

General J. H. Binford Peay III

Superintendent

Remarks at the Institute Society Dinner

11 November 2016

Thank you Hugh...

Members of the Institute Society, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen... Good evening...let me add my personal welcome to this very special annual gathering of friends and supporters of the Institute. Today, Founders Day, marks the 177th anniversary of VMI. Each year at this time, we celebrate the longevity and the many accomplishments of the Institute..., and for many years now it has also been a time for us to formally acknowledge and celebrate the generosity and support of members of the Institute Society. It is an occasion that I look forward to with pride and gratitude, as it is a testimony to how we come together as a family for something we believe in. I'll speak to that more in a few moments, but first I want to also acknowledge the gentlemen you just saw at this podium. I can't say enough about the Cabinet leadership of The Campaign for VMI...entitled, "*An Uncommon Purpose – A Glorious Past, A Brilliant Future*" and, particularly our leader, Don Wilkinson (VMI Class '61). You've heard it said before that these gentlemen were tapped for a role and like true VMI graduates, they didn't flinch at the challenge put before them. We've talked about this Campaign exceeding its goal at more than \$300 million with seven months to go --- these men truly exceeded expectations in the service they were asked to provide. Don has tirelessly and with great intelligence and passion guided this effort thru the past six years. And, frankly,

cabinet meetings were fun –enjoyable -- and substantively important. Don Wilkinson set that environment.

I also want to point to Hugh Fain and the Foundation Board of Trustees, a team of leaders who have oversight responsibility for all the operations of the Foundation, including the Campaign. They, too, provide outstanding service to this Institute in a very critical role. Hugh has offered tremendous direction with style, character and commitment.

And there is not enough time in a program like this one to pay tribute to the seven years of superior leadership that Brian Crockett has offered the VMI Foundation. This has never been just a job to Brian; it was a labor of love, and his legacy of service has played a tremendous role in ensuring VMI's future. I am grateful for Brian's support, commitment, and friendship. We will miss him.

I also want to publicly recognize and thank Mrs. Pat House, Senior Vice President for Graham-Pelton. She has been a consultant to the campaign and guided much of it. She is a professional and forever a member of the VMI family. Her husband, Steve, is Provost at Elon University, and is also here this evening.

This is an evening of gratitude and celebration, and as I mentioned earlier, it's also a demonstration of belief in something bigger than any one of us – and that is VMI, and all that it represents. You have many options for making gifts of time, treasure and talent, but you choose to give them to continue VMI's mission.

That commitment takes on greater meaning tonight. I say this knowing firsthand that these times are not economically easy for many of our alumni, for popularity of higher education, and periodically for patriotism. I don't have to tell you we've just come off of a particularly contentious election season. The matter of character and integrity was a constant theme throughout the campaign. Opinions on our country's global involvement and how we are addressing our own problems are perhaps the most polemical they've been in many years.

I am in my 14th year as VMI Superintendent, and as I travel the Commonwealth and our country...the challenges to higher education are evident. No college president in the nation is happy with the cost of education as exemplified by rising tuition and fees and as exacerbated by severe state financial cuts. Exploding student debt is a serious problem. Faculty recruitment, retention and compensation are all tied together, and resources are more and more limited. Quality of the graduate is questioned. Student unrest and calls for "safe spaces" represent what we value in this country – freedom of speech. College athletics is a force to be reckoned with, and as a college leader, you had better be involved able to take a stand on how far your institution will go in this competitive arena. Social, cultural, technological, legal, safety, and other challenges today are the norm on college campuses.

In the face of all this, I am even more confident about VMI's future. Because what this room demonstrates this evening, is that VMI's mission and its commitment to developing leaders of character, rises above these challenges. We are here this evening because we believe in what VMI stands for. We are here

because we are proud of the leaders this Institute produces. We are bound together in the adversity we have faced; we hold one another up and put personal gain aside; and, we are steadfast in our commitment to being citizen-soldiers and producing leaders with integrity. We know the world needs VMI graduates.

And we are here because we have stood tall in our beliefs with our financial commitment to VMI.

That generosity has (already) paid tremendous dividends. It has further moved the Institute to realizing Vision 2039, and in providing a superior educational experience in the VMI tradition. With your gifts, we can insure that more and more cadets who qualify for VMI's unique education will be afforded one regardless of their financial circumstances. Undergraduate research and innovation are flourishing. We are increasing opportunities and expanding academic resources that allow VMI to continually be ranked among the nation's top public colleges. Because of your support...

- \$80 million in new endowments have been created;
- 9 Professorships and Chairs have been established or increased in value;
- The Jackson-Hope Fund has grown to nearly \$28 million and continues to support faculty recruitment, retention, and development;
- Academic clubs like the Cadet Investment Group and Entrepreneurship Club are enhanced with increased resources;
- 142 scholarships have been established, including 81 academic and 61 athletic scholarships;

- \$67 million has been designated for athletics in operational and scholarship funds, which sustains all sports, and in particular will positively impact lacrosse, baseball, soccer and swimming;
- VMI's Museum system has been improved with more than \$500,000 in investments;
- Corporate partnerships and scholarships have expanded and as a result, cadet internship and career placement opportunities have increased;
- And, Corps life programs such as the Chaplain's Office, Club Sports, and Cadet Marksmanship have been bolstered with traditional funding.

Gifts to designations like the areas I have just mentioned are important and absolutely critical. But, I also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge contributors to the campaign that made unrestricted gifts. Those donors have essentially said to VMI, **{Quote}** "Wherever my money is needed is where I want it to go. I know that without unrestricted support, so many components of the VMI education that are taken for granted would cease to exist." **{End Quote}** Last year, more than \$2.4 million was provided to the Institute from unrestricted annual funds and endowment income. This support has vastly enhanced VMI's financial flexibility to advance all elements of this uncommon education...and I appreciate your confidence in the VMI Team that we will make wise decisions with your commitments.

I also want to recognize those of you who have made commitments to your reunion campaigns. The Class of 1966 has set the bar to a perhaps unattainable height for the foreseeable future: \$50 million raised in total, with an unparalleled

99% of the class contributing to this gift. In fact, they worked to the very last minute to bring the total from \$40,000,019.66 in April to \$50,000,019.66 by the end of the fiscal year. This is truly transformational. I know that all of our reunion campaign leaders would say, however, that it was the long tradition of reunion giving at VMI that motivated them to put their passion into such a remarkable effort.

To all the reunion donors, past and present, in the room, my deepest thanks to you for exercising your belief in VMI with such generosity.

Equally impressive in its own right is the Class of 2016 gift. Before they were even formally declared VMI alumni, members of the class contributed \$16,000 that will be used to establish the unrestricted Class of 2016 Endowment. The parents of the Class of 2016 were eager to express their belief in the Institute, too, and they contributed another \$50,000 to this effort.

I want to mention another group of supporters. These are people who give their time and talent to VMI every single day, and they are among the finest of their kind in the nation. I am talking about the faculty, staff and administrators of the Institute, without whom our cadets would not succeed. Beyond their time and talent, there are faculty and staff who give of their treasure as well, and they are the model to others for demonstrating the utmost dedication to VMI.

There are many other groups that I could point to with gratitude. Indeed, every donor to VMI deserves recognition and thanks. Together, we have all taken a stand

in this troubled world to say: civility counts; character matters; honor is cherished, and service is a privilege. The bonds of Brother Rats carry one another through trials and rise above tribulations. VMI is needed, and VMI will endure.

As I conclude my remarks, I remind us of the historic significance of this day, not just that it marks the anniversary of the founding of the Institute and other distant historic events..., but of two events within the lifespan of most of us. Today, we find ourselves situated between the 15th anniversary of the surprise attack on the twin towers on 9/11 and the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The consequences of these two horrific events on the nation – and on VMI – have been major, and they have demonstrated the importance of what we do here in preparing young men and women to defend our nation in times of peril...for VMI is a tower of strength in peace and in war.

I couldn't be prouder of the cadets we produce, the faculty and staff who mentor them, and our alumni who serve our nation and their communities and families. The Institute will "continue" to be heard from today!

Let's Beat The Citadel!