Founded in 1839, Virginia Military Institute is the nation’s first state-supported military college. U.S. News & World Report has ranked VMI among the nation’s top undergraduate public liberal arts colleges since 2001. For 2018, Money magazine ranked VMI 14th among the top 50 small colleges in the country. VMI is part of the state-supported system of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The governor appoints the Board of Visitors, the Institute’s governing body. The superintendent is the chief executive officer.

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

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January 2019

VMI NEW MARKET CEREMONY

Held on the VMI Parade Ground every May 15th (weather permitting)

Order of the Ceremony

The Ceremonial Formation: The Corps of Cadets marches from Barracks to the Parade Ground, forming two battalions centered on the statue Virginia Mourning Her Dead, at the base of which are buried cadets who died in the Battle of New Market.

The Roll Call: The ceremony begins with the historic roll call of the 10 cadets who died in the battle, each name called by the commander of the company in which that cadet served. In response to each name called, a cadet appointed for the ceremony gives the traditional reply: “Died on the field of honor.” The commanders of the companies of the Corps established since 1864 report for alumni who died in America’s wars since the Mexican-American War. The Regimental Commander then gives the full report to the Commandant.

The Ceremony and Review: Floral tributes are laid at the foot of Virginia Mourning Her Dead and at the three arches of Barracks that display plaques naming alumni who died in battle. The Chaplain recites the New Market Prayer, and a three-volley salute is fired. At the conclusion of the gun salute, an echo rendition of Taps is played followed by the playing of Amazing Grace. The Corps then marches to the end of the Parade Ground, onto Letcher Avenue toward Barracks, and renders an eyes-right salute to the Superintendent and the Commandant as it marches in front of the monument.

The source for this information is The Battle of New Market by William C. Davis, Doubleday & Co., 1975. Page references are indicated in parentheses.

May, 1864, the VMI Corps of Cadets was called by Gen. John C. Breckinridge to join his veteran troops to defend the Valley of Virginia against the onslaught of superior Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel.

The Union advance on the Valley was a key element in the grand strategy of Gen. Ulysses Grant to press the Confederates into submission. While he confronted Gen. Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia in the eastern portion of the state, Sigel’s army would secure the Valley and threaten Lee’s left flank. It was Breckinridge, a former vice president of the United States, who was entrusted by Lee to protect the Valley and also defend Lee’s left flank.

Pressed on all sides, the Confederates were undermined. When Superintendent Francis H. Smith first tendered the services of the Corps, made up of boys from 14 to 18 years old and half of them first-year cadets, Breckinridge declined. Later, he called them to come, but only as a reserve. “Gentlemen from VMI,” he shouted from horseback, “I trust I will not need your services today, but if I do, I know you will do your duty.”

Continued on next page
On the day of the battle, after taking massed fire from federal muskets, the Confederate front line was split by a gap of 350 feet, a clear advantage should Sigel order an attack. Facing near disaster, their forces disrupted, a Confederate officer urged sending in the cadets, to which Breckinridge replied, "...This will not do...I cannot expose them to such a fire as our center will receive," but the officer was desperate, "General, you have no choice."

"Put the boys in," Breckinridge decided, "and may God forgive the order..."[121-22]

With the Institute flag in tow, riddled with shot and balls,[22] the cadets closed the gap,[23] the Confederate forces met the Union charge and turned it back.[133-35] In drenching rain, the Confederate line moved forward over the rain soaked and recently plowed wheat field, called the "Field of Lost Shoes" by the cadets because the suction of the mud pulled the footwear off their feet. Soon, Sigel staged a rapid retreat northward, leaving the field and the Valley to Breckinridge's army, and the VMI cadets.[144-45]

The battle was not without cost to the cadet corps. There were 57 casualties, and ten cadets were killed.

The annual New Market Ceremony and Review commemorates the bravery and sacrifice of the Cadets called to the battle at New Market in 1864 and all of the Institute’s alumni who have served our nation.

The Ten Cadets Who Died at New Market

Corporal Atwill, Samuel Francis ........................................ A Company ............................................... Virginia
Private Haynes, Luther Cary ........................................ B Company .............................................. Virginia
Private Jefferson, Thomas Garland ................................. B Company ........................................... Virginia
Private McDowell, William Hugh .................................. B Company ........................................ North Carolina
Private Stanard, J. Beverly ........................................... B Company .......................................... Virginia
Private Wheelwright, Joseph Christopher ....................... C Company ......................................... Virginia
Sergeant Cabell, William Henry ................................. D Company ............................................. Virginia
Private Crockett, Charles G ........................................ D Company ............................................. Virginia
Private Hartsfield, A. Curtis .......................................... D Company ........................................... North Carolina
Private Jones, Henry Jenner .......................................... D Company ............................................. Virginia

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