

Lt. Gen. George R.E. Shell '31 VMI's Ninth Superintendent, 1960-71

"He was and is an impeccable gentleman of determination and force of character...This man never faltered in his adherence to high principle..."

—Henry A. Wise '27

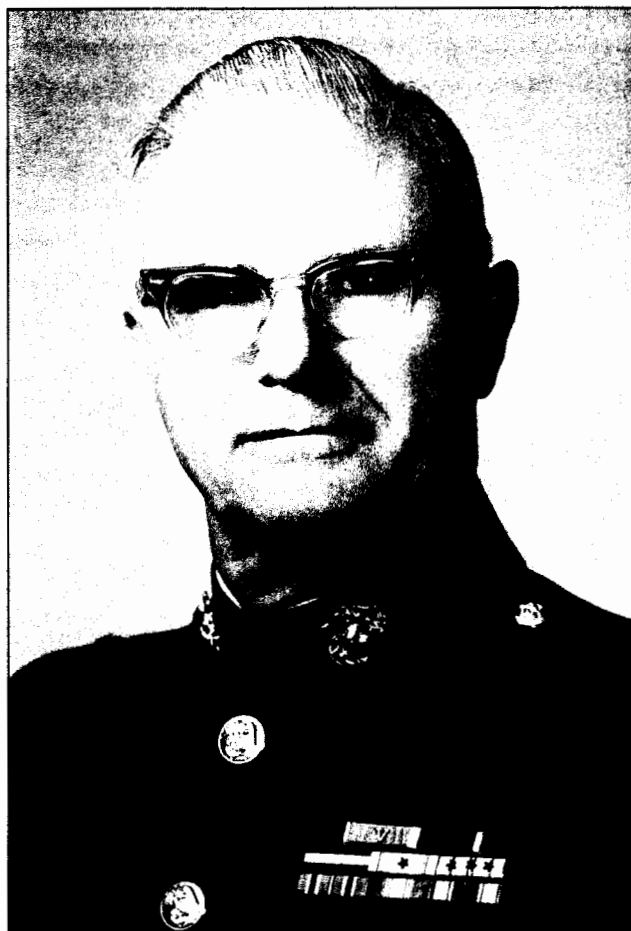
Lt. Gen. George Richard Edwin (Buddy) Shell '31, USMC (Ret), the ninth superintendent of VMI, died on Wednesday, Oct. 30, 1996, in a Charlottesville hospital at the age of 88.

"Gen. Shell united the qualities of character and intellect not commonly found in the same person; his selfless devotion to VMI was absolute," said Maj. Gen. Josiah Bunting III '63, VMI's current superintendent.

Gen. Shell was superintendent from 1960-71. The years of his administration were ones of great progress and advancement for the Institute. He guided the Institute with a strong and steady hand through a turbulent and rapidly-changing time in higher education, and oversaw the integration of the Corps of Cadets in 1968. It was a time that demanded the vigorous and confident leadership that Gen. Shell brought to VMI.

His efforts brought improvement and growth in the academic program, modernization and expansion in the physical plant, and the highest cadet enrollment up to that time in the long history of VMI. While each step enhanced the overall program, none detracted from the Institute's distinctive and universally recognized military character.

Gen. Shell's interest in a strong and viable academic program brought numerous changes which included a revised academic-year calendar; the addition of two academic majors, economics and modern languages; expansion of the faculty with increased emphasis on advanced degrees; organization of the VMI Research Labora-



tories; the addition of a computer center; and introduction of an evening college for classes in continuing education.

The moving force of his leadership brought VMI its first administration building, Smith Hall; a long-needed cadet activities center, Lejeune Hall; and a center for ROTC offices and classrooms, Kilbourne Hall. Other facilities added to the post under his guidance were a new alumni building, Moody Hall; annexes to Nichols Engineering Hall and to Cocke Hall; and beginning construction on the addition to Preston Library. Two other facilities in which Gen. Shell had the guiding hand were the George C. Marshall

Research Library and the Hall of Valor at the New Market Battlefield Park.

The athletic program at VMI also shared in the physical expansion with the enlargement of Alumni Memorial Field; the development of the practice area above the stadium; development of Patchin Field; a renovated Field House with a new indoor track; and a new swimming pool in the Cocke Hall Annex.

Gen. Shell ended a distinguished 29-year career in the United States Marine Corps to become superintendent of VMI. He had been commissioned into the Marine Corps upon his graduation, and at the time he was selected to become superintendent he was serving his second assignment as commanding general of the U.S. Marine Corps Parris Island Recruit Depot.

With the outbreak of World War II, Gen. Shell embarked for the Pacific area in the fall of

1942 and saw sea duty with Marine detachments on board the *USS Astoria* and the *USS Charleston*. He became the battalion commander of the Second Battalion, Tenth Marines, in 1942, and commanded that unit during combat on Guadalcanal, Tarawa and Saipan, and led that unit in New Zealand and Hawaii. His promotion to lieutenant colonel came in March 1943, and in 1944 he was awarded the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for outstanding service and courageous conduct in the landing on Saipan. He received a direct hit by a mortar shell in that landing, and for the next two years was under treatment at the U.S. Naval Hospi-

tal in San Diego.

Following World War II he was a student and instructor at the U.S. Naval War College from 1946-49 and later was chief of staff for Marine Corps Schools. He served in various staff posts with the Marine Corps and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and at Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe. In 1956 he was promoted to brigadier general and subsequently commanded the First Marine Brigade in Hawaii from 1955-56. He was commanding general of the Parris Island Recruit Depot in 1957 and deputy chief of staff for Research and Development, Marine Corps Headquarters, in 1958. He returned to Parris Island as commanding general in 1959, and retired from the Marine Corps in 1960 to accept his appointment as superintendent of VMI.

Gen. Shell was born on Oct. 20, 1908, in Phoebus, Virginia, and attended Hampton High School before matriculating at VMI. As a VMI cadet from 1927-31, he earned varsity letters in two intercollegiate sports, football and wrestling. He played four years of football at VMI and was a member of the wrestling team in the unlimited weight division. He was vice president of his class and of the Honor Court, and a member of the General Committee. He held the ranks of cadet corporal, color sergeant and A Company first lieutenant, and was president of the VMI cadet chapter of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers.

Gen. Shell was the recipient of numerous military decorations. In addition to the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" he was awarded the Purple Heart. He held honorary LLD degrees from Thiel College and Washington and Lee University, and was awarded the Medallion of Honor by the Virginians of Maryland, Inc., in 1966. He was a former president of the Association of Virginia Colleges.

Gen. Shell and his wife, the former Alice

Reid Cushing, lived in San Diego, California, for a short period of time before returning to Lexington, where they spent most of their retirement years and began a second career of leadership in the Lexington area. They moved to a retirement community in Charlottesville in 1993.

He was 1976-77 national chairman for the Historic Lexington Foundation's successful fund-raising campaign for the restoration of the Stonewall Jackson House. He became the first chairman of the Community Services Board when it was organized in 1982, continued his service on the board of the George C. Marshall Foundation, on which he served from 1960-87, and served on the board of the Stonewall Jackson Hospital from 1975-80 and of the Rockbridge Mental Health Clinic from 1975-81. He was a member of the vestry and senior warden

We know of no man in the class of '31 who has more right to be proud of his four-year record here than "Buddy." Combining the qualities of friendliness, fairness and leadership, he has proved himself a true man on the gridiron, in the classroom and in his everyday association with his fellow cadets. Here is a man who deserves the best that life has to offer.

—The 1931 BOMB

most of House Mountain for a continuing public recreation asset. He was honorary chairman of the Lexington Rockbridge United Way, and was a driver-distributor for the meals-for-shut-ins program in Lex-



Lt. George R.E. Shell '31 in November 1931 when he was attending the Marine School at the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

ington. Mrs. Shell served as chairman of the Rockbridge Regional Library Board and was active in the plans for the library expansion into its present headquarters. In 1993 the Shells were honorary co-chairpersons for the Rockbridge Regional Library Foundation Campaign.

In addition to his wife, Gen. Shell is survived by two daughters, Elizabeth Allen of Chula Vista, California, and Beverly Shell Kirsch of Charlottesville; one son, George Richard Shell of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; a sister, Shirley Shell Williams of Vinton; eight grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren. His brother, John Clifford Shell '32, died in 1995.

A private graveside service was held on Friday, Nov. 1 at the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery in Lexington, and a memorial service was held at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 11 at the Robert E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church, also in Lexington.

The family requests that donations in Gen. Shell's memory be made to the VMI Foundation, the Robert E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church in Lexington, or the Rockbridge Regional Library, also in Lexington.