

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

29 July 2020

Members of the VMI Corps of Cadets, Faculty and Staff, and the Classified Team, Alumni, VMI Agencies, George C. Marshall Foundation, and Friends of the Institute:

On 4 June 2020, I wrote to you reaffirming our dedication to our mission to: "...prepare all of our graduates for that mantle of leadership to affect appropriate change in our communities, eradicate racism, defend our nation, and lead the best institutions of business, medicine, law, politics, military, education and many others, while most importantly, providing principled leadership to our families." The principles on which VMI has stood – fairness, honor, integrity, respect, civility, and accountability - continue to be the backbone of who we are. We strive to advance these traits in society and correct inequalities that we see occur.

We are living in a unique time in the history of our country that has undoubtedly affected each of us in different ways. First and foremost, I believe we all agree we want to erase any hint of racism at VMI, in our communities, and in our country. It is also very clear that the VMI community consists of passionate individuals with deeply held beliefs. We have spent considerable waking hours trying to make sense of the turmoil and pain we have seen nationally. Many of you across the spectrum of our graduates have personally contacted me and expressed how this affects the operations of VMI today and concerns for the future. For weeks, I have listened carefully and contemplated your correspondence and will continue to do so. Some of our African American cadets and alumni have expressed that parts of the VMI experience did not live up to the standards that it should have, and I am committed to addressing and fixing any areas of racial inequality at our school.

The invaluable discussions I have had with many of you have caused me to reflect on the challenges and resiliency seen throughout the history of the Institute. VMI's early history was steeped in southern heritage, the Civil War, and the Battle of New Market. Our school's history has been intertwined with the history of Virginia and the Civil War. Unlike many communities who are grappling with icons of the past, VMI has direct ties to many of the historical figures that are the subject of the current unrest. Stonewall Jackson was a professor at VMI, a West Point graduate who served in combat in the Mexican War, a military genius, a staunch Christian, and yes, a Confederate General. Throughout the years, the primary focus on honoring VMI's history has been to celebrate principles of honor, integrity, character, courage, service, and selflessness of those associated with the Institute. It is not to in anyway condone racism, much less slavery.

Over VMI's nearly 200-year history, it has undergone many changes for the better and it will continue to change. Today this national treasure we know as VMI enjoys a splendid national reputation among our country's many colleges, and particularly in our armed forces as an institution with a proven and hard-earned record of producing educated, honorable citizens who are prepared to serve our communities, states, and country in times of peace and war. The VMI experience, which humbles all cadets who enter its gates and places each on a level playing field, overall has been advantageous to all alumni. From the time that African Americans first matriculated in 1968, they have excelled academically, athletically, and in leadership positions in both the regimental and class systems. They have been class officers dating back to the 1970s, Honor Court presidents, Regimental Commanders, a Rhodes Scholar, and in 2019 a female Fulbright Scholar. African Americans have served on the Board of Visitors and the boards of the Alumni Association, Foundation, and Keydet Club. As graduates, they have been extremely successful in every walk of life, rising to the highest ranks of the military and the board room. Their contributions to the communities, our nation, and to VMI are profound; and, their bond with the VMI experience has been extremely important to their success as it is with all VMI alumni. We are proud of them. The VMI experience works for everyone, regardless of race, because it is founded on the base of equality. We universally agree that the cadetship is not easy for anyone, but we are committed to an experience that is staunchly equal and fair for everyone who chooses to pursue it. We focus on providing the very best undergraduate education with personalized attention to each of our cadets. Cadets arrive this year representing nearly every state in the union and from foreign countries...and will graduate ready to contribute to society.

Our current strategic master plan is called "Vision 2039: Focus on Leadership". The plan, originally implemented in 2003, centers on improving the academic, military, and athletic programs and building the infrastructure necessary to the development of leaders and environment in which it takes place. To date, we have made enormous progress in meeting the objectives of Vision 2039 and impacting in a positive manner the culture in the Corps. However, we realize that leadership is more than a skill or simply improving the infrastructure of the Institute. Leadership has moral and ethical dimensions that are directly related to a cadet's character. Our goal has been and still is to develop cadets with the highest standards of honor, respect, civility, self-discipline, and professionalism. If we stay focused on this vision and our mission, then we will be ready to face and improve our weaknesses, including any discrimination and inequality that may exist. As a unique institution of higher education in America with a mission unlike any other, we have the ability to build on the close relationships of Brother Rats, Class and Regimental systems, teammates, a superb, caring faculty and staff, and on the work of our loyal alumni. We will continue to challenge the Corps through the class and regimental systems to address unbecoming conduct and racism. The Corps working with the administration, will effect change and improvement as we have done to enhance the overall culture and professionalism of the Corps..., an on-going effort since my arrival at VMI some seventeen years ago. I have great faith in the Corps of Cadets, as over the years I have watched them successfully confront difficult and sensitive issues...and make us all so proud in so doing.

While I will continue to listen intently to your input, it is time to implement an action plan that moves us forward. We will take heart during this defining moment and do what is right through our actions, while remaining grounded in our principles. Each of us in the VMI community is part of this team and has an important role to play. Implementation will require us all to recognize and accept the theme of “commonality of purpose”. We are striving to make VMI a better place not only for the current Corps and our faculty and staff, but also for generations to come.

The overarching goal of this plan is fourfold: (1) to retain the foundation of values and principles set in the Institute’s early years; however, we will shift the emphasis and celebrations to our remarkable history of our second century; (2) enhance recruiting, especially among marginalized youth, and meet the need for a more diverse faculty and staff; (3) provide greater leadership education for our cadets and thus a civil and respected environment on post, with cadets well prepared for leadership roles after graduation; and (4) provide greater access to our alumni network for all graduates. The following proposed plan includes a series of five pillars to guide our community. These pillars “operationalize in parallel and in time” to build a better future, with actions executed *prior* to one’s cadetship, *during* their cadetship, and actions *continuing* upon graduation. This is the outline of a plan, which will evolve and mature over time.

The **First Pillar** is **Education**, which will emphasize American history and civics within the context historically of national and world events, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and slavery. Every member of the Corps of Cadets will take the “American Civic Experience.” This required second year course (3rd Class Year) has been under development for the past 3 years and will be piloted for the first time in the fall of 2020. We anticipate hiring a respected scholar to occupy a new academic chair that will further the development of this curriculum. The new course will also provide the framework for advanced elective courses offered on the African American Experience, 19th Century South Africa, and Africa in Pre- and Modern Times. This fall will also see a massive redesign to our required LEAD 344 (formerly PS 344) Leadership in Organizations course to reflect a broader interdisciplinary approach with focus on interaction between leaders, followers, and the situational context of the leadership process. Clearly, these academic courses, under the direction of our Dean, will be broadening and helpful to our process. Finally, the two Virginia History Courses – prior to 1865 and 1865 (Reconstruction) to present - will be reviewed to ensure that they are taught with the proper context and from multiple perspectives. Our ROTC programs similarly provide advanced leadership classes and diversity instruction. The faculty and Academic Board are principal players in this pillar’s success.

Complementing this academic instruction, the VMI Commandant, the Inspector General and the Title IX team, along with Corps leaders, will present classes in diversity training, which mirror the mandatory and very successful Title IX training that has matured this past decade. While the Superintendent retains the title of Chief Diversity Officer as a function of command

and a reflection of its importance, the VMI Chief of Staff is the key executive with the assistance of the Inspector General and his staff in executing this function and reporting directly to the Superintendent. An avenue will be provided to learn more about how we can all be aware and treat each other with dignity and respect regardless of our beliefs and heritage. While this has always been our goal at VMI, the additional focus will serve as a reminder and provide practical training. Our engaged faculty and staff advisors are key mentors to this process and outcome.

The **Second Pillar** is the **VMI Corps of Cadets**...and their actions to capitalize on the various systems that are a centerpiece of the cadet experience. These systems are well known to our cadets and alumni: the Honor Court, the General Committee, the Class System, and the Regimental system. I have often said that the Barracks is a leadership laboratory, where we “clash” the regimental and class systems in an approach like no other. Peer leadership, the hardest of all, is formed and advanced. Cadets are taught to speak up when something is wrong and have the courage to enforce the rules. Fairness, civility, and respect for all are built into these systems. With the integration of women at VMI, we formed the Cadet Equity Association to work through issues involving discrimination and the most sensitive investigations; it reports to the General Committee with oversight by the Commandant’s Office for Cadet Government. This organization, along with the Officer of the Guard Association, has proven most effective. The Promaji Club, with faculty advisor guidance, will more closely coordinate with the Commandant and the VMI Chief of Staff on concerns and issues across the Institute from their perspective. Cadets are provided the opportunities throughout their cadetship to discuss challenging issues, teach one another, practice the art of listening, and ultimately lead a diverse group of people.

“Accountability” is key to this process and must be practiced by every cadet. I have seen first-hand the Corps’ ability to face tough discriminatory issues in the past and make corrections. This aspect will be reinforced by the VMI leadership, properly investigated and adjudicated. We will encourage members of the Corps of Cadets, particularly our NCAA athletes, to take advantage more fully of the numerous opportunities at VMI and to grow beyond the wonderful leadership opportunities they experience on their teams and in competition. Similarly, the Corps must more fully understand and appreciate the difficulty of classmates competing at the highest levels in representing their school, while balancing common challenges of priorities, time, and difficult academics. We will assign cadet athletes throughout the cadet companies to expand influence and perspective. Barracks rooms will include athletes and non-athletes. Dyke assignments will be similarly made. Additionally, we have the Cadet Oath, the Code of a Cadet, and our Honor Code. The three are perfect standards for life, which will be emphasized by the Corps leadership this fall.

The **Third Pillar** is to **Promote Increased Commissioning** in the armed services, especially with duty in the National Guard or Reserves. The military is one of the most diverse organizations in the nation representing all races and genders. Neither today’s military nor VMI have any tolerance for racism or insensitivity towards anyone. Our commissioned officers must and will be prepared to lead a diverse team. Their leadership experience must be based on mutual

respect and civility and VMI must ready them for this calling. Growth in reserve commissioning will place more cadets in military training for a short period with others from around the country...West Coast to East Coast and virtually every state in-between. The military focuses on working as a team to accomplish a common mission, which promotes individual growth and a maturing process, which will enhance Corps unity. Since 2003, when the commissioning rates began increasing at VMI, we have noticed a positive impact on the culture and professionalism of the Corps as cadets returned from ROTC summer camp experiences. The military training not only helps cadets see the effectiveness of diversity in action, but it also provides cadets with experience that will help them as they transition into civilian life with greater leadership responsibilities beyond their very short reserve military service.

The **Fourth Pillar** in the plan is to address **VMI Symbology**. VMI has, because of its unique role as a combat unit at the Battle of New Market, focused on our Civil War history at the expense of other times and events. As Mr. William Boland, President, VMI Board of Visitors, and I stated in our joint 12 September 2017 statement, "As the oldest state supported military college in the nation and a national historic landmark, VMI has produced leaders that fought in the Civil War, Mexican-American War, Spanish American War, World War I, defeated fascism in World War II, marched for civil rights in the '60's, fought in Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf, and has seen its alumni as the best of leaders across the national spectrum of industry, medicine, the law, politics, religion and business. Like the United States itself, who we were in the past only defines in part who we are today. Hate, bigotry and discrimination are wrong, do not represent the values of the Virginia Military Institute, and will always be addressed decisively. We will learn from the past and take the best from our predecessors in shaping our cadet citizen-soldiers for today and tomorrow."

As such, we will make several changes to include and highlight more of the Institute's history. The tall and massive parade ground flagpoles will be re-centered on New Barracks; this will change the symbolic focus from General Jackson and Old Barracks, and signals VMI's move to the future. Several years ago, we terminated saluting Jackson and Lee and this seems an appropriate transition that is also a better fit aesthetically with the addition of 3rd Barracks. Cadets will continue to enter and exit through Jackson Arch with frequency, checking guard team directions and activities associated with the Office of the Commandant at that location.

The second change will be relocating the Cadet Oath ceremony. The Cadet Oath has more recently been administered at the New Market Battlefield, followed by the "charge-up" the Field of Lost Shoes, as a reenactment of the historic Civil War battle successfully fought in by VMI cadets. And, while New Market will always be a major component of our history, the Oath is important to the current cadetship, and should be executed at VMI. I will administer this oath during our matriculation ceremonies on Post this year. The Rat Mass will be transported to New Market later in the year to learn about the Battle of New Market, the character of these young cadets in a war long ago, just as we introduce them to World War II battles and Normandy and service, leadership, pride in country, and courage of our few remaining veterans

on their visit to the Bedford D-Day Memorial. Learning about battlefields are an educational tool, particularly for those commissioning in the military.

Fifteen May is New Market Day, and its focus will be broadened to honor all VMI alumni, who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, an addition made several years ago. This parade will be retitled as the VMI Memorial Parade and will be moved to the parade ground. Many of the current aspects will be continued, focused on Corps unity, in front of an increasingly large audience.

The New Market Battlefield will undergo a comprehensive review with emphasis on articulating through programs and displays the unvarnished and accurate story of the Battle of New Market. This may result in a greater attention to living history events, emphasis on educational programming that has proven successful, and preservation of this element of history so closely linked to the Institute's.

Cadets are now transiting through Daniels Arch and Daniels Courtyard in large numbers to attend classes and Crozet dining, and this will grow with the completion of the major addition to Scott Shipp Hall. The addition to Kilbourne Hall and growth in ROTC, the establishment of the Physical Education Department at Cormack Hall, and enlargement of the Quartermaster Department on Route 11 all foster greater cadet daily activity. As such, we will move to accentuate Daniels Courtyard and further contextualize and promote his life example for all to learn.

In 2021 we will adjust portions of the Rat Bible to bring it into a more modern age in terms of important historical and lifelong information required to be learned by all first-year cadets.

We do not currently intend to remove any VMI statues or rename any VMI buildings. Rather, in the future we will emphasize recognition of leaders from the Institute's second century. We will place unvarnished context on the value and lessons to be learned from the Institute's rich heritage, while being mindful of the nation's challenges and sensitivities to being fair and inclusive to all. Nevertheless, this and other issues related to the Plan will be discussed in the September Board of Visitors meeting.

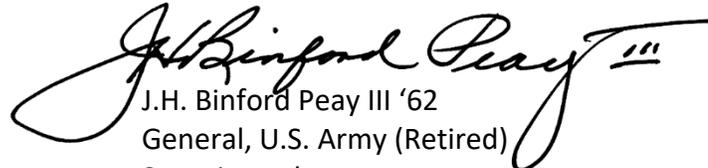
The **Fifth** and final **Pillar** – our **Alumni**. We will ask for their careful and thoughtful assistance. Today, the Corps demographics are changing commensurate with the changing of America. We need our alumni to assist us in the area of recruiting outstanding and qualified persons of color to compete for our staff and faculty positions and similarly to recruit students who can readily contribute to this unique, difficult and adversarial system; be successful within the Corps; and, graduate. VMI puts all cadets through mental and physical challenges regardless of race or gender. Our alumni endured these same challenges and remain our greatest assets. These young people will benefit from mentorship, friendship, and encouragement from our alumni from before they matriculate, while enduring the challenges at VMI, and after graduation to be successful in the best job markets. Our alumni network is strong and diverse, and I encourage

our alumni to take an active role in making sure our cadets and young alumni are warmly welcomed and feel included in the VMI family, wherever that may be. You can do this by providing your time, internship opportunities at your places of work, or simply your friendship. These actions will help us, and help make the VMI experience a more enriching one for all.

These five pillars will be integrated into VMI's Strategic Vision 2039 to ensure it is implemented across all parts of the VMI enterprise. We are a leadership institution focused on providing the very best education while instructing citizen soldiers to perform with integrity, honor, and fairness in all situations. We recognize the inequality that exists in our nation and the Virginia Military Institute is committed to delivering on our vision, its mission, and a purposeful path forward.

I have listened to and learned from the input from past Superintendents and key leaders of the Institute, current and past members of the Board of Visitors, leaders in the military, politicians from all parties, alumni (young and old), cadets, faculty, and staff. I want to reiterate, I am listening and appreciate your opinions and ideas. While we may not always agree, I recognize that "civil discourse" is very important to the future of VMI. The VMI leadership Team is committed daily to improving the Institute. As always, I appreciate the passion and support and my door remains open. I look forward to working with all of you as we implement this plan. I encourage everyone to come together and work as a family to improve the Institute we all know and love so well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J.H. Binford Peay III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J.H. Binford Peay III '62
General, U.S. Army (Retired)
Superintendent