

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

**Remarks at the Academic Convocation**

**7 September 2016**

**Cameron Hall**

- Ladies and gentlemen. Please remain standing for the playing of the National Anthem.
- Please be seated.
- Members of the Corps of Cadets; General Jumper, President of the VMI Board of Visitors and members of the Board; members of the Academic Board; faculty and staff, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to this morning's Convocation marking the opening of the 2016-2017 academic year. We are honored to have with us nationally-known geopolitical analyst and writer, Mr. Robert D. Kaplan, today's Convocation speaker, whom I will have the pleasure of introducing to you in a few moments.

It also gives me great pleasure this morning 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. [*Lead Applause*]

Once again, we are gathered 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, if qualified, to serve as citizen-soldiers. The means by which we seek to accomplish this mission have changed over the course of the Institute's nearly 177 years, but the mission remains the same. In fact, the words of founder J. T. L. Preston, which are affixed to the parapet wall and memorized by all cadets, are as valid today as they were when he wrote them in 1837 as a summary of his "argument" for the founding of the Institute.

We are justified in being proud of the strength, vitality, and success of VMI's academic program and of the profound effect it has on the cadets who

spend their most important formative years here. As designed, it is intended to mold the intellect, the character, and the physical well-being of every cadet. And the success of that design increases with each passing year, thanks to dedicated, innovative, and skilled faculty, mentors, and coaches. One needs only to look at traditional print or electronic media, or the many new social media sites to see that VMI is consistently rated “well up” in the upper quartile of all national colleges – public and private in *Princeton Review*, *Forbes*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Money* magazine, to mention a few.

However, VMI has never been satisfied only with producing educated, honorable, and useful graduates with a strong sense of public service. A cornerstone of our educational program has been the focus and development of men and women who possess the knowledge, skills, and personal strengths to be exceptional – in fact – outstanding leaders for society, the state, and the nation. And in this, the Institute has been incredibly successful.

Leadership education and training have always been part of the mission of VMI. That historic emphasis has been formally expanded to include an ethical component; conferences, lectures, seminars, and discussion sessions at the Center for Leadership and Ethics, have provided cadets and faculty with valuable experiences that have supplemented and enhanced what goes on in the classroom and have brought well-deserved attention to the VMI academic program. Among the several goals of the VMI leadership program are civility, mutual respect, and encouraging cadets to be open-minded to different viewpoints, while developing informed opinions of their own.

In keeping with the special interests of today’s speaker, I should mention that VMI has also become increasingly involved in international and global education...with the opportunities, challenges, and concerns. I am not speaking narrowly of the highly successful major in international studies, or of organized international travel and exchanges, or of the international context in which many disciplines are now viewed and pursued. I am speaking of active involvement and experience..., a kind of “boots-on-the-ground” approach. Even with the demanding schedule faced by every cadet, increasingly we are seeing the application of classroom lessons to actual challenges and conditions in the world beyond the limits of the Institute, both near and far.

Let me make a few related comments (now) before introducing this morning’s speaker. My comments are related to “life” at VMI. The Institute’s educational program, indeed, the entire program: intellectual, physical, and moral, is built on one overriding, though seldom mentioned, belief. That belief is that individual lives and society flourish when there is structure, agreed-

upon rules, reasonable certainty, civility, clear pathways to success and, to quote our Founding Fathers..., clear paths to “the pursuit of happiness.”

Life at VMI is what in history has been called “The Regular Life.” “Regular” because it follows, more or less, a “rule.” Life in the barracks, the wearing of uniforms, the Class System, a set schedule each and every day of classes and other activities, parades, a Blue Book of regulations, an Honor Code that makes clear what is acceptable and not acceptable for members of this community are all part of that “regulated life.” Although life here is also dynamic ... there are always changes and surprises; nevertheless, by and large, from day to day, you know what to expect and how to react to it.

So, after four years, what is the likely result on those who make this belief their belief? Graduates find that they are supported by a firm foundation and an outlook that life’s problems can be ameliorated, if not solved, by pursuing definite goals, definite paths, hard work, appropriate structure, and generally accepted rules of behavior, honesty and civility. There is only one problem with this, however: the world doesn’t necessarily operate that way... and it may even be moving to more and more uncertainty. Quoting our speaker this morning, the world appears to be sliding into what he has called “comparative anarchy.”

Given this observation, then, what is the effect of a VMI education? For many graduates, the VMI experience provides a solid personal foundation or coherent base..., a sense of stability and order, from which to confront and deal with the uncertainties of an uncertain or increasingly anarchistic world that will face them after graduation. It provides personal strength whether in a family setting, in civilian careers, or the military. Any open-eyed graduate recognizes that the VMI experience may be “uncommon” in today’s world, but that will not stop them from trying to exert a positive influence upon their new environment or to set an example for others. Graduates also draw strength from each other and, their “Brother Rats,” as the years go by. I can cite many alumni who have displayed this strength, but perhaps the finest example was George C. Marshall, VMI 1901, who championed recovery and order for a disordered Europe after WWII. If the world is sliding toward “comparative anarchy,” we need leaders like Marshall...more than ever.

Marshall’s strategic leadership had its foundations in the VMI experience where he learned how to lead during Corps and Ratline and academic and athletic “adversity” and to apply a broad understanding of the world to inform his judgment.

Today we are in the midst of another shift in the world's strategic environment that will require mature strategic leadership. In the years ahead, and very soon as VMI graduates..., you will provide the leadership necessary to confront our nation's challenges during this and other global transitions. Your understanding of the international environment is essential to this responsibility. Which brings me to our speaker this morning.

Our speaker is a *New York Times* best-selling author and journalist. Mr. Robert D. Kaplan rightly points out in his books, articles, and lectures that we live in a world of increasing uncertainty, and that "every place is interrelated to every other place as never before." He has authored sixteen books on foreign affairs and travel, translated into many languages, including *In Europe's Shadow*, *Asia's Cauldron*, *The Revenge of Geography*, *Monsoon*, *The Coming Anarchy*, and *Balkan Ghosts*.

He is a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and a contributing editor at *The Atlantic*, where his work has appeared for three decades. He was chief geopolitical analyst at *Stratfor* (an American publisher and global intelligence company), a visiting professor at the United States Military Academy, and a member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board. *Foreign Policy* magazine twice named him one of the world's "Top 100 Global Thinkers." In 2009, the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia awarded him the Benjamin Franklin Public Service Award.

Today, Mr. Kaplan will help us to understand the disruptive world-wide change underway by sharing his insights into "The Current Geopolitical Landscape." As we commence this Academic Year 2016-17...it is a pleasure to welcome Mr. Robert Kaplan....let's give him a warm Institute welcome.....Mr. Kaplan.