



# INSTITUTE REPORT

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

Volume 48, Number 8, June 2020



## Congratulations Class of 2020

The Class of 2020 forms the figure 20 on the floor of Cameron Hall moments after receiving their rings in November 2018. The graduates are now the first class in VMI history to complete their cadetships virtually. For more photos from their time at VMI, see page 8.—*VMI File Photo by Maj. John Robertson IV.*

## 'Be Adaptable and Stay Engaged' Just Under 180 Cadets Commission in Online Ceremonies

By Mary Price

Capping off the first semester in VMI's history to feature online classes, the Institute marked May 15, the day traditionally reserved for ROTC commissioning, by holding virtual commissioning observances. In fact, the Army's was the largest in the nation.

This year, because the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of the traditional joint ROTC commissioning ceremony in Cameron Hall, each ROTC branch held its own commissioning ceremony, with the Naval ROTC holding separate ceremonies for new Marine Corps

second lieutenants and Navy ensigns. In an effort to bring the ceremonies to families, friends, and the VMI community, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps ceremonies were streamed live on VMI's website,

*See Commissioning, page 4*

# POST BRIEFS

## English Instructor Has Essay Published

Sydney Tammarine, instructor of English, rhetoric, and humanistic studies, has had a nonfiction essay, "Blue Hour," published in *Ploughshares*, an award-winning journal of new writing that's been published since 1971. Tammarine, who just finished her first year of teaching at VMI, wrote "Blue Hour" to express her feelings as a middle school teacher facing the tragic

loss of a student. Tammarine's essays have appeared in *Cleaver*, *Pithead Chapel*, *The Missing Slate*, *Gravel*, and other publications. She is the co-translator of a book of poems, *The Most Beautiful Cemetery in Chile*. Tammarine received a master of fine arts degree from Hollins University and a bachelor's degree from Otterbein University.

## Cyber Fusion Cadets Place Fourth

A team of cadets placed fourth out of 18 teams in the Virginia Cyber Cup competition at the fourth annual Commonwealth Cyber Fusion conference and competition, held Feb. 21-22 at the Center for Leadership & Ethics. In the Cyber Cup competition, which is developed and hosted by the Virginia Cyber Range, teams tackle scenarios designed to simulate real-world computer security challenges across a range of categories that include cryptography, network traffic analysis, reverse

engineering, and more. The winner of this year's competition was George Mason University, with the University of Virginia placing second and Radford University placing third. Representing VMI at the competition were Aaron Causey '20, Kathleen Yates '20, Zachary Harris '20, Willem Sciandra '21, Sullivan Stern '21, and Zachary Farr '22. The cadets were coached by Dr. Mohamed Azab, assistant professor of computer and information sciences. 🌟

# New Projects Highlight Summer Construction Schedule

By Mary Price

This summer, work will begin on three construction projects, while work continues or nears completion on a multitude of others.

The largest and most visible of those projects will be the start of work on a \$40 million aquatics center, to be built along Main Street adjacent to the Corps Physical Training Facility. There may be a groundbreaking ceremony, but as of mid-May, no date had yet been set.

"The groundbreaking is largely ceremonial," said Col. Keith Jarvis '82, director of construction. "We're planning for [construction] to start sometime in July."

The project, which will enable the Institute to replace the 51-year-old pool in Clark King Hall, will take about two years to complete. The contractor on the project, Whiting-Turner, is no stranger to VMI, as the company also built the Corps Physical Training Facility and is now working on the renovation of Scott Shipp Hall.

A long-awaited project for the Institute, a pedestrian bridge carrying the VMI-owned Chessie Trail over the South River, is expected to get underway in June or July. The original bridge was washed away by Hurricane Isabel in 2003, and ever since then, trail users have had to detour onto Stuartsburg Road to continue on the 7.2-mile journey from Lexington to Buena Vista.

Plans for a new bridge have now been in the works for several years, but the project had been held up recently by the need to negotiate an easement with Dominion Virginia Power, which owns power lines in the area. Those negotiations were concluded in early May, and the project was then able to be sent out to bid.

Partial funding for the \$13 million bridge project is coming from a grant from the Eastern Federal Lands Access Program.

The other project kicking off this summer will be construction of a parking lot for cadet cars at Lackey Park, off Greenhouse Road in the vicinity of Rockbridge County High School. For the past several years, VMI has rented space for cadet vehicles at a parking lot off U.S. 60 east of Lexington, but once the new parking lot is completed, that rental expense will be eliminated.

"It'll be ready in time for the fall of 2021," said Jarvis. "The idea is to consolidate all cadet cars."

Currently, Jarvis said, approximately 40 to 50 cadet cars are parked on North Post, while 150 to 200 are



The 135-foot-tall crane was removed shortly after this photo was taken in May.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

See Construction, page 11

The Institute Report, VMI's monthly newsletter, publishes eight issues during each academic year. Inquiries, suggestions, news items, and address changes should be directed to Editor, Institute Report, VMI Communications and Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450-0304; (540) 464-7207; or [VMIReport@vmi.edu](mailto:VMIReport@vmi.edu).  
© 2020 Virginia Military Institute.

**Director** Col. Bill Wyatt  
**Editor** Maj. Michelle Ellwood  
**Assistant Editor** Kelly Nye  
**Designer** Robbin Youngblood  
**Institute Report Staff**  
Stephen Hanes  
H. Lockwood McLaughlin  
Mary Price

**Header photo on page 1 by**  
Kelly Nye

The Virginia Military Institute is committed to providing an environment that emphasizes the dignity and worth of every member of its community and that is free from harassment and discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, pregnancy, genetic information, against otherwise qualified persons with disabilities, or based on any other status protected by law. In pursuit of this goal, any question of impermissible discrimination on these bases will be addressed with efficiency and energy and in accordance with VMI General Order 16. General Order 16 also addresses complaints or reports of retaliation against those who have opposed prohibited practices, those who have filed complaints or reports of prohibited practices, and those who have testified or otherwise participated in enforcement of General Order 16. Questions regarding discrimination prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, or other federal law, may be referred to the VMI Inspector General and Title IX Coordinator, 212 Carroll Hall, VMI, Lexington, VA 24450, (540) 464-7072. Any cadet or prospective cadet having questions about disability services for students should contact the Director of the Center for Cadet Counseling and Disability Services, 448 Institute Hill, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Post Infirmary, Lexington, Va. 24450, (540) 464-7667. For employment-related disability services, contact the Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator in the VMI Human Resources Office, Lexington, VA 24450, (540) 464-7322.

## A Story the World Needed

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

Along with his fellow cadets, William Taylor '22 wrapped up the spring semester with a plethora of Zoom and Microsoft Teams video calls. But for Taylor, a few weeks of his virtual classes and meetings were intermingled with Zoom interviews with a wide variety of media outlets. Across the country, everyone needed a good news story, and he had one, full of creativity and a positive attitude.

Sent home with the rest of the Corps in mid-March, Taylor knew he'd have challenges completing his assignments and participating in his classes with Wi-Fi and cellular service practically luxuries on his rural Pennsylvania farm. He's also one of 10 children in his family, so a quiet space to concentrate is scarce. These challenges were not unique to many across the country as homeschooling, distance learning, and remote work became a new normal, but Taylor's attitude and resourcefulness caught the attention of many.

Armed with a tent, an open spot on his farm that seemed to be ideal for his mobile hotspot, and some extension cords, Taylor set up camp—literally. His new challenges became the late-winter chilly weather of Pennsylvania—even snow—and the feisty chickens and goats that would roam over to check out what he was doing.

Lt. Col. Spencer Bakich, associate professor of international studies, noticed during one class that Taylor's "walls" were moving due to the wind. He said he "quickly came to the realization that we had a non-traditional learning environment."

Emma Flora '22, a communications intern with the VMI Alumni Agencies, featured Taylor in an article about the challenges of distance learning, and his story spread.



William Taylor '22 participates in virtual classes from a tent on his family's farm in Pennsylvania.—Photo courtesy of William Taylor '22.

National outlets such as *CBS This Morning*, FOX News, and ABC News wanted to talk to him. He chatted with several Pennsylvania and Virginia local news stations, and the Army News Service also shared his story. But his favorite was chatting with a reporter from The Weather Channel, leading to a video of him in his tent as the cover story on

the homepage for a few hours.

Taylor, an aspiring Army chaplain working toward a degree in modern languages and cultures with a focus on Arabic, knows his light-hearted and undeterred attitude was just what the world needed. "I think the story was so interesting to everyone because most news lately has been very negative," he says. "So it was good to see a story about someone who, despite the hard times, was still chugging along at life, and I was accomplishing what I started, despite the virus."

Taylor humbly declined a few offers from kind people who saw his story, including new tents and lodging in someone's vacation home that had strong Wi-Fi.

His home-based media tour also allowed him to reconnect with family and friends. "It was pretty cool to have so many people excited to see me in the news," he goes on. "I'm still working on making sure I've responded to everyone who's contacted me. I think that, honestly, has been the best part of it all."

But Taylor is ready to return to post and temporarily get away from the chickens and goats. "I'm excited to return for my 2<sup>nd</sup> class year and just can't wait to be with all my BRs again. I think that's been the hardest part." ❁

while the Air Force ceremony was recorded and streamed after its conclusion.

In total, just under 180 cadets commissioned during the four ceremonies, with more planning to fulfill commissioning requirements this summer. That number represents an increase from last year, when more than 160 commissioned.

This year's 117 Army commissionees—110 from VMI and seven from the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership at Mary Baldwin University—will serve in almost all of the Army's 17 branches. As usual, VMI Army ROTC produced more second lieutenants this year than any other senior military college.

Commissionees heard pre-recorded video remarks from Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy '96, who reminded his listeners that the challenges of the pandemic, while real, will ultimately prove to be transitory. "Tough times don't last," McCarthy counseled. "Tough people do."

Also addressing those commissioning was Lt. Gen. Charles A. Flynn, Army deputy chief of staff. Flynn shared three lessons from his 35-year Army career: respect the



Andrew Ladi '20 and Conner Kelenske '20 watch the livestream of the AROTC commissioning ceremony from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in Lansing, Michigan.—Photo courtesy of Michigan National Guard 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Ashley Goodwin.

demands of your role; this job is bigger than you; and cultivate and produce soldiers with grit.

Flynn also told those commissioning that they will need to be ready to face the unexpected. "The call to serve does not always match our timeline," he stated. "It arises

when we're needed, calling us to put our individual wants aside."

After taking their commissioning oath from Col. Michael Wawrzyniak, head of Army ROTC, commissionees were given a few minutes to have their rank insignia pinned on by family and friends.



Zachary Shaffer '20 signs papers to commission as an ensign in the U.S. Navy.—Photo courtesy of NROTC.



Sarah MacDougall '20 says her oath to commission into the U.S. Air Force May 15 in Jackson Memorial Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Wawrzyniak then conducted a roll call of new second lieutenants, with each appearing on the screen for several seconds. Most were surrounded by beaming families and friends.

Twenty-six cadets commissioned into the Marine Corps, after first hearing remarks from Col. Craig Streeter '91, head of Naval ROTC, and then Maj. Gen. James W. Bierman '87, head of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command, who also administered the oath.

In his remarks, Bierman said that when he commissioned on May 15, 1987, in Jackson Memorial Hall, the commissioning officer that day told cadets, "To those whom more is given, more is expected."

Echoing some of Flynn's lessons, Bierman told commissionees that the military is bigger than any one person or role, and that their most important job is to take care of those under them.

"Caring will often take the form of tough love," he stated. "Foster a climate of dignity, discipline, and respect, fueled by your own example."

Bierman also reminded those commissioning that VMI has prepared them well for the challenges that lie ahead.

"You are ready," he stated. "VMI has seen to that. There is no better preparation for becoming a Marine Corps officer than



Tamera Robinette of the VMI infirmary checks the temperature of William Miller '20 before he enters Jackson Memorial Hall for his commissioning pin-on ceremony.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

making your way through the VMI Corps of Cadets."

The 24 cadets commissioning into the Navy also heard remarks from Streeter and then from Rear Adm. William J. Galinis, who currently serves as the Navy's program executive officer, ships. Those commissioning into the Navy also took their oath from Galinis.

"We need your leadership, your thoughts, your ideas, now more than ever," said Galinis. "We are being challenged on every front today by countries like China, like Russia, like North Korea, and a number of other state actors around the globe."

Galinis reminded those about to commission into the Navy to develop a strong moral compass, build relationships both up and down the chain of command, get to know members of their team well, and maintain high standards.

"We need 110 percent from each and every one of you every day," said Galinis.

Commissioning into the Air Force were 19 cadets. Noting the unusual nature of this year's online ceremony, Col. Philip Cooper, commander of Air Force ROTC, stated, "We're doing what the Air Force has been doing ever since its inception in 1947, and that's being innovative."

He then introduced this year's guest speaker, Lt. Gen. Scott Howell, commander of the Joint Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. Like the other commissioning officers, Howell stressed traits such as setting an example that others will want to follow, getting to know your people well, and valuing the power of relationships, as officers will encounter one another frequently.

Howell also discussed the need to prepare for unanticipated challenges. A 1987 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Howell told commissionees that he'd spent much of his time in Colorado Springs preparing for the threat of Soviet aggression.

"We spent all of our time studying Soviet military tactics because we knew we were going to go to war against the Russians," said Howell. "I've spent most of my career fighting terrorists. Things will change. ... Be adaptable and stay engaged."

Cooper then administered the oath of office to seven of this year's Air Force second lieutenants, with the others taking their oaths from other officers. Six of this year's Air Force commissionees came to post to take their oaths inside Jackson Memorial Hall, one family group at a time, after a medical screening. ❄



Abigail Dimirack '20 celebrates her commission into the USMC.—Photo courtesy of NROTC.

## Correction

Maj. Gen. James W. Bierman Jr. was incorrectly noted as Class of 1988 in the May Institute Report. Bierman, who provided remarks and administered the oath for cadets commissioning into the Marine Corps, is a member of the Class of 1987.

# Tick Rover Goes Global

By Mary Price

For more than a decade, the tick rover, a longtime project for Col. Jim Squire, professor of electrical and computer engineering, has provided research and learning opportunities for cadets. Now, despite the coronavirus pandemic this spring that's cast a pall over post and all over the globe, the tick rover has won a national award, with the VMI team beating out teams from several nationally recognized research universities, and is headed to the international stage.

Over the winter, four cadets—Frankie Celentano '20, Michael St. John '20, Eric Munro '21, and Joseph Lieber '23—took the tick rover, which is a robot designed to remove and kill ticks from people's yards, and tweaked it further before entering the new and improved rover in a contest sponsored by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).

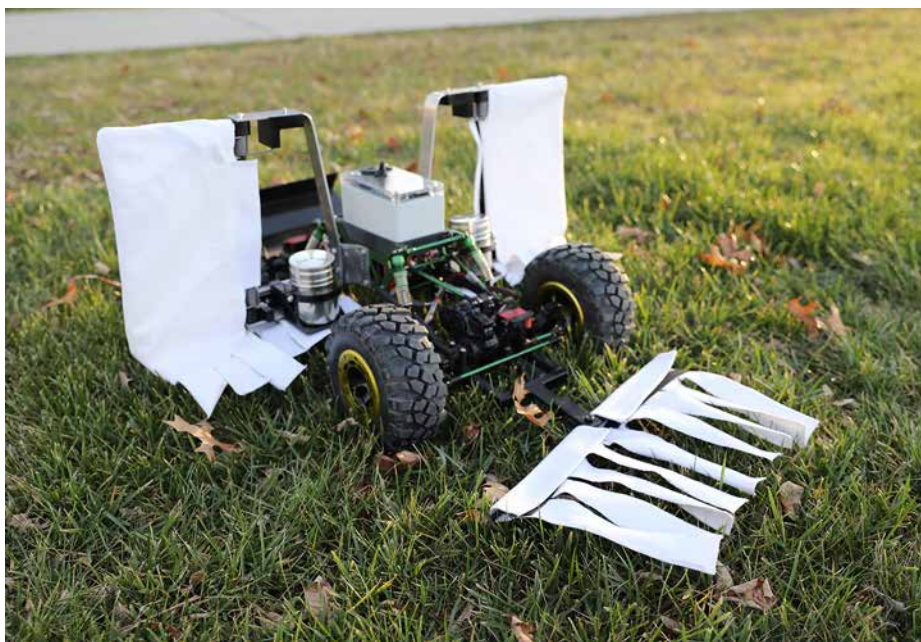
In late April, weeks after the cadets had headed home for the remainder of the semester, Squire found out that the VMI group had won the national competition. As a result, Squire and the cadets have been invited to Seville, Spain, Oct. 12-14 for the international competition, with their airfare and hotel costs paid for by IEEE. There, they'll be among four teams competing, with the others coming from South America, Europe, and Asia.

"I cannot express how grateful I am knowing that our team will be able to represent the United States in this competition," Celentano wrote in an email. "We all worked extremely hard on this project and it is nice to know that there are others out there who appreciate our efforts."

But national or international accolades were the last thing on anyone's mind when Celentano approached Squire over 18 months ago seeking an Institute Honors project. While pleased with how the rover had progressed over the years, Squire knew that there was definitely room for improvement.

Recent work on the rover had included alterations to the mechanics of the wings, which trap ticks hiding on bushes. That initiative was done in the mechanical engineering department by Michael Landry '18 and Matthew Davis '18, working under the direction of Col. Jay Sullivan, professor of mechanical engineering. On the electrical side, though, there was plenty of work left to do.

Jumping in cold when he hadn't been a part of the original design process was hard, so Celentano started with work on the base



The tick rover won a national award from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.—Photo courtesy of Col. Jim Squire.

station that provides the navigation signal for the robot to follow.

"It was a good way to get acclimated to the design of the system, how the system works, and also working within a project where I didn't see the original design," he commented.

Squire explained that many of the changes Celentano made were designed to make the rover easier to use for non-engineers.

Previous versions had run into trouble during field testing because the biologists in charge of the testing had trouble recognizing when the rover's battery was low, so Celentano added an audible low-battery alarm. He also wrote stronger algorithms to control the rover's speed and steering. Before, Squire explained, the rover went off course almost constantly.

"The workers—they'd essentially have to follow it around like a fussy toddler," Squire noted.

Because the IEEE competition requires a team entry, Celentano recruited others to work with him on the project. His first recruit, St. John, was easy to find because Celentano and St. John were roommates.

"When I came onto the project, I basically had to learn everything from scratch," said St. John, who took the role of technical writer. His job was to write an essay explaining how the rover works—and Squire noted that because of the complexity of the subject matter, St. John went through approximately 20 revisions in order to meet IEEE's exacting criteria.

The essay also had to explain the "why" of the project—how it would serve the public good. "Tick populations are increasing, and nothing has been done about it in an environmentally friendly way," St. John noted.

Munro, meanwhile, added a very user-friendly twist to the robot, as operators can now check its battery level via their smartphones. He'd had some experience getting an Android phone to link to a sensor via Bluetooth when he was in high school, but getting the same concept to work with the rover took some doing.

"My biggest challenge was the previous solution before I came on board was how I normally would have read voltage levels, and being told that didn't work, I had to consider other options," he

commented. On the plus side, Munro noted that he'd "added a new tool to the tool belt" by learning SPI, an industry standard communications protocol.

Also contributing his expertise was Lieber, who, although only in his rat year at VMI, was able to lend a hand with mechanical design and 3D modeling. He'd developed strong engineering skills while in high school at Mercersburg Academy, a boarding school in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, and had emailed Squire over the summer seeking a project to work on.

"[Lieber's] got the knowledge and practical experience of one of our typical sophomore, junior level mechanical engineers," said Squire. "That's what he came in with, which is very unusual for an electrical engineer."

But that's not to say Lieber didn't have anything to learn—quite the contrary. Before he could help with the rover, Lieber had to learn new software. In high school, he'd used Fusion 360, a 3D modeling software—but that wasn't what VMI was using.



Col. Jim Squire, Michael St. John '20, Frankie Celentano '20, Joseph Lieber '23, and Eric Munro '21 assemble the tick rover in Nichols Engineering Building earlier this semester.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

"When I came here, all of the models were on SolidWorks, which uses a slightly different file format, so I decided to start learning SolidWorks," he explained. "That way I could learn the industry standard."

The group also had the assistance of Brett Tomajczyk '19, who helped to implement the four-wheel drive system for the rover and also wrote the code for the throttle control system that enables the rover to keep a consistent speed on hilly terrain.

It's no surprise that Squire, who has spent countless hours working on the rover ever since he helped to create it in 2004, is more than proud of what the cadets have achieved.

"[Celentano] and his team have done amazing work on this device, among the best I have advised at VMI," Squire wrote in an email. "The last student project I advised to make it to nationals was by Matt Brooks '02. The fact that this team, combining freshmen through seniors, will represent the United States and Canada at the world finals says a lot about Frankie's leadership."

But beyond the national award and the possibility of an international trip, Squire is also pleased that years of hard work on the part

of dozens of individuals have produced a much sturdier device than the creators of the first prototype could ever have envisioned.

"[The current rover] involves a lot more electronic user feedback to let a non-electrical engineer figure out why it's not working why it should be in the field," said Squire.

And soon, his decade and a half of tick rover development may come to an end. "After this we're looking at hopefully licensing it," Squire noted. "We've got a neuroscientist over at Dartmouth [College] who wants to start a company based on it." 🌟

## New Market Ceremony

Col. Bill Wanovich '87 and regimental commander Austin Stansberry '20 place a wreath at the *Virginia Mourning Her Dead* statue during filming for a virtual ceremony April 24. The ceremony was part of a video that was recorded for the May 15 online commemoration of the cadets who died during the battle and all alumni in later wars.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



## Cadetships Completed

More than 330 cadets completed their course of studies at VMI and graduated this spring, despite the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing postponement of a graduation ceremony for the Class of 2020. Members of that class have been invited to participate in a Dec. 19, 2020, graduation ceremony to be held in Cameron Hall. This year's graduates came from 29 states and three foreign countries, and 54 percent commissioned into the armed forces. This year's graduating class also included three women who earned degrees in electrical and computer engineering, the highest number of female graduates the department has ever produced in one year. The top three majors for this year's graduates were civil engineering, economics and business, and international studies. See the full list of 2020 graduates, along with this year's commissionees and additional commemorative photos and videos, at [vmi.edu/class-of-2020](http://vmi.edu/class-of-2020).—VMI  
File Photos by Stephen Hanes, H. Lockwood McLaughlin, and Kelly Nye.







# First Class Awards

## Commandant's Office

### Charles R. Martin '55 Award

Emma Rose Noble '20

### Gen. Withers A. Burress Marksmanship Award

Hunter Kalani Jacob '20—*Club Sports*

Kelia Dane Aardema '20—*Club Sports*

### Cmdr. H.M. Mason Military Proficiency Award

Santiago Joaquin Lopez '20

### Gen. Douglas MacArthur Cadet Award

Austin William Stansberry '20

### Earl L. Valentine, Jr. Award

Jack Cameron Taggart '20

## Dean's Office

### Col. Herbert Nash Dillard '34 Award

Nicholas John Wainwright '20

### The Col. Daniel T. Ingram 1921—Castle Heights Military Academy Award

Bryant Jacob Smilie '20

## The Wilbur S. Hinman, Jr., '26 Research Award

### Information & Social Sciences

Tristan Lee Howard '20

Col. Barry R. Cobb

### Arts & Humanities

Cameron James McNeil '20

Maj. Jochen S. Arndt

### Natural Sciences

John Calvin Dickenson '20

Lt. Col. Daniel P. Harrison '05

## Department

### The John W. and Jane M. Roberts Award

Jonathan Michael Clines '20—*Economics and Business*

### The Floyd D. Gottwald, Jr '43 Award

Santiago Joaquin Lopez '20—*Chemistry*

### Civil and Environmental Engineering Award

James Edward Tulske Jr. '20—*Civil and*

*Environmental Engineering*

### Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury Award

MacGregor W. Baxter '20—*Applied Mathematics*

*(United Daughters of the Confederacy)*

### Stonewall Jackson Award

MacGregor W. Baxter '20—*Physics and Astronomy*

*(United Daughters of the Confederacy)*

### Lt. Randolph T. Townsend Award

Nicholas John Wainwright '20—*History*

### Bruce C. Gottwald, Jr. '81 Award

Jamie Ann Foster '20—*Psychology*

### Asa S. Dearing Award

Dolan Jack Delaney '20—*English, Rhetoric, and*

*Humanistic Studies*

### Stewart W. Anderson '08 Memorial Award

Francis Phillip Celentano '20—*Electrical and*

*Computer Engineering*

## Adolpho Ponzanelli Award

Samuel Robert Trepp '20—*Modern Languages and Cultures*

## Thomas S. Baur '75 Award for Excellence in Exercise Science

Nicholas Cole Bordonie '20—*Physical Education*

## Superintendent William H. Milton, Jr. Class of 1920 Award

James Francis Zecchini '20—*Mechanical Engineering*

## International Studies Award

Madeleine Sophie Barrett '20—*International Studies*

Samantha Paige Franklin '20—*International Studies*

## Alfred H. Knowles Award

Jacob Matthew Rao Baehman '20—*Biology*

## Graduating Class

### Class of 1964 New Market Legacy Award

Frank Harvey Barksdale III '20

Stewart McLeod Spurry '20

## Institute Honors Thesis Award:

### Engineering & Science

Jennifer Ann Baily '20

### Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

Madeleine Sophie Barrett '20

## Intercollegiate Athletics

### Intercollegiate Sports Awards

Garrett Scott Gilkeson '20

Neal Ethen Richards II '20

Isabel Rosa French '20

### Lt. Gen. Edward Mallory Almond '15 Award

Emma Rose Noble '20

## Cadet First Captains Plaque

Austin Stansberry '20 adds his name to the plaque of regimental commanders April 24. Normally, the name plate would be added on the day of the change of command parade with next year's regimental commander present. This year, Stansberry added his when he returned to post to clean out his barracks room.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



## Navy ROTC

### Lt. Mark R. Wilson, Sr. Midshipman Award

Cade Christian Kiely '20

### The Chief of Naval Operations Distinguished Midshipman Graduate Award

MacGregor W. Baxter '20

### Chesty Puller Award, First Marine Division

Stewart McLeod Spurry '20

### Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. Sixth Marine Division Award

Joshua David Austin '20

Jeffrey Chase Whitney '20

### Naval Submarine League: Adm. Frederick B. Warder Award

Aaron Richard Barraclough '20

## Army ROTC

### The Lt. John H. Lattin '66 Award

Joseph Patrick Gummo '20

### Col. Thomas St. John Arnold Award

Andrew Michael Ladi IV '20

## Air Force ROTC

### Brig. Gen. Alonzo J. Walter '49B Award

Santiago Joaquin Lopez '20 ✪

## Construction *continued from page 2*

parked at the large lot off U.S. 60. The new, \$3.5 million lot will include safety features such as security lighting and a fence. Cadets will travel to and from the lot via an Institute-owned shuttle, Jarvis said.

Wrapping up this summer will be construction of a new headquarters for the VMI Post Police. Last summer, the police department's longtime home, the Bachelor Officer Quarters, was demolished to make way for construction of a new, more secure Post Police headquarters on the same site. This work is part of the \$33.2 million post infrastructure improvement project.

Over the winter, the new building rapidly took shape, and it now has electricity and exterior stucco. Windows will be arriving shortly.

"By the end of July or the first week of August, we'll start moving the police folks into their new building," said Jarvis.

Also scheduled for a summer completion is the Anderson Drive bridge project, another part of the post infrastructure improvement project. The goal of that project has been to improve the back entrance to VMI via Jordan's Point by replacing the one-lane bridge over Woods Creek with a two-lane bridge and adding a sidewalk leading from the Marshall Hall parking lot to Gray-Minor Stadium.

Beams for the new bridge were installed in late April, with the expectation that a new bridge deck would be poured before the end of May. Over the summer, a retaining wall will be built on the Gray-Minor side of Anderson Drive, the road will be widened, and a



Work on Anderson Drive continues with beams in place for the widened bridge.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

sidewalk put in, so baseball fans and other visitors to the North Post area can walk along Anderson Drive safely.

Completion of the Anderson Drive project is set for Aug. 14.

Also nearing completion is the \$19.2 million renovation of Preston Library. As the spring progressed, passers-by on Main Street could see the exterior of the building become visible again as the sheeting and scaffolding which had encircled it for months was removed.

"Most of the scaffolding has come down," said Jarvis in mid-May. "It'll all come down by the end of May."

The 500 level of the library, where the main entrance is, is on track for completion by the end of June, Jarvis reported. Then, the contractor will begin work on the lower three levels of the building, with completion expected by the end of October.

A concurrent project, the expansion and renovation of Scott Shipp Hall, is also on schedule. At this point, the new addition to the building has been constructed—so the Institute skyline changed dramatically during the third week of May when the crane that had towered over the construction site for months was removed.

"It's done its job," said Jarvis of the crane. "The building has topped out."

By the end of December, the contractor is expected to turn both the new addition and the 1955 portion of Scott Shipp over to VMI for cadet and faculty use. Work will then commence on the original portion of the building, which dates to 1918, with a completion date of October 2021 anticipated. ✪

# Just as Sweet in February

## VMI Graduation Dates Have Varied across History

By Mary Price

College and university graduation ceremonies are now so concentrated in May that they've become as much a part of the month as Mother's Day and Memorial Day—but at VMI, graduations have been held as early as February and as late as fall.

This year, of course, the coronavirus pandemic forced the traditional May 16 ceremony in Cameron Hall to be postponed. Members of the Class of 2020 have been invited to participate in the Dec. 19, 2020, graduation ceremony, which promises all the pomp and circumstance of a typical May ceremony.

But this year is hardly the first time that the Institute has had to adjust its timetable in response to outside circumstances or even cadet misbehavior.

Looking back over 181 years of Institute history, a multitude of graduation dates can be found, some as early as Feb. 5, 1944, when World War II was pulling young men overseas to military service as fast as they could be commissioned and graduated, and some as late as September, as was the case with the somewhat infamous Class of 1899.

In January of that year, explained Col. Keith Gibson '77, director of the VMI Museum System, Brig. Gen. Scott Shipp, superintendent, dismissed the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Class, except for one cadet, because the class had set off fireworks from the roof of barracks after being specifically instructed not to do so.

"After much gnashing of teeth and mea culpas, (not to mention dozens of letters to the governor's office) the [Board of Visitors] re-instated the wayward cadets under a number of



VMI superintendent Maj. Gen. Charles Kilbourne, VMI Class of 1894, hands out diplomas to cadets during a special July 1944 commencement in Jackson Memorial Hall.—Photo courtesy of VMI Archives.

restrictions—one of which was that they would not receive their diploma until September and then by U.S. mail—no pomp, no circumstance," wrote Gibson in an email.

In modern times, it is traditional for the Institute to offer two graduation ceremonies—a large one in Cameron Hall in May and a smaller one in Jackson Memorial Hall in December. But even this hasn't been set in stone forever. Most of the Class of 1944 left at graduation, May 1943, with a "Certificate

of Three Year Completion" instead of the typical diploma. A few members of the class stayed to graduate either in December 1943, or February 1944. The Class of 1945 graduated on July 29, 1944!

Perhaps as a result of the need to push cadets through the educational pipeline and into military service, there was a 15-month gap between the March 2, 1946, and June 11, 1947, graduation ceremonies. Later in the postwar years, graduations were held every six to seven months to accommodate the

large numbers of cadets whose educations had been put on hold due to military service. In the 1950s and 1960s, graduation dates settled back into a more predictable pattern, with ceremonies typically held in June, but the dates shifted to mid-May from 1969 on.

A mid-May graduation date would have seemed incredibly early, though, to VMI's first graduates. The Institute's first graduation ceremony was held on July 4, 1842, and that date continued as the traditional end

of the academic year throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The anniversary of American independence would have been seen as a fitting time to commission officers and graduate cadets, noted Gibson.

"I think a graduation on or about July 4 that existed from 1842 until 1883 was part of [Gen. Francis H.] Smith's plan to associate and capture the patriotic moment—new 'citizen-soldiers' entering the field on Independence Day!" he wrote in an email. 🇺🇸



Cadets enrolled in the World War II Army Specialized Training Program graduate in July 1944 in Jackson Memorial Hall.—Photo courtesy of VMI Archives.

# Social Media During a Time of Social Distancing

By Mary Price

With cadets away from post for an extended period of time, and visits by both alumni and prospective cadets not happening as well, various organizations across post are using one of the newest but most effective tools at their disposal—social media—to reach their audiences.

Over the past several years, websites and smartphone apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have come to play a key role not only in entertaining their followers, but educating them as well. For many organizations on post, social media is vital during this period of social distancing.

The main social media accounts for the Institute became the primary venues to get the most up-to-date information as the plans for the spring semester and beyond were shifting rapidly. These accounts also featured special messages of advice and positivity from faculty, staff, and fellow cadets, as well as newly created tools for distance learning, and videos of special annual events like rank announcements and awards ceremonies.

Other VMI social media accounts with more targeted audiences kept their feeds active, as this was sometimes the only engagement available.

“I would say I’ve gotten busier since the pandemic hit,” said Micalyn Miller, creative content manager for the VMI Alumni Agencies. “I have more stories that I really want to share.”

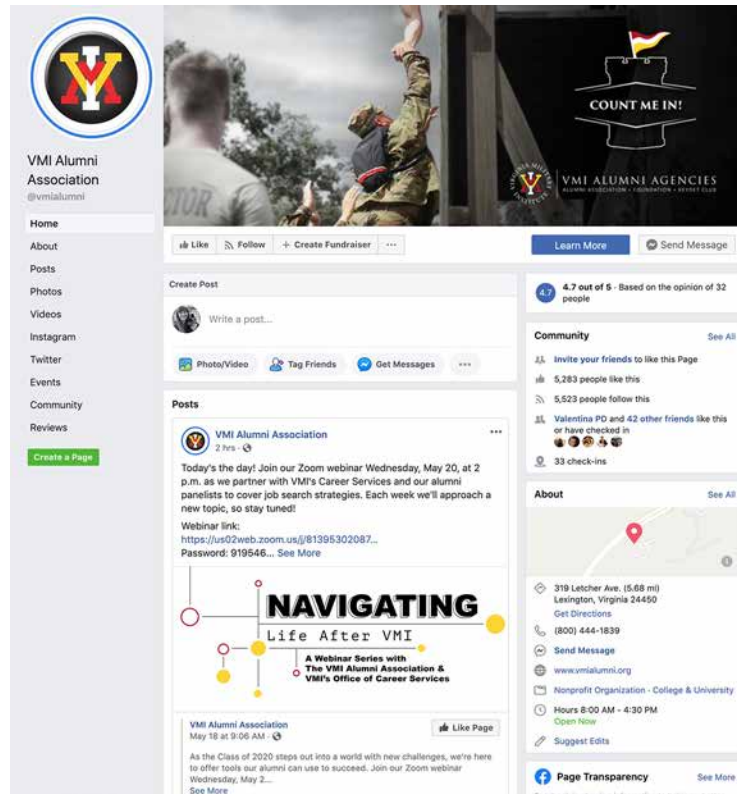
Miller has been using traditional social media, plus the career management social platform LinkedIn, to let members of the VMI community know about alumni who are making a difference as the global pandemic rages on.

“I want to highlight those alumni and the alumni working in tandem to help their communities,” said Miller. “We’d like to see even more of these submissions. These are the kinds of stories we always like to see, not just during a pandemic.”

During the crisis, Miller and her co-workers at the Alumni Agencies have adopted a hopeful tone to their messaging, stressing the cohesive nature of the VMI community and the strong bonds among the VMI family.

For athletics, social media isn’t just a nicety—it’s vital to recruiting a generation that grew up with smartphones. “Social media is indispensable these days,” said Scott Wachenheim, head football coach. “That’s how we reach potential players. You have to meet them where they’re at.”

Most years, though, potential Keydet football players can come to post in the spring, perhaps attend the spring scrimmage, and



VMI Alumni Agencies use Facebook for engaging alumni virtually.—Photo courtesy of VMI Alumni Agencies.

meet members of the coaching staff. This year, with the post closed to visitors, Wachenheim and his assistant coaches knew they’d have to think outside the box.

To that end, members of the coaching staff worked under Wachenheim’s direction to create short videos showing many aspects of life on post, from the barracks to Crozet Hall to the weight room where football players work out. There’s even a video showing Main Street in downtown Lexington.

“We couldn’t get them to post, so we had to bring post to them,” said Wachenheim.

So far, the reception has been warm and positive. Other schools, Wachenheim noted, are also using videos for recruitment, but those schools’ longer, professionally produced videos aren’t holding teenagers’ attention like VMI’s have been.

“Kids don’t want to watch a two-minute professional video,” Wachenheim commented. “The simplistic, short approach has worked well.”

The VMI baseball team is also using social media extensively this spring. Like Wachenheim, head coach Jonathan Hadra is using videos to sell prospective players on the Institute.

Recently, Hadra said, he found a promising recruit via Twitter—a high school senior who hadn’t yet committed to playing college ball. He was willing to consider VMI but had never been to post. So Hadra, with the support of his assistant coaches, put together a video tour.

“We put together a virtual tour of [post],” said Hadra. “I kind of walked him through it.”

It was a lot of effort for one recruit—but as of early May, the player was expected to sign his letter of intent to attend VMI within days. And once the video was completed, Hadra sent it out to a wide group of potential players.

“We sent it out to all of our top recruits because they can’t visit post right now,” said Hadra.

See Social media, page 14

# 2019-2020 Retirees

Best wishes and sincerest gratitude to the following VMI employees retiring during the 2019-2020 academic year. 🌟

<b>Alan Campbell</b>	Systems Analyst, Information Technology
<b>Edward Craney Jr.</b>	Custodian, Hinty Hall
<b>Col. Mary Ann Dellinger</b>	Professor, Modern Languages
<b>Joseph Fix</b>	Trades Tech III, Housing Maintenance
<b>Gerald Higgins</b>	Supervisor, Laundry
<b>Patricia Jack</b>	Tailor Shop
<b>Col. Diane Jacob</b>	Director, Preston Library
<b>Virginia Knick</b>	Laundry
<b>Col. Kenneth Koons</b>	Professor, History
<b>Col. David Livingston</b>	Professor, Electrical & Computer Engineering
<b>Col. Stewart MacInnis</b>	Director, Communications & Marketing
<b>Donald McGowan</b>	Custodian, Hinty Hall
<b>Beth McGrath</b>	Administrative Specialist, Laundry
<b>Col. Daniel Pharr</b>	Professor, Chemistry
<b>Capt. Brian Quisenberry '81</b>	Director, Financial Aid
<b>Karen Robinson</b>	Administrative Assistant, Football Office
<b>Sidney Smith</b>	Trades Technician, Plumber
<b>Dr. Mohamed Taifi</b>	Professor, Modern Languages
<b>Thomas Vess</b>	Custodian, Scott Shipp Hall
<b>Col. Mark Wilkinson</b>	Professor, History
<b>Col. David Williams</b>	Director, Auxiliary Services

## Social media continued from page 13

At the Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE), engagement with the wider VMI community is the goal of social media use. Staff have been promoting the CLE's new podcast, *The VMI Leader Journey*, but they're also on the verge of starting a new campaign with the hashtag #VMIMotivation, in which staff members will share what's keeping them motivated during this time of disrupted lives and social distancing, with an invitation for followers to share what's working for them.

At the admissions office, staff have been working closely with the communications and marketing team to share important deadlines and information in relation to becoming a VMI cadet. They've also signed up to attend online college fairs, since no one knows when

in-person fairs will resume. Interviews have also gone online, with high schoolers interviewing via Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Cadets have had more down time than they normally would in their daily schedule, so the S5 cadets, who normally assist with open houses and other public events on post, are interacting directly with students interested in attending VMI. They're communicating through phone calls and through InsideVMI—the platform that allows interested students and their parents to receive customized information about life at VMI. These interactions have really been beneficial to the cadets, who can share their individual VMI stories, and to the interested students, who are able to speak openly and candidly to someone who is living the experience. 🌟

## After 47 years, VMI Football Administrator Karen Robinson Takes a Break

In May, the VMI football office began to feel very different.

On April 30, Karen Robinson, who has handled VMI football administrative duties the past 47 years, stepped aside from her full-time role of managing the program's office operations.

"I just felt the timing is right," said Robinson of her decision. "The years have gone by so fast. It's just been a fun time."

It was August 28, 1972. The price of gasoline was 36 cents a gallon. The #1 song on the Billboard Top 100 that week was *Brandy (You're a Fine Girl)* by Looking Glass. Watergate was months away from dominating the newspaper headlines.

And a wide-eyed Karen Robinson reported for her first day of work for the VMI football program after being brought on board by legendary athletic director Tom Joynes.

"They advertised the position and Mr. Joynes interviewed me and hired me," recalled Robinson. "On the first day, I was just so young, and I wanted to do everything perfectly, and I was thankful for the job. And it's been great. I had no idea that I'd be here this long."

Robinson quickly established a professional, courteous, and dependable reputation that has been her trademark throughout her career supporting the VMI football program.

She served nine head football coaches and five athletic directors. Her work desk moved from Cocke Hall to Cameron Hall to Clarkson-McKenna Hall. She also assisted with the sports information office and wrestling program during a portion of her tenure.

"To work 47 years in a college athletic department as the primary administrative assistant to the football program is a fantastic accomplishment and likely will never to be equaled," said Donny White '65, former athletic director, baseball coach, and football assistant coach. "Karen Robinson performed her responsibilities with competence, grace, humor, and caring for almost a half century. I am sure all of the former VMI football coaches, as well as the present ones, stand with me today to salute her for a job well done."

Mike Strickler '71, who served as VMI sports information director from 1977 through 1992, echoed those sentiments.

"I certainly enjoyed working with Karen during my 15 years as SID," said Strickler. "She paid attention to details, which was so important

in the world of sports information. However, being able to adapt to as many head and assistant football coaches as she has served over 47 years is a tribute to her ability to cooperate with others, to adjust to an ever-changing work environment, and probably most importantly to her personality. There are only a select few individuals in the country who have so successfully filled this type of administrative assistant's role. Congratulations to her; she will be sorely missed in the football arena at VMI."

Robinson said it wasn't difficult adjusting to different head coaching administrations and all the changes they brought. She credits that as a key to her longevity.



Karen Robinson stands with her husband, Col. Wes Robinson, after receiving recognition for 47 years of service with the VMI football program.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

"The head coaches have been so good to me, and I love my job," she said. "It really wasn't hard (adjusting to different head coaches). They were easy to get along with. Hopefully, I did the job well and they were pleased with that. They've just been all so nice."

Robinson, who plans to return helping VMI football in a part-time role in the future, hopes to spend the coming summer months practicing with her Southern Gospel singing group "Ladies of Mercy" in anticipation of an active concert schedule once COVID-19 restrictions are eased. Gardening, house decoration projects, and visits to son, Ethan who lives in Oregon, and daughter, Tess who resides in the Detroit area, are also in the plans.

Robinson was presented with the VMI Achievement Award Thursday, April 30, in a ceremony recognizing her service to the Institute. Husband Wes, who serves as VMI's director of information technology, joined her for the recognition. Because of social distancing, the gathering was limited to 10 people, far fewer than would normally be attending for such an event.

Reflecting on her career, Robinson says absence of daily interaction at Clarkson-McKenna Hall is what she will miss most when she steps away for the interim.

"What I'll miss most is seeing the coaches day to day. They'll come in and sit down and we'll just talk. They've been like my second family and this is my second home here."

— Wade Branner, Associate Athletic Director



Virginia Military Institute  
Communications & Marketing Office  
Lexington, VA 24450-0304

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Richmond, VA  
Permit No. 320

# ROTC Summer Training Curtailed Significantly

By Mary Price

This summer, only a small fraction of commissioning cadets will participate in summer ROTC training activities, as all branches of the service have either canceled or severely curtailed their usual summer offerings in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

For the Air Force, only 16 out of 46 eligible cadets will attend summer field training at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, as the number of summer sessions at the base this year has fallen from six to three, according to Col. Philip Cooper, commander of Air Force ROTC. But those cadets who aren't going have plenty of company: they're among 1,400 across the nation unable to secure a spot at Maxwell, and the Air Force as of yet has no plans for how to get all of those deferred cadets through the training pipeline.

And that's just the first thorny problem. The second, Cooper noted, will be finding a way to evaluate commissioning cadets who haven't been to field training. Typically, he explained, a cadet's performance at field training plays a role in job placement

after commissioning. "They're going to have to come up with new metrics [for evaluation]," Cooper commented.

Those cadets going to field training this summer will be required to self-quarantine at home for two weeks prior to arrival at Maxwell and train in a socially distanced environment once there.

Naval ROTC is also seeing its summer training schedule drastically cut. In a typical year, said Command Senior Chief Petty Officer Terrance Foote, Naval ROTC would send 100 to 120 cadets to summer training. This year, 15 are scheduled to attend.

Most of those 15 will be attending Marine Corps Officer Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia, while one is slated to travel to Coronado, California, for Navy SEAL Officer Assessment and Selection. A few others are waiting to hear if the explosive ordnance disposable (EOD) immersion course will take place or not.

What's more, an entire new program for Naval ROTC—Naval Student Indoctrination—has been canceled. That event, which

would have been held at Naval Station Great Lakes near Chicago, Illinois, would have been mandatory for both incoming rats and rising 3<sup>rd</sup> Class cadets enrolled in Naval ROTC.

Foote commented that there would have been "an extremely large number" of Naval ROTC cadets attending summer training if the coronavirus pandemic had not intervened.

On May 12, the *Army Times* reported that ROTC Cadet Summer Camp had been canceled. The decision came just 12 days before the first individuals were supposed to report for training in Fort Knox, Kentucky. Training will take place this fall and next spring instead, but at individual ROTC units, not Fort Knox. The *Army Times* also reported that performance at training will not affect branch selection for this cohort of cadets. ❄

## Coach of the Year

Lt. Col. Bill Bither, head coach of the men's and women's rifle teams, was named SoCon rifle co-coach of the year. He shares the title with Georgia Southern's Sandra Worman. The announcement came after VMI finished third in the 2020 SoCon Rifle Championship in Statesboro, Georgia, in March.—VMI File Photo by Kelly Nye.

