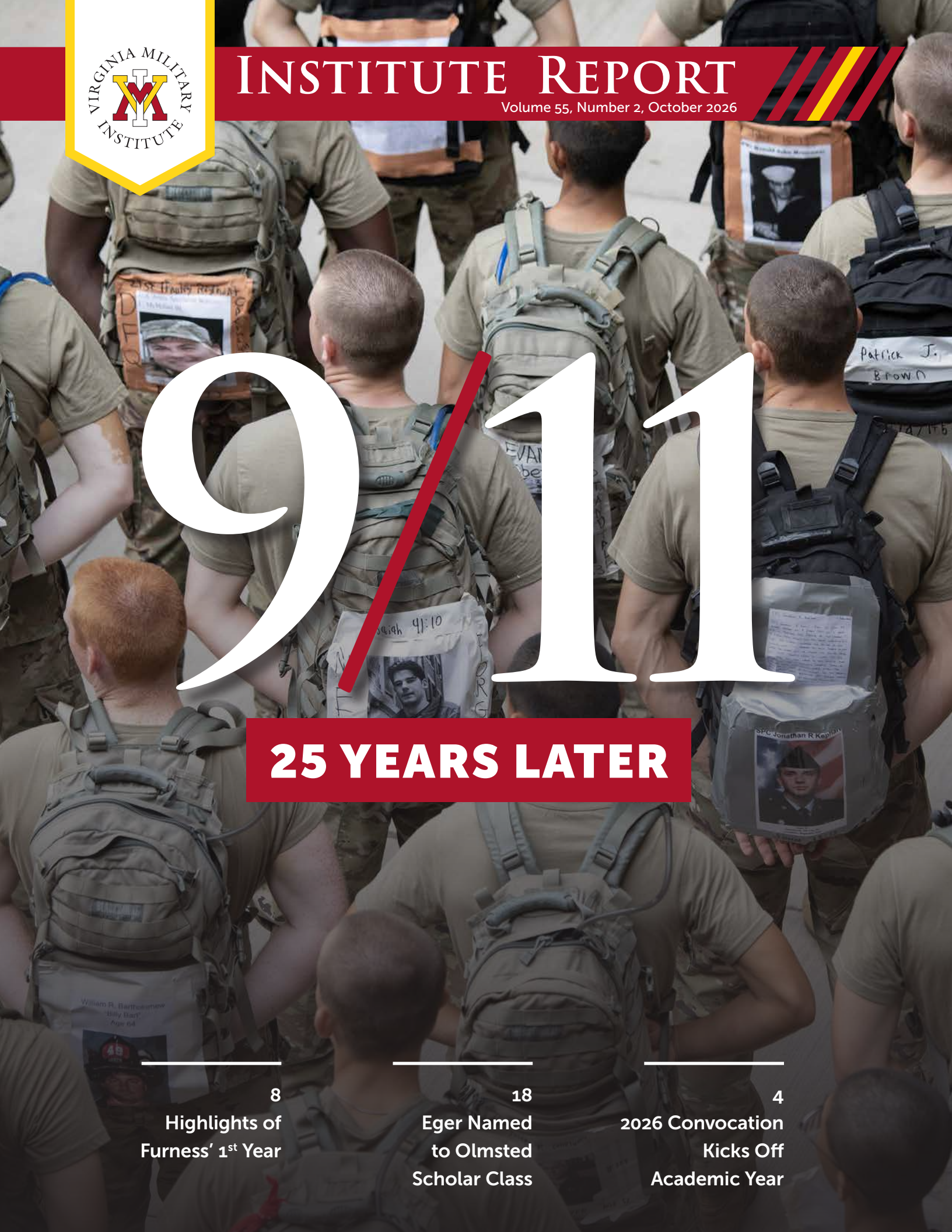
VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 55, Number 2, October 2026



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Post Briefs

VMI Maintains Strong Rankings in U.S. News Best Colleges

VMI maintained its reputation as one of the nation's best colleges, according to the 2027 Best Colleges rankings released Sept. 22 by U.S. News and World Report.

Among public liberal arts colleges, the Institute ranked fourth behind the United States Naval Academy, the United States Military Academy at West Point, and the United States Air Force Academy. VMI ranked No. 62 among more than 200 national liberal arts colleges.

This year, VMI moved up to No. 26 out of more than 300 institutions nationwide that have an accredited engineering program but do not offer a doctorate degree. The Institute's undergraduate economics program was also recognized in this year's rankings. U.S. News reports the median salary of a VMI alumnus is $63,545 six years after graduation.

The methodology is very thorough, with data-driven comparison of more than 1,700 colleges and universities using up to 17 measures of academic quality and graduate success.

VMI Receives NSA Designation

The National Security Agency (NSA) has designated VMI as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense, recognizing VMI's commitment to cybersecurity education, research, and the development of highly qualified cyber professionals.

The designation became official June 12, 2026, and is effective through academic year 2031. It applies to the Bachelor of Science degree in computer science-cybersecurity track as an NSA-validated cybersecurity Program of Study.

The National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity program establishes rigorous standards for institutions offering cybersecurity education. Schools receiving the designation must demonstrate that their academic programs meet requirements established by the NSA and support the nation's growing need for skilled cybersecurity professionals.

Constitution Day Celebrated with Award-Winning Historian

By Marianne Hause
Photos by Jake Falcone '27

Constitution Day, Sept. 17, was recognized by the Department of History, with support from the Jackson-Hope Fund, by means of a conversation with award-winning historian, Dr. Francis D. Cogliano, and moderated by Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft, associate professor of history and holder of the Conrad M. Hall '65 Chair in American Constitutional History, in Gillis Theater.

Approximately 200 faculty, staff, cadets, and members of the public attended the conversation which was focused on insights and ideas from Cogliano's new book, "Thomas Jefferson Survives: American Independence in His Time and Ours," co-authored with Peter S. Onuf. Cogliano discussed Jefferson's ideas about constitutions, the role of later generations in preserving independence, the importance of citizen-soldiers, and civilian control of the military.

Boonshoft shared Cogliano is one of the world's leading experts on Thomas Jefferson and the American Revolution. "His book, and his remarks stemming from it, made the case for Jefferson's continued relevance and offered important lessons on the role ordinary Americans must play in preserving democratic institutions," said Boonshoft.

Earlier in the day, Cogliano visited a course on the history of the U.S. presidency and the history capstone seminar. In both classes, he discussed with cadets how to frame and execute research projects.



Dr. Francis D. Cogliano and Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft lead a Constitution Day conversation with the audience in Gillis Theater.



Dr. Francis D. Cogliano discusses Thomas Jefferson's thoughts about constitutions in Gillis Theater, Sept. 17.

Institute Report
Volume 55, Number 2, October 2026

The Institute Report, VMI's news magazine, publishes eight issues during each academic year. Inquiries, suggestions, news items, and address changes should be directed to Editor, Institute Report, VMI Public Information & Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450-0304; 540-464-7207; or **VMIReport@vmi.edu**.
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Career opportunities are available across post. Learn more about faculty, staff, and hourly career opportunities at **www.vmi.edu/jobs**.

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On the cover: Rats await instruction before the 9/11 stair climb in New Barracks.–*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Below: The VMI rugby team poses for a photo after their game with Washington and Lee Sept. 26.–*VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

View the latest Institute stories and updates at **www.vmi.edu/vmi-stories**.



Mount Vernon Historian Speaks at VMI Convocation



Dr. Douglas Bradburn addresses the Corps of Cadets at VMI's convocation Sept. 2.

Challenges Corps with Lessons from Washington

By Marianne Hause
Photos by Kelly Nye

VMI opened its 187th year with a convocation ceremony Sept. 2 in Cameron Hall. Guest speaker Douglas Bradburn, Ph.D., president and CEO of George Washington's Mount Vernon, addressed the entire Corps of Cadets, members of the academic board, faculty, staff, and guests.

Brig. Gen. Robert Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, opened the observance with a welcome to all assembled, especially the record number of rats to their first convocation. He thanked alumni and friends of VMI for their enduring support, recognized the academic star cadets seated in a place of honor, and acknowledged faculty and staff for their service to the Institute. He then invited Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 to the lectern to speak at his first convocation as superintendent.

Furness greeted the audience, and reminded the Rat Mass embarking on its first academic year of the many educational avenues VMI provides. "We host conferences, you may attend competitions, experiment in the laboratory, go on field training exercises, and travel abroad." He then thanked the alumni and friends of the Institute for their continued support of the VMI Foundation, a key supporter of the academic programs. Furness also congratulated the cadets whose hard work earned them the distinction for academic merit, and challenged all cadets to strive for academic excellence. "Set goals for yourself. Stay focused, and strive to achieve these goals this academic year. Do not ever give up, and remember that excellence is a habit, not a singular act." He cited several programs VMI holds throughout the year to help the cadets expand their knowledge, including those provided by the Center for Leadership and Ethics. Furness then introduced the guest speaker.

Bradburn opened his talk by asking the cadets what the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence means to them as future leaders of this country, noting that even though 2026 is a year of celebration, there are irritations and challenges unique to the time. "We are in the midst of a war. We have security challenges and all kinds of new things in cyber and AI that are going to frustrate us all. Partisanship is at an all-time high, some would say." Instead of being angry and frustrated, he encouraged his listeners to recognize the incredible story of the nation's history.

He noted the 200th anniversary of American independence came right after the Watergate scandal, Similarly, at the centennial in 1876, the country was still scarred by civil war. Just 50 years after independence, the

presidency had been so contested that it had to be decided in the House of Representatives. "Then, of course we go back to 1776 itself. The Declaration of Independence is a critical marker in that moment when this nation in rebellion had declared itself free and independent. But it's a lot easier to declare independence than to win it." He described how the army under Gen. George Washington initially suffered major setbacks and defeats, but Washington, through the leadership skills he learned and developed, pressed on to victory.

Bradburn noted several lessons for the cadets to glean from Washington's example of leadership. The first lesson is to persevere and be resilient. "Winning independence was not inevitable. It took extraordinary resilience and perseverance in the face of tremendous failure. Washington's army would have to fight for seven more years with privation, corruption, foolishness, mistakes, and a cause that became oftentimes unpopular. But they struggled through it. In some ways, perseverance in a higher cause is the highest form of courage. It's one thing to step into the breach in a moment and show extraordinary valor, but the Continental Army was able to persevere day after day toward a vision to establish the liberty that we often take for granted in this nation."

The second lesson of Washington's example is that leadership matters. "People have to step up and take on the challenge of leadership. In our case, we are fortunate to have had one of the greatest leaders America has ever produced, George Washington, at the helm. He was the man that led the Continental Army, the man without which we would not have had a constitutional convention when we had it, and the U.S. Constitution, as written and ratified, would not have been ratified, and of course he was the first president of the United States." To illuminate Washington's thoughts of being the first president, his sense of the moment, the role he held, and the work he was doing, Bradford read a passage from a letter Washington wrote to Catharine Macaulay Graham, an 18th-century English historian, the night he gave the first State of the Union address, "'I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any action whose motives may not be subject of a double interpretation. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent.'" Bradburn noted that Washington knew all eyes were upon him. "He was experiencing incredible pressure. Not thinking about a 24-hour news cycle, but the generational news cycle. He knew what he was there to create."

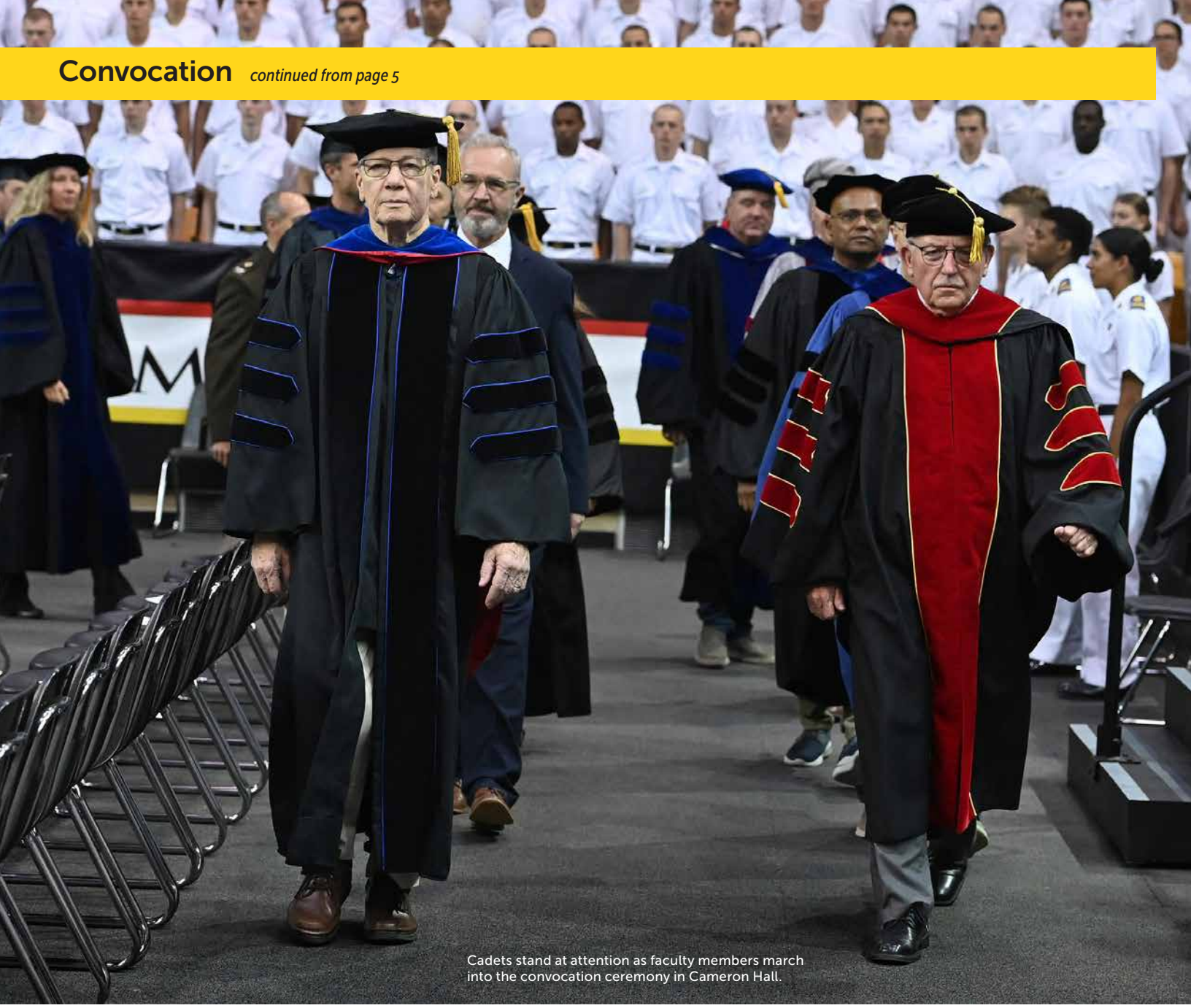
The third lesson, and one of the most important values that has made America a free country, according to Bradburn, is civilian control of the military. "This is a fundamental value that goes back to Washington's leadership, by the way he built the armed forces 250 years ago. He promised when he took his command that he would listen to Congress, that he would listen to civilian authority, and he promised that he would turn that commission when the job was done. That had rarely been done throughout history. It's incredibly rare that revolutionary struggles end in anything other than a military dictatorship. The English Civil War ended with Oliver Cromwell marching into Parliament and saying, 'You have sat too long here,' and then he served as Lord Protector of the Realm until he died. Napoleon had great ideals, but the French Revolution ended with him declaring himself an emperor. When King George III of England heard that Washington was going back to a private situation at the end of the war, he said, 'If he does that, he'll be the greatest man of the age.'

See **Convocation,** *page 6*



Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 speaks at his first convocation as superintendent.

Convocation *continued from page 5*



Cadets stand at attention as faculty members march into the convocation ceremony in Cameron Hall.

That act of virtue, that selfless walking away from power, he would do again at the end of the presidency. It is why we have two terms for presidents in the United States. You serve as a public servant, then you become a normal citizen again."

Bradburn closed by quoting Washington's Circular to the States, "'It is yet to be decided whether the Revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse: a blessing or a curse, not to the present age alone, for with our fate will the destiny of unborn millions be involved.'" He then challenged the cadets with a final question, "Is this great experiment going to be handed off to the next generation stronger, intact, better, and more perfect? I think it's a question still worth asking 250 years later. I look forward to seeing how the Corps of Cadets answers that question. For soon enough, you all will be running the country."

Bradburn is the author of "The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774-1804," and three anthologies, including "Early Modern Virginia: Reconsidering the Old Dominion," the most significant book produced to mark the 400th anniversary of the English founding of Jamestown. He is the co-founder and editor of the award-winning book series, "Early American Histories," published by the University of Virginia Press, and the winner of numerous awards, grants, and fellowships, including the yearlong Gilder Lehrman Institute research fellowship at the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello.

He has received five Telly Awards for his work on animated documentaries for classroom use, and a Thea Award for the popular Be Washington interactive educational game. Bradburn has appeared on CSPAN, "Good Morning America," and "Sunday Morning" on CBS, and was most recently featured in the History Channel's docudrama, "Washington."

Before arriving to Mount Vernon, Bradburn served as chair of the history department at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He received his doctorate in history from the University of Chicago and his bachelor's degree in history and economics from the University of Virginia.

2026-27 New and Promoted Faculty

The Office of the Dean of the Faculty announced the promotion and granting of tenure to several faculty members and introduced new members of the faculty for this academic year.

Promoted

History
» **Col. Jochen Arndt**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

Modern Languages and Cultures
» **Dr. Laura Xie**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

Promoted, with tenure

Civil and Environmental Engineering
» **Lt. Col. Rebekah Martin**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

Economics and Business
» **Lt. Col. Steven Landgraf**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies
» **Lt. Col. Adam Cody**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.
» **Lt. Col. Henry Wise**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

History
» **Lt. Col. Christopher Blunda**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.
» **Lt. Col. Liz Schroepfer**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

New Full-Time Faculty

Economics and Business
» **Dr. Ah Jung Kim**

Electrical and Computer Engineering
» **Dr. Shamsul Arefeen**

Mechanical Engineering
» **Maj. Nick Alden**

New Adjunct/Part-Time Faculty

Applied Mathematics
» **Ms. Kristy Watkins**

Biology
» **Dr. Amin Ferdous**
» **Dr. Robert Rimkis**

Economics and Business
» **Dr. Thorsten Matje**

International Studies and Political Science
» **Mr. David Natkin**
» **Dr. NamTae "Joshua" Park**

Modern Languages and Cultures
» **Ms. Li-Zhong Huang**

New ROTC Faculty

Air Force
» **1st Lt. Marcos Alejandro**
» **Tech. Sgt. Lance Ryans**

Army
» **Capt. Emily Dalmolin**
» **Sgt. 1st Class Donald Hardy**
» **Staff Sgt. Solomon Lamptey**
» **Sgt. 1st Class Wedeler Mitial**
» **Capt. Bradly Paul**
» **Capt. Todd Pinney**
» **Staff Sgt. Lashyia Robinson**
» **Staff Sgt. Rakazha Struiken**
» **Sgt. 1st Class George Thompson**

Also joining VMI, reporting to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, include:

Institutional Research, Planning, & Assessment
» **Capt. Clare Robson**





Lt. Gen. Furness' First Year in Review

By Marianne Hause
Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, Jake Falcone '27, and courtesy of Col. Jeff Kendrick and Alexis Gonzalez '25

Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 recently reflected on the first year of his tenure as the 16th superintendent of VMI, and described it as a fast-paced, fun-filled year of learning.

A goal Furness prioritized and one he stated is important when leading any organization is to establish relationships with people within the organization—administrators, faculty, staff, and cadets—and to be present, a concept he refers to as "leadership by walking around." He makes a habit of visiting barracks, the dining hall, and the academic buildings. He watches the cadets compete in sports as well as their ROTC training. "Because then I can give them feedback. I can interact with them and find out what's on their minds in a less stressful environment. I can learn the things they care about, and can transmit things I care about to them. I'm pretty much everywhere all the time, and they have a lot of opportunities to interact with me. They also know that I can pop around any corner at any time, and you know that tends to keep them on their toes," he said with a smile.

The first thing he discovered when chatting with cadets was the Wi-Fi in barracks was old and inadequate in keeping up with the demand required by staff and cadets. Within 90 days, work began to improve it.

He shared the biggest surprise he experienced was the exceptionalism of the female cadets. "When I was a cadet, this was an all-male institution.









I was probably one of the alumni who wanted to keep it single gender because I think it benefited me as a cadet and my focus, but I could never imagine, after this year, VMI without female cadets. In fact, if I had my way and I had the resources, I would have several more female sports teams."

A significant accomplishment Furness achieved in his first year was growth in enrollment. He stated 1,800 cadets is the target number to start each academic year, but there have been many years that target was not reached. Earlier in the year he set the goal for over 500 matriculants, and in August, VMI welcomed the largest rat class in history with 532. "We met our goal. We'll need to do that three or four more years in a row to get the overall enrollment up to where it needs to be."

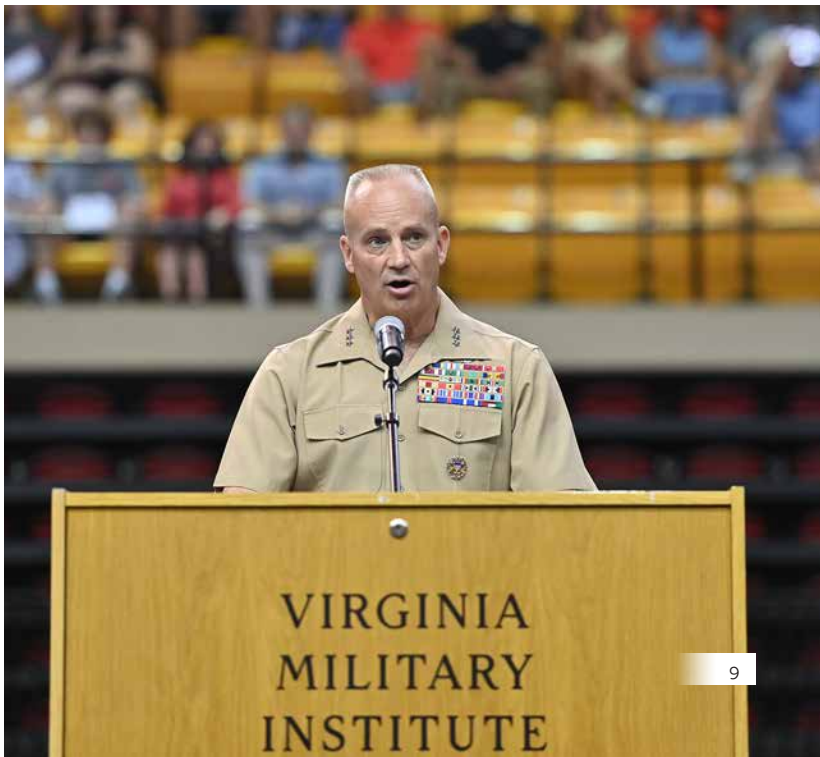
He also discussed the standards for the personal appearance of the Corps has improved from when he arrived a year ago, but not entirely where he wants them to be. "Our students deserve a pat on the back for their focus and self-discipline in improving those standards. But we can be better, and that's what I keep trying to inspire them to be."

Early in 2026, Furness met a challenge when members of the Virginia General Assembly attempted to pass two house bills unfavorable to VMI. "One bill did not pass the Senate. The other bill that did pass was amended appropriately by both the patron and the governor to be more amenable to VMI. That was a very stressful three months, but in the end, I think we achieved good results, and worked well with people on both sides of the political aisle."

Throughout the year, Furness made a concerted effort to connect with alumni. He engaged with them during their reunions and special events on post, and traveled to visit

See **Furness' First Year,** *page 10*





Furness' First Year *continued from page 10*



alumni chapters around the country. Within the commonwealth, he met with chapters in Fredericksburg, Hampton Roads, Lynchburg, Northern Virginia, Rappahannock, Richmond, Roanoke, Shenandoah, and Williamsburg. He met with alumni in California, Idaho, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, as well as Washington, D.C. Over the summer, he ventured overseas to Taiwan and Thailand where he was warmly welcomed by the alumni there and recruited potential future cadets.

In discussing his future goals, Furness referred to the three core values of academics, military leadership, and athletics, symbolized by VMI's Three-Legged Stool. "The military leg is stronger now than when I was a cadet. We train young officers better than anybody in the business. The academic leg is stronger. There are more course offerings than when I was a cadet, and there are more opportunities for cadet research and overseas study. The athletic leg, though, needs improving. We've underinvested in that leg for over 50 years, and we have to change that in order to make us more competitive to win. We are currently working on an athletic strategic plan that will help us achieve that goal."

Additionally, by next year, Furness believes a master's in executive leadership will be developed through the Center for Leadership and Ethics, which may be available to students online. He is also trying to establish a program in which cadets can earn simultaneously both a bachelor's degree and MBA in four years. "We are working with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia right now on that program."

Furness' favorite memories over the year are of handing out class rings to 2nd Class cadets and handing out diplomas to 1st Class cadets as they graduated. "I enjoyed seeing the looks in their eyes as they reached that part of their VMI journey. I think those are two very special moments of my first year."



VMI Rugby Dominates

By Kelly Nye
Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin

The VMI men's rugby team is off to a spectacular start this fall, winning most of their matches by margins of 50 points or more. They started their season at home, beating Virginia 56 to 3 Sept. 5. Less than a week later they traveled to North Carolina to beat East Carolina University 61 to 0. Both the A and B sides—divided by game time experience—got a chance to play in Blacksburg Sept. 19, beating Virginia Tech 54 to 0 and 12 to 7 respectively.

Caleb Chandler '27, team captain, attributes their success to the commitment of his teammates and support from the administration. "Our level of buy-in helps us stand out amongst a great field of competition," he said. "Institute leadership has supported the team every step of the way, allotting us more time and resources to continue developing our craft, and we are extremely grateful for every opportunity."



Caleb Chandler '27 runs with the ball during the A side game against W&L.



Ryan Maxwell '28 rushes the ball past W&L during the game on Sept. 26.

Andrew Dover '28 dives with the ball during the Sept. 26 game against W&L on North Post.

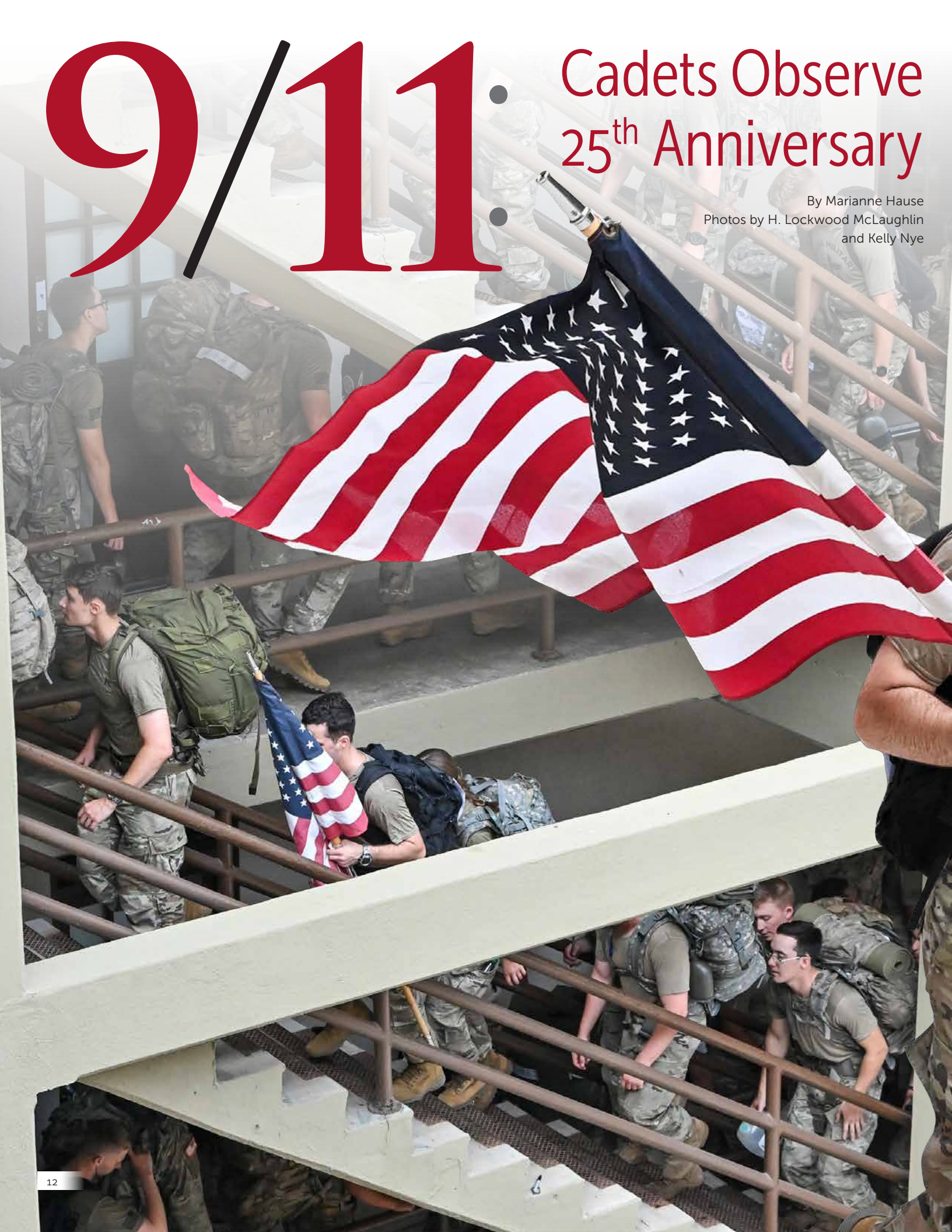
Saturday, Sept. 26, the Keydets defeated Washington and Lee's Screaming Minks by an even larger margin—106 to 0. The Minks previously had big wins over Elon and Emory and Henry, but they were no match for VMI's A side. The B side played James Madison University later that afternoon and won 51 to 10.

"Our team this fall consists of a group of guys with exceptional athletic ability, toughness and determination. The effort, commitment, and attitude displayed thus far this season has been exceptional," said assistant coach John McCoy. "We're excited about the potential for this team moving forward."

October will see matches against Appalachian State, Wingate, Radford, Emory and Henry, and then the first round of playoffs start Oct. 31. Chandler also has high hopes for the team. "The best part of being rugby captain is leading such a motivated group of guys who are equally passionate about winning and bettering themselves on and off the field... My brothers and I will continue to work hard until we reach our goal of a national title this winter."

9/11: Cadets Observe 25th Anniversary

By Marianne Hause
Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and Kelly Nye



Close to 1,000 cadets participated in the annual 9/11 memorial stair climb. The cadets honored those who perished in the terrorist attacks by avidly ascending and descending the steps in barracks from 1st stoop to 4th stoop 37 times, replicating the 110 stories the first responders at the World Trade Center climbed during the rescue attempt that unforgettable day 25 years ago.

The cadets carried the name of a 9/11 victim taped on the back of their rucks, which were loaded with an average weight of 45 pounds. In addition, some cadets carried firefighting tools, rifles, and flags. Others took turns carrying a fragment of glass recovered from the rubble of the Twin Towers, as well as an American flag recovered from Ground Zero.

Before the climb began, Lt. Gen. David Furness '87, superintendent, thanked the cadets for engaging in the meaningful activity, and Col. John Casper '04, Institute chaplain, who was a cadet on post Sept. 11, 2001, led the Corps in prayer.



Micah Hamilton '28 carries the American flag during the 9/11 stair climb.

Among the 2,977 lives taken on 9/11 were two VMI alumni, Charles Mathers '62, a civilian who died when the plane hit the first tower of the World Trade Center, and Lt. Cmdr. David Williams '91, an officer in the Navy, who died when the plane struck the Pentagon.

Capt. Walt Kreitler '80, who worked in the Pentagon, survived the strike, having left his office briefly to withdraw cash from an ATM. Jim Spellman '85 spent nearly two weeks following the attack helping to search for survivors at Ground Zero.

Items belonging to Kreitler and Spellman, including Kreitler's ATM receipt time-stamped 9:36, one minute before the plane hit the Pentagon, were part of a temporary 9/11 display in the VMI Museum.

A video created specifically for the 25th anniversary of the attacks looks back at VMI that week in 2001. It features Casper's personal experience. Use the QR code to watch the video.









Yui's Visit Highlights VMI's Partnership with Taiwan



By Col. Jeff Kendrick
Photos by Kelly Nye

Alexander Tah-Ray Yui, Taiwan's representative to the United States, and three VMI alumni serving on his staff visited post Sept. 15 at the invitation of Superintendent Lt. Gen. David Furness '87. Citizens from the Republic of China—Taiwan's official name—have been part of the Corps since the early 1900s, and VMI welcomed a record seven Taiwanese rats in August. During the official office call, Yui and Furness discussed ways to bolster the strong relationship between VMI and Taiwan. Later that evening, about 300 cadets attended remarks by Yui in which he highlighted the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Taiwan when it came to security in the Pacific in face of the growing threat from communist China. He wrapped up his visit the following morning by breakfasting with 18 Taiwanese cadets and two semester exchange students from Taiwan. The visit was co-hosted by the Office of Global Education, the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis, and the Center for Leadership and Ethics.



ERHS Professors Present Papers on Philosophy and Ethics

By Marianne Hause

Dr. Duncan Richter, professor in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies (ERHS) and holder of the Charles Luck III '55 Institute Professorship, and Dr. Reshef Agam-Segal, professor of philosophy in ERHS, recently presented papers as part of the LOE Centenary Project, an online lecture series hosted by the University of Potsdam, located in Potsdam, Germany.

Both Richter and Agam-Segal are scholars of Ludwig Wittgenstein, considered to be one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. The project derives its name from, and is dedicated to Wittgenstein's famous, "Lecture on Ethics," which he delivered in 1929 to the Heretics Society at Cambridge University in England.

The LOE lecture series began in March, when Agam-Segal presented his paper titled, "How to Be Morally Resolute: Diamond vs. Conant." Richter followed in June when he presented, "Ethics and the Supernatural."

Additionally, in June, Agam-Segal attended the Wittgenstein and Ancient Philosophy conference in Athens, Greece, where he presented his paper, "Wittgensteinian Hylomorphism in the Philosophy of Mind." In July, he traveled to Toronto, Canada, for the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy where he presented, "Aesthetic Characterization."

In August, Richter attended the 47th International Wittgenstein Symposium 2026 in Kirchberg, Austria, where he presented, "The Groundlessness of Ethics," a paper which addresses the fact that Wittgenstein, at least in 1929, seemed to believe there was nothing rational about being ethical. Richter detailed in his paper, which he plans to expand into a book, reasons to think ethics could be rational as well as reasons to think it could not.

Agam-Segal teaches courses in philosophy, logic, and critical thinking. Richter teaches courses in ethics, aesthetics, and comparative religion, and is the academic adviser to the Ethics Team.



Dr. Duncan Richter

Dr. Reshef Agam-Segal


VMI KEYDETS
GREENWOOD
VMI








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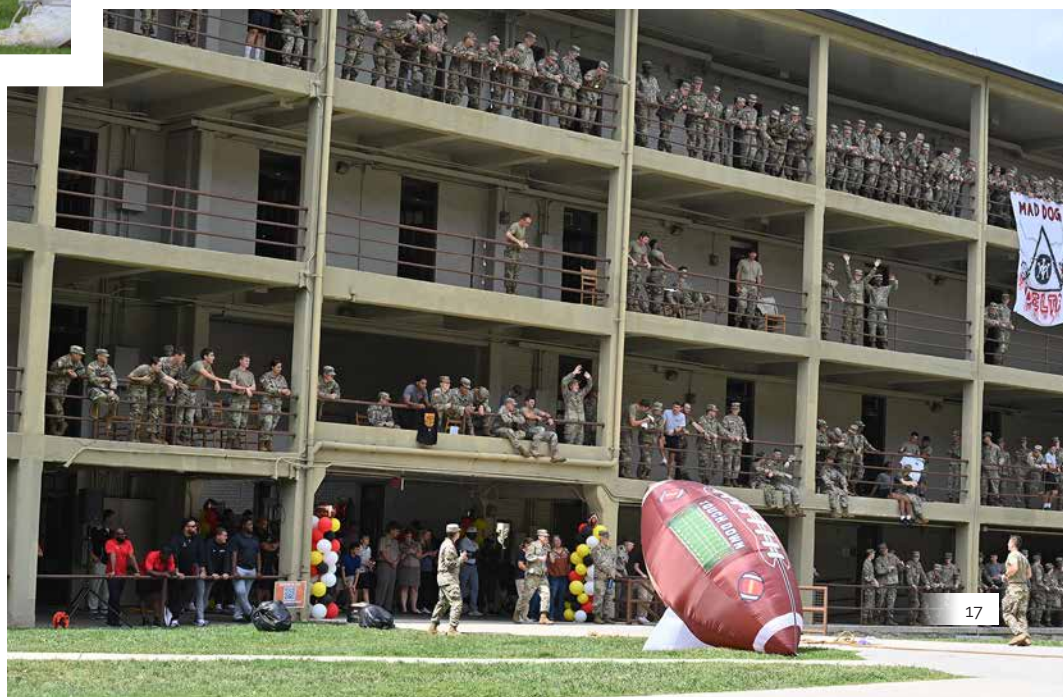






Kick-Off to the Year

The 2026-27 academic year started Tuesday, Aug. 25, the first day of classes. Other firsts for the new year include the first parade, held Sept. 4, and the Keydet football team hosting the Bucknell Bison Saturday Sept. 7 for the first game in Foster Stadium. The game was preceded by a parade and tailgating, and a pep rally was held in barracks that Friday, led by S9 staff.—*VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and Kelly Nye.*



"My True Passion:"

Eger '21 Receives Prestigious Olmsted Scholarship

By Scott Belliveau '83, VMI Alumni Agencies

U.S. Navy Lt. Jonah Eger '21 was one of the 16 U.S. military officers named to the Olmsted Scholar Class of 2027 by the board of the Falls Church, Virginia-based Olmsted Foundation in March. He is only the eighth VMI alumnus selected for this prestigious program since the Institute's first Olmsted Scholar, William Short '77, was selected in 1982.

Originally from Ashland, Virginia, Eger was a distinguished graduate with Institute Honors who majored in economics and business. Today, Eger is a surface warfare officer currently serving on the USS Milius (DDG-69), based in Japan. He has completed four deployments in the Seventh Fleet's area of operations and two combat deployments to the Fifth Fleet's area of operations in support of Operation Rough Rider and Operation Epic Fury. He holds several advanced qualifications, including engineering officer of the watch, force anti-air warfare coordinator, ballistic missile defense officer, and command duty officer. Eger has received many awards, including the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with Combat "C" device and the Battle "E" award. He was promoted to lieutenant (junior grade) and lieutenant in June 2023 and June 2025, respectively.

Eger had an interest in international affairs before his time at VMI. However, what he describes as "his true passion" for the subject stems from an experience he had as a cadet. "I spent a summer in Fez, Morocco, studying Arabic, Darija, and Moroccan culture at the Arabic Language Institute in Fez through the Project GO (Global Officer) Scholarship. I lived with a Moroccan family in the heart of the Fez Medina. This amazing exposure to a foreign language and culture sparked my desire to live abroad and my professional interest in international affairs."

Later, working with his mentor, Col. Atin Basuchoudhary, professor of economics and business, he completed an honors thesis in which he developed a machine-learning algorithm to identify socioeconomic predictors of poverty in developing nations. During his 1st Class year, he participated in the International Law of Armed Conflict Competition, hosted annually by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law. Disappointingly, COVID-19 restrictions prevented Eger and his teammates from traveling to the usual location in Italy.



U.S. Navy
Lt. Jonah Eger '21

Eger credits his VMI experience for leading him to this moment. "Without VMI, I never would have made it this far. Coming from humble beginnings, I never imagined there were opportunities like the Olmsted Scholar program. VMI's ethos of service directly contributed to my decision to pursue a commission in the U.S. Navy. Without VMI, I would never have received the NROTC scholarship and other money that helped me afford my undergraduate education. Without the leaders at VMI who believed in me, I never would have been selected for Project GO and sent to Morocco, where I developed my passion for international affairs, foreign languages and cultures, and building connections with people of all backgrounds."

Established in 1960, the Olmsted Scholar Program is the foundation's signature program. It was born from the experiences of Maj. Gen. George H. Olmsted, the foundation's creator. After graduating from the U.S. Military Academy in 1922 and serving in the U.S. Army, Olmsted returned to Iowa. There, he joined the insurance industry, started his

own company, and by 1940, had developed it into one of the country's leading insurers.

Recalled to active duty during World War II, he ran the Lend-Lease program, which provided U.S.-built equipment and material to Allied nations. He later served on the staff of Army Lt. Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer, who concurrently served as the commander of U.S. forces in China and the chief of staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Republic of China.

He returned to his company after the war but was called to the colors again when the Korean War broke out in June 1950. As a brigadier general, Olmsted was responsible for the Army's military assistance activities. In 1951, he was promoted to major general and reassigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where he led all U.S. government military assistance programs.

Olmsted expanded his business interests after he returned to civilian life in 1953. By the late 1950s, he had established International Bank, headquartered in Washington, D.C., a conglomerate encompassing insurance, banking, shipping, and manufacturing.

According to retired U.S. Army Col. Mark Elfendahl, president and chief executive officer of The Olmsted Foundation and a 1999 Olmsted Scholar, this experience formed in Olmsted a conviction that "the greatest leaders must be educated broadly." The program does so by providing highly qualified, active-duty junior officers with scholarships to study a foreign language for one year and then attend graduate school in a country where that language is spoken. To date, the program has sent 815 officers to more than 60 countries where they have studied at more than 200 universities in 40 languages.

"The program shapes future leaders by developing in them a strategic awareness of the world and an understanding of how America can best lead it," Elfendahl continued. "That, in turn, strengthens American leadership around the world and advances the interests of the United States across the national security environment."

Elfendahl stressed that the program purposefully restricts applicants to those officers who have served between three and 11 years on active duty. "We want to ensure that the scholars have been acculturated to the profession of arms and the ethos of military service. We want them to have served with their peers, experienced the challenges of basic military leadership, and demonstrated excellence at the tactical level." This is important because the program's goal is to serve the nation by giving scholars the knowledge, perspective, and confidence to succeed as senior warfighting commanders who will be "strategic assets to their services and the Joint Force." Evidence of the program's success in achieving that goal is that 52 scholars have achieved general or flag officer rank, and eight of these have attained four-star rank.

> ***"Without VMI, I never would have made it this far. Coming from humble beginnings, I never imagined there were opportunities like the Olmsted Scholar program."***

Eger was motivated to apply for the Olmsted Scholar program because, "I could readily see that there are countless benefits, both personally and professionally, from this experience. I have always loved school, and studying languages comes naturally to me. To have the time to focus on getting a master's degree and developing language and cultural proficiency in another country would be a dream come true."

Each service has its own way of determining which candidates are best fitted for the program. After each of the six services chooses its candidates, it forwards scholarship "packets" to the Olmsted Foundation. Usually, there are approximately 70 a year. After reviewing the applications, the foundation's staff interview candidates by telephone. "We do that," explained Elfendahl, "because some are deployed or in a war zone, and we don't want to put them at a disadvantage." Afterward, the foundation's board chooses the new class. Each service's number of selectees reflects its relative size. The Army, Air Force, and Navy usually have four scholars each per year, the Marines usually have two, and the Coast Guard and Space Force have one each. All told, the process takes approximately nine months.

Eger learned of his selection March 19, 2026. At the time, he was engaged in combat operations in support of Operation Epic Fury. "To say it was an emotional moment is a complete understatement," recalled Eger. "When my captain told me the news, I could not believe it initially. Not only had I been selected, but I had been picked to go to my first choice of location: Lisbon, Portugal."

Asked why he had chosen Portugal among his top destinations—candidates must submit 10—, he replied, "It is completely different from any place I've been before. I've lived in Morocco and studied Arabic. I've lived in Japan and familiarized myself with its culture. I've never been to Europe, and I wanted to be in a place that had an interesting history that I don't know much about. Portugal also has a

See **Olmsted Scholarship,** *page 20*



Lt. Jonah Eger '21 rides a camel in Morocco.—*Photo courtesy of Lt. Jonah Eger '21.*

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great maritime tradition, and living there would give me the opportunity to do some sailing."

One of the program's peculiarities is that, while Olmsted Scholars receive their military pay and allowances and some financial support from the Olmsted Foundation, they have no official status. They are required, therefore, to handle all the details of their stay. As Elfendahl put it, "They must find housing, figure out where to shop, how to get around, and how to work within the local healthcare system. That's part of the program's value. It gives scholars a new set of experiences, boosts their self-confidence, and enhances their leadership abilities."

Eger welcomes this. "It's an important part of the Olmsted experience. I will be fully immersed in the day-to-day lives of the locals and so better understand their financial and social obligations. I am most looking forward to making friends with the locals, conversing with them in their language, and building a sense of community. I also love traveling, and I cannot wait to explore the rich history, culture, and food that Portugal has to offer."

For the past five and a half years, Eger has been on extremely demanding and challenging sea tours. Of the past 19 months, he has spent 15 months at sea—and 11 of them have been on combat deployments. So, while he is eager to learn a new language and study for an advanced degree in Portugal, he will be happy to live at a relatively slower pace. "I am looking forward to using this unparalleled opportunity to focus on improving my physical, mental, and spiritual fitness in order to strengthen my character and leadership abilities for the rest of my Navy career."

Just as he will apply his prior experiences to the Olmsted program, he will apply what he learns from the program to his naval career. "Afterward, I'll return to the fleet as a department head on an operational ship. I am determined, therefore, to use my time as an Olmsted Scholar to make myself a better person, leader, and sailor and so return to the Navy with even more to contribute." More specifically, Eger hopes to get a ship assigned to the Navy's Forward Deployed Naval Forces—Europe, based in Rota, Spain. "There, I can offer 'the best return on investment' by applying the cultural knowledge and language fluency I'll acquire during my Olmsted tour."

All that is three years in the future. Right now, Eger is anticipating an experience that he describes as "the perfect crossroad of my personal and professional interests. Undoubtedly, it will offer unmatched rewards. I am incredibly grateful to the Olmsted Foundation for selecting me for this rare opportunity."



Jonah Eger '21 attends Model Arab League as a cadet in 2019.—*File photo courtesy of Maj. Jason Schroepfer.*

VMI Hosts Statewide Debate & Discourse Workshop

By Marianne Hause
Photo by Kelly Nye

VMI's Civil Discourse Initiative, in partnership with the national College Debates and Discourse Alliance (CD&D), an initiative of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, hosted a training workshop on how to incorporate intentional civil discourse on college campuses. Students, faculty, and staff from colleges and universities across the Commonwealth of Virginia were invited to attend the event held Sept. 4 in Marshall Hall.

Attendees of the workshop were taught that CD&D honors ideological diversity and fosters civil discourse. CD&D debates and dialogues are not competitive or performative events separating speakers and audiences. They are immersive and participatory, inviting everyone in the room to express themselves freely in a collective search for truth. Conducted in a light parliamentary format and chaired by trained experts, students are encouraged to express their views, frame persuasive arguments, listen deeply, and engage respectfully around challenging political and social issues. Workshop participants were taught strategies for building communities of practice, how to compose an engaging debate resolution that would attract a balanced two-sided discussion, and how to serve as a debate chair. They put what they learned into practice while engaging in a debate.

Doug Sprei, co-founder/director of CD&D, assisted in leading the workshop. According to Sprei, CD&D has enjoyed a lasting and productive collaboration with VMI since 2021. "We're so proud of our remarkable faculty partners at VMI. They have enabled VMI to become CD&D's leading community of practice and a national model in integrating civil discourse into campus culture. From the onset, we've seen how VMI inspires and engages cadets and faculty, helping them develop crucial skills in cultivating dialogue around critical issues facing the campus, the local region, and our nation. The school has become an anchor for our work across Virginia. Our joint effort in launching this statewide training workshop brought several more institutions into our initiative. We look forward to helping them foster transformative debate and dialogue on their own campuses and carry the movement forward."

Civil discourse and debates faculty fellow, Col. Sara Whipple, professor in the Department of Psychology, stated the vast majority of what is implemented in the program at VMI is a direct result of the training and techniques learned from CD&D. "Consequently, we were happy to collaborate with CD&D to provide interested faculty, staff, and students from across the state with an opportunity to learn how to incorporate civil discourse techniques into their classrooms and across their campuses. We were pleased to welcome so many eager participants who are invested in creating opportunities for dialogue, intellectual humility, and broader community engagement for their students. This workshop is a testament to both the community of practice we built here on post and to VMI's regional leadership in this realm. We are grateful to the administration, faculty, staff, and students who have supported this work."

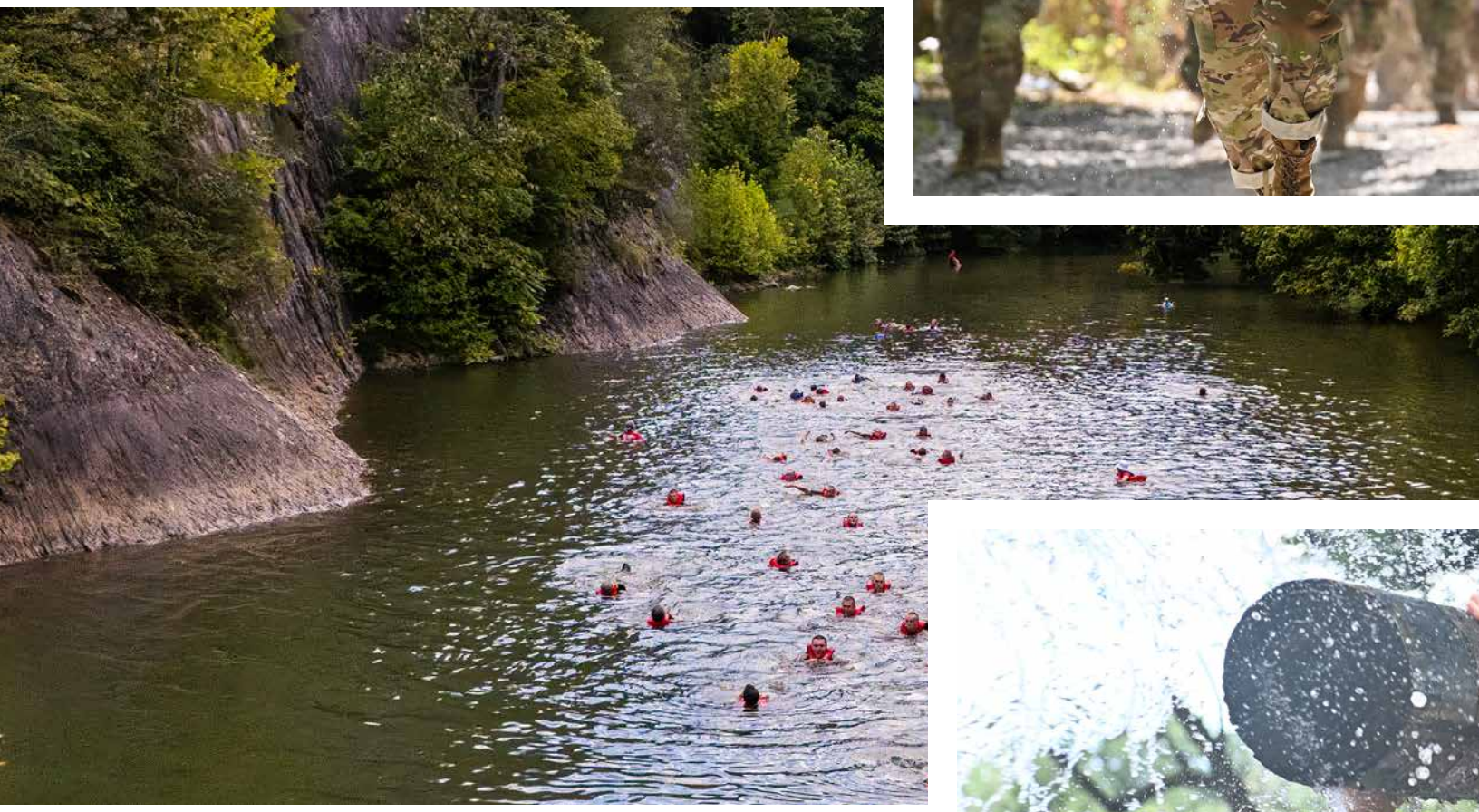


Doug Sprei leads discussion at the College Debates and Discourse Alliance workshop held Sept. 4 in Marshall Hall.

The Civil Discourse Initiative includes cadets, faculty, and staff. It is sponsored by the Jackson-Hope Fund and holds multiple debates throughout the academic year. Information about the program and a schedule of upcoming events may be found at **www.vmi.edu/cle/debate**.





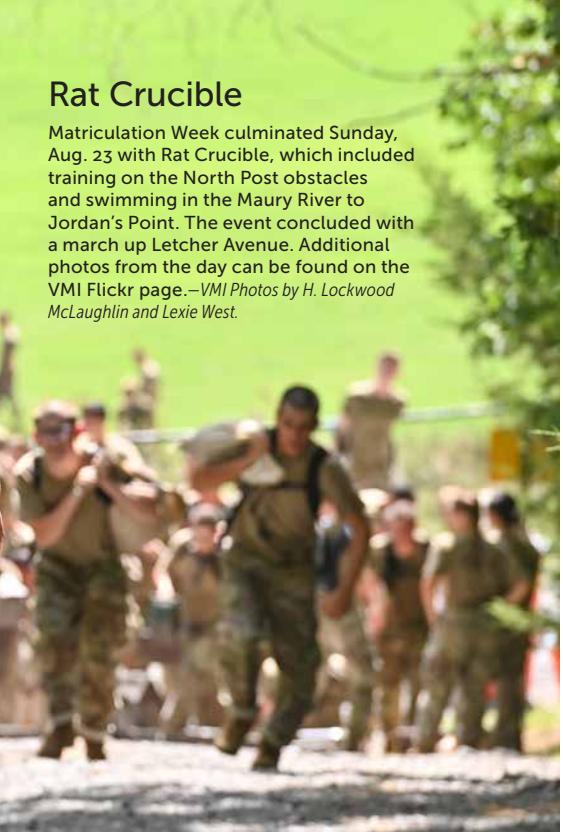






Rat Crucible

Matriculation Week culminated Sunday, Aug. 23 with Rat Crucible, which included training on the North Post obstacles and swimming in the Maury River to Jordan's Point. The event concluded with a march up Letcher Avenue. Additional photos from the day can be found on the VMI Flickr page.–*VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and Lexie West.*













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