

**GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III
SUPERINTENDENT**

**Remarks at the Academic Convocation
8 September 2014
Cameron Hall**

- Ladies and gentlemen. Please remain standing for the playing of the National Anthem.
- Please be seated.
- Mr. Ramsey, President of the Board of Visitors and members of the Board; members of the Academic Board, Faculty and Staff; Members of the Corps of Cadets, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to this morning's Convocation marking the opening of the 2014-2015 academic year. We are honored to have with us the Honorable **Ralph Northam**, Lieutenant Governor of the Commonwealth, and today's Convocation speaker, whom I will have the pleasure of introducing to you in a few moments.

With the beginning of this academic year and the occasion of our annual "Academic Convocation", it gives me great pleasure to welcome our new Chief Academic Officer, Brigadier General Jeffrey G. Smith, Jr., VMI Class of 1979, and his wife, Deb. General Smith was appointed Dean of the Faculty and Deputy Superintendent for Academics in February, and joins us today as we begin VMI's historic 175th year.

Next, I want to recognize the cadets who are seated to your front. They are Cadets Distinguished in Academic Merit, and I ask you to join me in expressing our congratulations to them on their accomplishments. [*Applause*]

Each year at this time we gather to acknowledge and to celebrate the central mission of the Institute, which is to produce educated, informed young men and women who have the knowledge, skills, fitness and character to be useful citizens for all professions..., and ready to serve as citizen-soldiers in times of the nation's peril. The means by which we seek to accomplish this mission have changed over the course of the Institute's nearly 175 years, but the mission remains the same.

For more than a decade that I have had the privilege of serving as Superintendent, I have been "greatly" impressed with the growth and development of VMI's academic program. In a rapidly changing world, colleges

must keep abreast of developments by adapting, when appropriate, their academic offerings and instruction to the changing needs of society and to the needs of the new cohorts of students who enter their doors. I can say with confidence that the faculty of this college -- this Institute -- has consistently met this challenge in a responsible, serious, and creative manner. Former Deans: Brower, Stockwell and Schneider....each different...all passionate....all smart...have led this positive movement resulting in a nationally acclaimed undergraduate Institute that provides citizens in its broadest definition for defense of the nation. If I were to survey all the developments that have occurred in our academic program over the past decade, we would be here the rest of the day. I'll resist the temptation, as proud as I am of our faculty's work and dedication. But, I do think a few words this morning about their most important developments over -- say -- the last five or six years are in order.

Upon the completion of our highly successful ten year Accreditation-Reaffirmation in 2007, and responding to new requirements of our Quality Enhancement Plan, the Institute's academic leadership undertook a full review of the academic core-curriculum. The Dean and faculty proposed to the Board of Visitors a series of Academic Program Initiatives for study. Those initiatives are currently being implemented with the goal of promoting greater vitality in the core curriculum and meeting "right-sizing" objectives among the different disciplines and departments. These academic initiatives include strengthening the writing and fine arts programs and much more in the Department of English and Fine Arts -- now known as the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies -- and incorporating into that department a refreshed philosophy curriculum.

Other initiatives include adding Mandarin Chinese in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, resulting now in foreign language offerings of Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and French. The world our graduates are entering is, as some say, "Global"; the opportunities for international travel and work are found everywhere, and the faculty has responded with important changes and initiatives. Limited only by the number of faculty, the Institute will support a balance between traditional and strategic foreign languages.

Although it predated 2009, and VMI's hosting of the National Conference on Undergraduate Research with W&L..., the first time for such event in the Commonwealth....., the Institute's Undergraduate Research Program has played an increasingly important role in the education of cadets and has brought attention and a number of prestigious state and national awards to individual cadets, faculty members, and to VMI. This outstanding program has been supplemented by the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute and Undergraduate Research Symposiums. The lesson is clear: experience with serious and sustained research on the undergraduate level greatly enhances a cadet's education and prepares he or she for the future, whether it be in graduate school, industry, or the military. Undergraduate research, like internships and foreign study, gives our graduating cadets an edge that is priceless.

The construction of VMI's Center for Leadership and Ethics not only brought a handsome and useful new meeting complex and theater to the Institute, but it has enabled a substantial expansion of instruction in leadership and the sponsorship of timely conferences on national public policy. Conferences, lectures, seminars, and discussion sessions at the Center have provided cadets and faculty members with valuable experiences that have supplemented and enhanced what goes on in the classroom. Simultaneously, the Gottwald Professor Chair was embedded in rotating academic departments to provide an explicit link between the Center for Leadership and Ethics and the academic program. That chair this year is held by the highly respected Dr. Andy Young, VMI '74.

As an "Institute," VMI has from its beginning stressed science, mathematics, and engineering, in addition to the important foundation of the liberal arts. In recent years, emphasis in the nation has been placed on the development of what are called the STEM programs: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. VMI faculty members have been active players in this effort and have received grants from a variety of funding agencies, including a five-year grant from the National Science Foundation to support scholarships for 40 cadets who are interested in these fields of study..., and faculty members have received grants to support their own research in these fields, often involving cadet participants. VMI has also been the physical location for several highly successful STEM conferences.

Changes in major and minor programs at the Institute continue to occur as requirements of accrediting agencies evolve, the needs of the Institute change, fields of study take new directions, faculty expertise changes, and technology develops. For example, in 2011 the Mathematics and Computer Science Department was restructured to offer more electives and a new minor in Information, Technology and Design (ITD) was offered. A new Mathematics Education Resource Center "now" helps cadets excel in mathematics coursework, and last year we have seen the creation of a new Department of Computer and Information Sciences. A new class in Conservation Biology has been added by VMI's biology department featuring field excursions and class work with the aim of offering opportunities for considering the effect of human conservation efforts through "understanding how to apply the principles of ecology, wildlife management, and sustainability to the goal of global conservation." An interdisciplinary Minor in Exercise Science will introduce cadets to groundbreaking scholarship in the Department of Biology and Physical Education. The Jackson-Hope Fund, a dedicated privately funded academic enhancement fund, has provided support for many academic initiatives, to include the expansion of a number of courses in fine arts that the Institute can offer. In Economics, a Web.2.0 for Business has been added that teaches cadets how increasingly complex social media sites are used in the business world.

From "bat" research to "tick bot" development; from visits to NSA to attending a national Arab relations conference; from learning to use

photogrammetry and 3-D printers to capstone research on the history of VMI; from devising a marketing plan for a local hotel, to designing a smart Petri dish, VMI offers experiences that significantly enhance and extend the basic academic program, and the best part is that most VMI classes are small enough to offer hands-on experience and primary source research materials for its cadets.

These are just a few of the developments that have taken place in the academic program during the very recent past and there are many more, too numerous to mention here. But, I hope the picture I have painted is clear. The academic program at VMI is strong... and getting stronger year by year. And the work has not ended... it has just begun! Change, development, improvement, and refinement continues and will continue. VMI was established 175 years ago as an experiment in a “practical education” to prepare students to meet the needs of a growing and developing state and nation. In the academic area, as with all areas of the Institute, we must look deep into the future if we are to remain strong and vibrant and continue to meet the needs of a changing world.

At the start of this 175th Academic Year, we salute you The Ladies and Gentlemen of the VMI faculty ... and thank you for your dedication to the education of our young men and women of the Corps of Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute. I ask our faculty to stand and receive our applause ... thanks for your passion and professionalism.

Our speaker today is a politician, a physician, and a VMI graduate of the Class of 1981. In 2013, he was elected Lieutenant Governor, the 40th Lieutenant Governor of Virginia.

Originally from Onancock, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, he earned the BS degree in Biology at the Institute and was President of the VMI Honor Court in his first class year. He attended Eastern Virginia Medical School for the M.D. degree. From 1984 to 1992, he served in the United States Army as a physician, attaining the rank of Major, and during Operation Desert Storm, he treated evacuated casualties at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

A fiscal conservative, Dr. Northam was first elected to office in 2007, winning the Virginia 6th Senate District seat, and was re-elected in 2011. Two years later he campaigned and won the election for Lieutenant Governor.

Under his photo in the 1981 BOMB, is the following tribute:

“In the final days of his cadetship, Ralph shouldered the greatest burden that VMI can bestow. Yet, as always, Ralph rose to the challenge and in his quiet, dedicated, unselfish way did honor to himself, the Corps, and most of all to the code of conduct, whose preservation meant more to him than his own future.”

Let me read that again.

“In the final days of his cadetship, Ralph shouldered the greatest burden that VMI can bestow. Yet, as always, Ralph rose to the challenge and in his quiet, dedicated, unselfish way did honor to himself, the Corps, and most of all to the code of conduct, whose preservation meant more to him than his own future.”

That brief statement so accurately describes this gentleman.

Please welcome, Lieutenant Governor and distinguished VMI alumnus,
The Honorable Ralph Northam.