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Dabney Awarded Navy Cross 37 Years After Action

By Lt. Col. Stewart MacInnis, Editor

Retired Marine Col. William H. Dabney '61, former professor of Naval Science and former commandant of cadets, was awarded the second highest award available to a Marine April 15 for his actions in the Vietnam War 37 years ago.

Dabney received the honor in a ceremony in Jackson Memorial Hall witnessed by Marines he led in battle, family, friends, and cadets.

Lt. Gen. H. P. Osman, deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs for the Marine Corps, presented the award, which is second only to the Medal of Honor.

Retired Marine Col. William H. Dabney of Lexington, Va., greets a VMI cadet prior to a ceremony in which he was awarded the Navy Cross. – VMI Photo

According to the award citation, Dabney's leadership as the commander of a reinforced infantry company in defending the vital Hill 881S decisively contributed to the ultimate victory in the 77-day Siege of Khe Sanh in 1968. During the larger Khe Sanh siege, Dabney's unit itself withstood a siege on its isolated, but important hilltop. The unit from the 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines suffered near 100 percent casualties and had to be re-supplied by helicopter.

"I wear this honor today only symbolically," he said of his former comrades, many of whom witnessed the award ceremony. "It is they who earned it."

To the assembled cadets, he said, "Many of you will soon shoulder the responsibility of leading our citizen-soldiers. If you should be called upon to lead America's patriots into harm's way, you will find their resolution awesome."

The paperwork for his original award recommendation was lost, and was only recently completed.

VMI and W&L Host Conference to Promote Student Research

By Wendy Lovell, Special Correspondent

Like many colleges and universities across the United States, VMI and Washington and Lee University have embraced undergraduate research. They are encouraging their students to pursue research and also helping them to share their work beyond their own campuses.

That commitment compelled the leaders of the two colleges to join forces to bring the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) to Lexington. For nearly four years, the neighboring institutions have worked together to pitch Lexington as an ideal site for NCUR and then to plan and implement the 2005 event.

"VMI and Washington and Lee share an affinity for undergraduate research, and we are similar in size and in the close relationships shared between faculty and students," said Brig. Gen. Charles F. Brower IV, deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty at VMI. "Coming together to host NCUR 2005 has helped us capture that excitement and synergy, and it has given us a way to showcase the great work both institutions are doing."

About 2,400 students and faculty from across the country converged on Lexington on April 21 for the three-day conference.

This marks the first time in its 19-year history that NCUR has come to Virginia, as well as the first time it has been jointly hosted by a public

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NCUR Conference Culmination of Months of Planning

By Wendy Lovell, Special Correspondent

Between the lure of tourists to the Shenandoah Valley and Blue Ridge Parkway, and events at the Virginia Horse Center, VMI, and Washington and Lee University, the city of Lexington has learned how to entertain a crowd. From April 21-23, Lexington hosted one of its largest parties of guests when VMI and W&L co-hosted the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, or NCUR.

What did it take to plan and execute a three-day conference for 2,500 undergraduate students and faculty from across the country? Patience, long hours, a strong committee, and cooperation from just about every department on both campuses, said Mary Wright and John Taffe.

Students from across the country set up posters about their research in Cocke Hall. - VMI Photo by Kevin Remington

The two represent VMI and W&L, and have worked on the conference for the past three years. For the past six or seven months, it's been the main focus of their attention.

"This event really brought VMI and W&L together, and now that we've gotten to know each other better, I think it will lead to more collaboration in the future," said VMI's Wright.

Collaboration was the key to the process, considering the logistical challenges of hosting such an event in a small town. The closest airport is an hour away, none of the local hotels are large enough to house all of the participants, and there's no public transportation system to shuttle participants around town. However, after months of work the committees overcame those challenges.

"There was no manual to follow in planning this conference, but if one existed it wouldn't cover the challenges we faced," said Taffe, director of special events for W&L. "However, both W&L and VMI are accustomed to hosting large events for alumni, and we relied on our knowledge of coordinating those events to help with this conference."

Taffe added that the colleges formed a strong committee of 13 members that coordinated everything from fundraising and finance to speakers and programs to hospitality, entertainment, transportation and the media.

Technology was an important element of the conference, too.

"For the first time, NCUR was a web-based conference," said Taffe. "Early on we designed a Web site for disseminating information and registering applicants, and it was a tremendous timesaver. From travel arrangements, to ordering meals to registering for the conference itself, students were able to handle all of their arrangements online."

"Neither W&L or VMI could have hosted this conference independently," said Wright. "Neither has the physical space or resources to go it alone. However, what we've done together, we did really well, and I think the next host will have a tough act to follow."

Considering that the colleges received 2,345 abstracts and accepted 1,768 projects involving 2,500 presenters and faculty members, the Web site proved its worth. In addition, 60 percent of the participants flew to Virginia for the conference, so travel coordination was a crucial element of the planning process.

A small army of buses and vans transported participants from their hotels to two satellite parking lots in Lexington, where they were shuttled to the colleges to ease parking limitations. Another small army provided lunch and snacks for the conference-goers each day. W&L and VMI even held a casino night for students and faculty and tours of the Lexington area following the close of the conference.

VMI's Undergraduate Research Initiative Nationally Recognized

The *CUR Quarterly*, a national publication of the Council on Undergraduate Research, or CUR, has a feature article on the "Institutionalization of Undergraduate Research at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI)" in the Institutional Highlights section of its March 2005 issue.

CUR and its affiliated colleges, universities, and individuals share a focus on providing undergraduate research opportunities for faculty and students at predominantly undergraduate institutions.

"VMI's URI Program was formed in 2001 and has rapidly risen to national visibility with the culmination in the hosting of the NCUR 2005 conference in Lexington on April 21-23, 2005," said Col. James E. Turner '65, VMI's first director of undergraduate research and professor of chemistry/biology.

Turner also said the phenomenal success of the URI is due primarily to the support of the Institute's administration, particularly from the dean's office, and the dedication of its faculty to this unique way to teach cadets about leadership and how to solve real-world problems in an academic setting.