



INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 53, Number 1, September 2024

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POST BRIEFS

VMI Rated Five Stars

VMI was rated a 5-star college in Money magazine's Best Colleges in America list for 2024, in the magazine's tenth year of publishing a Best Colleges list. Money assigns colleges a rating on a five-star scale, with five stars being the best. More than 740 colleges were scored based on factors

in three main categories: quality, affordability, and outcomes. Money reports that VMI graduates typically earn a median salary of \$77,000 early in their careers. The full Best Colleges list, along with the methodology, can be found at www.money.com/bestcolleges.

Guns and Hoses Softball Game

The VMI Police Department hosted their inaugural "Guns and Hoses" softball game July 31 at Lamore Field at Gray-Minor Stadium. Members of police and fire departments from Rockbridge County, Lexington, and

Buena Vista competed. The Guns won both games against the Hoses: 30-18 and 29-12, and they raised \$1,000 and 356 pounds of donated food for Rockbridge Area Relief Association.

Food Offerings Expand on Post

The PX is offering items from two new Parkhurst Dining brands: Cinco, which offers Tex-Mex food, and Grill 1839, which offers classic grill items. Corner Mercantile Express continues to sell sandwiches, and Starbucks maintains the coffee concession. Kiosks have been installed to ease the

process of ordering and paying, while one manned register remains at the Starbucks counter. In addition, Click-It Kitchen, a mobile ordering app specific for the PX, is available to download for free, for cadets, faculty, staff, and guests on post. 🍷



Summer Transition Program

Summer Transition Program (STP) participants stayed on post for four weeks, acclimating themselves to VMI in July. The incoming matriculants lived in barracks, took an academic course, and undertook rigorous physical fitness training. STP helps prepare students for the Rat Line, which began on Matriculation Day, Aug. 17.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye and Rhita Daniel.



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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 Communications and Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450-0304; 540-464-7207; or VMIReport@vmi.edu.
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Director Lt. Col. Sherry Wallace
Editor Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood
Assistant Editor Kelly Nye
Designer Robbin Youngblood
Institute Report Staff
Rhita Daniel
Marianne Hause
H. Lockwood McLaughlin
Laura Shapiro
Lexie West
Back Cover Photo
H. Lockwood McLaughlin

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On the cover: Family members catch a last glimpse as Brian Pritchard '25 leads the Rat Mass into barracks on Matriculation Day.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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2024 Rat Mass Matriculates

By Marianne Hause

Matriculation Day was held Saturday, Aug. 17, beginning the Rat Line for the new academic year. This year marks the 185th year of the Institute. Since 1839, VMI has been built on the core values of honor, excellence, self-discipline, courage, esprit de corps, selfless service, and resilience.

The balmy day included a fair in Cocke Hall where the students and their families were able to meet with local churches, VMI coaches and clubs, and community organizations. Various other VMI agencies were present, including the chaplain's office with their new facility dog, CAVU, commemorating his first Matriculation Day. Also part of the process were uniform fittings and issuing of physical training uniforms in Cameron Hall, completion of paperwork, meeting department faculty, and the traditional signing of the Matriculation Book in the Corps Physical Training Facility. Throughout the morning, barracks were teeming with parents assisting their students moving into their rooms, and meeting their roommates.

In the afternoon, the Chaplain's



The new matriculants take their oath in Cameron Hall before marching up to barracks.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Prayer, an optional non-denominational prayer session for matriculants and their families, was held in Memorial Hall, followed by the Superintendent's Welcome in Cameron Hall.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, welcomed the incoming matriculants and their families. He reminded the young men and women who will become the Class

dant, also addressed the rats. He pointed out that they chose VMI because they want a challenge, and a journey less traveled. He told them that to succeed at VMI, they must be willing and committed teammates. "Get to know each other quickly. Work together. Give your best each day, and strive to be better the next day," he advised.

The matriculants took the cadet oath during the ceremony. With hugs, cheers, and a few tears, they bid good-bye to their families and formed up with their companies for the first time. After marching up to barracks, they met their cadre, a group of cadets holding rank in each company, and are chosen based on performance and ability to serve as instructors for the Rat Mass.



The cadre slowly march into barracks to introduce themselves to the rats Aug. 17.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

of 2028, that they will be challenged in the days to come, but that they have come to VMI to succeed, not fail. He reminded them the rat training only lasts about six months out of their four-year cadetship, and to keep it all in perspective. He advised them to lean into the training, and never quit.

Col. Lawrence Havird '90, the new commandant,

also addressed the rats. He pointed out that they chose VMI because they want a challenge, and a journey less traveled. He told them that to succeed at VMI, they must be willing and committed teammates. "Get to know each other quickly. Work together. Give your best each day, and strive to be better the next day," he advised.

The matriculants took the cadet oath during the ceremony. With hugs, cheers, and a few tears, they bid good-bye to their families and formed up with their companies for the first time. After marching up to barracks, they met their cadre, a group of cadets holding rank in each company, and are chosen based on performance and ability to serve as instructors for the Rat Mass.

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This year's Rat Mass comes from 36 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Guam, six foreign countries, with 62% from Virginia and 38% from out of state. Eighty-six are female, and 168 are recruited NCAA athletes. Forty-nine percent have selected a major in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines and 51% are majoring in the liberal arts.

Sean Bergman '28, a history major from Richmond, is the nephew of the Institute physician, Dr. Melissa S. Krawiec '01, a member of the first coeducational class at VMI. Krawiec shared that she is immensely proud of Bergman. "Sean spent the last year working in the 'real world' putting in long hours and hard work and comes to VMI with experiences that a lot of rats have not had. I think that perspective makes him appreciate the opportunity to be in school and influence his own future. The fact that he chose VMI has, I think,



Sean Bergman '28 sports his new haircut after donating his hair to Children With Hair Loss. – VMI Photo by Marianne Hause.

very little to do with me and everything to do with his goals for his own future. Sean is excited and committed to doing well at VMI and I can't wait to see what's next," shared Krawiec.

Bergman wanted his first day as a rat to make a difference in the lives of others, so anticipating his rat haircut, he refrained

from cutting his hair for nearly three years, in order to have hair long enough to donate to Children With Hair Loss, a nonprofit organization that provides human hair replacements at no cost to children and young adults facing medically-related hair loss.

The matriculation process continued throughout the week with the cadre leading the new arrivals in military drills and physical training, culminating with

the Rat Crucible on Sunday, Aug. 25. The Rat Mass will officially become the Class of 2028 in the spring semester, after Breakout.

Upper class cadets returned Saturday, Aug. 24, and classes began Tuesday, Aug. 27.

Additional photos from Matriculation Day are on page 10. ✨



Strong Start for Keydets

VMI's soccer teams kicked off the fall athletic season with very strong results. Women's soccer played first, beating the Davidson Wildcats, followed by a win over the Eagles of American University, and then a third victory over the Emory & Henry Wasps. Whitney Tracy '25, goalkeeper, was named the Southern Conference Defensive Player of the Week early in the season.

Men's soccer started their season with two wins, including a shutout against the Warren Wilson Owls. The 2-0 start is a feat that has not been accomplished since 2005. Their first win was over the Emory & Henry Wasps with the Rat Mass in attendance at Patchin Field. – VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and courtesy of Randall Wolf.

P2 Readies Athletic Fields and Buildings

By Marianne Hause and Eric Schwartz '95

The Keydet football and soccer teams are playing on newly sodded fields this year. Alumni Memorial Field at Foster Stadium and Patchin Field were both sodded over the summer with Tahoma 31 bermudagrass, known for its exceptional tolerance to cool temperatures, as well as wear and tear, making it an ideal choice for athletic fields, and enhancing the gameplay of high-intensity sports.

Eric Schwartz '95, deputy director of the Department of Facilities Management, also known as physical plant or P2, stated that with the new sod's improved cold tolerance, VMI is considering skipping the usual overseeding of the football field this fall. "Typically, this process involves spreading hundreds of pounds of ryegrass seed to keep the field green throughout the entire football season, followed by spraying out the rye in the spring. However, the new sod remains active at soil temperatures down to 55 degrees. Since our average soil temperatures range from 45 to 55 degrees in November, even if the Tahoma 31 goes dormant and turns brown, it will still retain its playability characteristics."

Before laying down the new sod, the fields were meticulously prepped through a multi-step process. The old turf was stripped using a technique called fraise mowing. Then, the fields were reverse tine tilled to improve soil structure and aeration. Finally, the surfaces were laser leveled to ensure a perfectly even playing surface.

According to Schwartz, natural grass turf is typically replaced every three to five years on heavily used fields. "At VMI, the sod at Foster Stadium underwent significant repairs in 2005, and Patchin Field saw major repairs in 2009, but a full sod on each field predates this. The grounds shop at VMI extended the life of the old sod for many years through diligent maintenance and strategic repairs, demonstrating their dedication to maintaining excellent playing conditions," he said.

The field lines and markings were done by the department's robotic field painter, Carl, affectionately named after an inept character from an insurance commercial, who while daydreaming, makes a shambles of drawing base lines on a baseball diamond with a line chalk. In contrast, Carl the robot came with dimensions prepackaged in its software, and ensures precise and consistent field markings while saving labor, reducing paint requirements, and cutting costs.

Schwartz shared that Carl can paint a soccer field in 45 minutes and a football field in a few hours, compared to the several hours and three days required, respectively, when done manually. "Carl also painted the VMI spider in the center of the football field. The precision of Carl's work is significantly higher than traditional



Willy Lilly walks beside the robot affectionately known as Carl, as it paints lines on Alumni Memorial Field in Foster Stadium.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

methods, resulting in a more professional appearance. The time savings has allowed us to add unique touches to the football field, such as the end zone lettering of "Keydets."

In addition to football and soccer fields, Carl paints the rugby field and painted the baseball field before it was upgraded to synthetic turf. Carl uses a GPS antenna for accuracy within a few millimeters. "That is how we can paint over the same field without any ghosting of the old

paint," explained Schwartz.

P2 stayed busy on other projects over the summer. In the brief window of 13 weeks from graduation to matriculation, P2 repaired, painted, stripped, waxed, and deep cleaned areas on post that are difficult to get to during the academic year.

Members of the department went through each of the 438 cadet rooms in barracks to make sure the emergency lights worked, all the desk and wardrobe drawers were serviceable, graffiti was removed, windows were repaired, damaged shades were replaced, all sinks worked, and there was the correct amount of furniture.

In Crozet Hall, they made sure lights worked, damaged tile was replaced, plumbing was repaired, and painting was completed.

The housing maintenance teams repaired, painted, and cleaned 12 apartment units in which Institute faculty and staff members resided over the past year, making them ready for new incoming faculty and staff.

The grounds crew mowed and weeded nearly 12 acres; maintained 275 acres of athletic fields, including the Parade Ground; and landscaped nearly 100,000 square feet of flower and shrub beds.

The lock shop made sure all the locks and doors are serviceable, and completed a conversion to a new electronic access software, with new electronics, boards, and wiring.

The heat plant took down each of the three boilers—one at a time—and examined them thoroughly, making sure they were safe and ready for heavy use.

The custodial teams focused on stripping and waxing floors, shampooing carpet, and deep-cleaning classrooms and common areas.

The fire and safety team executed facility inspections of fire detection and suppression systems, CCTV camera systems, and life safety equipment.

"We are excited to showcase the enhanced athletic facilities, and all of P2's efforts that reflect VMI's dedication in providing a superior environment for cadets, ensuring they have the resources and support needed to excel both on and off the field," said Schwartz. 🌿



Cadre Week

Members of cadre returned to post the week of Aug. 11 to prepare for the incoming rats who arrived on Matriculation Day, Aug. 17. Training included practice parades, uniform inspections, and information briefs from the superintendent and commandant.—VMI
Photos by Kelly Nye and H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Cadets Excel With Summer Research

By Marianne Hause

Over the summer, nearly 30 cadets spent between five and 10 weeks engaging in in-depth research with their faculty mentors through the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI) and Applied and Industrial Mathematics (AIM) programs. Research project topics included the divisions of engineering, the humanities, and the sciences.

Jack Conley '25, a history major, researched a 2,000-year-old hand-written birthday party invitation, along with other ancient tablets, for his project titled, "The Vindolanda Tablets: Understanding the Roman Frontier in Northern Britain."

Conley studied the postcard-sized wooden tablets discovered at Vindolanda, the Roman legionary fort in northern Britain, near Hadrian's Wall. Rome occupied Vindolanda from approximately 85 to 370 A.D., and during that time frame it was home to roughly 2,000 people, including 400 military members, their families, and local merchants.

In 1973, a young British archaeologist discovered the tablets that turned out to be the correspondence of the inhabitants of the fort, written in Latin, addressing everything from party invitations to legionary strength assessments to commercial orders for supplies.



Jack Conley '25 researches ancient Roman tablets.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

According to Conley, the tablets weave a fascinating and previously unseen picture of Roman life at the lower social levels, and can shed light on what military operations took place in order to keep the Roman border secure. The wood tablets were well preserved because the soil in northern Britain is very anaerobic, meaning an absence of oxygen, which prevents decomposition. His primary database consisted of 890 tablets, but tablets are still being discovered and the number could grow to 10,000, though most are incomplete. The majority of the discovered tablets are now stored at The British Museum in London, and have been scanned. Excavation for more tablets continues at Vindolanda.

Bruce Hay '25, a mechanical engineering major and applied mathematics minor, completed his SURI project by designing an

off-road laser measurement mapping system to forewarn drivers of trail conditions and help prevent dangerous mishaps.

Hay first became interested in pursuing the summer project while enrolled in a spring semester class in machine dynamics, taught by Maj. Craig Altmann, assistant professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME). Altmann mentioned that he had received funding and purchased equipment necessary to build a precision laser measurement tool including a scanning laser, a global positioning system (GPS), and an inertial measurement unit (IMU), that measures and reports acceleration, orientation, and gravitational forces. This intrigued Hay, especially since he had recently taken a class in mechatronics—which combines mechanical, electrical, and computer engineering—a requirement for any cadet involved in building the measurement tool. According to Hay, accurate measurement of off-road surfaces can provide more accurate input to vehicles, and provide information to road maintenance crews to help them determine when road maintenance should be performed.

To test the mapping system, Hay and Altmann set up a small base station within their testing area to hone in a signal with satellite and the closest radio tower, which is 40 miles away, in Roanoke. The laser is mounted on the hitch of a truck, and as the truck is driven, data is collected. "We tested out the GPS on the truck while driving around the VMI parking lot. The data came out really well. We haven't fully tested the entire system together, but the independent parts fully work. We can take full measurements from the laser, and take full data from the GPS," stated Hay.

"Hay was very successful this summer completing his part of this research, which is the electrical and programming side of it, not the mechanical side. As soon as the frame is built and the laser, GPS, and IMU are mounted to it, we will be able to measure terrain surfaces



Bruce Hay '25 and Maj. Craig Altmann collaborate on the off-road laser measurement mapping system.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Continued on next page

with ease,” stated Altmann, who will be continuing the project in the fall as part of his research.

Aidan Carman '27, an applied mathematics major, researched ways to help colleges keep their admission and retention numbers healthy for his AIM project titled, “Analytics in Support of VMI Admissions and Cadet Retention.”

Col. John David, professor in the Department of Applied Mathematics, Jackson-Hope Distinguished Professor of Natural Science, director of the AIM program, and Carman’s advisor with the project, stated that the AIM program allows cadets to experience practical applications of applied mathematics and computer science beyond the classroom, and work with clients in a multi-disciplinary setting.

Working alongside the VMI admissions and financial aid offices, David and Carman sought to determine what factors ultimately decide the likelihood a cadet will graduate, the likelihood a cadet will graduate in a particular major, the likelihood a cadet will return after the first year, what retention programs are the most effective, how to best track potential cadets from the time they consider attending VMI through graduation, and how to utilize financial resources in efficient and effective ways.

Carman used MATLAB, a computer program for coding and building algorithms. “We took a large amount of non-confidential data from the classes of 2013 through 2017, including information from their applications through the time they left VMI—whether or not they graduated—entered it all into the program, and got a prediction on the graduation rate. What we found is that the most important things in terms of graduating were high school GPA, high school rank, ACT and SAT scores, and the math placement score that everyone takes before matriculation. In terms of retention, however, it was a little bit different. High school GPA was still important, but ROTC was a big factor, and mattered a lot more than ACT and



Aidan Carman '27 and Col. John David analyze their algorithm findings.—VMI
Photo by Kelly Nye.

SAT scores. Commissioning cadets were more likely to both return for each new academic year, and to graduate,” revealed Carman.

David was not surprised with most of Carman’s findings, but acknowledged that discovering commissioning cadets had a higher likelihood of graduating was a bit of a surprise. “But really if you think about it, they had a concrete objective, and they wanted to become commissioned officers, so that was a driving force,” he said.

David stated they are always cognizant about using algorithms in ethical ways. “Anytime you build an algorithm, you want to think about things like fairness and equity, and making sure you are evaluating these young people on their own merits. That’s what our model does. We want to give good guidance, and support VMI in making good decisions with its resources, and numbers and data help us do that.” ❁

Wallace Named Director of Communications and Marketing

By Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood

Sherry Wallace arrived to post Aug. 26 after being named the new director of communications and marketing. Wallace replaces Col. Bill Wyatt, who became executive officer to the superintendent earlier this year. Wyatt served in the role since 2020.

Wallace has nearly 20 years of experience in media relations, communications, and marketing. Wallace most recently served as national public relations lead for a growth strategy firm, working with a wide array of clients, including higher education institutions, on strategic communications. Earlier, Wallace was with Radford University, where she served as deputy chief spokesperson for the university and senior news editor, and she established robust earned media and subject matter expert programs. Wallace worked in civil aviation for



Lt. Col. Sherry Wallace

13 years. She is a proud veteran of the U.S. Army and holds a Master of Public Administration from Missouri State University and a bachelor’s degree from Hendrix College.

“It is an honor to join this historic institution. I appreciate General Wins giving me the opportunity to be part of VMI’s exciting growth, and I look forward to being part of the team,” said Wallace. “My military experience makes me appreciate what an exceptional learning and leadership development experience this is for cadets, and I am eager to contribute to it.”

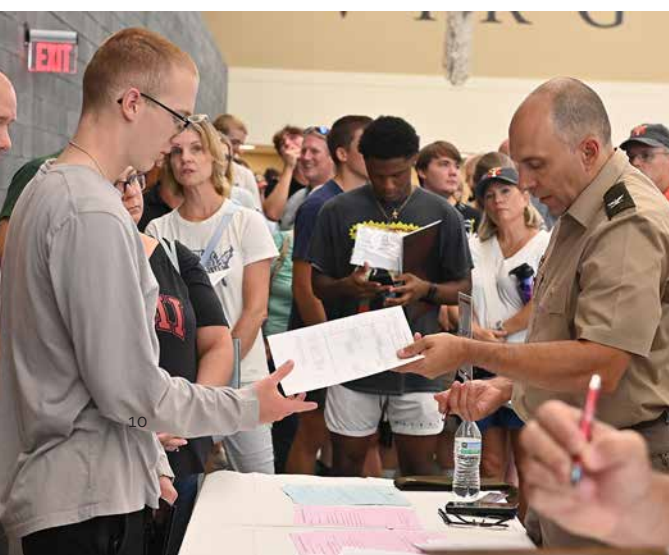
“I look forward to working with Sherry as she takes the helm as the director of a high-profile department at VMI,” said Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent. “Her extensive experience in public relations and communications, and her time with the Army will be a tremendous asset to the Institute.”

Wallace holds the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Virginia Militia. The search for the director of communications and marketing included interviews and input from numerous departments on post. ❁



Matriculation

On Aug. 17, matriculants arrived on post. Cadets, faculty, and staff assisted them as they registered for classes, received parts of their uniform, moved into barracks, and signed the Matriculation Book. Later in the afternoon, matriculants were called down by company during the Welcome Ceremony in Cameron Hall. After the ceremony, cadre marched the rats into barracks for the beginning of their training. More photos from Matriculation Week are available on VMI's Flickr page.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye, H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Marianne Hause, and Lexie West.



Summer Studies Abroad

By Marianne Hause and Laura Shapiro

Over the summer, groups of cadets of all majors traveled to Poland, Spain, and Ireland, among other countries, to experience different cultures, expand their education, earn class credits, and build relationships.

Impactful, challenging, and exposure to atrocities are not ordinary descriptives for a college trip to Europe. For the contingency of cadets and staff members who traveled to Poland, though, those words are appropriate. Col. David R. Gray, director of the Center for Leadership & Ethics, and Sgt. Maj. Tom Sowers, Institute and Corps sergeant major, along with 18 commissioning cadets, traveled there for seven days, arranged through The MirYam Institute, a U.S. based, 501(c)(3), nonprofit.

MirYam was established as a forum for leading Israeli experts of diverse and varied perspectives. MirYam's program, I-SAP (Israel Strategy & Policy) tour is designed for U.S. military cadets to travel throughout the country, learn about Israel, its place among the nations, and its relationship with the United States.

According to Gray, the ongoing Israel-Hamas war curtailed a visit to Israel with MirYam this year. Instead, a trip to Poland was arranged for cadets to learn about the



Flowers and wreaths lie in honor of those who lost their lives, following a memorial ceremony at Auschwitz.—Photo courtesy of Delilah Martindale '25.

Nazi Final Solution and its malevolent execution during the Holocaust.

Sowers observed that exposing the cadets to the horrors of the Holocaust will affect how they will lead in the future. "Watching the cadets experience the horrors of

mankind was something that wasn't enjoyable, but it was good for them to see in order to learn from that chapter of history. Their emotional responses were real," he said.

Spain was the destination for nearly two dozen cadets who participated in a five-week program put together by Dr. Sabrina Laroussi, associate professor of Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures. Cadets took three classes at the Universidad de Alcalá in Alcalá de Henares, and lived in a dorm along with Spanish students and other international students who were also taking summer classes there. The cadets were enrolled in two Spanish classes taught by the university professors and an economics elective class, which was taught by Col.

Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, VMI professor of economics and business.

According to Dimitrova-Grajzl, study abroad programs are important because

Continued on next page



Delilah Martindale '25 and Audrey Grace Davis '25 enjoy the sites of downtown Warsaw.—Photo courtesy of Delilah Martindale '25.



Cadets assemble in front of the Royal Palace central courtyard in Madrid.—Photo courtesy of Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl.

they humanize the rest of the world and introduce the students to new ideas and different ways of living, working, and interacting. “In a world of so much polarization, such programs can be a bridge for better understanding and cooperation,” she said.

Laroussi said she gets immense satisfaction seeing her students’ Spanish language skills progress, embracing new experiences and stepping out of their culinary comfort zones. “Every student has strategies to overcome language barriers as they go from being shy to ordering food in a restaurant or a coffee shop, or purchasing something in a store, to making every effort to speak some of the local language to get around, connect with locals, and make friends. When we visited very touristy cities such as Seville, Barcelona, or Toledo, I always emphasized to students to avoid tourist traps: restaurants on big, popular squares or near major tourist attractions, or restaurants with a menu featuring multiple languages. So, at the end of the day, when they told me that they went to a restaurant where there were only locals, the waiters did not speak English, the menu was entirely in Spanish, and they ordered a local specialty—that was my greatest satisfaction.”

Nearly 600 nautical miles northwest of Spain, a third group of cadets enjoyed the warmth and hospitality from the people of Ireland. Eleven cadets, along with Col. Wade Bell, professor and head of the Department

of Biology, and Lt. Col. Stephanie Hodde, associate professor in the Department of English, Rhetoric and Humanistic Studies, traveled to Dingle, Ireland. There they stayed at the Díseart, formerly a convent of the Presentation Sisters. Bell taught *Epidemics in Society*, framed around Ireland’s Great Famine from 1845 to 1852, so Hodde framed her class, *Voices from Ireland-Artistic Responses to Social and Political Issues*, around the same approximate era, known as the Irish literary renaissance.

Hodde explained that a particular focus of her class was the peasant population and their heritage, history, their many struggles, their colonial role with Britain, their resilience, and their attachment to the land. The Gaelic language, which was a big part of that renaissance, allowed the Irish to resist Britain’s insistence that English be the official language, and Gaelic continues to be a primary language in that area of Ireland. A big part of the cultural experience was for the cadets to immerse themselves in the daily life of Irish people, and to record their thoughts and encounters with other voices.

“Dingle is an incredibly friendly community and relatively small. The cadets enjoyed conversing

with the locals about what it means to be an American, and shared common life experiences. For me, being able to experience Ireland with the cadets on a daily basis was my favorite part of the trip. Whether we were hiking Mt. Brandon, the highest point on the peninsula, or visiting a local famine graveyard, or listening to a world-renowned accordion player, we learned together the unique and rich cultural traditions. It’s such a magical place!” ❁



Stained glass windows at the Sagrada Família Basilica in Barcelona shine down on cadets.—Photo courtesy of Cristina Monjo Ortega.



Cadets ascend Mt. Brandon, towering above the Atlantic coastline.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Stephanie Hodde.



The VMI contingent gather at Cnoc a’Cairn in Ireland, the famine graveyard, overlooking Dingle Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Stephanie Hodde.

Chaplain's Office Grows by Four Feet

By Marianne Hause

The chaplain's office has welcomed a new staff member in the form of a warm, furry, and faithful facility dog named CAVU. Facility dogs assist people to cope after a traumatic event or overly stressful environment. CAVU's occupational specialty is to assist the Institute chaplain in bringing morale, welfare, and care to cadets, especially those who are faced with upsetting news or painful issues, like the death of a family member.

The two-year old golden lab was trained by Mutts With a Mission (MWAM), a non-profit located in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and accredited through Assistance Dogs International (ADI), the world leader in the service dog industry. MWAM prepares service dogs for disabled veterans, first responders, and law enforcement. Facility dogs undergo the same rigorous training that service dogs go through, but instead of helping an individual with a disability, facility dogs ultimately help multiple people. They are often placed with police departments and courtrooms to assist with victims having to testify. Donations to MWAM fully cover the nearly \$60,000 price tag of training each dog, so there is no cost to any recipient.

Col. John P. Casper '04, Institute chaplain, first learned of MWAM about a year-and-a-half ago while he was associate chaplain. Project Horizon hosted an event on post to bring awareness to victims of sexual assault, and brought their facility dog with them. "Seeing how the dog was interacting with everyone, and the impact it made at Project Horizon, I thought a dog like that could make a huge impact with cadets," said Casper.

When Casper was promoted to Institute chaplain last July, he was encouraged to think outside the box for fresh ideas in his ministry. "I thought about it for a little while and knew I had an out-of-the-box idea. I was aware of other facility dogs placed with colleges and floated the idea to General Wins. We invited Brooke Corson, executive director of MWAM, to visit post, and she agreed a facility dog would be a great addition for us. We then started the process for approval, which took about a year," he explained.

Provisionally, along the same time the idea of bringing a facility dog to VMI first sparked in Casper's mind, a puppy was undergrowing his two-year



Col. John P. Casper '04 and CAVU

training. The pup, along with seven others, spent a large portion of his training on the aircraft carrier, USS George H.W. Bush, which is where he received his unusual name from the servicemembers stationed aboard. CAVU is an acronym for Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited, a term commonly used among Navy pilots, which means flying conditions are ideal. "In the Navy, we young pilots all prayed for CAVU. But, you see, that is where my life is now. Thanks to my family and my friends, my life is CAVU," said the late President Bush on his 80th birthday.

Casper explained that because so many of the dogs were to be placed with first responders and veterans, having them trained in a military environment was ideal. "That, coupled with the fact that Captain Dave Pollard, commanding officer of the Bush at the time, saw the value of having these dogs come aboard and positively impact his sailors, airmen and Marines. That connection is very special. CAVU is very familiar with a military environment and being around people in uniform, so it is an ideal fit for him to be here."

Casper is CAVU's exclusive handler, and, per ADI standards, was required to go through 120 hours of training with other handlers. "CAVU knows over 75 commands, so I had to memorize all those. Our training included taking our dogs to various places an average person would go, like the zoo, coffee shops, entertainment venues, museums, and stores. We learned how to interact with our dogs, and how to handle people who approached us. CAVU goes with me everywhere, so when he's not at VMI, he's at my house. When I go elsewhere, like to the store, I put his service dog vest on him so people know they shouldn't touch him. CAVU understands when he is wearing the vest, he is working. When we come home and I take off his vest, he knows it is time to relax, and turns into a different dog. He becomes playful and affectionate, and can be a little goofball, just like any other family dog," Casper remarked.

Casper shared that he is blown away by the barriers CAVU is able to break down. "His presence can start conversations that probably wouldn't have otherwise happened. He has a calming presence, and he matches your attitude. If your attitude is timid or quiet, CAVU will be docile and sit at your feet, but if you get down on the ground and play with him, he will eat that up! CAVU is also able to pick up on emotions. If he senses something is not quite right with someone, he will immediately give



CAVU visits cadets in barracks.—Photo courtesy of VMI chaplain's office.

Continued on next page

me subtle signals that I am able to pick up on. He has even given me signals about my own stress levels. Chaplain ministry is often crisis ministry, and I do absorb a lot. So CAVU is helpful to me too, on both a personal and professional level.”

CAVU does not have a rank yet, but may soon. “In a military context and with first responders, dogs typically outrank their handlers to prevent any perception of abuse. The handler has

ownership over the dog, but if the dog outranks him, that changes things a little bit,” Casper quipped.

Because CAVU first arrived at VMI toward the end of spring semester, it wasn’t long before the cadets left post for the summer. Casper has enjoyed seeing CAVU interact with the matriculants. “I’m really excited about seeing him shine during the Rat Line. I think that’s going to be a game changer.” ❄



Legion Riders Pass Through Post

Twenty-four motorcycles carrying 34 riders roared up Letcher Avenue and onto post June 14, as part of the 7th annual Legacy Run of the Virginia American Legion Riders. VMI was chosen as a stop because of its direct connection with the military. The assembly then toured the VMI Museum, barracks, the Corps Physical Training Facility, and the Aquatic Center before leaving post.

The group raises money for the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, which provides much-needed assistance to disabled veterans, U.S. military families with children at home who are facing unexpected financial hardships, troops recovering from wounds and illnesses, and the children of fallen troops and disabled veterans.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.

Eskam Promoted to New Role

By Marianne Hause

Lt. Col. Shannon Eskam, director of financial aid, has been promoted to assistant superintendent for strategic enrollment management/director of financial aid.

In her new position, Eskam oversees the Office of Admissions, the Office of Financial Aid, Cadet Marketing, and the Retention Center. She is responsible for developing, implementing, and overseeing the execution of the multi-year comprehensive strategic enrollment management plan, and ensuring compliance with Title IV and other relevant state and federal laws and regulations. Serving as a liaison to VMI athletics, she will uphold National Collegiate Athletics Association and Southern Conference rules.

Eskam began her career at VMI as director of financial aid in September 2022. She came to Lexington from Casper, Wyoming, where she served as the director of financial aid, deputy Title IX



Lt. Col. Shannon Eskam

coordinator, enrollment services supervisor, and Veterans Affairs certifying official at Casper College. Prior to Casper College, she worked at Gillette College in Gillette, Wyoming, as the assistant director of financial aid services.

Eskam earned her doctorate degree in higher education administration and a bachelor’s degree in communication with an emphasis in marketing from the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. She holds a master’s degree in organizational management from Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska.

Col. John Young, chief of staff, stated that Eskam is well-suited for the critical role. “Since joining VMI, Lieutenant Colonel Eskam has demonstrated dedication and a commitment to excellence, with an exceptional ability to collaborate. Major General Wins and I are confident that her strategic vision for enrollment management will significantly contribute to the continued success and growth of the Institute.”

Eskam stated she is honored and excited about the position. “Serving alongside the dedicated individuals at this esteemed institution fills me with pride, and I look forward to further contributing to the growth and success of the Institute and our cadets,” she said.

Eskam and her husband reside in Lexington with their two school-aged children and three dogs. ❄

Naval ROTC Unit Turns 50

By Marianne Hause

The Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) unit at VMI celebrated its 50th anniversary July 1 in Kilbourne Hall. Col. Travis Homiak '95, NROTC commanding officer (CO), presided over the ceremony and welcomed special guests from the original unit.

Homiak stated it was important for him to be the CO during the 50th anniversary since he was a product of the unit, came back to be a Marine officer instructor from 1999 to 2002, and will finish his career at the unit, as he retired from the Marine Corps this year. "I feel very strongly about it, and I see by the cast who have come from far and wide, that you do too. Being able to bring everybody together to this place, where I think we're unified around the fact that for 50 years, this unit has been producing—in conjunction with VMI—a great product for both the Navy and Marine Corps."

According to Homiak, the unit has commissioned 2,032 Navy ensigns and Marine second lieutenants. "This past May, we produced the largest class in my tenure of 59 officers. Thirty-six for the Navy, and 23 for the Marines. We have 37 freshmen, all of whom are coming with four-year Call to Duty scholarships, which covers the cost of room and board. That is hands down the biggest number of high caliber matriculants we have ever had."

Homiak reported that nationally, the NROTC produces about 1,000 officers every year. Of those 1,000 officers, 20 to 25% come from five senior military colleges. "VMI is the third largest unit in size behind Texas A&M and Virginia Tech. We are second only to the U.S. Naval Academy in producing Marine officers, and we are the second largest producer in the NROTC curriculum behind Texas A&M for Naval officers. One of the things I'm most proud of though,



Col. Travis Homiak '95 directs the attention of guests to the place where the plaque commemorating the anniversary will hang in Kilbourne Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

is that we lead the nation in sideload scholarships, which is when a student comes here without a scholarship, but earns a scholarship through hard work and is then placed on a commissioning track. VMI punches well above its weight, and that's part of the magic of this school," he said.

Beth Ripley Owerlohle, daughter of Col. George Ripley '52, the unit's original CO, attended the ceremony

on behalf of her father, who passed away in 1987. She shared how proud she was of her father's accomplishments. "I remember the day that we moved here from the Northern Virginia area, to this little town, and thinking as a young teenager, 'what is there to do here?' But there was a lot to do here! We so enjoyed having cadets over, and I was pleased to see my father so happy doing his job of educating Marines. I remember being so in awe of all the things going on here," she said. Accompanying her at the ceremony was her husband, retired U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Kurt Owerlohle '81, a VMI alumnus who trained at the unit before commissioning into the Marine Corps. He returned to the unit in the late 1980s and served as an instructor for three years.

A VMI NROTC plank owner—a Naval term referring to an original crew member—is Sgt. Maj. Alvin Hockaday, who attended the event. Hockaday started at the unit as assistant Marine officer instructor then later served as Institute and Corps sergeant major when Homiak was a rat. Hockaday remembers when he first got orders to report to VMI. "It was spring 1974, and I was a gunnery sergeant stationed on Okinawa, Japan. One night late, one of the guys said, 'Gunny Hockaday, you've got a phone call. Somebody at the Pentagon wants to talk to you.' I thought



Col. Travis Homiak '95 shares a laugh with Sgt. Maj. Alvin Hockaday after Hockaday sliced the cake with a saber.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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VMI Institute Report

it was a joke. No one at the Pentagon wants to talk to me. So, I didn't get up to go to the phone. A couple of minutes later he came back, 'Hockaday, somebody from the Pentagon wants to talk to you.' So still believing it was a joke, I thought I'd play along, and went to the phone. On the other end was Colonel Ripley. 'Gunny Hockaday?' I replied, 'Yes, sir.' He said, 'We're going to VMI to start a unit. You in?' I answered, 'I'm in!' When I got to VMI that summer, I remember sitting in Colonel Ripley's office with Jim McManaway and Jim Williams. The Colonel said to us, 'Okay, guys, we're gonna start an ROTC unit.' He looked at Jim Williams and said, 'You've been here a year, you know the ropes, get things going.' Then he turned to McManaway and said, 'Get with the other senior military colleges, find out what they're doing, and see how we can use the best of what they're doing.' Then he looked at me and said, 'Gunny, I don't know what the heck a gunnery sergeant is supposed to do here, but do a good job!' That was the start of the Naval ROTC unit



Ensign Gabriele Woodward '24 discusses the design of the temporary commemorative plaque.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

at Virginia Military Institute in July 1974, and we proceeded to have fun," Hockaday laughed.

Capt. John E. "Ned" Riester Jr. '78, who retired from VMI in 2023 after teaching in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering for 29 years, was one of the original rats in the fledgling NROTC unit. He vividly remembers Hockaday and his example of leadership. "At the start of the semester, the NROTC staff members were introduced to us one by one. Hockaday marched out, stopped, did a right face, and popped his heels together. I was in awe. One afternoon, all the NROTC rats were doing a physical training test led by Hockaday, who asked us what class we were. We told him, 'Gunny, we

are not allowed to say that number.' To which he responded, 'You don't know what class this is?' We answered, 'Well, this is the class of '75 plus three.' He replied, 'Oh, the class of '77.' We corrected him, 'No, '78.' To that he declared, 'I didn't think you were allowed to say that number.' He then pulled himself up to the pull-up bar and did 78 pull-ups. He then dropped down, clapped his hands a few times and said, 'Just letting you know who is in charge here.'"

A plaque commemorating the anniversary was designed by a group of Navy ensigns commissioned at VMI last May. It will hang at the entry door of the unit in Kilbourne Hall. ✪

D-Day Donations Come to Museum

The VMI Museum received a donation of items belonging to Lt. Benjamin Kearfott '43, one of three VMI alumni who died during the Allied invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944. Kearfott was in one of the first landing crafts to reach Omaha Beach, and was killed along with most of the men in the boat, including several of the Bedford Boys. Kearfott is buried in the cemetery above the cliffs of Normandy. The donated items include his Purple Heart and casket flag, which providentially arrived on the 80th anniversary of D-Day. They can be viewed during normal museum hours, daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



Alumnus Named New Commandant

By Marianne Hause

Retired U.S. Air Force Col. Lawrence Havird '90 has been named commandant. He assumed the position Aug. 5 following Col. Adrian T. Bogart III '81, who retired June 30 after three years.

Originally from Portsmouth, Virginia, Havird graduated from VMI with a degree in history. He played baseball for the Keydets all four years of his cadetship. He commissioned into the Air

Force, where he served for 32 years before retiring last year.

The first 21 years of his military career, Havird held various officer leadership assignments at multiple locations, leading aircraft and munitions maintenance units and guided mission operations. His contingency operational deployments were Kyrgyzstan, Diego Garcia, and Qatar.

In 2012, he served as maintenance group commander in the United Arab Emirates, and was responsible for 1,800 personnel supporting contingency combat, air refueling, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

Havird returned stateside to Clinton, Maryland, in 2013, where he supported personnel providing executive-class air transport for the office of the vice president, first lady, secretary of defense, secretary of state, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other executive branch cabinet members for three years.

He was then transferred to Layton, Utah, where he served as air



Col. Lawrence Havird '90



Col. Lawrence Havird '90 addresses the cadre in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

logistics complex vice commander, overseeing an 8,500-person aircraft and missile major repair and overhaul facility. In addition, he managed maintenance operations in seven groups and 30 squadrons across the U.S. and overseas.

In 2018, he moved to Edwards, California, where he was maintenance group commander, responsible for 1,600 personnel supporting Air Force developmental aircraft and munitions test programs and the Air Force Test Pilot School. Two years later, he became detachment commander of The Pennsylvania State University Air Force ROTC unit, overseeing the recruiting,

training, and commissioning of Air Force officers. Following his retirement from the Air Force in 2023, he accepted a position as academic adviser for the College of Health and Human Development at The Pennsylvania State University.

Havird holds two master's degrees: one in military studies from the American Military University in Charles Town, West Virginia, and the second in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

"The chance to serve in this capacity at my alma mater is both humbling and a once in a lifetime opportunity," said Havird. "I wish to

thank Major General Wins for his support and confidence in extending the chance to continue service in the development of future leaders. The lessons and mentorship I received as a cadet at VMI were foundational to a successful Air Force career. My goal as commandant is to inspire, challenge, and guide cadets in becoming the confident, decisive, and innovative leaders our nation will need to navigate future challenges."

"I am excited to welcome Colonel Lawrence Havird back to post as VMI's 59th commandant," said Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent. "He brings a



Col. Lawrence Havird '90 receives the New Market flag from Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 in the change of leadership ceremony.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Continued on next page

wealth of experience from his time at VMI and in the U.S. Air Force that will allow him to lead the Corps effectively as a coach, teacher, and mentor. His experiences make him ideally suited to produce young men

and women of character, fully prepared to step into any leadership role our nation calls for.”

Havird will be joined on post by his spouse, Jennifer, and their two daughters.

A nationwide search was conducted to identify the new commandant, with input from numerous departments on post, as well as cadets, alumni, and the VMI Board of Visitors. ❁

New Music Director Arrives

By Marianne Hause

Cadets are marching to the beat of a different director of music this fall, as percussionist, Lt. Col. Matthew Halligan, has been hired to replace Col. John Brodie, who recently retired after 36 years.

Halligan, who will lead the Regimental Band, the Commanders Jazz Band, the Institute Brass Ensemble, the Herald Trumpets and Drummers, and the Cadet Buglers, holds a doctorate degree in music performance from George Mason University, and has extensive experience in directing marching bands in high schools and colleges.

He comes to VMI directly from Missouri Western State University in Saint Joseph, where he served as director of athletic bands and director of the percussion studio for two years. Prior to that, he worked at the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) in Annapolis, Maryland for three years, where he directed the Naval Academy Drum and Bugle Corps, and oversaw all instrumental music ensembles, including the pep band, the jazz band, the pipes and drums band, and the Naval Academy Orchestra. In addition, he coordinated football halftime performances, and performed with the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra. Before working at the USNA, he was an adjunct faculty member for multiple colleges and universities including Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria and Annandale, Virginia; Stevenson University in Stevenson, Maryland; and George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. He also worked with the marching bands at the University of Maryland in College Park, and Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, Kentucky.

After receiving a bachelor of music education degree from the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Kentucky, Halligan joined the U.S. Marine Corps as a member of The Commandant's Own, the U.S. Marine Drum and Bugle Corps at Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. The ensemble performed all over the world, with Halligan playing marimba and serving as a percussion music arranger. While in the Corps, he earned a master of music degree from Eastern Kentucky University.

Halligan noted that he was not looking for another position when he stumbled upon the VMI job listing, as he and his wife, Christine, were quite happy in Missouri. “I was intrigued by the job description, and after talking to Christine, who is from Virginia and still has family here, we decided that it was an amazing opportunity. I had previously lived in Northern Virginia for about 16 years, so many of my friends and professional colleagues are nearby, so it is kind of a homecoming.”



Lt. Col. Matthew Halligan

The Halligans are familiar with VMI. Christine's father, Fred Bauer '72, is a VMI alumnus who majored in history. The job itself is a combination of several of Halligan's interests: the military, military history, teaching at a military college, marching, music, and athletic bands. “Altogether this really seemed to make a lot of sense for my interests professionally. I'm up for the challenge, and there's a good template already established by Colonel Brodie,” he stated.

Halligan wasted no time recruiting new members to Band Company by reaching out to the incoming rats, especially those who attended the Summer

Transition Program, and gauging interest in the Regimental Band and the Pipe Band. He hopes to start a cadet concert band soon if his schedule and budget allow, as many new instruments would need to be purchased. “I think everybody would enjoy a change of pace from a lot of the marching, and it can be a great chance for the band members to work on their musicianship, play some slower pieces, and even some faster pieces in a different genre.”

Col. Kevin Faust '96, commandant's office chief of staff, looks forward to working alongside Halligan. “He is uniquely positioned, as a former member of the U.S. Marine Drum and Bugle Corps, and director of the Naval Academy Drum and Bugle Corps, to make an immediate and positive impact within our community. Halligan's passion for music, and the rapport that he is already building with our cadets, make clear that the future of the VMI band is in good hands,” said Faust.

The Halligans reside in Lexington with their two young sons, Brody and Caleb, as well as their golden retriever, Shosti, and Lady, a whippet mix. ❁



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Summer Theater

The VMI Community Theatre presented "The Foreigner" July 26 through July 28 in Gillis Theater. The play, written by Larry Shue, is a two-act comedy. Trying to forget his marital problems, dull and doleful Charlie Baker takes a fishing-lodge holiday in rural Tilghman County, Georgia. To avoid being pestered by the locals, he pretends that he is a foreigner who speaks no English. The lodge's guests quickly begin revealing their secrets, and Charlie soon discovers scandals amongst some of the residents of the lodge.

Included in the cast were Tom Oxendine as Froggy LeSueur, Tim Price as Charlie Baker, Linda Gorman as Betty Meeks, Pete Farnham as Rev. David Lee, Kristen Pace as Catherine Simms, Clay Burch as Owen Musser, and Andrew Hartless as Ellard Simms. —VMI
Photos by Kelly Nye.

