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POST BRIEFS

Passmore Featured in International Studies Quarterly

Lt. Col. Tim Passmore, associate professor in the Department of International Studies and Political Science, recently published an article addressing the effect of populist government on international cooperation in *International Studies Quarterly*. The article was co-authored with Dr. Jared Oestman, assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Passmore has spent several years studying nations' willingness to support multinational peacekeeping operations with personnel and funding. Passmore and Oestman collected data over a number of years to test the impact of populist governance on financial contributions to U.N.

peacekeeping operations since 1991. They found a strong negative impact of right-wing populism, but no such effect for left-wing populism. They theorized that right-wing populist leaders are more averse to the costs of participating in multilateral operations, oppose interventions in distant foreign countries, and are more likely to view the U.N.'s bureaucracy as part of the global elite.

This research makes an important contribution to a growing body of literature on how shifts in the domestic political landscape, particularly among western democracies, has impacted and will continue to impact international order and cooperation.

Burke's Food Safety Research Published

Maj. Alison Burke, assistant professor and health professions advisor in the Department of Biology, recently had a research article published in *PLOS One*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

Burke, whose specialty is molecular microbiology, explained the article highlights information about four newly discovered viruses that could be used to improve seafood safety. "We used oysters purchased from the grocery store, that had been harvested from the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia, to isolate bacteriophages—viruses that destroy host bacteria—against *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, a bacterium commonly found in coastal

waters that can accumulate in oysters and cause foodborne illness in humans when contaminated shellfish are eaten raw or undercooked. Unlike antibiotics or chemical treatments, bacteriophages are highly specific and naturally occurring, targeting only their bacterial hosts without harming other organisms or the environment."

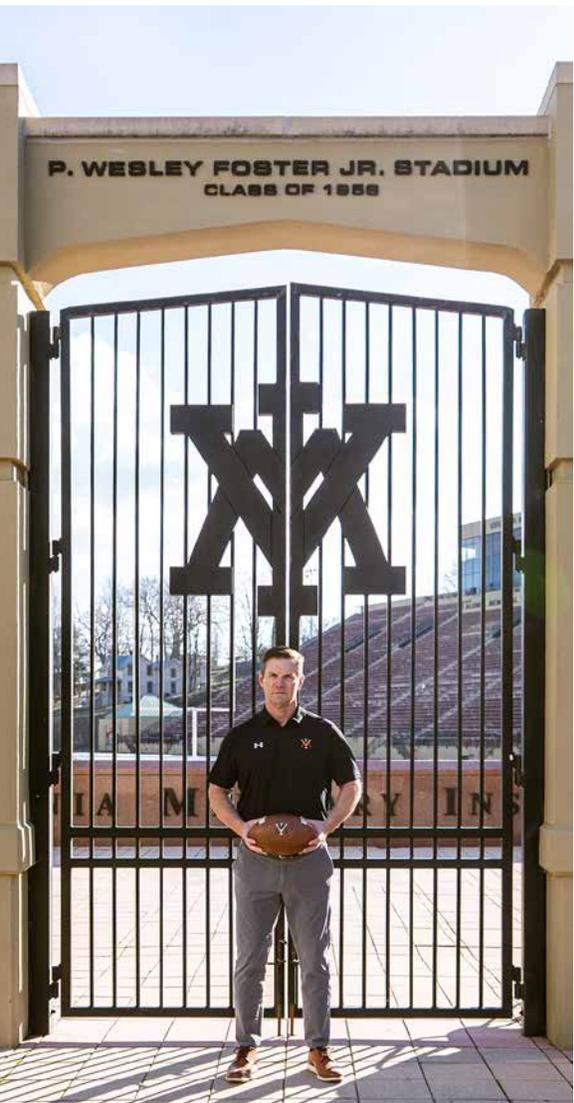
This work, which spanned over a period of one year and co-written by five other biologists, contributes to a growing body of research exploring solutions for food safety and aquaculture. ❄️

Ingram Hired as Head Football Coach

While the vast majority of the VMI community was enjoying a holiday break, VMI Athletics announced the hiring of Ashley Ingram as the next Keydet head football coach Dec. 30. The news came just two weeks after Danny Rocco announced his resignation after three seasons with the program.

Ingram, joining VMI after being the head football coach at Carson-Newman University in Tennessee for two years, spoke at a press conference in Marshall Hall Jan. 16 and was introduced in Cameron Hall at the basketball game against The Citadel Jan. 17.

Jamaal Walton '07, athletic director, emphasized Ingram has a transformational opportunity ahead and knows the values and unique aspects of a military college, as Ingram spent 16 years in various football roles at the U.S. Naval Academy. Walton says they are committed to "building a program, not just a team."—Photos courtesy of VMI Athletics.



INSTITUTE REPORT

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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 VMIRreport@vmi.edu. © 2026 Virginia Military Institute.

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Career opportunities are available across post. Learn more about faculty, staff, and hourly career opportunities at www.vmi.edu/jobs.



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On the cover: Brother rats assist each other over a wall obstacle on North Post during Breakout Jan. 24.–
VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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Additional photos are available on Flickr.

Boonshoft to Co-Edit History Journal

By Marianne Hause

The Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR), an association of scholars dedicated to exploring the events and the meaning of United States history between 1776 and 1861, recently named Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft, associate professor in the Department of History and holder of the Conrad M. Hall '65 Chair in American Constitutional History at VMI, co-editor of their quarterly publication, *Journal of the Early Republic* (JER). His term as co-editor will be five years beginning at the conclusion of the July SHEAR conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Additionally, VMI will be recognized as a sponsor of JER—the first liberal arts college to serve in that capacity since the journal was first published in 1981—and many cadets will be given the opportunity to help with the editorial work.

Originally from New York, Boonshoft attended the University at Buffalo-SUNY where he majored in history. He earned his doctorate in United States history, focusing on the era of the American Revolution and Founding, at Ohio State University. He served as a historian at the New York Public Library (NYPL) in Manhattan where he worked on a project that digitized 50,000 pages of original manuscript sources from the late 18th century and early 19th century, wrote about history for the NYPL website, advised on exhibitions, and organized various educational programs. He also taught at Norwich University and Duquesne University and worked for a time as the executive director of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, an interdisciplinary academic organization devoted to studying the history and arts of the 18th century world.

Boonshoft's first book, "Aristocratic Education and the Making of the American Republic" was published in 2020 by the University of North Carolina Press and was a finalist for the 2021 George Washington Book Prize. He is currently working on a book tentatively titled, "The Violent Origins of Constitutional Democracy in



Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft

Revolutionary America," using New York state as a case study.

He is also the author of two JER articles, one of which received the biennial History of Education Society Prize.

Boonshoft, who has taught at VMI since 2022, said he couldn't be more honored and excited to serve as co-editor of the journal. "JER has been such an important part of my professional life, at least since I was a graduate student anxiously navigating the peer-review process as a prospective author. The anonymous reviewers and the editors with whom I worked on my submissions taught me much about how to critically but supportively nurture work into publishable form. I've been lucky to work with JER in various capacities and look forward to navigating it through a changing historical profession and public history landscape." Boonshoft has served JER as contributor, book reviewer, and peer-reviewer. He was a member of the editorial board from

2021 to 2024, and currently acts as associate editor for critical engagements. ✨

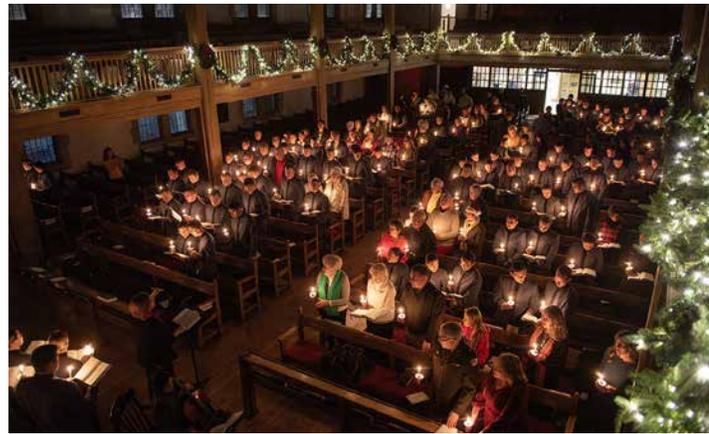


Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft engages cadets in a classroom in Scott Shipp Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Holiday Festivities

December activities on post kicked off the holiday spirit before furlough. Spirit Night was held Dec. 11 starting with cadets enjoying a special dinner served by Parkhurst Dining in Crozet Hall. Later, community members enjoyed "Carols in the Courtyard" with singing by the Glee Club in barracks and a candlelight service with the chaplain's office in Memorial Hall. The next evening, the Building BRIDGES Club; the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion; Preston Library; and the cadet art group hosted a holiday card making event, allowing cadets, faculty, staff, and family members to create cards which were sent to veterans and to residents at local assisted living facilities. Also that Friday evening was "Christmas at the Jacksons" at the Jackson House Museum. Faculty and staff were treated to a holiday meal in Crozet Hall Dec. 16.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye and Jake Falcone '27.



Corps of Cadets Shine in Inauguration Parade

By Marianne Hause

In keeping with tradition, VMI took part in the inauguration of the 75th governor of Virginia, Abigail Spanberger, in Richmond Jan. 17. The theme of the inauguration was “United for Virginia’s Future.” As governor, Spanberger becomes the first female commander in chief of the VMI Corps of Cadets.

While snow flurried before sunrise on the 17th, 28 buses loaded with cadets, uniforms, weapons, and musical instruments pulled away from VMI and headed to the state capital. A small group of cadets served as ushers for the swearing-in ceremony at noon. The parade immediately followed.

The Corps appeared as the second group in the line-up,



The Corps of Cadets form a ribbon of red and blue as they march in the inauguration parade along Capitol Square in Richmond Jan. 17.—Photo courtesy of Virginia Army National Guard.

Continued on next page



Two cadets serve as ushers during the inauguration ceremony.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Moe waves to the crowd while marching with other college mascots in the inauguration parade.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Cadets form a cordon and salute their new commander in chief.—VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.

and captivated the large group of spectators gathered along Capitol Square, as they marched with precision and polish. The Regimental Band played “The Spirit,” then completed a musical handoff to the Pipe Band who played “Shenandoah.” As the cadets passed Spanberger, the command of “eyes right” was given, instructing the cadets to turn their heads and eyes 45 degrees to the right as a ceremonial salute to the governor. Further back in the procession, VMI’s mascot, Moe the kangaroo, charmed the crowd when he appeared with 11 other Virginia public university mascots.

To prepare for the flawless presentation VMI is renowned for, the Corps returned three days early from winter furlough to visit the post barber shop for needed trims, inspect uniforms, distribute rifles and sabers,



Cadets salute Gov. Abigail Spanberger as they pass her during the parade.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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rehearse music, and carry out practice parades. During those practices, cadets made multiple circuits down Letcher Avenue, across the Parade Ground, and back up to barracks. They rehearsed their “eyes right” to the George C. Marshall Statue.

Regimental Commander Devin Auzenne '26 shared it was a privilege to lead the cadets in the parade. “It is fulfilling to prepare the Corps, then experience the well-executed performance, and knowing the entire commonwealth was able to witness it. Participating in the parade is a representation not only of the Institute’s values, such as peaceful transition of power and support of the newly elected commander in chief, but also a reminder that the Institute is staying true to its promise of developing leaders of character that go on to serve the commonwealth and nation after graduation.”

Commandant of Cadets Col. Lawrence Havird '90, who accompanied the Corps to the inauguration, said the cadets were honored to participate in the transition of governance from

Gov. Glenn Youngkin to Spanberger. “The Corps of Cadets took pride in the opportunity to showcase its military precision and discipline to their new commander in chief. We look forward to Governor Spanberger visiting post sometime soon so she can see first-hand how the VMI mission benefits the Commonwealth of Virginia and why the Institute is such a special place.” ❄



The Corps of Cadets practices their formation for the governor’s inauguration parade in front of barracks Jan. 14.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Cadets Rally at NYSE

By Marianne Hause

Ten members of the Cadet Investment Group (CIG), along with advisor Maj. Steve Landgraf, assistant professor in the Department of Economics and Business (ECBU); and Capt. Zebulen Riley, instructor in ECBU, traveled to Wall Street in New York City (NYC) in December, to meet with financial analysts and traders, including VMI alumni who work in the industry.

CIG is a student-led organization that is charged with making investment decisions with actual cash provided by an endowment established by an alumnus. Most members major in economics and business, but it is not a requirement. According to Landgraf, two different groups in CIG manage approximately \$380,000 in total. “Group



Cadets listen to broker John O’Hara, brother-in-law of former CIG member, John O’Donnell '19, on the floor of the NYSE.—Photo courtesy of Maj. Steve Landgraf.

Continued on next page

A invests in cyclical sectors, which are consumer discretionary, energy, industrials, technology, and materials. Group B invests in defensive sectors, which are health care, consumer staples, utilities, financials, real estate, and communication services. This annual trip to New York is another great example of how dedicated VMI alumni

are to mentoring our cadets. CIG itself provides cadets the opportunity to put their education into practice every week, but the interaction with finance professionals in New York is an experience that's difficult to replicate anywhere else," he said.

A tour of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) was arranged for the CIG with assistance from Brian Tate '90, executive managing director and head of Energy and Natural Resources Group at Regions Securities LLC; and Jim Sharp '93, managing director at Regions Bank. Tate and Sharp flew up from Charlotte, North Carolina, to join the VMI contingent at NYSE for the day.

Later, the CIG visited Bill Argiriou '81, a commodities trader at RBC Capital Markets. The group met with Charlie Branch '95, a wealth manager for Merrill Lynch, then proceeded to TM Capital, a middle-market investment bank founded by Gregory Robertson '65. Robert Browning '94 at AllianceBernstein, an asset management and investment advisory firm, also spent time with the group providing career advice. The day was capped off with a dinner in Midtown Manhattan hosted by the NYC VMI alumni chapter, presided by Paul Dickinson '96.

Conner Reid '27, cadet-in-charge of the CIG, is majoring in economics and business with a concentration in finance. He shared the trip was an incredible experience. "We visited several banks including TM Capital and Bank of America, and even had the opportunity to attend the opening bell of the New York Stock Exchange. The trip was especially impactful because we were able to connect with VMI alumni and professionals who have already walked the path

many of us are about to embark on. Building those relationships and receiving guidance from people who have been so successful in their careers has been invaluable, and many of them have become true mentors throughout my journey. It reinforced how powerful it is to foster relationships and form bonds with people 10, 20, or even



Brian Tate '90, Jim Sharp '93, Capt. Zebulen Riley, members of the CIG, and Maj. Steve Landgraf gather below the bell at NYSE.—Photo courtesy of Maj. Steve Landgraf.

40 years ahead of you, who can serve as mentors and role models in your career."

CIG meets weekly and reviews overall fund performance, discusses current events and their impact on the financial markets, then votes on portfolio additions or deletions, requiring a majority to execute a transaction, either buy or sell. ✨

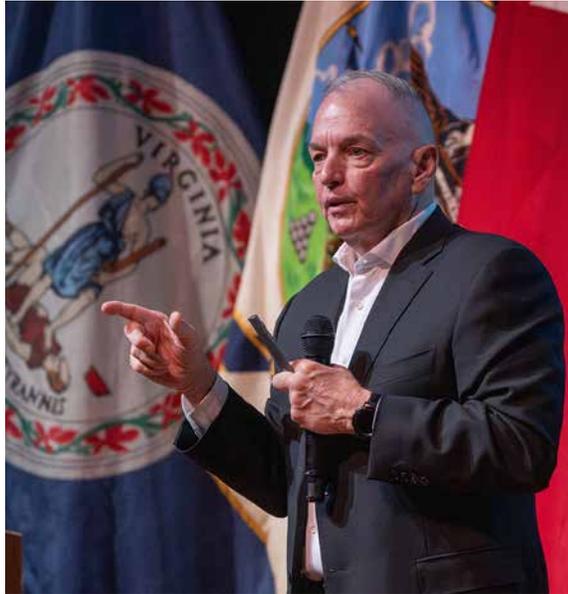
Retired Marine Shares Message of Post-Traumatic Winning

By Marianne Hause

VMI welcomed retired U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Michael “Mac” McNamara Jan. 12-14 to address the Corps of Cadets. McNamara is a broadcaster and author of “From Trauma to Joy” and “Colleen Can’t Forget.” Both books address living successfully after experiencing trauma.

Each of the four cadet classes attended separately McNamara’s three-hour seminar, “Post-Traumatic Winning,” which has been presented to more than 150,000 civilian and military audiences across the United States since 2019. It highlights lessons learned by McNamara from years of interviews and discussions about living a great life after traumatic events. He also shared his message with faculty and staff.

Superintendent Lt. Gen. David Furness ’87, who personally invited McNamara to post, served with him in the Marine Corps and has known him for over 35 years. Furness introduced McNamara to the audiences by sharing his own heartbreaking experiences in 2018. “I took over the command of Second Marine Division in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and in my first three months of command, I had five suicides. I reached out to the mental health professionals and asked, ‘Why is this happening? What can we do about it?’ I wasn’t going to accept continuing what had



Retired U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Michael “Mac” McNamara shares his message with cadets in Gillis Theater. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

always been done, because it wasn’t working. I knew Mac was doing a radio show called ‘All Marine Radio,’ and was interviewing lots of combat veterans, hearing common themes, and finding trends in trauma and healing. I asked him to develop a program that would help my Marines with stress and emotional health, and he agreed. In 2019, right after the Christmas holidays, he came to Camp Lejeune with his presentation and gave it to a total of 14,000 over a one-week period.” The impact the seminar had on the Marines was successful and immediate. Furness was pleased. “I couldn’t go anywhere without Marines coming up to me thanking me and telling me it had changed their lives.”

McNamara himself has seen and experienced significant trauma and loss. He is a combat veteran who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He was a close-up witness to a helicopter crash during a training exercise at Twentynine Palms, California, in which the pilot was decapitated in his seat. His family shared deep hurt and pain when his sister Peggy’s husband shot and killed their two sons, then after beating her, turned the gun on himself. Another sister died horrifically. Instead of dwelling in a dark place, he chose a better way.

His methods of helping others overcome suffering are based on building relationships and sharing testimonials of personal traumatic ordeals. He told his audiences not to be afraid to sit down and talk to people who are struggling. “I don’t want you to hit the ejector seat as soon as they start getting serious, saying, ‘It is not a place where I belong.’ You do belong there because you’re in their life.”

McNamara equipped his listeners with helpful ideas they can implement immediately, and provided them with a wealth of additional resources including reels, online seminars, and podcasts accessible on his website www.fromtraumatotojoy.com. 🌟



Retired U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Michael “Mac” McNamara addresses 2nd Class cadets in Gillis Theater Jan. 14. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Pistol Club Ends Semester with a “Bang”

By Marianne Hause



Jamie Palacio '27 and Chase Boucher '27 practice shooting at the indoor range in Kilbourne Hall. —Photo courtesy of Dale Hybl '94.

The pistol club closed out a successful fall 2025 season in December, after competing in two national-level competitions sanctioned by USA Shooting, the national governing body for international shooting sports in the United States.

Early in the month, the club hosted two of USA Shooting's Junior Olympics (JO) qualifiers at VMI. Team members participated in the .22 caliber sport pistol and air pistol events. Jamie Palacio '27 led the team in the .22 caliber event, setting a personal record with a score of 518. Varick Nitzsche '29 led the team in the air pistol event with a personal record of 525. Notably, Sheng-Chun Tseng '29 set a personal best in his first competitive match with a score of 425. The team's scores were sent to USA Shooting for consideration in the JO rankings and invitation to the 2026 JO competitions.

In mid-December, three club members, Palacio, Chase Boucher '27, and Kate Patrick '27, traveled to Camp Perry, Ohio, for USA Shooting's winter air gun championship. During the match, all three posted personal records in air pistol. According to head coach Dale Hybl '94, Patrick placed 11th and Palacio placed 20th of the 24 shooters in the women's category. Boucher placed 12th of the 17 shooters in the men's category. "I'm exceptionally proud of the team's growth this semester. In the five formal matches during the semester, the nine members achieved new personal records 25 times. We will spend January and February preparing for the Intercollegiate Pistol National Championship being held in Columbia, Missouri, in March." 🌸



Chase Boucher '27, Kate Patrick '27, and Jamie Palacio '27 visit Lake Erie after their victories at the winter air gun championship at Camp Perry, Ohio. —Photo courtesy of Dale Hybl '94.



Breakout 2026

Just hours before post was covered in snow and sleet, Breakout took place Saturday, Jan. 24. Cadre woke the Rat Mass at 5 a.m. for training before breakfast. Breakout activities continued through the early afternoon, including workout stations on North Post and a crawl across the Parade Ground. The new class hosted an alumnus of the Class of 2023 as their dinner speaker and concluded the day with the first Old Yell for the Class of 2029. The week prior, rats and cadre completed a 20-mile march along the Chessie Nature Trail. Additional photos of these events are on the VMI Flickr page.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, and Jake Falcone '27.



Study Abroad Ambassador: Morgan Fraser '27

By Laura Peters Shapiro

More than 10% of cadets each year choose an international learning experience. Through semester or summer programs, cadets not only widen their global perspectives, but also build critical thinking, resilience, independence, and the ability to communicate across cultures. Learn more about these first-hand experiences through our Study Abroad Ambassador series.

Morgan Fraser '27, an international studies major, talks about her study abroad experience.

Which program did you do?

I studied abroad in Madrid, Spain, through the Spanish language program in summer 2025, which gave me the chance to really dive into both the language and the culture. Other cities visited include: Toledo, Consuegra, Barcelona, El Escorial, and Valencia.

What made you decide to participate in this program?

I've always wanted to improve my Spanish, but more than that, I wanted to challenge myself by living in a different country. I had never been outside the U.S. before Spain so there were a lot of firsts. The idea of experiencing Spain firsthand; the history, the food, and the daily life, it was something I knew I couldn't pass up.

How did you balance this program with VMI's unique educational approach?

VMI teaches you how to manage your time, stay disciplined, and handle challenges head-on. I relied on those same skills abroad—keeping up with classes, adapting to new and different routines, and making the most of every day and opportunity.

Continued on next page



Morgan Fraser '27 visits Plaza de Oriente in Madrid, Spain.—Photo courtesy of Morgan Fraser '27.

Other Cadet Highlights

Check out a wide array of cadet feature stories at www.vmi.edu, now highlighting other ambassadors for study abroad opportunities, as well as articles from The Vanguard and Behind the Balance series.



What were your keys to success?

Being open-minded and willing to step out of my comfort zone were keys to my success. I tried to speak Spanish as much as possible, even when I made mistakes. And I said “yes” to experiences that felt unfamiliar at first. I would always walk into a café or

restaurant to use my Spanish to get better, and most of the time they would work with me, even when I struggled. I was just so thankful to be there that I knew I wanted to succeed and try my very best in classes while I was being taught by Spanish speakers from Spain.

How do you think participating in this program will aid you in your future?

It sounds cliché, but it gave me confidence in adapting to new situations and showed me the value of seeing the world through a different lens. Those lessons will carry over into both my career and personal life, especially in environments that demand flexibility

and strong communication skills. You have to be willing to adapt in a country that’s not yours and it was a humbling experience, but also cool and amazing.

What was the best part of the program?

My favorite part was definitely the people, both the students I traveled with and the locals I met. Sharing meals, exploring new places together, and hearing stories from people who grew up in Spain made the whole experience unforgettable. One of my favorite people from my study abroad trip was my professor, Maria, from Spain. She was just great, very down to earth, and we would share so many stories back and forth during class time. We both wanted to learn about each other’s backgrounds, and it just made the classes so personal, and I truly learned a lot.

What was the most surprising thing about the country you visited?

The slower pace of life was the most surprising thing. In Spain, meals are long, people take time to connect, and there’s less of a rush. The work-to-life ratio is insane and they appreciate slowing down. It really stood out to me, especially compared to the constant go-go-go I’m used to at VMI. It was a good place to be to re-center yourself and appreciate all the little things.

Favorite memory?

There is a place in Madrid called Temple of Debod. It is an ancient Egyptian structure that was donated to Spain in the 20th century as a thank you gift. It’s on an overlook in the center of the city and you can see the entire landscape of Madrid; it was absolutely beautiful. We went one evening to watch the sunset, because that’s where everyone went to watch the sun go down, and people would bring their guitars and sing and bring food, and it was just amazing. It was such a good memory and experience overall. 🌟



Morgan Fraser '27 poses with her study abroad classmates for a photo at El Escorial near Madrid, Spain.—Photo courtesy of Morgan Fraser '27.

Cadet Reconnects with FLOTUS at Holiday Event

By Marianne Hause

A 4th Class cadet, Caoilinn McLane '29, had the honor of introducing the First Lady of the United States when she arrived to Children's National Hospital (CNH) in Washington, D.C., for her holiday visit in December. According to the CNH website, Melania Trump read a holiday story to a group of children and their families; sat with patients at their bedside; posed for photos; and spent time with nurses, doctors, and support staff. Her visit renewed a tradition that dates back to 1945 when First Lady Bess Truman called on families who could not spend their holidays at home.

McLane, an international studies major from Aldie, Virginia, was originally diagnosed with childhood acute myeloid leukemia (AML), an aggressive cancer of the blood and bone marrow, when she was 15 years old. She was treated at CNH—50 miles away from her home—as an inpatient, so the hospital became her residence for nearly a year. She returned home to restart her teenage life, but had a relapse a year later, and returned to CNH. “I had to go back and endure all of the aggressive chemo I had before, in addition to total body and cranial radiation, as well as a bone marrow transplant.” After receiving the transplant from a bone marrow donor found through the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) registry, McLane was able to return home again and try to pick up with her life. In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was raging and she was preparing to graduate high school, the cancer returned. “At that time, the survival rate of relapsing leukemia was less than 10% and there wasn't a set medical protocol for treatment. My options were palliative care or participating in a medical trial. I had to research a bunch of trials. I could only be in one, and the doctors were not allowed to advise me, so I had to choose. I was treated with more chemotherapy, radiation, and another transplant. After the transplant, I participated in the RESOLVE trial and I have remained cancer free since the second transplant.” Though her cancer has been in remission for over five years, McLane has suffered from late-term side effects. Six months before matriculating at VMI, she had a total hip replacement, and prior to that, she had four other major joint surgeries.

It was during her original stay at CNH in 2017 that McLane first met Trump. The hospital opened the Bunny Mellon Healing Garden, named after late philanthropist and horticulturalist Rachel “Bunny” Lambert Mellon, and dedicated to the First Ladies of the United States. “I was in a wheelchair at the time, so they pushed me up on the stage, and I spoke about what the garden would mean to patients. The First Lady and I, along with some other patients, planted a few flowers to start the garden. It was really special. Every time I've seen her, she spends a lot of time talking one-on-one to patients and families. She's truly genuine and gracious. She cares and she's very sweet with all of the kids.” After that initial meeting, Trump called McLane a few times during her treatment to check on her. McLane has also received personalized greeting cards from her throughout the years.

Fast forward to last November, when McLane heard again from CNH. “They tried to call me, but VMI rats don't have cell phones, so they called my mother and told her they wanted me to come back for a holiday event with somebody special. They wouldn't reveal what the event was or who the special person was, but I was pretty confident I knew,” she said laughing. “I was



First Lady Melania Trump and Caoilinn McLane '29 reconnect in December at Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C.—Official White House Photo by Andrea Hanks.

Continued on next page



Melania Trump and Caoilinn McLane '29 first meet at the opening of the Bunny Mellon Healing Garden in 2017.—Official White House Photo.

honored and touched Melania remembered me and wanted me to come back. I felt very special. The holiday event itself was small and intimate. An official White House photograph was taken of the First Lady with me, and we chatted. She remembered I played soccer, and she asked about my mom.”

Attending VMI had been McLane’s goal before she got sick, and admits the physical demands and struggles VMI throws at all the rats, poses additional challenges for her.



Caoilinn McLane '29

“The VMI values like grit, commitment, dedication to service, and giving it your all—even on the hard days—is what got me here, and is getting me through the Rat Line. I’m not giving up on myself or my goal. I’m determined to finish the Rat Line and graduate from VMI.” She is excelling academically, and made the fall semester dean’s honor list.

McLane is a goalkeeper on VMI’s women’s soccer team. The team’s head coach, Jim Robbins, reported she was a walk-on player last fall. “Caoilinn has worked very hard to get her soccer fitness and strength back. She is all heart, commitment, and dedication, and has a no-quit attitude.”

An alumna of John Champe High School, she hopes to work in government intelligence.

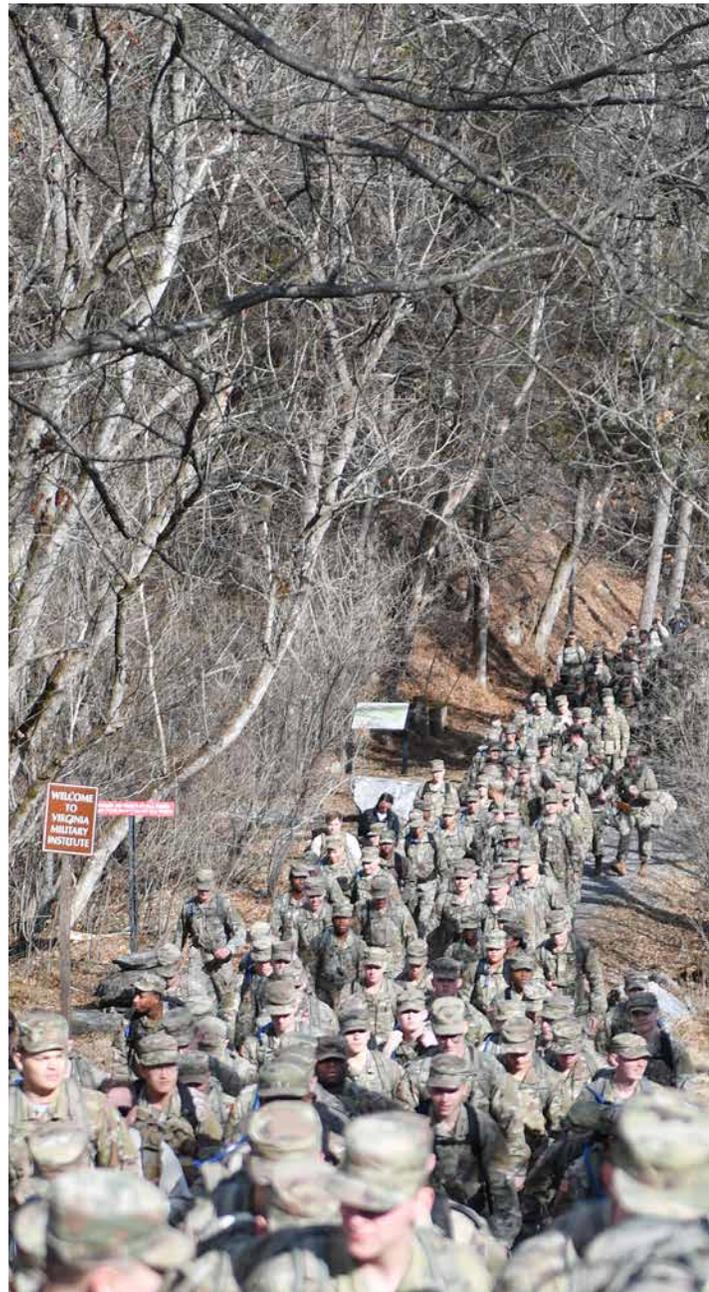
According to NMDP’s website, every three to four minutes, someone in the United States is diagnosed with a blood cancer. Bone marrow donors are urgently needed. The process to become a donor is easy. Anyone between the ages of 18 and 35, who meets the residential and health eligibility may join the registry. For more information on how to become a donor, go to www.nmdp.org/get-involved/join-the-registry. ❄

Rat Unity

Less than 24 hours after returning to post from winter furlough, the Rat Mass participated in a Rat Unity event to benefit the Rockbridge Area Relief Association (RARA). Cadets brought cans of food to donate to the cause, totaling more than 1,900 items. The rats rucked the donations across town for RARA the afternoon of Jan. 13.

“The effort not only demonstrated how closely the Rat Mass has grown over the past several months, but also highlighted to the town of Lexington VMI’s commitment to giving back to the community that has provided so much to us,” shared Samuel Paccassi '29.

Maximus Ankrah '26, 1st Class president, agreed with the sentiment of bonding and giving back. “They have proven that the Rat Line isn’t just about discipline and resilience, but putting others first; that only through working together will you accomplish anything set before you.”—VMI Photos by Jake Falcone '27



December Graduation and Commissioning

By Marianne Hause

The December commencement ceremony was held Thursday, Dec. 18. Proud families and delighted friends gathered in Memorial Hall to honor 29 cadets as they were awarded their bachelor's degrees.

At his first graduation ceremony as superintendent, Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 welcomed the assembly, and thanked the parents for their invaluable role in raising their children and instilling in them the values, ideals, drive, and determination necessary to succeed at VMI. Furness told the graduates that the Institute is meant to be a hard and demanding school in order to prepare them for the unique situations that are difficult to predict, but assured to come. "Each of you has completed that training and are ready for the next chapter of your journey." He congratulated them and reminded them that they are part of the VMI family, "a network of support that will last a lifetime." Furness then introduced the keynote speaker whom he referred to as his personal friend and battle buddy, Lt. Gen. William J. Bowers '90, deputy commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

Bowers, who was a rat the year Furness was regimental commander, addressed the graduates with commanding enthusiasm and infectious energy. He cited one of VMI's founders, Col. J.T.L. Preston, and his belief that the true value of a college was best determined by the character of its students and the performance of its graduates. He continued by challenging the graduates to live by

Preston's words inscribed on the parapet in Memorial Garden. "The healthful and pleasant abode of a crowd of honorable youths pressing up the hill of science with noble emulation, a gratifying spectacle, an honor to our country and our state, objects of honest pride to their instructors and fair specimens of citizen-soldiers attached to their native state, proud of her fame and ready in every time of deepest peril to vindicate her honor or defend her rights." He clarified Preston's message for the cadets.

"The healthful and pleasant abode of a crowd of honorable youths.' You all have made fitness a part of your lifestyle. It is part of who you are. Pleasant is not normally the first word that comes to mind when you think of the VMI experience," he said, evoking laughter from the audience, "but now we see what Preston meant. Pleasant means you have a cheerful disposition. You have resilience. The world is going to knock you down, but as a VMI graduate, you have what it takes to get back up and overcome adversity with a cheerful, pleasant disposition. You're going to be trusted implicitly wherever you go, because you've lived under the most stringent and rigorous honor system anywhere in the country.

"Pressing up the hill of science with noble emulation.' You're going to be expected to press



Nathalie Lavender '26 leads the graduating cadets down the aisle in Memorial Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Continued on next page



Lt. Gen. William Bowers '90 offers encouraging and motivating words to the graduating cadets.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

constantly uphill. You're going to do hard jobs in hard places. You're going to press the boundaries of science and technology. You're not only going to meet the standards of those who have come before, but you're going to surpass them and do it in a way that inspires.

"A gratifying spectacle.' Your fellow citizens are indeed grateful that young men and women of character like you take up the challenge willingly to become part of this VMI experience, to live a harder life, and to become honorable leaders in our country and our state. Our country has always counted on VMI to produce leaders of character.

"Objects of honest pride to their instructors and fair specimens of citizen-soldiers.' You're all expected to have those positive attributes of citizen-soldiers, the selfless person whose ideal is to serve others in a democracy.

"Attached to their native state, proud of her fame and ready in every time of deepest peril to vindicate her honor or defend her rights.' Now it's probably a stretch to call the current times a time of deepest peril, but make no mistake, we are being challenged every day by those who seek to undermine and disrupt. There are significant storm clouds gathering. The people of our country and the Commonwealth of Virginia are counting on you. We are eager to see you get out there and make a difference. Congratulations."

The presentation of candidates for degrees was delivered by Brig. Gen. Robert W. Moreschi, dean

of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics. Following the conferring of degrees by Furness, the audience gave the graduates a standing ovation as they tossed their gloves in the air, and sang "The Spirit" and "The VMI Doxology."

Nathalie Lavender '26 maintained a four-year cumulative GPA at 3.5 or higher, and completed the rigorous Institute Honors program, designating her as a distinguished graduate with Institute Honors. John Moore '26 also maintained a four-year cumulative GPA at 3.5 or higher, designating him as a distinguished graduate. John Covert '25, Colby Evans '25, Michael London '25, Nicholas Sitzman '25, Robert Priest III '26, and Collin Shannon '26 graduated with distinction for having maintained a four-year cumulative GPA between 3.0 and 3.499.

Bowers commissioned into the Marine Corps after graduating with distinction from VMI with a degree in history. As a

See December Graduation, page 20



Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 welcomes guests to the December commencement ceremony in Memorial Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



John Moore '26 receives his diploma from Lt. Gen. David Furness '87.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

cadet, he was a member of the boxing club, the Semper Fi society, the Ring Figure honor guard, and was Echo Company commander. Throughout his military career, he has served in every Marine Expeditionary Force, in every element of the Marine Air Ground Task Force, and in most parts of the supporting establishment including a variety of assignments in various locations including Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii; the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, California; Camp Pendleton, California; Recruiting Station Lansing, Michigan; the Naval Command and Staff College in Newport, Rhode Island; the III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, Japan; Iraq, as a plans team leader for Multi-National Force Iraq; and Beaufort, South Carolina. After deploying with the squadron to Operation Iraqi Freedom, he relinquished command in 2009 and reported as a student to the National War College in Washington, D.C. In 2010, he reported to the Joint Staff, J-5 Directorate as the strategy concepts branch chief. From 2012 to 2015, he commanded the 6th Marine Corps District at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina. In 2017 upon selection to brigadier general, he was assigned as the president, Marine Corps University and commanding general, Education Command. In 2019, he assumed duties as commanding general, Marine Corps Installations Pacific-Marine Corps Base Camp Butler, on Okinawa, Japan. In August of this year, he accepted the position which he currently holds, deputy commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Bowers' personal

decorations include the Legion of Merit (with gold star), the Bronze Star, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal (with oak leaf cluster), the Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (with two gold stars), the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. He was the "Combat Engineer Officer of the Year" in 1998.

The evening before commencement, the ROTC joint commissioning ceremony was held in Memorial Hall, where 17 commissioned into the Army as second lieutenants, two commissioned into the Navy as ensigns, and one commissioned into the Marine Corps as a second lieutenant. Offering remarks and administering the oath of office was Col. Timothy Price '04, who graduated from VMI with a degree in international studies, and commissioned as an Army infantry officer. The individual pinning ceremonies and first salutes followed the ceremony.

Price commended the cadets on the hard, necessary path they have chosen. He encouraged them with a quote from VMI's most famous graduate, Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901. "The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul are everything. If you are a soldier, a Marine, or a sailor, that sentiment remains the same." He shared with them that VMI changed his life, and has prepared them well for their career ahead. They are physically

Continued on next page



Col. Timothy Price '04 congratulates the newly commissioned officers.—VMI
Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

fit, well educated, and have lived by the Honor Code. “And the friendships you have made here will outlive deployments and all the chaos of a military career.” He thanked the families for their continual support for those commissioning, congratulated the new officers, and concluded with, “Rah Virginia Mil!”

Price’s first assignment as an infantry officer was as a stryker rifle platoon leader at Fort Lewis, Washington. From there he deployed to Iraq and served as a rifle platoon leader, company executive officer, and company commander during operations in Mosul, Baghdad, and Baqubah. He later held a variety of assignments at Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Zhari District, Afghanistan; The Pentagon; Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Vilseck, Germany; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington; and Fort Polk, Louisiana. His service also includes multiple combat deployments across the Middle East in support of both conventional and special operations, as well as operational deployments to South Korea, Israel, Poland, the Baltic states, and the Southern Caucasus region. His military education includes the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Maneuver Captain’s Career Course, Ranger School, and Command and General Staff College. He also earned a master’s degree in public policy management from Georgetown University as part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Internship Program. He is currently a student at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. His awards include the Bronze Star Medal for Valor, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal for Valor, Joint Service Achievement Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Master Infantry Badge, Parachutists Badge, Pathfinder Badge, Air Assault Badge, Ranger Tab, Joint Chiefs of Staff Identification Badge, and Army Staff Identification Badge. ❁



Commissioning cadets raise their right hands and recite the oath of office.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Faculty, Staff Recognition at Citadel Basketball Game

By Marianne Hause

Col. Jeffrey Smith, head of the Department of Economics and Business and holder of the General Edwin Cox 1920 Institute Professorship in History and Economics; and Maj. Isaac Slone, assistant director of operations and training in the commandant's office, were recognized during the Jan. 17 home basketball game against The Citadel Bulldogs in Cameron Hall. They have been named members of the All-Southern Conference

Faculty and Staff Team for the 2025-26 academic year. With two representatives chosen from each of the Southern Conference's 10 member schools, the All-Southern Conference Faculty and Staff



Maj. Isaac Slone and Col. Jeffrey Smith are surrounded by Brig. Gen. Bob Moreschi; Col. Jay Johnson; Jamaal Walton '07; and Geoff Cabe, senior associate commissioner with SoCon, in Cameron Hall as they are recognized as members of the All-Southern Conference Faculty and Staff Team for the 2025-26 academic year.—VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.

Team recognizes individuals who have demonstrated service to their schools and made contributions to campus life and the local community. Michael Cross, SoCon commissioner stated, "These

outstanding faculty and staff members exemplify the excellence and commitment that define the Southern Conference. Their dedication to mentorship, teaching, leadership, and service, their contributions to their institutions, and their positive impact on students and communities make them truly deserving of this recognition. We are proud to celebrate each of these dedicated individuals who go above and beyond in their roles and help make each SoCon campus a special and exceptional place."

Smith, a retired Air Force officer, is honored by the recognition. "We



Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 joins cadets in enthusiastically cheering for the Keydets against The Citadel Bulldogs.—VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.

Continued on next page

are here to support all cadets. Athletes dedicate a tremendous amount of time in support of the Institute. It is my pleasure to help them as I would any other cadet.” Smith earned his undergraduate degree from the University of South Carolina, his master’s degree from Wright State University, and his doctorate from the University of Tennessee. His research interests include market efficiency, exchange-traded products, alternative assets, investment, wealth, and retirement. He has been published in multiple journals, and has taught at VMI since 2011.

Slone, who has held various key roles throughout his 13 years at VMI, said he is grateful for the acknowledgment. “This recognition truly reflects the strength of the team I serve on here at VMI. Our focus is on supporting cadets who face unique academic, military, and athletic demands, and our successes are the result of shared commitment and hard work.” His broad experience at VMI has equipped him



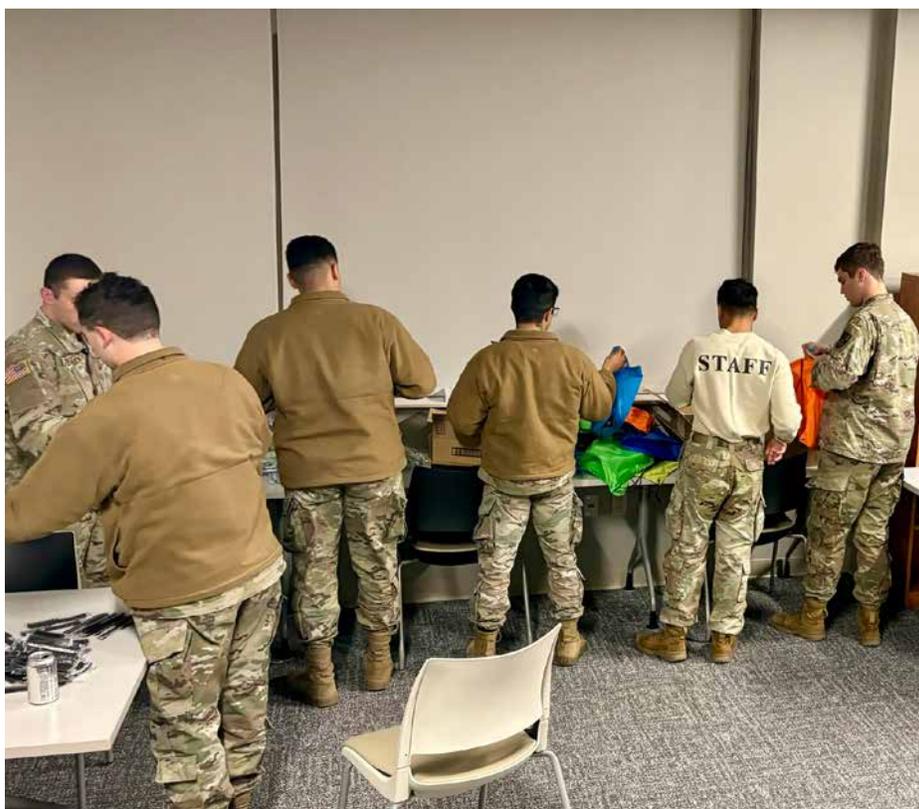
AJ Clark '27 completes a slam dunk against the Bulldogs in Cameron Hall.—
VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.

with a unique perspective on leadership, team development, and operations management. He has served as Echo Company TAC officer, head coach of the rock climbing team, and director of both indoor and outdoor training facilities. A native of Roanoke, Virginia, Slone earned his undergraduate degree from Ferrum College, and an MBA from Salem University in West Virginia.

The atmosphere was electric and loud in Cameron Hall that evening for The Citadel game, even after the cadets had already traveled to and from Richmond for the inauguration parade earlier in the day. Lt. Gen. David Furness '87, superintendent, stood with cadets for most of the game and kept up with their enthusiasm. Even with a strong comeback effort in the second half, the Bulldogs topped the Keydets, 82-68. 🦁

BRIDGES Packs Hygiene Kits for RARA

The Building BRIDGES Club, with support from the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion, hosted a hands-on service event Jan. 21 in Scott Shipp Hall. Nine cadets, one faculty member, and one staff member packed 250 personal hygiene kits, which will be delivered to the Rockbridge Area Relief Association, who in turn will provide them to people in need in the local community. The project was funded by a grant the club received last semester to promote community service.—Photos courtesy of Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl.





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DEVIN AUZENNE '26
TELLS HIS VMI STORY.

I AM
VMI



The cadets, faculty, and staff, both past and present,
are what define Virginia Military Institute and make it
NO ORDINARY COLLEGE.



Scan the QR
code to watch
Devin's story.