

GENERAL J. H. BINFORD PEAY, III  
SUPERINTENDENT

Superintendent's Remarks at Commissioning  
15 May 2016

Good morning.

On behalf of Mr. Pete Ramsey, President of the VMI Board of Visitors; BG Djuric, Commandant of Cadets, Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership and Mary Baldwin College, and the entire VMI community, it gives me great pleasure to welcome those who will soon receive commissions, their proud families and friends, members of the VMI faculty and staff, and members of the Corps of Cadets. Today's ceremony marks the culmination of four years of serious study and work on the part of each graduate and the beginning of a life of service to the nation in a tradition that extends to the founding of our great Republic. Moreover, it is the fulfillment of one of the central and historic purposes of the Virginia Military Institute: the preparation of Citizen-Soldiers. Of the important moments that will remain in your memory throughout life ..., this Commissioning Ceremony certainly will be one.

We are most fortunate to have with us today, as commissioning officers, four outstanding officers whose service to the nation stands as an inspiration to all of us, and especially to the young men and women who will follow in their paths from this day forward. It is my honor to welcome: Army **Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson**, a 1981 U.S. Military Academy graduate who is the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (G-3/5/7) of the Army with duty at the Pentagon; Navy **Admiral Michelle Howard**, a 1982 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, who serves as Vice Chief of Naval Operations with duty at the Pentagon; Air Force **Major General Mark Hicks**, a 1986 graduate of VMI, who is Chief of Staff, Headquarters, U.S. Special Operations Command stationed at McDill AFB, Tampa, Florida; and, Marine Corps **Brigadier General Stephen Neary**, a 1988 graduate of VMI, who is Deputy Commanding General of the Marine Corps' Combat Development Command stationed at Quantico, VA. With the wartime demands of duty and responsibility that these officers face, VMI is privileged to welcome these senior officers to deliver the commissioning oath to soon to be officers of our services.

Although these distinguished officers represent separate branches of our Armed Forces, it is important to remember that all who lead and all who serve our country in the military are members of a dedicated and highly professional team with many things in common. For example, not only have they gained their higher education at the same or similar institutions, their advancement through the ranks has included advanced degree programs and attendance at service schools at times offered by sister services. This is one of the great strengths of our outstanding military establishment, and for those of you who choose to remain in the military, a pathway through these many schools lies before you. VMI is but the "foundation" and starting point from which you will grow and build your career. The flag officers with us today are products of that outstanding system. They are seasoned officers who have served at the highest

echelons of our national command structure, as well as having extensive experience at the cutting edge in leading soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. We are honored by their presence today...and let's give them our applause in appreciation for their service.

I now invite our professors of military science and their staffs to stand and receive our expression of thanks for the inspiring work they have accomplished in teaching and mentoring the young men and women who will be commissioned this morning .....

And, now, I ask that all of the veterans and those currently serving in the audience stand ... cadets, staff, faculty, parents and other guests here today... to receive our heartfelt thanks for your service .....

Nearly 100 years ago, the United States entered the First World War and, as the song has it, thousands of American men and women went... "Over There." By the end of the war, 1,800 VMI alumni had served our country and helped to win victory. At the time, that conflict was referred to as "The War to End All Wars." But, sadly, that has not been the case. Despite the hope of permanent peace, seventy-seven years ago the world plunged into the Second World War, and scores of conflicts have followed. The world continues to be a dangerous place. That fact underscores the continuing ... and increasing ... need for a strong military establishment, led by highly educated, skilled, and dedicated officers, and especially men and women who can meet the challenges of modern warfare.

Since the end of World War II, the traditional concept of the battlefield has changed completely. Now it is no longer confined to a specific geographical area. Even the nature of warfare is expanding. I use the term "expanding" instead of "changing" because we have seen over the past decade that boots on the ground continue to be required, even as some of our warriors now wage combat with remotely guided drones, robotics, satellites, cyber and other intelligent systems. As technological advances accelerate, these weapons become increasingly sophisticated and, as a result of the application of information systems, increasingly smart.

As important as these weapons and systems are, nevertheless, the key to the strength of any nation's military establishment remains its men and women who intelligently and thoughtfully carry out US policy and who operate the tools of warfare on the ground, on and under the sea, in the air, and – now – in cyber space. From its very first days, VMI has been dedicated to producing the very best liberal education set in a distinctive military environment and what the founders called broadly... "scientific officers" – professionals and citizen-soldiers – to play a leading role in the defense of our nation.

The level of professionalism, skill, and intelligence required of those who wear the uniform today has never been higher in our nation's history, and this level continues to rise. This condition demands flexibility, adaptability, wisdom, and the very best of leadership from its officers..., skills that I feel certain you have developed over the course of your four years of study and development at

the Institute. VMI, Mary Baldwin, Washington & Lee, and Southern Virginia University are proud of its sons and daughters who have prepared themselves for these challenging tasks and who accept the responsibilities and duties as officers in the armed forces.

Fifty-four years ago, I sat in J.M. Hall with my classmates...then mandatory commissioning...and, just like you, was sworn-in as a Second Lieutenant, United States Army. I was a young and, frankly, a very green Second Lieutenant. After the initial schools, I reported in to my first unit – an eight-inch towed nuclear artillery battalion in Erlangen, Germany in the midst of the Cold War. Then, Sergeant First Class Floyd Daniels, Chief of the Firing Battery, took me under his care; I hope you will be as fortunate...as over the next eighteen (18) months, he mentored me in leadership, skill, competency, and provided the best of advice. Now retired in Knoxville, Tennessee...he is here today and let me ask him to stand up. He is the epitome of our wonderful Non-Commissioned Officer Corps, which no other nation can replicate. Non-Commissioned Officers are special!

My life was soon filled with exacting missions, tough training, rapidly changing responsibilities, assignments around the world, attendance at outstanding professional military schools, and service under remarkable leaders. Above all, I became part of a great Team of soldiers and families. You, too, will have these same experiences.

I congratulate you on the attainment of a commission. Frame it, keep your commission on display... and read it with regularity. It will guide you through the challenging profession you have chosen...and give you strength in the tough decisions you will face. The Institute could not be more proud. Your families are proud of you. And you can take just pride..., in yourself and in your accomplishments. Our country is fortunate with your decision to serve...and to lead. Good luck to each of you in the years ahead.