

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

**Remarks at the Academic Convocation, AY 2018-19
5 September 2018
Cameron Hall**

- Take Report from Regimental Commander.
- Ladies and gentlemen. Please remain standing for the playing of the National Anthem.
- Please be seated.
- Members of the Corps of Cadets; Mr. Boland, President of the VMI Board of Visitors; members of the Academic Board; faculty and staff; guests; ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to this morning's Convocation marking the opening of the 2018-2019 academic year. We are honored to have with us Mr. Jon Meacham, 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*]

As this is an Academic Convocation commencing a new academic year, it is appropriate to recognize our accomplished faculty members. Ninety-nine percent of our full-time faculty members have earned a doctorate or a terminal degree in their field. That extraordinarily high percentage puts VMI in rare company among colleges and universities in our nation. In addition, our adjunct faculty members bring to the classroom deep knowledge of their subjects gained through years of study bolstered by career experience, often gained at high levels of business and government service. Please join me in showing our

appreciation of their efforts and accomplishments. [*Applause*]. I also want to introduce our faculty who currently hold “named” Institute Chairs and professorships, and our visiting scholars. They are depicted in your program this morning and are recognized for their professionalism, scholarship, and dedication to the science of art and teaching. I ask that this group please stand and receive our appreciation and admiration. These positions and recognition are made possible by many dedicated donors whom provide generous support and the funding for these honors...and we thank them.

We live in tumultuous times. The world order that began to emerge as the result of the 9/11 attacks continues to evolve. The global implications of polarizing issues – the war in Afghanistan, terrorist threats, mass migrations, social media, politics, domestic problems, the economy, to name but a very few – remain unclear. What is clear, however, is that courageous leadership will be needed to find solutions and guide our actions. For leaders, facing fear and overcoming it and inspiring others with principled conduct is the essence of this type of leadership. This year, the Center for Leadership and Ethics will be exploring the theme of “Courageous Leadership”... and our annual Leadership Conference has “GRIT” as its central thematic. Leadership, to a great extent, can be taught. It is a science and an art. And, here at VMI, we do our best to create an environment where it can be taught and practiced. Courage, however, comes from within, and it takes different forms: physical courage, moral courage, and intellectual courage, to name the most obvious. VMI contributes to the development of each and especially to intellectual courage where the goal of a VMI education is to impart knowledge and a dedication to truth in a disordered and confusing world.

VMI’s dedication to academics – the intellectual development of each cadet – has never been stronger or more robust. Coming out of the recent successful fund-raising Campaign, we see an encouraging picture with the creation of new academic chairs, professorships, increased merit scholarships, and funded scholarships for masters programs for VMI graduates, as teaching fellows..., and new construction, significant improvement to our infrastructure, and modernization of academic buildings will provide the foundation for excellence. Renovation of Preston Library, a major annex additive to Scott Shipp Hall, a new Steam Plant, and fixes to utilities and roadways commence this academic year.

Planning from architectural drawings to construction plans for a new Olympic size aquatic center will enhance our physical education academic program, while also supporting ROTC, NCAA Swimming and Diving and our Water Polo Teams.

It is now my great pleasure to introduce this morning's speaker.

Mr. Jon Meacham is a renowned presidential historian, contributing writer to *The New York Times Book Review*, contributing editor at TIME magazine, and Pulitzer-Prize-winning author. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Society of American Historians, Mr. Meacham is a distinguished visiting professor at Vanderbilt University. He has written for *The New York Times* op-ed page, *The Washington Post*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Garden & Gun*. He is also a regular guest on the MSNBC "Morning Joe" broadcast.

His recent books have been bestsellers, including *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*; *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*; and, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush*, among others. His latest book, debuting at Number 1 on the New York Times best sellers list, *The Soul of America: The Battle for our Better Angels*, was published in May. It examines the present moment in American politics and life by looking back at critical times in U.S. history, where and when hope overcame division and fear.

Mr. Meacham is a 1991 graduate of Sewanee: The University of the South (Sewanee, TN). In 2014, he returned to his alma mater as a visiting professor of history. What perhaps is not generally known is that there is a VMI-University of the South connection that goes back to the university's establishment in 1857. The school's founder, Bishop Leonidas Polk was a close friend of VMI's first Superintendent, Francis H. Smith. When Polk thought of how to organize his new school, he consulted with Smith on the details of the academic program and student life. The war practically destroyed his University, much like VMI, and it was completely rebuilt and reorganized in 1866. Today, Sewanee is a highly regarded private, residential, coeducational, liberal arts college owned by 28 southern dioceses of the Episcopal Church, and like VMI it is located in the scenic mountains of Tennessee.

Please welcome...a favorite son of the University of the South and nationally respected historian...Mr. Jon Meacham....