

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

**Remarks at Founders Day Convocation
11 November 2014**

Governor and Mrs. McAuliffe, Mr. Ramsey, members of the Board of Visitors, Foundation Trustees, members of the Academic Board, Guests, faculty and staff, and ladies and gentlemen of the Corps of Cadets. Welcome to this morning's Founders Day convocation, which marks a significant milestone in the history of the Institute. Today, VMI celebrates the 175th anniversary of its founding.

The story of the beginning of VMI in the state arsenal here in Lexington on a wintry Monday, 11 November, in 1839, has been told many times. What may be less well-known is that the school was officially created two years earlier, in 1837, but had to be postponed because of the economic panic of that year, a financial downturn that strongly resembles what this nation has just endured. It's very possible that the Founders – members of our first Board of Visitors and Smith, Crozet, and Preston – might have abandoned the idea of founding a military college under such difficult circumstances, but they persisted and succeeded. And the Institute has lived on, through many other financial crises, Civil War, the Great Depression, and two World Wars to reach a level of excellence that even the forward-looking Founders could never have imagined.

Today's convocation also occurs on Veteran's Day, once known as Armistice Day because it marked the signing of the armistice between the Allies of World War I and Germany that temporarily halted the fighting on the Western Front. The signing took place at eleven o'clock of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. One year later, in November of 1919, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11 -- "Armistice Day."

One hundred years ago, in August of 1914, the war, which many thought would be over before Christmas, but lasted four terrible years, had only recently begun. The United States did not enter until April of 1917, but the war had an enormous effect on VMI. Over 85 percent of all alumni between the ages of 17 and 40 served in the armed forces – over 1,800 individuals. VMI had graduated only 1036 men between 1887 and 1917. VMI's role in the war also marked – symbolically – the Institute's final and complete "re-integration" into the mainstream of the American military after the Civil War. A number of well-known soldiers of that war had VMI connections, including Generals Charles Kilbourne, John A. Lejeune, George C. Marshall, and George S. Patton.

Today's VMI Founders Day, therefore – coming on the 175th anniversary of our college and Institute, and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of "The Great War," is very special.

Looking closer at our three Founders, it is not a coincidence that their careers reflect the three major academic areas of emphasis of the Institute and its military character. Col. Claudius Crozet was an engineer; Gen. Francis H. Smith was a mathematician and, Col. J. T. L. Preston was a teacher of Latin and the Liberal Arts. All three served in the military: Crozet, a graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique, served in the army of Napoleon; Smith, a West Point graduate, served in the US and Confederate armies; and Preston, a graduate of Washington College, served in the Confederate army. In addition, importantly, all three, at one time, were teachers.

These three men had one characteristic in common: they were men who looked to the future with confidence, not only for the new college that they had helped to establish and which they organized, *but* also for the nation, which was entering the early phase of the Industrial Revolution. Despite the war that came in 1861, and the near complete destruction of the Institute that Crozet, Smith, and Preston had labored so hard to nurture and promote..., VMI was rebuilt and the vision articulated by the Founders for the Institute returned. Slowly, across many years, VMI grew in stature from a regional college, to a national, and finally an internationally recognized institution of higher education today.

Despite the fact that our nation has recently experienced a difficult decade economically and its operational dollars certainly haven't kept up with needs, I am pleased to report that the Commonwealth has been generous in funding the essential rebuilding of our infrastructure which has "transformed the post" and laid the foundation for even greater success and effectiveness of our academic programs.

The Board of Visitors and I cannot be more proud of our faculty that have performed magnificently in the classroom through these difficult times, resulting in a national reputation for excellence reflected in the pages of Forbes Magazine, Money Magazine, U. S. News and World Report, and elsewhere. What VMI has attained, impressive and important as it has been, however, is no measure of this institution's potential. Much has been accomplished, but there is much left to be accomplished. Like the Founders, we are optimistic for what VMI is capable of becoming and being a leader in a changing world. This unique community of educators, mentors, coaches, administrators, and cadets are capable of even greater accomplishments than those we now celebrate as we look back over 175 years.

It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce today's speaker, The Governor of Virginia, The Honorable Terry McAuliffe.

Governor McAuliffe, the 72nd Governor of the Commonwealth, is a businessman, entrepreneur, a political fund-raiser and a leader who has lived in Virginia for more than 20 years.

In politics and business, Governor McAuliffe has worked with people from all walks of life and different political backgrounds. Since becoming Governor in January of this year, he has focused on growing Virginia's economy, expanding access to health care, strengthening the state's

transportation infrastructure, and increasing educational opportunities for students for jobs of the 21st Century.

Governor McAuliffe – the son of World War II Army Captain Jack McAuliffe has worked to improve the lives of Virginia’s veterans. He expanded the Virginia Values Veterans initiative, which encourages employers to recruit, hire, train, and retrain our veterans. He launched the Virginia Cyber Security Commission which will put Virginia on track to become the national hub for fighting cyber crime and for attracting jobs that come with this rapidly growing industry.

Governor’s McAuliffe’s business career began at an early age. When he was 14, he started his first business, the McAuliffe Driveway Maintenance Company, to help pay for his education. Over the years, he became a highly successful banker, real estate developer, home builder, hotel owner, and internet venture capitalist.

Governor McAuliffe’s memoir, *What a Party! My Life Among Democrats: Presidents, Candidates, Donors, Activists, Alligators, and Other Wild Animals*, was published in 2007, and made the *New York Times* Best Seller List, debuting at #5 in February 2007. Among anecdotes told in the memoir is one about Governor McAuliffe wrestling an eight-foot, 260-pound alligator for three minutes to secure a \$15,000 contribution for President Jimmy Carter in 1980.

Governor McAuliffe served as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 2001 to 2005, was co-chairman of President Bill Clinton’s 1996 re-election campaign, and was chairman of Hillary Clinton’s 2009 presidential campaign. He attended Catholic University and Georgetown Law School.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in warmly welcoming Governor Terry McAuliffe to the Virginia Military Institute.