

# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE



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.

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## STONEWALL JACKSON AND VMI

On May 15, 1863, the funeral of one of the great military leaders of the South was held in Lexington, and hundreds came to pay him tribute. In the short span of two years, 1861 to 1863, Thomas Jonathan Jackson had risen to fame in the South and had become the immortal "Stonewall." He had captured the respect and admiration of the people of the Confederacy and of soldiers from both sides of the North-South conflict.

VMI prizes the distinct kinship it has with the life of "Stonewall" Jackson. It was in Lexington that he made his home and at VMI that he spent the years before the Civil War, years of instructing cadets in the classroom and drilling them in the field. It was at VMI that his personal qualities and code of living made such an imprint that his influence exists to this day.

At VMI one cannot escape the memory of "Stonewall" Jackson nor forget those things for which he stood. On the west side of the cadet barracks overlooking the parade ground—larger now, but still the same ground on which Jackson drilled cadets—stands Sir Moses Ezekiel's bronze statue of Jackson, depicting him as he surveyed his army just before the Battle of Chancellorsville. It was May 2, 1863, the day of his greatest triumph and also of the wound that proved to be fatal. As Jackson looked about, he saw many former cadets and VMI associates in command positions with the army, and his words at that moment, addressed to his cavalry leader, Col. Thomas T. Munford, VMI class of 1852, are inscribed upon the base of the statue: "The Institute will be heard from today."

Guarding the statue are the four six-pounder guns of the old cadet battery used by Jackson in artillery instruction at VMI. Near these same guns he stood at

First Manassass when he won his nickname. The guns are a reminder that although Jackson became a great exponent of the war of movement, he was primarily a master artilleryman.

To the rear of the Jackson statue, across the wide road which circles the parade ground, is the principal entrance into the cadet barracks, an archway with the words "Stonewall Jackson" lettered over it. Cadets entering the arch see inscribed in bronze letters the maxim Jackson wrote in a composition book in which he made notes during his own cadet days at West Point: "You may be whatever you resolve to be."

VMI's assembly hall is Jackson Memorial Hall, including the Institute's museum which houses a handsome collection of Jackson memorabilia. Among the items displayed in the museum are the uniform he wore as a member of the VMI faculty, the forage cap he wore, his field desk and camp stool, the bullet-pierced raincoat he wore the night of his accidental wounding, and other items from pre-war days.

Also in the museum is the mounted hide of his famed war horse, Little Sorrel. Jackson obtained the sorrel gelding shortly after the war began and was riding him at First Manassass when Gen. Barnard E. Bee made the statement that gave Jackson his lasting nickname. He rode Little Sorrel throughout the Valley campaign and was astride the little horse when he received his fatal wound.

Jackson was born Jan. 21, 1824, in Clarksburg, Va., now in West Virginia. He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point on July 1, 1846, with the commission of brevet second lieutenant of artillery. The young lieutenant immediately reported

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for duty with the First Artillery and was soon assigned to Magurder's Light Battery, then serving in Mexico. Fourteen months later he had risen to the rank of brevet major of artillery and had established his reputation as a soldier.

At this time, the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute was considering a new appointment to its faculty, and in the school year 1850-51 the Board began an active search for a suitable person to fill the chair of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, or physics as it is called today. It was not surprising when associates of Jackson, who had been commended highly for bravery in the Mexican War, were quick to point out his qualifications.

In early February 1851, the then superintendent of VMI, Col. Francis H. Smith, wrote to Jackson offering him the position at the Institute. Jackson at this time was stationed with the First Regiment, U.S. Artillery, at Fort Meade, near Tampa Bay, Fla. He accepted the appointment and reported to the Institute on Aug. 13, 1851.

Jackson was 27 when he came to VMI. The Institute, even younger, was only in its 12th year, and over the next 10 years of Jackson's active faculty status they struggled and developed together.

In addition to his teaching duties at VMI, Jackson served as instructor in artillery tactics and had an integral part in the military training of all cadets. The cadet battery, made especially for VMI in 1848, was used by Jackson for artillery instruction, and though mounted drill was not established at VMI until 1919, it is recorded that three months after his arrival at the Institute he developed a plan for a battery of horsedrawn artillery.

As a professor, Jackson was strict and often stern in his discipline. He was never a popular professor, but no faculty member garnered a higher degree of respect from the cadets for unbending integrity and fearlessness in the discharge of his duty. He was, so it is said, "exact as the multiplication table and full of things military as an arsenal." Jackson was exacting in the demands he made upon the cadets, and no less so in the demands made upon himself.

A popular Jackson story at VMI is that of an incident that typified the character of the young officer. The story concerns an appointment between Jackson and the VMI superintendent, who had advised the major that he wanted to see him in his office. Jackson arrived at the precise hour of the appointment, but the superintendent, remembering something he had to do, asked Jackson to be seated and to remain until he returned. Detained longer than he had anticipated, the superintendent remembered quite late that Jackson was waiting, but presumed Jackson had waited a reasonable time and then gone home. Arriving at his office the next morning, the superintendent found Jackson still waiting, sitting upright in the same chair where he had been seated the evening before. Jackson had interpreted the superintendent's request that he remain seated as an order—and Jackson never disobeyed an order.

Jackson was a man of perfect truth and sincerity, and so sensitive about misrepresentation that it is told he walked a mile and a half through rain one night to correct a statement about an incident which had occurred between two cadets. He had represented the incident as taking place on the lawn when it had occurred on the porch. Though this seems to be an exaggerated effort to keep in line with perfect truth, it was characteristic of the young officer.

At VMI, Jackson taught his classes with the same directness with which he thought and acted, and though he was severely criticized for his manner, the superintendent and others saw his worth. He never wavered in his character, in his devoutness to church, in his dependability, faith, and resolution. These qualities overshadowed any professorial deficiencies and set a mark that even the young cadets recognized as the potential of greatness.

Jackson married in Lexington and established in the town the only home he ever maintained.

Two years before the Civil War, the cadets at VMI had an indication of what was to come in the growing differences between North and South. Abolitionist John Brown, who had been captured after his raid on Harpers Ferry, had been found guilty of conspiring to commit treason and had been sentenced to be hanged Dec. 2, 1859. There was fear there might be another uprising to aid his escape, and the aid of the VMI cadets was sought by the governor of Virginia. Jackson moved a contingent of cadets to Harpers Ferry where they helped to maintain order in the days before and following Brown's execution. Fifteen months later, Jackson moved the entire cadet corps out of Lexington. War had come, and he was never to return to VMI alive.

In early 1861, unrest among the people of the community provoked several incidents, one of which resulted in one of Jackson's rare public speeches. One Saturday afternoon attempts were made to raise two flags in Lexington, one for secession and one for staying with the Union, and among citizens assembled on the streets there was strong feeling. Being a free afternoon for cadets, many were in the town and were thrown in contact with persons whose sentiments differed greatly from that of the VMI Corps in general. Excitement increased when an extremist drew a revolver and knife on a squad of cadets, and though the difficulty was quelled by onlookers who intervened. Word spread quickly to barracks that a group of cadets was in danger. At the barracks, the already aroused cadets, with rifles in hand, began to run toward the town but were instantly headed off by the VMI superintendent, who ordered their return to the barracks. There the Corps was assembled, and the superintendent urged Jackson to speak to the cadets.

"Military men make short speeches," he said, "and as for myself I am no hand at speaking anyhow. The time for war has not yet come, but it will come and that soon; and when it does come, my advice is to draw the sword and throw away the scabbard."

With the final outbreak of hostilities between North and South, the cadets were ordered to Richmond to serve as drill instructors for Confederate recruits. Under Jackson's command, the cadets left VMI on April 21, 1861, and in Richmond reported to Confederate headquarters at Camp Lee. There, Jackson was commissioned a colonel in the Confederacy and, leaving the cadets at Camp Lee, moved on to active military service with the Southern forces.

From this point, his military victories, his tactics, and his strategy are history. From Manassas to Chancellorsville where he was fatally wounded, Jackson, who had advanced to the rank of lieutenant general, was practically faultless. His battles have been studied almost the world over, and his tactics have become text for many a soldier.



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