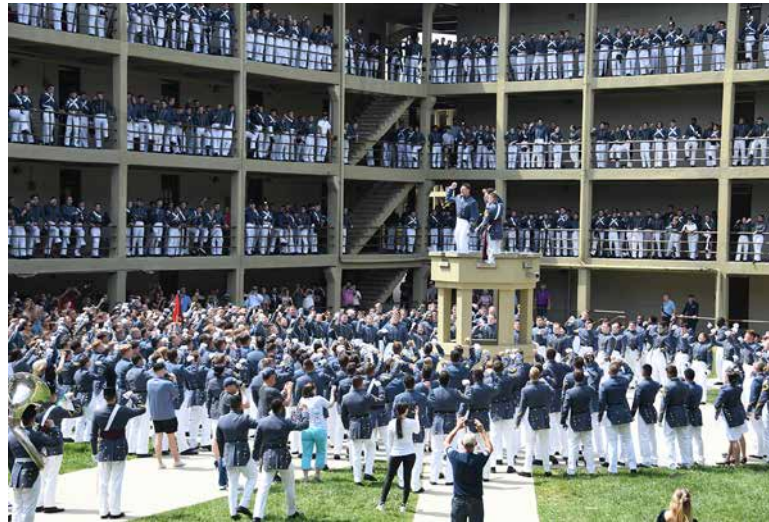
By Marianne Hause

Under a picturesque blue sky, the change of command parade was held on the Parade Ground Sunday, May 14, as the 183rd Regiment handed over leadership of the Corps of Cadets to the 184th Regiment for the 2023–24 academic year.

In front of a substantial crowd of family, friends, alumni, faculty, and staff, the Corps marched out of barracks as the Regimental and Pipe Bands played a medley of U.S. Military Branch theme songs.

It was one of the last parades for Blake Smith '23 as regimental commanding officer (RCO). Smith, a native of Crozier, Virginia, majored in economics and business, commissioned into the Marine Corps, and was this year's recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Cadet Award, presented to a 1st Class cadet who emulates and practices the qualities exemplified by MacArthur and has demonstrated the most soldierly performance, considering academics, athletics, and leadership.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent,



Cameron Cavanaugh '23, Brandon Marks '23, and Blake Smith '23 lead the Class of 2023 in their final Old Yell in barracks following the change of command parade.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Mark Shelton '24, new regimental commander, leads the incoming regiment during the change of command parade.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

conducted the change of command ceremony, as Smith relinquished the VMI Regimental flag and company guidon to Wins, who in turn presented it to incoming RCO, Mark Shelton '24, a computer science major from Stafford, Virginia, where he attended Mountain View High School.

As the 184th Regiment took command of the Corps of Cadets, the 183rd Regimental commanders were relieved of their duties and commanded to "Fall out!" to the cheers and applause of their fellow 1st Class graduating cadets, who were excused from marching in the parade, enjoying it seated in a place of honor.

The RCO is the highest-ranking position a cadet can earn. As RCO, Shelton hopes to set an example, motivate his fellow cadets, and give them the best opportunities to be successful at VMI. "I am extremely

Continued on next page



Col. Adrian T. Bogart III '81, commandant, looks on as Mark Shelton '24 assists Blake Smith '23 in adding his nameplate to the cadet first captains plaque in barracks following the parade May 14.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Col. Adrian T. Bogart III '81, Mark Shelton '24, Blake Smith '23, and Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 stand before the cadet first captains plaque in Old Barracks.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 presents the VMI Regimental flag and company guidon to incoming RCO, Mark Shelton '24.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Blake Smith '23, outgoing regimental commander; Cameron Cavanaugh '23, 1st Class president; and Brandon Marks '23, Honor Court president, join Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 in taking review of the parade as the new regiment passes before them.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

honored to serve as the regimental commander in the 184th Regiment.

The change of command parade is the first time the incoming commanders officially fulfill their duties leading the Corps, and assuming leadership is a moment I will always treasure," he said.

During the 2022–23 academic year, Shelton served as 3rd Battalion sergeant major. The prior year, he served as Company F corporal.

Shelton was inspired to attend VMI because it offered him a unique challenge to attend the best military college in the

country, get an excellent education, play NCAA football, and pursue a commission in the U.S. Army. "I have always tried to push my limits to see what I am capable of, and VMI has not disappointed in providing me the opportunity to do just that," he said.

Shelton plays football for VMI as a running back. He serves on the Cadet Superintendent Advisory Board, and is a member of the Promaji club and cyber clubs. He was this year's recipient of several awards including the Major General Stephen Sewell Jr. '60 Award, given to a

ROTC scholarship recipient in high standing with both the school and the Army ROTC department; the Charles H. Dayhuff Jr. '31 First Captain Award, presented to the rising first captain in the Corps of Cadets; and the Marshall Citizen-Soldier Award, awarded to the cadet whose career as a cadet has most closely paralleled that of Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901. He is the son of retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Mark Shelton and Patricia Tidwell-Shelton. After graduating, Shelton will commission into the U.S. Army. 🌟



Family Day

VMI faculty, staff, and their families gathered at McKethan Park Saturday, May 20 to celebrate the end of the academic year and the kickoff to summer. During the event, guests enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs, along with a bouncy house, inflatable obstacle courses, corn hole, and pick-up baseball games. In addition, several employees received recognition from Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, for going above and beyond in their roles at the Institute.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



Bunting Papers Now Part of VMI Archives

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

VMI's 13th superintendent, Lt. Gen. Josiah Bunting III '63, was on post April 25 to reunite with his brother rats of the Class of 1963, but he spent a portion of the morning in Preston Library in a ceremony to recognize his recent contributions to VMI's archives. Twenty-six containers of Bunting's papers are now part of the archives, including correspondence, speeches, lectures, research and meeting notes, drafts of books, military orders, maps, and photographs from Bunting's time in the Marine Corps, to his time at VMI, then through his life up until 2020.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, opened the ceremony highlighting Bunting's many accomplishments as a cadet and throughout his life. During his time at VMI, Bunting was a member of the swim team, an associate editor of *The VMI Cadet* newspaper, and was regimental commander during his 1st Class year. He was also VMI's 8th Rhodes Scholar. He entered the Army in 1966 and retired in 1972. His life then turned fully to education, being a professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the U.S. Naval War College. He went on to hold leadership roles at Briarcliff College, Hampden-Sydney College, and The Lawrenceville School. He became VMI's 13th superintendent in 1995, as VMI was in the midst of a legal battle on whether or not it would become a coeducational institution. Bunting led the transition as the first female cadets matriculated in 1997. He also oversaw one of VMI's largest capital campaigns.

As he began his remarks, Bunting took a moment to recognize his wife Diana for "being responsible for about 90 percent" of what he has accomplished. He came to VMI, a place he knew nothing about, because of the brief mention of the Institute by an unknown fellow Marine. "It's a jewel of a college, and for that I will always be very grateful. And everything I hear now confirms everything I expected VMI to continue to be. It's a privilege to come back and see the school in full flourish."

Bunting has been a writer and a historian alongside his professional roles, with a particular focus on military history. He has published several fiction and non-fiction books, and has studied Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901, thoroughly, citing Marshall as one of his heroes.

Jeff Kozak, head of archives and records management at VMI, emphasized the importance and vast size of the new addition to VMI archives, especially providing more



Lt. Gen. Josiah Bunting III '63 greets guests in Preston Library on April 25.—VMI Photo by Lexie West.

context into cadet life during the 1960s. The donation of Bunting's papers has been under discussion for over 20 years, but finally came to fruition over the last year, getting the materials to VMI and organizing them for public view. "This is a very great thing from a historical standpoint, because it provides researchers a valuable resource. We can now understand the positions Bunting was in as a cadet, a scholar, an author, a superintendent, as well as the person behind those positions," Kozak explained.

One letter in particular caught Kozak's attention as he sifted through the bins. It was a letter Bunting wrote as the regimental commander to the 4th Class that said, "Set for yourselves only the very highest goals, and do not waiver in pursuit of them. Do not be satisfied with good grades. Do not be satisfied with a good performance at drill. Do not be satisfied with excellence on the athletic fields. Do not be satisfied until you've thrown yourselves into every facet of cadet life, with all you have to give it." Kozak and his team continue to sift through the collection to organize them and make them available for researchers.

The Classes of 1953, 1958, and 1968 were also on post to celebrate their reunions and many were in attendance for the ceremony. ❁



Several items of note donated by Lt. Gen. Josiah Bunting III '63 were on display in Preston Library, including memories from his cadetship.—VMI Photo by Lexie West.

POST BRIEFS

Arndt Travels to South Africa to Discuss Book

Wits University of Johannesburg and the University of Cape Town, the two highest-ranking universities on the African continent, invited Lt. Col. Jochen S. Arndt, associate professor of history, to South Africa to discuss his book, "Divided by the Word: Colonial Encounters and the Remaking of Zulu and Xhosa Identities," at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) and the University of Cape Town's Historical and African

Language Studies departments. The book explains how Zulu and Xhosa emerged as written languages and markers of Zulu and Xhosa identities. The discussions at WiSER and the University of Cape Town were well attended since languages and language-based identities are hotly debated issues in contemporary South Africa.

Middle Schoolers Learn History of Mascots

Students and teachers from the Maury River Middle School Youth Achieving Success after-school program visited Preston Library in mid-May to get a tour and learn about the history of mascots. Liz Kocevar-Weidinger, head of research and instruction in the library, and Jeff Kozak, head of archives and record management, hosted the group. Using the

archives and other resources available to the community, the students examined VMI mascots through the years. They discussed values they would choose if they created a personal mascot and what mascots can symbolize. Of course, part of their visit included a meeting with VMI's mascot, Moe.

McDonald Presents "My Time with Cy" in Vienna

The internationally celebrated artist Cy Twombly remained dedicated to his hometown of Lexington, Virginia, and created many of his most important later works at his studio downtown during his annual visits. Col. Rob McDonald, associate dean for academic affairs and professor of English and fine arts at VMI, was an acquaintance of Twombly. He often

photographed Twombly's home and in his studio. McDonald's photographs and mixed-media works are the subject of a solo exhibition at the Anzenberger Gallery in Vienna, Austria, which opened May 11 and runs through August 18. McDonald's daughter Grace, Class of 2021, living in Edinburgh, joined him in Vienna for the opening reception and lecture.

Cadets Participate in Datathon 2023

Facing the topic of "Unmasking Maternal Mortality" were Komsun Samngamkeao '24, Mitchell Meyer '24, and Jesse Dennis '24, at this year's Virginia Datathon held at the Library of Virginia in late April. Each year, a complex challenge is presented, and participants must develop an innovative solution and present their proposed solution. The VMI team took a

close look at maternal mortality rates based on age and ethnicity, as well as the leading causes of death. Solutions focused on equal opportunity among public health care plans, regardless of race and age, and to ensure health care workers have knowledge about the disparities in health factors and health care among the different groups. 🌿



Norwegian Foot March

Just shy of 300 participants undertook the Norwegian Foot March, or Marsjmerket, Sunday, April 23. In addition to VMI cadets, other college ROTC program cadets, exchange students, and even some serving at bases across the country joined the event in Lexington. This march is a physical challenge to ruck 18 miles with at least 25 pounds in their pack. Upon completion within the time standards based on age, participants receive the Norwegian Proficiency Badge. Cadets will be eligible to wear this badge on their uniforms, and potentially wear it on their future military uniforms. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Commissioning Ceremony *continued from page 9*

and Reserves swore him in, and he received his first salute from his 91-year-old grandfather, George Allebach, who was a corporal in the Army Corps of Engineers during the Korean War. Petruskie will report to Basic Officers Leader Course in June as an armor officer.

Wagner, from Dakota Dunes, South Dakota, served as Company A commander, was operations sergeant as a 2nd Class cadet, and a cadre corporal as a 3rd Class cadet. He served as an EMT as both a 3rd and 2nd Class cadet. He majored in economics and business with a concentration in global business and graduated with distinction. “I am very blessed and honored to share this experience with all the other great men and women in my class. For it is they who have made this experience truly worthwhile and hold so much value,” he said. He was pinned by his dyke, Lt. Andrew Ladi IV '20, and received his first salute from Sgt. Maj. Tom Sowers. He is commissioned as a finance officer in the Minnesota National Guard, and reports to the 247th Financial Management Support Detachment, part of the 347th Regional Support Group as a platoon leader in June.



Jack Mion '23 is congratulated by Col. Travis Homiak '95 after commissioning into the Marine Corps May 15. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Bowers '90 Commissions 15

Bowers was introduced by Col. Travis Homiak '95, commanding officer of Naval ROTC. Bowers talked about the oath of office which the cadets were about to take, specifically, the part that refers to “bearing true faith and allegiance” to the U.S. Constitution. “Bearing true faith, especially to Marines, comes intuitively—‘Semper Fidelis’—we’re always faithful to our country, our Corps, and to each other. Allegiance means being part of something bigger than ourselves, being part of the ideals of what this country was built on, the Constitution.” He described the preamble of the Constitution as “the greatest mission statement ever written,” and went through “the five Ws” of the preamble: who, what, when, where and why. “The Who is ‘We the People of the United States.’ The Why is ‘In order to form a more perfect union.’ The What is ‘to establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, and promote the general welfare. The Where is wherever they are, all over the

world. They will be global representatives of this country, for our allied partners, and for the citizens of the world. When? For all time.

Bowers conceded that it is a tall order, but encouraged the cadets that what they have accomplished at VMI prepared them well. “You’ve demonstrated academic excellence, leadership, and the ability to lead and gain the respect of your peers. You’ve shown grit, determination, and resiliency. You’ve overcome adversity, and most importantly, lived under an uncompromising honor system. You all have what it takes to lead the young men and women volunteering to serve our country in the armed forces of the United States.” He then administered the oath of office to 14 cadets, commissioning them as second lieutenants.

Homiak cited two outstanding cadets entering the Marine Corps: Jack Mion '23 and Blake Smith '23. “During their time as cadets, they challenged themselves academically, physically, and in leadership roles—excelling across all three areas. They took full advantage of what VMI offers in terms of a unique educational and leadership experience. It will be exciting to see them develop as junior officers. No matter what course they choose to take, I’m certain that they will have a huge impact,” said Homiak.

Mion, a civil engineering major from Glenville, New York, served as executive officer of Company G. “It has been a very eventful and fast four years here at VMI. The Institute turned me into the person I am today, for which I am forever grateful. I developed as a leader, earned a commission in the U.S. Marine Corps, and made many friends along the way. I will miss this place but am excited to see where this next chapter takes all of us. RAH '23!” he said. He was pinned by his father, retired Marine Corps Sgt. Farren Mion, and his mother, Kathy Mion. He received his first salute from his father. He will report to The Basic School in Quantico, Virginia in October.

Smith served as regimental commander, the highest-ranking position a cadet can earn. He is from Crozier, Virginia, and majored in economics. He was this year’s recipient of the General Douglas MacArthur Cadet Award, presented to a 1st Class cadet who emulates and practices the qualities exemplified by MacArthur and has demonstrated the most soldierly performance, considering academics, athletics, and leadership.

Navy Rear Adm. McLane Commissions 20

Homiak also introduced McLane, who shared that he is the grandson of a 1936 VMI alumnus. He told those about to be commissioned, “This is a great moment that you will remember for the rest of your lives. Savor it and be grateful. You are joining an elite force in a time when our nation needs you the most.” He quoted President John F. Kennedy by saying, “Any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile, I think can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction, ‘I served in the United States Navy.’”

McLane continued by telling the future ensigns, “You have all voluntarily joined a select group, and assume a great deal of responsibility. Everyone commissioned here today has volunteered to serve, and that service comes with hard work, responsibility, and

Continued on next page



Rear Adm. Brendan R. McLane addresses the cadets commissioning into the U.S. Navy in Cameron Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

obligation. Consequently, in order to guarantee the freedom of our citizens, you give up a great deal. In return, you will receive the priceless gift of adventures you will tell stories about for the rest of your lives. You will work hard and have the satisfaction of a job well done. Remember all those who have gone before you and who served with honor. You are answering the call of this great nation.” He thanked them for their dedication and willingness to serve. He then administered the oath of office to 20 cadets, commissioning them as ensigns.

Homiak cited two outstanding cadets entering the Navy: Alex Feher '23 and London Yerasimides '23. “Each represents the best that the Institute and the Naval ROTC program have to offer. I am proud to see them achieve their goal of graduating VMI and commissioning into the Naval Services,” Homiak said.

Feher, from Midlothian, Virginia, served as vice president for investigations for the Officer of the Guard Association and midshipmen battalion commander. He made an outstanding score on the Navy physical readiness test. He performed in the pipe band and the Commanders jazz band. He majored in biology and minored in chemistry with a 3.82 GPA, and was a distinguished graduate. He was this year’s recipient of the Lieutenant Mark R. Wilson, Sr. Midshipman Award.

Yerasimides, from Prospect, Kentucky, served as Company F commander. She was captain of the swimming and diving team, served on the midshipman battalion staff, made an outstanding score on the Navy physical readiness test, and received one of the three Intercollegiate Sports Awards. She majored in



Philip Argauer '23 takes his oath as he commissions into the Air Force on May 15.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.

psychology and minored in national security. She was a distinguished graduate with institute honors, and a 3.82 GPA. “VMI has given me the unique opportunity to learn my own leadership style, but also gave me room to fail and learn from my mistakes. The Navy ROTC has given me the tools in order to be a successful Naval officer and allowed me the freedom to find my own path,” she said. She was pinned by her father, stepmother, brother, and sister. She received her first salute from her rat Sarah Woosley '26. She will report to San Diego, California in August for her first school to become a Surface Warfare Officer.

Space Force Gen. Garrant Commissions 21 Air Force Cadets

Garrant was introduced by Col. Nichole K.A. Scott, commanding officer of Air Force ROTC.

Garrant began his talk by asking the cadets, “Will you be able to meet the expectations and requirements to well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office you are about to enter?” He explained that like all uniformed services, the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Space Force each have a set of core values to help execute those duties, which he shared with them. “They are character, which lays the foundation of trust and teamwork; connection, all members are connected with a common purpose greater than ourselves; commitment to ourselves and our profession; and courage to persevere despite adversity, and take on challenges. Courage empowers us to take necessary personal or professional limits, make decisions which may be unpopular, and admit our mistakes.”

Garrant administered the oath of office to 21 cadets, 18 into the Air Force, and three into the Space Force, commissioning them as second lieutenants.

According to Scott, three cadets have stood out. Josephine Freeman '23, Fatoumata Diallo '23, and Philip Argauer '23.

“Freeman has been a standout leader, resulting in being a Distinguished Graduate. Her maturity, tenacity, dedication, and fierceness have led our detachment to the next echelon. She has held multiple roles from wing executive, responsible for 233 cadets to squadron director of operations, to holding rank. She’s done this

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Col. Nichole K.A. Scott presents the distinguished graduate award to Josephine Freeman '23.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.

Ranger Challenge Team Places Fifth at Sandhurst

By Marianne Hause

Team members of Ranger Challenge, the “varsity sport” of the Army ROTC program at VMI, placed fifth, winning a Sandhurst Medallion for the top five overall teams out of 48 teams in the annual Sandhurst Military Skills Competition at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point April 28 and 29.

During the two-day competition, VMI competed against teams from USMA, the Air Force Academy, and the Coast Guard Academy,

as well as Army ROTC units across the United States including Texas A&M, University of Notre Dame, North Carolina State University, Liberty University, and the University of Central Florida. In addition, 14 international teams competed including the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS) in Great Britain, as well as teams from Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Germany, Korea, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, Poland, Thailand, and Sweden.

While it is called the Sandhurst Military Skills Competition after the RMAS, the annual competition has always been held at West Point. Sandhurst was started in 1967 when RMAS presented West Point with a

British officer’s sword to use as the prize for a competition to promote military excellence. It wasn’t until 1975 that the competition began to resemble its current form with teams taking part in different challenges to test their military skills. Sandhurst was only an internal West Point competition until 1992 when ROTC teams began competing, and in 1993 RMAS began taking part annually. The Royal Military College of Canada (RMC-Canada) joined in 1997 and since 2002 the competition has featured a diverse group of U.S. and international teams.

After fighting through two days of obstacles including weapons disassembly/assembly, grenade assault, gas mask function, rifle

and pistol shooting, programing a radio, carrying a casualty, land navigation, and lugging their minimum 35-pound rucks for approximately 30 miles, the winner is chosen based on performance at each of the obstacles as well as the speed with which they complete them.

USMA Black was the winning team, (one of the 14 teams from West Point) and was awarded the Reginald E. Johnson Memorial Plaque, named for a Sandhurst competitor who died during the land navigation phase in 1980. Although it is called a plaque, the award follows the initial tradition of the

Continued on next page



The VMI team receives their Sandhurst Medallion for placing fifth overall at the annual Sandhurst Military Skills Competition at West Point.—Photo courtesy of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.



Ranger Challenge team members, directed by squad leader, Collin Fitzpatrick '23 race through an obstacle course on post to prepare for Sandhurst.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



The Ranger Challenge team hurries down Stono Lane during training for the annual Sandhurst Military Skills Competition at West Point.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

competition and is a mounted cadet saber. The saber has been used as the award since 1999. USMA Gold, the Air Force Academy, and Texas A&M placed second, third, and fourth respectively.

VMI squad leader, Collin Fitzpatrick '23, a history major from Duck, North Carolina, assigned tasks to his team members. "Everyone on the team was well rounded in their training and prepared to handle any military task asked of them. We trained

hard through early mornings and late nights for this competition, and I'm very proud of our performance. I cannot wait to see the team that the new leadership will build next season," he said.

According to Maj. Cory Weiss, assistant professor of military science / operations officer, officer in charge and head coach for them, the team was named champions of the 1st Brigade Army ROTC Ranger Challenge last October at Fort Knox, Kentucky, which

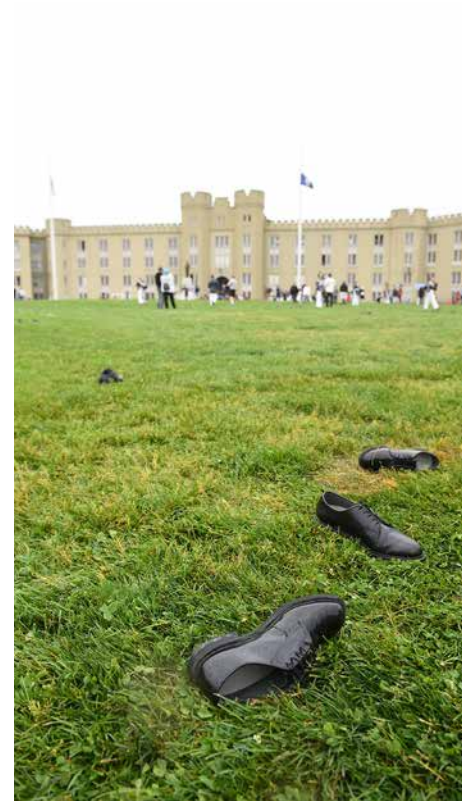
qualified them to compete at Sandhurst. "This is the first time VMI has been to Sandhurst since 2019, and at that time they placed 26th overall. Sandhurst is both physically and mentally demanding, and I couldn't be prouder of the team. Fifth place at Sandhurst is a monumental accomplishment. It is the most difficult competition in the world for cadets," stated Weiss.

Try outs for the Ranger Challenge team at VMI are held each fall and spring. ✪



Memorial Parade

Under a light rain, the Memorial Parade was held May 15, commemorating the bravery and sacrifice of all alumni who died on the field of honor. Reading all 591 names were Angelina Garcia '25, Harrison Henneberg '25, John Kennedy '25, and Thomas Reagan '25. A wreath was laid at the foot of the monument, Virginia Mourning Her Dead, as well as at the three barracks arches, followed by the firing of a three-volley salute. A stirring echo rendition of "Taps" was played, followed by the Pipe Band leading the Regimental Band in an emotional delivery of "Amazing Grace." The Corps then marched from the Parade Ground down Letcher Avenue toward Barracks, rendered an eyes-right salute to Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 and Col. Adrian T. Bogart III '81, as they marched past the monument.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Alumna Returns as New Physician

By Marianne Hause

Dr. Melissa S. Krawiec '01 (formerly Melissa Williams) comes to VMI as the new Institute physician, 25 years after she signed the matriculation book August 19, 1997, as a member of the first coeducational class. She continues the care formerly provided by Dr. David Copeland, who recently retired after treating the Corps of Cadets for 31 years.

Krawiec (pronounced KRA-vee-its), a Virginia native and youngest of three sisters, remembers discussions with her family about VMI and its plans of becoming co-ed. "My sister Sarah and I thought of athletic and studious girls we knew in high school who would have thrived at VMI, but never considered ourselves at all," she recalled. They attended a college fair while in high school, and her father dared her to go up to the VMI table. She had always wanted to become a Navy doctor, and was strongly considering the U.S. Naval Academy. "So, I went up to the VMI table and introduced myself and said, 'I want to go to the Naval Academy, why don't you tell me what VMI has that the Naval Academy doesn't.' Tom Mortenson, associate director of admissions at the time, leapt to his feet, and with a big smile shook my hand, and asked me to sit down so he could tell me all about it. That evening, he registered Sarah, myself, and my best friend for the first co-ed admissions open house. After staying the night in barracks, Sarah and I both decided to apply to VMI. It just made sense to me. I loved the Honor Code and everything a VMI education represented. I knew placement to medical school was over 90% for biology majors. I was awarded a full scholarship, and that was 'icing on the cake,'" she said.

Sarah, who already had two years of college, decided to leave VMI a few weeks following matriculation. Even though she knew it was an incredibly difficult decision for Sarah to make, and hard to see her sister leave, Krawiec conceded it was the right decision for her, as she went to nursing school and became a nurse with a rewarding career.

Krawiec said she and her female brother rats (BRs) didn't see themselves as trailblazers, just cadets trying to get through VMI. "I always felt I had to be the best at things because the burden of proof was on us, we were under the microscope. I was very single-minded that first year, and never seriously considered going home. I was in the middle of everything. If the guys were going to do it, I was going to do it. I was involved with theater, women's rugby and soccer clubs, Taekwondo, the rock climbing club, a little bit of everything. I worked at the Marshall Museum, which was a great experience, as I met many alumni and heard their stories."

Unable to commission into the military because of a health condition, Krawiec decided to apply to medical school at West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine (WVSOM) in Lewisburg, West Virginia, after Col. Wade Bell took a bus load of cadets there to tour the school. "I hadn't planned on going. I told Colonel Bell that I didn't



Dr. Melissa Krawiec '01

want to go to osteopathic school, that's where people go when they can't get into real medical school," she joked. But he encouraged her to get in the van, and they rode to WVSOM on a gorgeous fall day. That evening they listened to a talk about osteopathy. "That was it. I was sold on the school and on osteopathy. I didn't apply to any other medical school," she said.

After graduating from WVSOM, she completed her internship at West Virginia University's Charleston Area Medical Center, and her family practice residency at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine in Maine. After Krawiec passed her board exams, she worked in family practice and urgent care in and around Portland, Maine, for several years before joining the U.S. State Department in 2011 as a regional medical

officer (RMO), a foreign service job. As RMO, she was assigned to a post overseas and covered several embassies within a region, treating Americans assigned to the embassy, as well as their family members. She traveled a lot, and worked with local nurses, doctors, and State Department nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. Her first assignment was in New Delhi, India, for two and a half years. She returned to Washington, D.C. for three years working in State Department's Bureau of Medical Services, then worked for four years as RMO in Warsaw, Poland, where she met her husband, Lukasz (pronounced Wu-kosh). In 2021, she returned to D.C. where she worked until she came to VMI in April.

Krawiec believes securing the job at VMI was serendipity. She and Sarah were on post last September, attending a reception to celebrate the 25th anniversary of women matriculants. "We were talking with General Wins, and Sarah asked jokingly, 'Do you ever hire doctors?' General Wins responded, 'Well as a matter of fact, Doc Copeland is retiring.' Everyone looked at me. I told General Wins that I was very interested." The next week she got a call from Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, deputy superintendent, to discuss the job.

Though she said it was a big decision to leave the State Department and move to a new location, she is thrilled to be back at VMI. "I want to do the best I can for VMI, because they've done a lot for me."

Krawiec said it is helpful that she has first-hand knowledge of what it is like to be a rat and a cadet. "I know how it feels not to be well enough to participate in all the activities, and how eager the cadets are to feel better so they can get back at it, just as much as we want them to. We have an incredible staff who understands the demands put on these students, and Doc Copeland was so helpful with the transition, and a great example to follow," she said.

She said VMI is a much better place now than when she was a cadet. "It's a much more normal thing to be a woman at VMI, and that is a blessing for these women. They really shine, and work very hard. I am very proud of VMI's integration of women."

Continued on next page

Gussie Lord '01, member of VMI's Board of Visitors and Krawiec's BR, is gratified to see her friend take on the role of Institute physician. "I know she will do a wonderful job taking care of the Corps and we are lucky to have her," she said.

Krawiec wants to get more involved with the cadets outside the infirmary, and is interested in learning more about the EMT program on post and finding ways she can help. She continues to have relationships with her former biology and physics professors,

and hopes to become more involved in supporting cadets through that network.

Although she and her husband were married in March at the courthouse, they will have a formal, intimate wedding at her parents' home in West Virginia. "We'll have a ceremony in the woods with friends and family." Following the ceremony, they will take a trip to New York City and Washington, D.C. before returning to Lexington where they live with "Ziggy," their rescue cat. ❀

Commissioning Ceremony *continued from page 19*

while earning a double major, and the dean's list every semester. She was hand-selected as a cadet chaplain, studied abroad in Morocco, volunteered at the library, and is a VMI color guard leader. She will be commissioned as a space operator into the U.S. Space Force," said Scott. Freeman is from Warrenton, Virginia.

"Diallo, from Secaucus, New Jersey, is also a Distinguished Graduate. She majored in French and international studies. She was hand-selected as the Delta vice commander to train 184 Air Force ROTC cadets. She commissioned as an intelligence officer into the Air Force," shared Scott.

"Argauer was selected in the first round to be a helicopter pilot, and only a few in the nation were chosen for this highly competitive program. He has held numerous leadership positions in the Air Force ROTC and in the VMI Corps of Cadets. Argauer is also a Distinguished Graduate," Scott said. Argauer is from Vienna, Virginia.

Coast Guard Adm. Poulin Commissions Four

Poulin was introduced by Capt. John J. Driscoll '92, chief, office of cutter forces, USCG and VMI alumnus.

Poulin shared that he is proud of the tradition of the USCG and pleased that VMI has begun commissioning officers into the branch and looks forward to growing the relationship with the Institute. "For 233 years, the USCG has protected ports, both at home and abroad, in peacetime and in conflict. The United States is a maritime nation, and so our faith is inextricably linked to the sea. That makes the Coast Guard a unique instrument of national power. We are a military service, we're a proud contributor to the joint force, and we fight alongside our soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen. We're also a law enforcement agency, a regulatory agency, and a lifesaving agency. We uphold the rule of law and enable the nation's economic prosperity," he said.

Poulin administered the oath of office to four cadets, commissioning them as second lieutenants. This is the first year in VMI history in which cadets have received active-duty direct commissions to the USCG, which falls under the

Department of Homeland Security, unlike other military branches that fall under the Department of Defense. The USCG does not offer a ROTC program like the other branches, but instead offers Auxiliary University Programs (AUP) for cadets interested in commissioning upon graduation.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Suzanne Rubenstein, director of cadet activities and VMI liaison for the AUP, all the USCG cadets have done remarkably well this inaugural year. Aidan Simmons '23, an international studies major from Aldie, Virginia, who also served as the AUP unit commander, and Sarah Robertson '23, a computer science major from Richmond, have been instrumental in keeping the AUP running smoothly.

"It is such an honor to be the first Coast Guard cadets in the joint commissioning ceremony. I feel immense pride knowing that all our hard work over the last few years has paid off," Robertson said. She was sworn in by Lt. j.g. Madeline Cordle '20. She was pinned by her mother, Sharron Robertson, and her rat, Avan Johnson '26. She received her first salute from Joyce Ellis '24. Robertson will be a deck watch officer on the USCG cutter Douglas Denman in Ketchikan, Alaska.

Simmons served as 2nd platoon lieutenant for Company G, team lead for the Rat Disciplinary Committee, cadet in charge of the boxing club, and won the championship in his division at the United States Intercollegiate Boxing Association National Tournament held recently in Cocks Hall. "This historical event shows that VMI

is constantly advancing its structure and programs to accommodate for cadets and the world around us," said Simmons. He was pinned by his family, along with boxing club coach, Joe Shafer, and received his first salute from retired U.S. Army Master Sgt. Darrin DeCoster. He reports to Sector Maryland-National Capitol Region, which protects the Chesapeake Bay region, as an enforcement management officer. ❀



Aidan Simmons '23 gets pinned by boxing club coach, Joe Shafer and a family member at the Coast Guard pin-on ceremony on May 15.—VMI Photo by Marianne Hause.



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Employee Breakfast

Just before graduation week festivities began, an employee breakfast was held May 12 in Crozet Hall to celebrate and honor VMI's classified and wage employees. Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 expressed his gratitude for their work and recognized dozens of employees celebrating milestone anniversaries with the Institute. Most notably were Joellen Bland, director of VMI Theatre, and Sam Kessinger, member of facilities management, with 45 years of service, and Christine Clark, member of communications and marketing, with 50 years of service. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

