



187th Regimental Leadership Announced

page 7

Marshall Awards

Return to VMI

page 4

Medal of Honor Recipient

Visits Post

page 10



VMI Cadet Rescues Citadel Administrator Renders Aid to Rival Fan

By Marianne Hause

When it comes to school rivalries, the one between VMI and The Citadel is among the most historic and intense. The Military Classic of the South, the annual football game between the two senior military colleges, is their biggest competition, with the winner taking home the coveted Silver Shako trophy. This academic year, the game was held in early November in Charleston, and it was there that Dusand Barrow '28, a VMI emergency medical technician (EMT), set aside his team partiality to aid a Citadel fan in distress.

For all away NCAA events, VMI Emergency Medical Services (EMS) sends a small contingent of cadet EMTs to provide emergency response services for cadet spectators in need. Originally, Barrow was not intending to attend the football game at The Citadel, but it was the birthday of a cadet who had been assigned to go who wanted to spend time with his family. So, Barrow volunteered to fill in, and, along with three other VMI EMTs and EMS advisor, Donnie McBrayer, found himself on the bus to Charleston.

Upon arriving to Johnson Hagood Stadium at The Citadel, Barrow prepared to march in with the other corporals, but was alerted that McBrayer needed his help with a patient. He sprinted to McBrayer who was aiding an older gentleman who had fallen and was bleeding. "We treated him, cleaned him up, and sent him to the hospital in an ambulance. After that, I went under the stand area to buy a snack. A group of people high up in the stands saw me, ran down the stairs, and asked if I was an EMT. One of their friends had passed out and needed care. I climbed the stairs with them to their friend, who was fully unconscious. I treated her for about five minutes until the EMTs The Citadel had hired for the game arrived. By that time, the patient was awake but still a bit groggy. I grabbed their equipment and monitored her vital signs. The other EMTs talked to her, and got more information. She had a history of high blood pressure and became overheated in the South Carolina sun. She declined to go to the hospital, so I gave her some water and told her, 'If anything else happens, please feel free to grab me or somebody who's in a blue shirt like me, or call one of the other EMTs.'" It was then the patient and her friends realized that Barrow was a VMI cadet, and were impressed he had come to the home team side of the stadium willingly and without any reservation to



Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 presents a letter of commendation to Dusand Barrow '28 for his service as an EMT at the football game in Charleston Nov. 1.—Photo courtesy of Col. Bill Wyatt.

render aid. "I told them this is my job, it is how I was trained, and what's expected of me. They told me if I ever think of switching from VMI to The Citadel, they can help. I told them, 'No, no, I'm very happy at VMI,'" laughed Barrow.

The group asked Barrow for his name so they could send a recommendation to VMI's commandant of cadets, Col. Ley Havird '90. Though Barrow did not expect to receive anything for what he considered a normal service call, a couple days later he received an email from the group of Citadel friends. "It turns out they are all faculty members at The Citadel. So that entire group sent an email to our advisor, and to our commandant, who awarded me an optional—an authorized excuse from supper roll call. Then I got another email saying our superintendent wanted to meet with me in

his office." It was there that Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 presented Barrow with two challenge coins: One from himself and one from the president of The Citadel. Furness also presented Barrow with a letter of commendation.

According to McBrayer, VMI EMS is a Virginia department of EMS non-transport agency that runs 911 emergency services on VMI property. "It provides coverage for any cadet-related function that needs EMS support, such as rat activities, parades, NCAA events, and ROTC exercises. VMI has 58 EMTs. Barrow is very competent when working with medical patients. He is constantly striving to learn more when it comes to training as an EMT."

Barrow is originally from the South American country of Guyana, but now calls Norfolk, Virginia, home. He is majoring in biology and is the cadet in charge of VMI's firefighting club. He volunteers as a fire fighter for the Lexington Fire Department. Being a first responder is extremely important to Barrow, and because of the EMT and firefighting training and practical opportunities offered at VMI, it is one of the reasons he chose to become a cadet. He is also involved with the climbing team, VMI Theatre, Officers' Christian Fellowship, and works at the Corps Physical Training Facility. Following graduation, he plans to enlist in the Army Reserves and become a professional EMT or firefighter. ❄️

INSTITUTE REPORT

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Contents

VMI Cadet Rescues Citadel Administrator	2
Marshall Leadership and Awards Seminar Returns to VMI	4
Midwinter Formal	6
1 st Class Rank Announcements	7
VMI Hosts 9 th Annual Cyber Fusion	8
Carpenter Inspires Cadets to Embrace Adversity	10
First Spring Parade	10
Post Briefs	12
Dunham Receives Three-Legged Stool	12
Cadets Lead Cyber Defense Workshops	13
Smith Receives AMCSUS Award	13
VMI Receives Accreditation Award	14
Daniels Ceremony	14
February Cultural Events	15
VMI Promotes Japan-U.S. Alliance	16
Spring Career Fair and Networking	17
Retired Green Beret Serves as Leader-in-Residence	18
Legislative Reception	19

On the cover: A cadet admires Kyle Carpenter's Medal of Honor in Cameron Hall during the moderated interview March 9.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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Marshall Leadership and Awards Seminar Returns to VMI

By Mariane Hause

After a hiatus, VMI welcomed the return of the George C. Marshall Leadership and Awards Seminar Feb. 23-24. Each year since 1978, the U.S. Army Cadet Command recognizes and awards the top-tiered cadets at senior ROTC programs and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, by sending them to the seminar, originally held at VMI, the alma mater of Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901. In addition to being the driving force to get the event back to VMI, the George C. Marshall Foundation led efforts to secure speakers and prepare discussion topics.

Cadets were nominated from their respective programs based on scholarship, leadership, physical fitness, and community



Retired Gen. Gary Brito lectures on George C. Marshall as a soldier in Gillis Theater Feb. 23.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Retired Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute speaks following dinner Feb. 24 in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

involvement, and are designated George C. Marshall Award recipients for their respective year. This year, a total of 65 cadets were selected to attend. Regrettably, the blizzard that hit the East Coast prevented the nine cadets from West Point and other New England schools from traveling. The others came from all over the country; as far away as Hawaii, California, and Wyoming; and as close as Richmond, Williamsburg, and Lexington.

Over the course of the two-day conference, the award recipients learned of Marshall's legacy as a soldier and as a diplomat. They heard from and engaged with professionals knowledgeable in

the military, geopolitics, and history, including Col. Spencer Bakich, professor in the Department of International Studies and Political Science (IS) at VMI; Brig. Gen. Maurice Barnett, commanding general of U.S. Army cadet command; retired Gen. Gary Brito, former commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and president of the Brito Group, LLC; Lt. Gen. Johnny Davis, commanding general of U.S. Army recruiting command; George Foresman '84, former undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security; Dr. Paul Levingood, president of the George C. Marshall Foundation; retired Col. Thomas Linn '73, professor at the Naval War College; retired Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute, former ambassador of the United States to the North Atlantic



Dr. Philip Potter and retired U.S. Marine Corps Gen. John Paxton conduct a panel discussion in Gillis Theater Feb. 24.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Continued on next page

Treaty Organization; retired Marine Gen. John Paxton, former assistant commandant; Dr. Philip Potter, professor of public policy at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia; Col. Patrick Rhamey, professor of IS at VMI; Command Sgt. Maj. Darrell E. Walls, command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Cadet Command; and Dr. Clyde Wang, assistant professor of politics at Washington and Lee University. The award recipients listened to speakers, attended a panel discussion, and engaged in small group breakout sessions that covered a wide range of topics including how the military reflects a changing society; operating in a multinational environment; drones and the effects on warfare; the integration of artificial intelligence in warfare; and the great power competition in the South China Sea. They established a long reading list, gained advice to use as young officers, studied, engaged in intense physical training, networked with their peers, and formed new friendships.

A highlight for the award recipients was sharing dinner Feb. 23 with VMI alumnus, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine, VMI Class of 1990. Following the meal, Caine gave the keynote speech in Cameron Hall in which the entire VMI Corps of Cadets, along with many members of the faculty and staff attended.

Caine opened his speech simply and sincerely, "It is nice to be home. I cannot tell you how overjoyed my inner child is to be back here in Lexington. It's just a very, very special place." He immediately bonded with the Corps of Cadets by good-naturedly teasing their superintendent, Lt. Gen. David Furness '87, reminding the Class of 2026 of the advice he offered



Gen. Dan Caine '90 speaks to the Corps of Cadets and Marshall seminar participants in Cameron Hall. —VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Participants of the George C. Marshall Leadership and Awards Seminar gather in Marshall Hall. —VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

them when he spoke to them at their Ring Figure in 2024, and congratulating the Class of 2029 for their recent Breakout of the Rat Line. He referred to both the VMI cadets and the visiting cadets as teammates.

He recalled how when he was a cadet, he helped with the Marshall seminar when it was previously held on post. To the award recipients he said, "It was striking to me then, and it's striking to me now, how lucky we are to have you entering into the service. We are proud of you and grateful for you." To all the cadets in the arena he said, "Your path and service will not always be easy. You will be tested and challenged. You will be asked to make tough decisions. From time to time, you will find yourselves at a crossroads where you simply don't know what to do... I encourage you at that point in time to ask yourself the question: 'What would Marshall do?' There are many leaders that I've learned from in my career, but there is only one George Marshall."

Caine stated Marshall was passionate about leadership, and something he studied his entire career. "It all started and stopped with people; how to properly lead them, how to connect with them, how to care for them, and how to love them. Marshall was humble. It was never about him. It was about doing the right thing. It was always about the deed and never about the glory. He believed, as I do, that every day we have a responsibility to get out of bed and earn it, in a quiet, humble way."

Caine confessed that after he graduated from VMI, he didn't always wear his class ring. But as he started to grow in responsibility, he returned to wearing it again. "Because it reminded me every time I looked at it, 'What would Marshall do?'"

See Marshall Awards, page 6

The most precious thing you have as a leader is the people you are blessed to lead. People were everything to Marshall, so I became a people person. I encourage you to do the same thing. Relationships are essential in your path of service, in or out of the military. It means asking folks a simple yet beautiful question, 'What is your story?' Sometimes they'll tell you good things. But every once in a while, they'll tell you when they need your help. Listen carefully to the answers to that question. Marshall was a master at this."

Caine closed by asking the assembly to remember the members of the Joint Force doing the nation's business, the deployed and their families, and most importantly, the fallen and their families. "They show us what courage looks like. It is through all of them and Marshall that we find the gift of a perfect example. Thank you. Congratulations to our



Matthew Kleinschuster '26 power lifts as part of the intense physical training during the Marshall Seminar.—VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.

Marshall award winners, and to the Corps of Cadets. It's nice to be home with you." Caine's audience gave him a standing ovation, and he returned the affection as he left the arena, with a smile and wave.

Matthew Kleinschuster '26, a VMI cadet, was one of the award recipients. Kleinschuster is an applied mathematics major with a business minor, from Richmond. He is commander of Foxtrot Company, as well as commander of VMI's Blue Ridge Battalion, the largest ROTC program in the country. Upon commissioning, he will branch in explosive ordnance disposal. He shared that attending the seminar was a huge honor.

"Learning about all of Marshall's accomplishments has given me confidence, and I am excited to join the Army and hopefully carry out his legacy. I have learned so much during our civil discussions, and hearing all the perspectives of very successful AROTC cadets. I plan to take everything I have learned and implement it into my approach in becoming a future officer." ❄️



Midwinter Formal

Cocke Hall was decorated patriotically to celebrate America's semiquincentennial for the Midwinter Formal, held Feb. 27 and 28. The 1st and 2nd Class cadets danced to the music of The Significant Others on Friday night, while the 3rd and brand-new 4th Class cadets enjoyed their music on Saturday. Additional photos can be found via the QR code.—VMI Photos by Jake Falcone '27.





1st Class Rank Announcements

Cadets gathered in Memorial Hall March 3 as the 1st Class rank announcements were made for the next academic year. The cadet captains for the 2026-27 academic year are Kimlong Nguyen, regimental commander; River Smith, regimental executive officer; Gabriel DuPlessis, chief of staff; Abduhu Chauhdury, 1st Battalion commander; Samuel Castle, 1st Battalion executive officer; Caleb Chandler, 2nd Battalion commander; Zachary Denton, 2nd Battalion executive officer; Katelyn Redlinger, 3rd Battalion commander; Alejandra Knoedler, 3rd Battalion executive officer; Jonah Sporleder, S1 captain; Aleck Tiller, S2 captain; Colin Tortorelli, S3 captain; Gianna DeCicco, S4 captain; Ronnie Thompson, S5 captain; Jesse Vaughn, S6 captain; Laura Canaday, S7 captain; Margaret Townsend, S8 captain; Paige Becker, S9 captain; Cameron Jones, Alpha Company commander; Aiden Psczulkoski, Bravo Company commander; Jacob DeMarco, Charlie Company commander; Connor Roche, Delta Company commander; Trygve Bloom, Echo Company commander; Daniel Duke, Foxtrot Company commander; Nathan Brinker, Golf Company commander; Brentton Fentress, Hotel Company commander; Lucas Cosby, India Company commander; and Jackson McDonald, Band Company commander. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



VMI Hosts 9th Annual Cyber Fusion

By Marianne Hause

VMI hosted the 9th annual Commonwealth Cyber Fusion and Virginia Cyber Cup (VCC) Competition, a state-wide collegiate cyber security competition, Feb. 20 and 21. The invitation-only event is for colleges that are National Security Agency / Department of Homeland Security-designated National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense. It was organized by VMI's Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) as part of its strategic engagement initiatives; and co-hosted by the Virginia Cyber Range, an initiative with a mission to enhance cybersecurity education for students in the commonwealth's public high schools, colleges, and universities; and the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative (CCI), Virginia's main access point for cybersecurity research, innovation, workforce development, and news.

VMI founded this cybersecurity event in 2017 at the suggestion of Bryce Bucklin '17, a computer science major, who suggested the Commonwealth of Virginia create a statewide cybersecurity competition. United States Sen. Mark Warner served as honorary chairman.

Participating were 150 students with nearly 30 of their faculty advisors representing 19 colleges in Virginia: Danville Community College, ECPI University, George Mason University, Germanna Community College, James Madison University, Laurel Ridge Community College, Liberty University, Marymount University, Northern Virginia Community College, Old Dominion University, Radford University, Regent University, Tidewater Community College, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, VMI, and making their inaugural appearance, William & Mary.

Activities included a job fair, free professional headshots, a Tech Duels team debate competition, and a faculty/industry round table discussion hosted by representatives from CCI.

Col. David Gray, executive director of the CLE, served as master of ceremonies for the event. Brig. Gen. Robert W. Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, welcomed the participants to VMI. "You are here by invitation, which indicates that you are elite students in cybersecurity. Your career starts here with networking and honing



Student teams from 19 colleges gather to tackle computer security challenges during the annual Cyber Fusion event.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

your skills. The country needs you, the commonwealth needs you, and businesses need you. Make friends and enjoy your time here." He then introduced the keynote speaker, Patrick McShea, executive director for cyber mission operations for CACI International Inc.

McShea spoke on the importance of soft skills, such as teamwork, leadership, adaptability, problem-solving, communication, and

Continued on next page



VMI cadets work together to decipher problems across a range of categories during the capture-the-flag competition in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

creativity. “Why do soft skills matter in a technical world? Employers want well-rounded people. I would take someone with a great attitude and the aptitude to grow into a role over the smartest person in the room if I feel that the smartest person in the room is going to be a problem. Technical skills are a foundation, but they aren’t the only thing.” McShea also stressed the importance of a well written and succinct resumé, and being true to oneself in discovering life’s calling. He ended by reminding the students that “Lifelong learning is not an option.”

A highlight of the two days for the student participants was the VCC capture-the-flag competition, in which teams tackled problems in scenarios designed to model real-world computer security challenges across a range of categories including cryptography, network traffic analysis, and reverse engineering. George Mason University was the high scorer in the four-year college division. The University of Virginia finished second, and William & Mary came in third. For the community college division: Germanna Community College was the winner, followed by Danville Community College in second, and Tidewater Community College in third. VMI cadet competitors were Caroline Marini '26, Sarah Fitzsimmons '27, Isaac Gwin '27, Santiago Rocha



The team from George Mason University lifts the Virginia Cyber Cup in victory after winning the capture-the-flag competition.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

'27, and John Stotler '27. Their coach was Jacob Klein, software engineer in the Cyber Defense Laboratory. Klein stated the cadets did very well despite most of them being new to the competition. “It was intimidating and nerve-racking, however they buckled down and put up a respectable score. They look forward to future opportunities to compete.”

Lt. Col. Kim Connolly, assistant director of programs and conference for the CLE, stated the collaborative event develops Virginia’s cybersecurity workforce. “Its unique design provides a well-rounded experience for the students, helping them develop both their technical and soft skills before they enter the workforce.” 🌟



Patrick McShea imparts the importance of soft skills during his keynote speech in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Participants in the Tech Duels team debate competition exchange points of view in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Carpenter Inspires Cadets to Embrace Adversity

By Marianne Hause

Gen. George S. Patton, VMI Class of 1907, is credited with saying, “The supreme measure of a man, is what he would risk his life for.” By Patton’s gauge, retired U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. William “Kyle” Carpenter, who humbly stands at 5 feet, 5 inches, is a giant among men.

Carpenter, the youngest living recipient of the Medal of Honor (MOH), who held the rank of lance corporal at the time of his heroism, participated in a moderated interview March 9 in Cameron Hall before the entire Corps of Cadets, faculty and staff, and members of the community. He appeared as part of the Center for Leadership and Ethics’ (CLE) Courageous Leadership Speaker series and H.B. Johnson, Class of 1926, Distinguished Lecture series. Col. David Gray, executive director of the CLE, served as moderator. The CLE’s leadership theme this academic

year is “American Values,” and explores honor, integrity, service, and character as the nation prepares to commemorate its 250th anniversary.

The MOH is the U.S. armed forces’ highest military decoration and is awarded to recognize American soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, guardians, and coast guardsmen who have distinguished themselves by acts of valor. President Barack Obama presented the MOH to Carpenter in 2014 for the heroic act of throwing himself on a grenade to save his best friend and fellow Marine, Nick Eufrazio. In 2010, the two were manning a rooftop security post in Marjah, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, during a chaotic battle. A grenade was thrown on the roof by enemy forces, and instinctively, Carpenter covered the grenade with his body to protect Eufrazio. Carpenter’s Kevlar body armor took the brunt of the explosion, which blew a hole through the roof. Marines and medics



A cadet chats with Kyle Carpenter at his book signing in Cameron Hall. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Kyle Carpenter allows cadets to pass his Medal of Honor during his remarks in Cameron Hall. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Col. David Gray listens as Kyle Carpenter shares his message of hope March 9 in Cameron Hall. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

immediately came to his aid, and were able to medevac him to a hospital within 40 minutes. He was resuscitated multiple times, his heart stopped twice, and he remained unconscious for five weeks.

Incredibly, Carpenter stirred back into consciousness with optimism. “I woke up thinking that I would never wake up again. I could never not be thankful or hopeful, because no matter how banged up I was, I experienced the alternative. It wasn’t a deep sleep, it was nothing. Clearly, I didn’t fully commit,” he quipped to the delight of his audience. Indeed, not only did Carpenter not commit to death, but he has fully embraced life, and accepted his path and purpose of sharing his message of hope to others.

The grenade blast left Carpenter with deep scars all over his body and took out his right eye. He stayed in the hospital three years and endured 50 surgeries. The pain and adversity most people would use as an excuse to give up on life, Carpenter sees as tools toward

growth. He told his audience, “Without adversity and sometimes extreme adversity, you can never reach your ongoing full potential. You can never be perfect, but adversity is the path to becoming the best version of yourself. Growth and comfort cannot coexist. Through those most difficult times, I learned the greatest and most powerful, optimistic lessons.” To the cadets, who daily live a Spartan life and don’t always appreciate the significance of their discomfort he said, “Embrace the adversity. Understand that the most difficult lessons, the most difficult past, the hardships, struggles, and those roads less taken, will teach you more about yourself and the world, and, in turn, allow you to help and lead those around you, much more than you ever would have had you taken the easy or the already paved road. You can have the right people around you. You can have people that push you. You can have professors that care, that try to teach you day in and day out, but ultimately, it is up to you

to accept what you’re being taught and apply it today and every day for the rest of your life.”

Of the medal itself, which he graciously allowed to be circulated among the cadets, the soft-spoken Carpenter shared he has a love-hate relationship with it. “I’m honored and deeply humbled to be a recipient, to be recognized by our great nation, but it’s difficult to wear. The weight of it is immeasurable. It is a medal and a recognition for us all. It’s not an individual award. It seems like it, but it never has been and it never will be. It represents all Americans. It represents those that never made it home.”

Following a standing ovation, Carpenter lingered to sign copies of his book, “You Are Worth It: Building a Life Worth Fighting For.” Hundreds stood in line to purchase the manuscript and to meet the author. ✪



First Spring Parade

The Corps of Cadets marched in the first parade of the spring semester March 6 after weeks of delays due to lingering snow and ice. Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, deputy superintendent for finance and support, took review of the parade, with families from the second spring admissions open house in attendance. –VMI Photos by Jake Falcone '27.

POST BRIEFS

Webb Named Fellow for IGA

Maj. Mattie Webb, assistant professor in the Department of History, was recently named a nonresident fellow with the Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group (IGA), a nonprofit research and public education organization focused on geopolitics. Webb's tenure as IGA fellow will run until December 2026. Throughout the year, she and other IGA fellows will participate in policy-focused discussions, professional development

workshops, and publish public-facing research. Additionally, Webb's article, "Diplomacy at Work: The South African Worker, U.S. Multinationals, and Transnational Racial Solidarity," was recently published in *Enterprise & Society*, a journal focused on historical relations between businesses and their larger political, cultural, institutional, social, and economic contexts, and serves as a preview of her forthcoming book.

Richter Publishes 7th Book

Dr. Duncan Richter, professor in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies and holder of the Charles Luck III '55 Institute Professorship, has recently authored his seventh book titled, "Wittgenstein Versus Anscombe on How to Live: Linked Philosophical Lives," published by Bloomsbury Publishing. The book explores the lives of two of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Elizabeth Anscombe. Anscombe was Wittgenstein's friend and

student, chosen by him to be his translator and editor, but the two had very different views on ethics, religion, killing in war, sexuality, politics, God, and the meaning of life. Drawing on previously unpublished work by Anscombe, Richter explains where these beliefs came from, how they affected the lives of these two great philosophers, and some of the strengths and weaknesses of their divergent positions. All seven of Richter's books may be purchased on Amazon.

O'Neil Shares Middle East Experiences

The Academic Speakers Fund and the Department of International Studies and Political Science hosted U.S. Marine Corps veteran Tom O'Neil Feb. 4, who gave a talk titled, "Nothing as it Seems: War, Business, and Politics in Karzai's Afghanistan." O'Neil covered a range of topics, from the tactical elements of his command over Marines in Iraq, to his dealings

with high-level officials, warlords, and gangsters in Afghanistan. Cadets were captivated as he described his time as a fire support team leader and platoon commander in one of the very first U.S. infantry units to cross the Kuwaiti border into Iraq at the outset of Operation Iraqi Freedom. ✪

Dunham Receives Three-Legged Stool

By Mary Price, Alumni Agencies

On the evening of Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026, a large crowd gathered in Marshall Hall for the Keydet Club Scholarship Banquet. Held in gratitude for the many donors whose generosity makes athletic scholarships possible, the event allows donors to enjoy a meal and fellowship with their cadet scholarship recipients.

The highlight of each year's banquet is the presentation of the Three-Legged Stool award, which is given to the cadet-athlete who most exemplifies the philosophy of a VMI education encompassing academics, athletics, and the military. The term was coined by one of the Institute's most beloved alumni, Giles Miller, VMI Class of 1924.

This year's recipient is Dyson Dunham '26, a wrestler who not only advanced to the NCAA tournament last year, becoming the first Keydet wrestler to do so in five years, but also won his first match at the NCAA tournament, becoming the

first Keydet to score points in the NCAA tournament in 17 years. The recipient of a three-year U.S. Army ROTC scholarship, Dunham finished in the top 23% at Army Advanced Camp last summer. Academically, he's a civil engineering major who's been named to the dean's list three times and currently holds a 3.4 GPA.

Jim Gibson, VMI wrestling head coach, described Dunham as having made "a lasting impact in his leadership, a reflection of his personal drive and his readiness to lead in the future."

Speaking briefly after accepting the award, Dunham thanked a number of people for believing in him and supporting his goals—among them his parents, grandparents, coaches, and fellow athletes.

The other finalists for the recognition this year were Jack Rogers '26, a member of the Keydet lacrosse team, and Sadie Smith '26, a member of the water polo team. ✪



Dyson Dunham '26 (center) is honored with the Three-Legged Stool Feb. 7 in Marshall Hall.—Photo Courtesy of VMI Alumni Agencies.

Cadets Lead Cyber Defense Workshops

Benefits Rockbridge Small Businesses

By Marianne Hause

VMI has developed an experiential learning project called, “Student-Led Cyber Defense: Creating a Safer Digital Landscape for Local Businesses and Nonprofits in Rockbridge County,” in which VMI cadets serve as instructors, mentors, trainers, and support to nonprofits and small local organizations in Rockbridge County which have no information technology or cybersecurity team. The initiative is designed to equip cadets with practical cybersecurity skills, bridging the gap between traditional classroom learning and real-world application, and positioning them for successful careers after graduation. The project is funded by a grant from the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative.

According to Dr. Sherif Abdelhamid, assistant professor in the Department of Computer and Information Sciences, team member of the Cyber Defense Lab, and the project’s principal investigator, the project began in January 2025. “We spent last spring preparing the training material and learning modules, and an additional four months developing ‘Aegora,’ a web platform that hosts the material and service tools. Our first instructional class was with the Virginia Innovation Accelerator (VIA) in Buena Vista. Cadets conducted comprehensive cybersecurity threat assessments, advised on securing network systems, delivered cybersecurity training, and provided advisory support for integrating artificial intelligence to enhance daily workflows, marketing strategies, and data analysis while maintaining data integrity.”



James Bangura '26, Katelyn Redlinger '27, and Gunnar Romsland '26 review their cyber defense presentation for nonprofits and small local organizations in Rockbridge County. —Photo courtesy of Dr. Sherif Abdelhamid.

Nickie Hawkins, director of VIA, attended the cadet-run class and found it invaluable. She was able to use what she learned the following week, when one of her workplace accounts had a password breach. “I was able to recognize the issue, communicate with my team, and apply the necessary interventions to protect our data and accounts. Having the confidence to move forward quickly reduced the potential impact of the breach and reduced the time spent on securing data,” said Hawkins.

One cadet on the team, James Bangura '26, a computer science

major on a cybersecurity track, said the program has been one of the most meaningful hands-on experiences of his academic career. “I have been involved in assessing digital vulnerabilities and helping develop practical security recommendations for local businesses and nonprofits in Rockbridge County. This project has been incredibly rewarding because it allowed us to apply classroom knowledge to real-world challenges that directly impact our community. Working on this initiative has strengthened my technical skills, improved my ability to communicate complex security concepts to non-technical audiences, and reinforced my commitment to serving others through cybersecurity.”

In addition to Bangura, there are currently seven other cadets on the team including Benjamin Davis '26, James Jeffers '26, Gunnar Romsland '26, Shahryar Shah '26, Lucienne Ashmore '27, Ian Coker '27, and Katelyn Redlinger '27. Abdelhamid stated there are plans to provide training to additional local businesses, and to apply for additional grants to extend the program. ✨

Smith Receives AMCSUS Award

Sadie Smith '26 has been selected as a 2025 Association of Military Colleges and Schools of the United States (AMCSUS) Leadership Award winner. The award, which consists of a \$1,000 check and a plaque, was presented at the organization’s scholarship and awards ceremony held Feb. 23. Each year, this honor is awarded to two top leaders at the collegiate level and two at the preparatory school level. AMCSUS consists of 35 military colleges and high schools, including the nation’s senior and junior military colleges, and advocates on behalf of its member institutions. It promotes high military and ethical standards.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



VMI Receives Accreditation Award

By Col. Andrew Luna and Marianne Hause

VMI was recently honored by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), an institutional accreditor for quality assurance in higher education, representing 780 institutions. It presented VMI a Torch Award, a new recognition that celebrates member institutions for their leadership in one of three categories: affordability, student success, and post-college outcomes. VMI was recognized for exceptional post-college outcomes, the only Level II institution—one whose highest degree offered is a bachelor's degree—to receive the award in that category. Dr. Stephen Pruitt, SACSCOC president, formally announced the award at the association's annual conference in December.

The Torch Awards elevate the work of institutions that demonstrate

exceptional commitment to access, quality, accountability, and measurable improvement, reflecting SACSCOC's mission to highlight and support student-centered excellence across the region. The recipients were selected based on their strength across multiple indicators in each award category, rather than overall ranking.

VMI was granted the award based, in part, on its strong postgraduate successes. According to recent data, 97% of VMI graduates are employed or are in graduate/professional schools within five months of graduation. Brig. Gen. Robert W. Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics at VMI, stated approximately 54% of the Institute's recent graduates were commissioned into the military while 30% accepted full-time positions with well-known public and

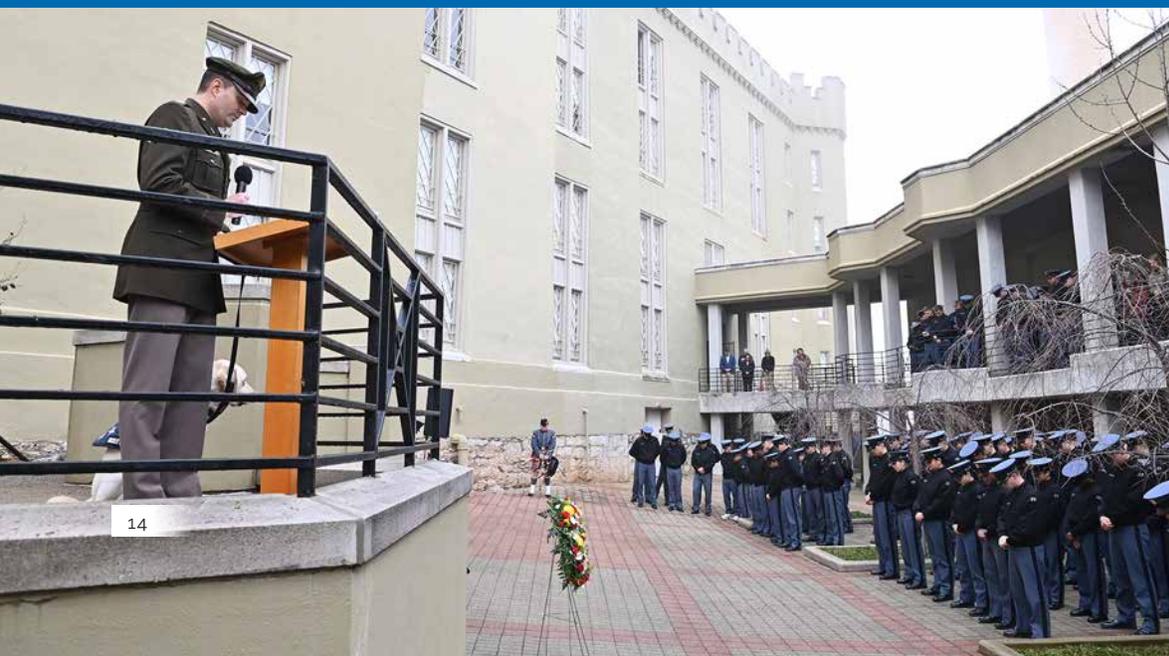
private sector employers. "Furthermore, 10% were accepted in graduate and professional institutions with many of these attending academic programs ranked in the top 75 by U.S. News & World Report."

Col. Andrew Luna, director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and SACSCOC liaison for VMI, strongly believes the Torch Award is the culmination of VMI's ongoing commitment of honor and excellence to every cadet it serves. "While we are currently undergoing our 10-year reaffirmation of our accreditation with SACSCOC, we have actually been accredited by them since 1926. For 100 years, VMI has met rigid accreditation standards to prepare our cadets for strong leadership roles, and this new award shows VMI is clearly doing its job." ❁



Daniels Ceremony

Fourth Class cadets honored Jonathan M. Daniels '61, an alumnus and clergy member who was an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement, the morning of March 4. The commandant and cadet leadership placed a wreath in the Daniels Courtyard following a prayer by Col. John Casper '04, Institute chaplain. In 1965, Daniels was arrested for participating in a voter rights demonstration in Alabama. Shortly after release from jail, Daniels was killed protecting Ruby Sales, a Black teenager, as she and a friend attempted to buy a soda. When he heard of the tragedy, Martin Luther King Jr. said, "One of the most heroic Christian deeds of which I have heard in my entire ministry was performed by Jonathan Daniels." —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.





February Cultural Events

The Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion (DOI), in close partnership with Parkhurst Dining, held several events through February to engage with cadets, faculty, and staff to celebrate various cultures and traditions.

A "Roots of Soul" luncheon Feb. 4 in Crozet Hall honored Black History Month with a menu exploring the African origins of soul food. Later in the month, a pass the mic event centered on music, connection, and community, sponsored by The Promaji Club and DOI.

A New Orleans-inspired meal was available Feb. 17 with the VMI Jazz Band and Washington and Lee Jazz Ensemble offering live performances in Crozet Hall for a Mardi Gras celebration. Later in the month, VMI celebrated the Year of the Horse with Chinese calligraphy, a chopstick challenge, and traditional games for Lunar New Year. This event was hosted by DOI and the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



VMI Promotes Japan-U.S. Alliance

By Mariane Hause

VMI hosted a Japan U.S. Military Program (JUMP) event which included a reception, dinner, and expert panel discussion Feb. 3 in Marshall Hall. JUMP is a partnership between Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA) and the Embassy of Japan, which honors U.S. military personnel and veterans for their contributions to the U.S.-Japan security alliance and engages them in high-level dialogue with U.S.-Japan alliance leaders.

Col. David Gray, executive director of VMI's Center for Leadership and Ethics, served as master of ceremonies for the evening. Welcoming guests to the event was Lt. Col. Jochen Arndt, associate professor in the Department of History and deputy director of the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis (Adams Center). Arndt stated the strategic



Expert panelists Dr. Satohiro Akimoto, Lt. Gen. Larry Nicholson, and Col. Satoshi Masaka lead discussion during the JUMP event Feb. 3.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Adm. Ryo Sakai shares his career experiences at the JUMP event in Marshall Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

analysis portion of the Adams Center ties in with the importance of the U.S.-Japan military alliance. “This event took over four months of planning, and we are very happy, proud, and honored to welcome all our guests here tonight.”

Guest speakers included retired U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Larry Nicholson, former commanding general of III Marine Expeditionary Force in Japan who now serves as a distinguished senior fellow for Sasakawa USA and sits on boards of several veteran-related nonprofits; retired Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Adm. Ryo Sakai, a former surface warfare officer and JMSDF chief of staff; and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Col. Satoshi Masaka, a career infantry officer who currently serves as military attaché for the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C. Dr. Satohiro Akimoto, director of JUMP and president and chairman of Sasakawa USA, served as moderator.

Topics of discussion included the strong alliance between Japan and the United States and the hard work involved to build trust after WWII; other partners and ally countries in the Pacific like Australia, the Philippines, and South Korea; the security and safety of Japan; emerging security threats in the Indo-Pacific; long-term sustainable deployment in the Indo-Pacific; the safety and security of Taiwan; artificial intelligence; undersea military operations; what the future holds for VMI cadets; and the importance of building strong and mutually beneficial relationships with peers from different nations.

Past JUMP events have been held at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Air Force Academy, Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton, the Marine Corps University, and Naval Station

Continued on next page

Norfolk, but this is the first time the event has been held at VMI. Over 50 cadets attended the dinner and panel discussion including J. Paul Sporleder '27, the cadet in charge of the Adams Center, a history major with a military history concentration, who plans to commission in the U.S. Army as an infantry officer. He stated the event was a wonderful experience. "I got to spend time showing the JUMP delegation around post, discussing international affairs, and learning from their experiences and different perspectives about the situation in East Asia."

For Daniel Korniluk '27, an international studies major who plans to commission into the U.S. Marine Corps, the event provided insight on alliance strategies. "The perspectives from Lt. Gen. Nicholson and Col. Masaka were inspiring in how to approach real-world problems and fostering productive thinking on how relationships are utilized in times of threats from other countries."

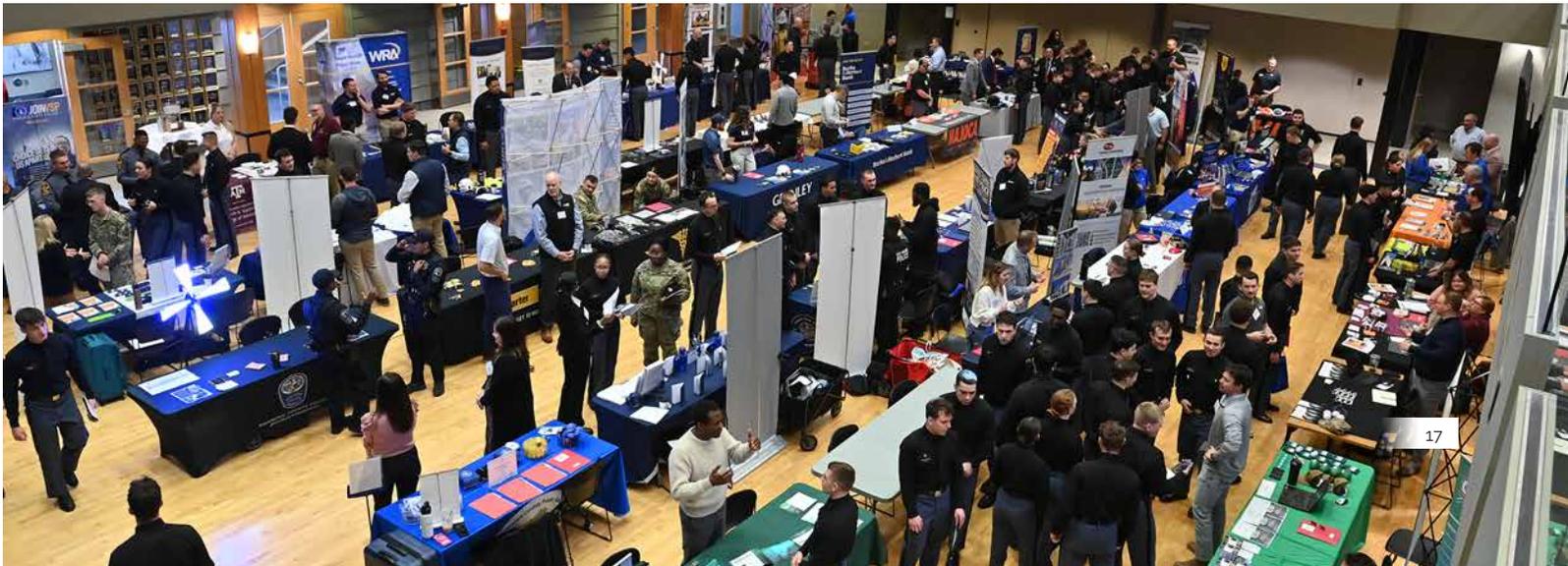
Additional information on JUMP may be found on their website www.jumprogram.org. ✪

Spring Career Fair and Networking

The spring career fair, open to all cadets, hosted more than 50 employers Feb. 11. Afterward, the Office of Career Services co-hosted a networking event with Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (VTOP) in Marshall Hall. The informal meeting was designed to build a bridge between academia and employers by making connections to explore work-based learning opportunities for college students in the form of class projects, internships, research, and guest speakers. Many vendors from the career fair attended along with faculty members from VMI and other local colleges.

Mary Sullivan, VTOP project coordinator for Augusta, Bath, Clarke, Frederick, Highland, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren Counties, explained a good way to promote work-based learning opportunities for students is by working directly with businesses. "Perhaps a class could do research or a project for a company, or maybe a class is looking for a guest speaker to come in and talk about their business or career. We can work together to get the students prepared and for the companies to discover the talent that they're looking for."

Blake Wingfield, senior vice president and director of talent acquisition at Towne Bank in Suffolk, lingered after the career fair to network. "We value what VMI does for the country, as well as our community. We want to ensure cadets are aware of the opportunities we have for employment, and we are excited for the opportunity to recruit interns and full time professionals. VMI cadets hold ideals that we highly value including a strong work ethic, discipline, leadership, teamwork, and camaraderie." —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



Retired Green Beret Serves as Leader-in-Residence

By Marianne Hause

VMI's 2025-26 Gen. J. H. Binford Peay III '62 Leader-in-Residence (LIR) Lt. Col. Scott Mann visited post Feb. 9 through Feb. 13. He is a retired U.S. Army Green Beret and author of the New York Times best seller, "Operation Pineapple Express." Named in honor of VMI's 14th Superintendent, the LIR program is an important part of the Center for Leadership and Ethics' (CLE) efforts to educate, engage, and inspire cadets, faculty, and staff to develop as leaders, and brings to post people of stature within their fields whose distinguished careers exemplify the citizen-soldier model. Mann's residency will amount to a two-week visit over the course of the academic year. He has interacted with cadets in various formal and informal settings, including the classroom, barracks, and during athletic activities such as club sports. He also met with cadet counseling, VMI police, and a group of VMI alumni; recorded an episode of the VMI Leader Journey podcast titled, "Relationship Centered Leadership;" and performed his one-man play, "11 Days" in Gillis Theater.

Mann shared his powerful testimony to cadets in several classes. He talked of being inspired, at the tender age of 14, to become a special operations officer, and described the true mission of the Green Berets, and the services he provided in Afghanistan. He shared his struggles in adjusting to civilian life, and in Col. Polly Atwell's Artistic Responses to Social and Political Issues class in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies, he communicated how he learned to become a storyteller, a skill which led to his healing.

"I had a really crappy transition from the military. I went from being this high performing Green Beret to a dude padding around his house in a bathrobe and not having



Retired Lt. Col. Scott Mann performs his one-man play, "11 Days" in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.



Retired Lt. Col. Scott Mann shares his powerful story with cadets during his recent visit to post.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

showered in two weeks." It got so bad for Mann, that he considered ending his own life. Through a friend, he learned of a workshop in California taught by former Houston Oiler, Bo Eason, who helped people overcome struggles by sharing their stories. Mann flew from his home in Florida across the country to California to hear Eason. "The guy was telling a story about his final moments in the NFL, the moment he blew out his knee during a game. As they were carrying him off the field, he knew his football career was over. He thought he would end up in prison because the only thing he knew how to do was hit people hard. He wanted to learn how to take that TNT inside him and put it toward something productive. He took acting classes, and wrote plays, and actually performed one off-Broadway. The whole time I was listening to him, I was thinking, 'that's me.' When he was done speaking, I went up to him and told him my story, and he agreed to work with me." Eason worked with Mann for two years in helping him in the ancient art of storytelling. It was Mann's goal to share the stories of what he had done in Special Forces, and, more importantly, what his team had done.

Mann's talent to weave a story blossomed and he authored "Operation Pineapple Express," which

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addresses the human cost, moral courage, and extraordinary leadership demonstrated during the final days of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. It is a firsthand account of a covert, volunteer rescue effort led by U.S. special operations veterans and partners who refused to leave Afghan allies behind. Working from kitchens, basements, and living rooms throughout the U.S., the group coordinated across time zones and bureaucratic barriers to help evacuate nearly 1,000 at-risk Afghan interpreters, commandos, and their families. Mann later wrote, "11 Days: The Story of Operation Pineapple Express," a one-man, one-act play adapted from his book, which he performed Feb. 11 in Gillis Theater to an enthralled audience. Directed by Jason Cannon, the production centers on themes of courage, healing, honor, and leadership under extreme pressure. "11 Days" is Mann's second play. His first, "Last Out—Elegy of a Green Beret," has toured throughout the country.

Mann is chief executive officer of Rooftop Leadership, a professional training and coaching company specializing in human connection skills, and the founder of The Heroes Journey, a 501(c)(3) committed to helping U.S. and Afghan veterans tell their stories and transition



Retired Lt. Col. Scott Mann brings his one-act play to an engaged audience Feb. 11.—VMI Photo by Jake Falcone 27.

to civilian life. He will return to post April 6-7 to complete his term as LIR, be the featured speaker at the Superintendent's Leadership Dinner, and have an encore performance of his one-man play. ✪



Legislative Reception

Alumni, faculty, staff, and cadets gathered at the Library of Virginia in Richmond on the evening of Feb. 19 to thank members of the legislature for their service and support of VMI. The reception is sponsored by the VMI Alumni Agencies. Earlier in the day, cadets visited with members of the General Assembly.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.





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JULIA WARD '26
TELLS HER 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
Julia's story.