

GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III
SUPERINTENDENT

Superintendent's Remarks at Commencement
16 May 2015

Mr. Farrell, Mr. Ramsey, Members of the VMI Board of Visitors, Members of the Academic Board, Faculty and Staff, families and friends of today's graduating cadets, and member of the Corps of Cadets. Welcome to this Commencement Ceremony...the climax of four years of diligent study and hard work by the Class of 2015.

I have the great pleasure as we begin this morning's ceremony to welcome Mr. Thomas F. Farrell, II. He will be "formally" introduced in a few moments by the First Class President; however, I want to take this opportunity to extend my personal welcome to him and his family and express, on the part of the entire VMI community, our sincere appreciation for being with us today. I would especially like to commend him for setting an example for us and others of what an individual can accomplish in a number of wide ranging fields. Not only is he the highly successful leader of a major corporation that is essential to the day-to-day lives of all Virginians, he has also contributed his time and leadership to many civic and cultural organizations, and – most recently – he co-authored and produced the feature motion picture *Field of Lost Shoes* that dramatizes the events, 151 years ago, that took place at New Market. Mr. Farrell, we all look forward to your remarks this morning and we welcome you to VMI.

Graduation from VMI is a great personal achievement, but it is an achievement that cannot be reached alone. Many others have contributed to the success of today's graduates: parents and grandparents, guardians, brothers and sisters, friends, Brother Rats, faculty, staff, coaches, and host families, to name but a few. VMI is "particularly" grateful to parents and grandparents for encouraging and sustaining their sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, throughout these cadet years. May I ask parents & grandparents to please stand and receive our thanks....and are there great-grandparents present; would you please stand. This is certainly a proud day for all of you.

Universities and colleges are many things to many people, but at heart of any great institution of higher education is its Faculty. They are the ones who

teach, guide, counsel, and encourage young people on a day-to-day basis. I include in this group our military staff and those who coach our athletes..., for at VMI we believe that the academic and physical aspects make for a “full and complete” education. Please join me in expressing thanks to the Institute’s faculty.

The Class of 2015 matriculated in August 2011 with a strength of 509 ... and today will graduate 297 cadets. Adding graduates from other classes, today’s ceremony will see 321 cross the stage.

By the end of this summer, a total of 158 members of the Class of 2015..., 53%... are projected to be commissioned in the Armed Forces. Some took their commissioning oath yesterday and received the rank of second lieutenant or ensign; others will soon be commissioned upon completion of summer training or the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. Those numbers are especially commendable and reinforce VMI’s historic mission of producing Citizen-Soldiers. Many VMI cadets, staff, and faculty have been called to active duty in support of the current war on terror, thus placing their lives and cadetships temporarily on hold. In addition, there are parents and family members and others in the audience this morning who have served. Would you “patriots” please stand and receive our appreciation for your service.

I want to thank the Class of 2015 for your leadership over the four years of your cadetship, and especially for your work as First Classmen. This year you trained and dyked a matriculating class of 500 New Cadets. You conducted a superb Ratline, strengthened the Class System, led a successful “Breakout,” and set the example for the other classes. I congratulate you on your important academic achievements: scholar athletes, leaders nationally in undergraduate research, impressive graduate school attendance, impressive Commissioning awards, and a large number of top-tier academic awards. These accomplishments add to the luster of your class and to the reputation of the Institute. Your class is proud of the accomplishments you made as a class, but you are especially proud of the accomplishments of individual members of your class. They include stories of amazing resilience, compassion, camaraderie, success, failure, and the ability to come back from failure and tragedy. This is what makes the class of 2015 unique: the “individual” actions of young men and women that describe and define the character of this class, whose destiny I believe is bright, service-filled, and bound for success.

The Class of 2015 has another distinction: it is was present in the year that marked the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Institute, the 150th anniversary of the Battle of New Market, and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, in which 1,800 VMI alumni served. VMI is a

forward-looking institution, dedicated to producing intelligent and useful citizens, but it is also steeped in history. We march into the future, but we are ever mindful of the rich legacy of our past...and the strength that gives us.

Today's ceremony represents a look backward and a look forward. In fact, the two terms used for this ceremony – graduation and commencement – reflect these two meanings. It is the culmination of four years of hard work and dedication to a goal, and it is the beginning of putting those lessons and goals to work in careers that will be satisfying to yourself and useful to the broader community. Today, in fact, represents a passage from **preparation** to **fulfillment**. Such turning points come rarely in one's life ... so grasp its potential and hold yourself ever-open to its many possibilities.

Just by selecting VMI as your pathway to the future reveals your determination... your resolve. All higher education is demanding and challenging, but a VMI education tests you on all levels. You have met the test... your individual resolve has paid off. And I congratulate you.

Individual initiative and individual accomplishment are essential to success, but we must always recognize that success is not and never will be exclusively a matter of individual resolve. You have succeeded because of your determination, but you have also been helped, supported, encouraged, and assisted by family, friends, Brother Rats, faculty members and coaches. You have succeeded within a very special community. As you move forward with your lives, build on your individuality and what makes you distinctive, but also remember the importance of community and your role within it. Community provides the environment, structure, and systems in which it is possible to be “what you resolve to be.”

Hold onto the concept of honor that is the foundation stone – the very bedrock – of VMI. Seek ways to serve your community and your nation as citizen leaders. Use your talents to their utmost... and strive to develop new talents, new knowledge, and new directions. People will hold you to a higher standard because you are a VMI graduate. This high expectation cannot be avoided... it comes with the ring and the diploma. Embrace it as the heritage that has been passed on to you by former graduating classes, and strive always to preserve and enhance it.

As you receive your diploma today...we offer warmest “congratulations!” Performance and achievement.... well done! **Press on ... the open road awaits you. Godspeed!**