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Pence Praises Honor, Military Service

By Mary Price



Vice President of the United States Mike Pence addresses faculty, staff, and the Corps of Cadets in Cameron Hall Sept. 10.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Vice President of the United States Michael R. Pence, accompanied by Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy '96 and U.S. Rep. Michael Waltz '96, visited VMI Thursday, Sept. 10, and Pence addressed the Corps of Cadets in Cameron Hall.

The visit by Pence and McCarthy had been in the works for approximately eight to 12 months, with the goal of enhancing leadership development opportunities for cadets. "It's important, in forming leaders, to expose them to many different types of leaders and leadership

See Pence, page 8

'Playing Right Now for the Hope of Spring'

By Mary Price

It's a hard fall semester for all cadets, with mask requirements, social distancing, daily health checks, and new ways of learning that vary from class to class. But for the Institute's NCAA athletes, many of whom came to VMI specifically for the opportunity to be part of a Division I athletic team, there's the added stress of not knowing when they'll compete again. In many ways, athletes are playing a mental game that's as tough as the physical game could ever be.

Coming off a 2019 season that saw the most wins since 2003, members of the Keydet football team were especially looking forward to a return to the gridiron this fall. Players had been on post approximately a week when the bad but somewhat expected news came: the Southern Conference would postpone competition in most fall sports until the spring.

See Fall Sports, page 10

POST BRIEFS

Longevity Awards

Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, presented service pins to employees on Friday, Sept. 4. Those honored were Col. Gary Bissell '89, deputy chief of staff and operations, 20 years of service; Col. Jeff Boobar '86, inspector general, five years; Lt. Col. Sean Harrington '94, executive assistant to the superintendent and secretary to the Board of Visitors, five

years; Brooke Higgins, executive secretary, protocol office, 16 years; and Lori Parrent, administrative staff specialist, superintendent's office, 40 years. All of those honored would normally have received their awards at the annual employee breakfast in May, which was canceled this spring due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Jackson-Hope Chair Holder Named

Lt. Col. John David, associate professor of applied mathematics, has been named holder of the Jackson-Hope Distinguished Chair in the Natural Sciences. Funding for these professorships comes from the Jackson-Hope Fund, which provides financial support for academic excellence at VMI. In addition to David, other holders of Jackson-Hope chairs are Col. Dennis

Foster, social and information sciences; Col. Christina McDonald, arts and humanities; and Col. James Gire, life sciences. Next year, a Jackson-Hope chair in engineering will be open for nominations. The Jackson-Hope chairs were established in 2014 with the goal of recruiting and retaining quality faculty members. ❄



Board of Visitors Resumes In-Person Meetings

On Tuesday, Sept. 15, the VMI Board of Visitors gathered for its first in-person meeting since the coronavirus pandemic began. The one-day meeting, a departure from the two-day meetings common in the past, followed extensive safety protocols. Members of the board were seated with one member per six-foot table, with masks required for all and hand sanitizer provided. Lunch, which was previously served buffet style, was pre-packaged and placed at each member's table. Prior to their Sept. 15 meeting, board members had last met in a virtual format June 10.—*VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.*



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.
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The VMI COVID-19 information portal is available at www.vmi.edu/COVID.

STEM Shorts Reach Educators

By Mary Price

Ongoing at VMI since 2012, the annual STEM Education Conference sponsored by the Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) has the goal of promoting excellence and best practices in the teaching of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics among elementary and middle school teachers.

As an answer to that question, Roy hit upon the idea of creating “STEM shorts,” brief video clips of past STEM conference speakers, and posting those clips on social media. And there’s plenty to choose from: over the past eight years, speakers have included Sal Khan, founder of the online learning platform Khan Academy, astronaut

and professional football player Leland Melvin, and Christine McKinley, host of “Decoded” on the History Channel.

“[The STEM shorts] will be sound bites of something motivational to let teachers know how highly we think of them and how important they are,” Roy said. “They’re unsung, front-line, essential workers.”

And while the STEM shorts will first be seen on social media, Roy also plans to put them on the STEM Conference’s website, along with a link to the full-length YouTube

videos, so teachers and anyone else who’s interested can find them there in the future.

It’s a project that might not have happened if it weren’t for the public health crisis. “Now that we’re not creating content, we actually have the time to do it,” Roy noted. “Normally this time of year, I’d be deep in the weeds on three or four events.”

Roy also pointed out that the STEM shorts project connects well with the CLE’s theme for the 2020–21 academic year, which is “Teamwork: Out of Many, One.”

“That theme plays on our nation’s motto,” said Roy. “It’s an election year. There’s lots of chaos and division going on. ...This STEM shorts campaign does speak to that in some respects. We’re demonstrating that we’re with the teachers, that we’re unified.” ❄



A short clip of Neil deGrasse Tyson speaking at VMI in 2013 is one of the many STEM shorts available on Center for Leadership and Ethics social media platforms.—Photo courtesy of the Center for Leadership and Ethics.

This year, though, the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of this event, which has traditionally been held in early October.

That doesn’t mean, though, that CLE staff members have forgotten about STEM teachers—far from it. As she planned for a very uncertain fall, Maj. Catherine Roy, the center’s communications and marketing specialist, knew that she’d need to find a creative way to reach her audience of educators.

“For the sake of our conferences maintaining some kind of momentum, we didn’t feel, from a communications and marketing standpoint, that we could afford to be just vacant or absent this year,” she commented. “What could we do in its place?”

Civic Discourse Class Focuses on Women’s Suffrage

By Mary Price

The recently observed 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, which guarantees women the right to vote in the United States, provides the backdrop for a class this fall taught by Col. Christina McDonald, Institute director of writing and professor of English.

McDonald explained that the course, “Civic Discourse,” is a requirement for English majors, but this fall, the course is cross-listed as an Institute Honors seminar titled “Civic Discourse, Language, and Culture: Women’s Rhetorical Practices in the Progressive Era.” Because it’s an honors seminar, the course attracts cadets from a wide variety of majors.

“One of the great things about teaching Civic Discourse cross-listed as an honors seminar is the wide range of perspectives and knowledge [cadets] bring to the course,” said McDonald. “I have as much to learn from them as I hope they do from me.”

“I love teaching the honors seminars because they can treat timely issues and topics,” McDonald continued. She noted that this summer, the *Washington Post* published a series titled “The Long Struggle

for Suffrage.” The articles contain links to archival materials, including pictures, newspaper articles, films, speeches, and petitions that characterize the public discourse surrounding the movement.

Cadets will use this as a resource, as well as national and state celebrations of the anniversary of the 19th Amendment on the website of the 2020 Women’s Vote Centennial Initiative (WVCI). Digitally available materials, coupled with the small seminar format, were intentional elements of the course design.

Within the first two class meetings, McDonald strove to help cadets understand “how we’re going to look at this historical moment through the lens of literacy, culture, and education.”

For McDonald, the centennial celebration of women’s suffrage merges well with her own scholarly interest in rhetoric during the Progressive era, which ran roughly from 1890 to 1920, so choosing women’s suffrage was a natural fit for this seminar. Her doctoral dissertation was on writing instruction for women during the Progressive era.

McDonald explained that the world of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was divided into two spheres, public and private, with women largely confined to the private sphere, or home. Within that sphere, though, women communicated with one another by creating book clubs, as well as women’s clubs.

“It’s in that private sphere that [women] started to share concerns about the limited scope of their influence and roles in the public sphere,” she stated. Scrapbooks, diaries, and even cookbooks—common forms of women’s writing in the domestic sphere that cadets also will examine—chronicled the history of the women’s suffrage movement.

“The rhetorical abilities women cultivated in the private sphere were actually very useful in communicating their views and arguing for change in the public sphere,” said McDonald.

In all of her courses, Col. McDonald’s goal is to help cadets understand “how we employ rhetoric in both public and private contexts” and “how language, culture, and identities connect.” ❧

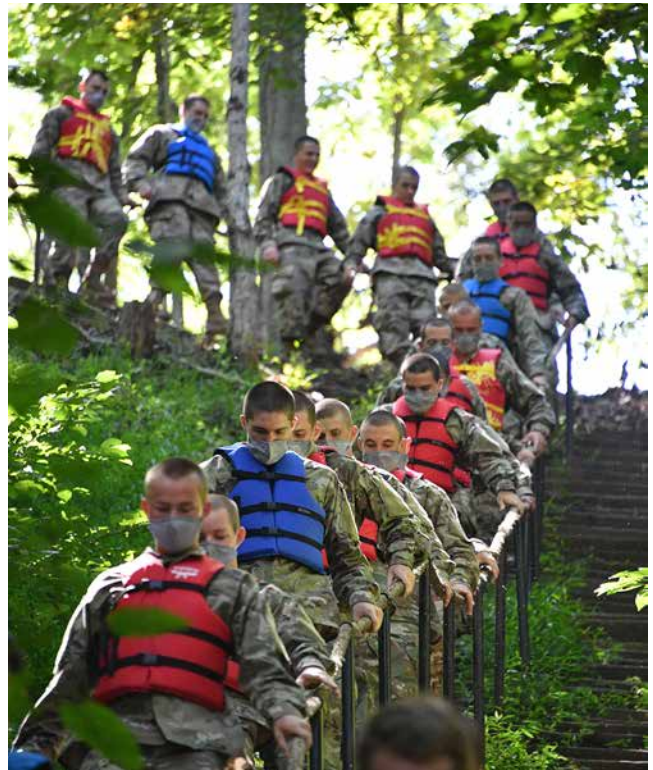
Blood Drive

Following more safety procedures than usual due to the coronavirus pandemic, the American Red Cross hosted a blood drive Sept. 15, 16, and 17 for faculty, staff, and cadets in Coker Hall. More than 200 cadets participated in the first blood drive of the academic year, with Band Company being the most represented.—VMI photos by Maj. Michelle Ellwood.



Rat Crucible

Matriculation training week culminated Aug. 30 with Rat Crucible, which included training on the North Post obstacles and swimming in the Maury River to Jordan's Point. The event concluded with the rats marching up Letcher Avenue to receive their shoulder boards and then taking part in their first Old Yell. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Pegg Named Commander of National Guard Unit

By Mary Price

Each August, Lt. Col. Todd Pegg '92 goes from busy to busier. As deputy commandant for operations, Pegg is responsible for creating the elaborate matrixes of schedules that govern rat and cadre activities during Matriculation Week—a task made much harder this year by COVID-19 and the need for social distancing.

And this year, Pegg added a new level of responsibility to his already full plate when he assumed duties as commander of the Virginia National Guard's 329th regional support group, headquartered in Virginia Beach, Virginia. In that role, he's responsible for more than 1,900 Guard soldiers across the state.

"It's the unit that really deploys the most in the Virginia Guard, and is very, very active," said Pegg, who entered the Guard as a cadet through the Simultaneous Membership Program (SMP), which allows cadets to both participate in Army ROTC and drill with the Guard on weekends.

In 1992 he won the Jackson-Hope Medal, which is awarded each year to cadets who graduate at the top of their class. After graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering, Pegg commissioned into the Guard.

"That way I could pursue my civilian engineering career and still be in the military," explained Pegg.

Over the course of his 28-year career with the Guard, Pegg has deployed four times, three of them to combat zones. He's served in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait—and the



Lt. Col. Todd Pegg takes command of the Virginia Beach-based 329th Regional Support Group in a change of command ceremony and exchange of organizational colors on Aug. 19.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Todd Pegg '92.

fourth time, Pegg's unit was headed to Iraq when they got word to report to Fort Lee, near Richmond, instead.

Pegg doesn't know how long he'll be commander, but he said assignments typically last about two years.

"It'll be my last assignment," he noted, adding that his mandatory retirement from the Guard will come in November 2022.

In a change of command ceremony held Aug. 19, Brig. Gen. K. Weedon Gallagher '90, land component commander of the Virginia National Guard, praised Pegg's leadership, saying, "You all know the kind of leader you're getting, the kind of strategic thinker

you're getting ... [Pegg] doesn't shy away from challenging and complex duty assignments. He tends to go after them."

For his part, Pegg said he's looking forward to "really being at a level where I can work on building and influencing a team with impacts that go farther beyond just the time I'm there. There's good training and working with leaders and soldiers who figure things out and develop skills and learn lessons—and that lasts longer than a command tour does."

There's good synergy, he added, between his job in the commandant's office at VMI and his service in the Guard. "The things I do in uniform for the Guard partner really well with the things I do in uniform on the commandant's staff, so I not only

have really good employer support of my service, but VMI also benefits from those experiences, skills, training, and other things like that," said Pegg.

Being commander, of course, means a daily level of responsibility—typically, there's a few hours of computer time each evening in addition to trips to Virginia Beach, which take place at least once a month. Pegg, though, is more than willing to put in the hours, knowing that a commander's time of service is typically short.

"When things go well and you're surrounded by the right people, you have an influence that long outlasts that," he said. 🦋

Despite Pandemic, Alumni Outreach Continues

By Mary Price

"We're not busy with events, but we're busy."

That's what Thom Brashears '95, chief operating officer of the VMI Alumni Association, has to say about his organization's activities this fall. With on-post events canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, he and others have been seeking ways to connect with members of the VMI community.

Had the pandemic not occurred, members of 15 classes would have returned to post this fall for reunions. So far, only two reunions have been rescheduled—both for 2021—and members of other classes are still mulling over their options.

"We're reaching out to all of the classes to see what they want to do," said Brashears.

"For some of the classes, we're facilitating a virtual reunion using Zoom. For others, they just kind of want to roll on."

Alumni whose reunions have been canceled will all receive a "koozie" can holder as a token gift, along with a note from Brashears.

Not surprisingly, Brashears is particularly concerned for older alumni whose reunions mark 55 years or more since they've

Continued on next page

graduated from the Institute, as they may not have another chance to gather with their brother rats. In late August, Brashears and other members of the Alumni Association staff were saddened to hear of the death of VMI's oldest alumnus, Charles Abbott '41.

Aside from helping to facilitate virtual reunions, Brashears and others will be undertaking a couple of new initiatives this fall. Traditionally, the Alumni Association has highlighted significant donors, but this year, the organization will be highlighting volunteer leaders such as chapter presidents as well.

"We're going to do some stewardship on them to promote them as volunteers, giving time or talent," said Brashears.

Additionally, Brashears is teaming with staff from the Office of Admissions to recruit new cadets from underserved areas such as central cities, as a means of offering opportunity to young men and women who might not otherwise study at a four-year college.

"This will be proof of concept on some things we want to do anyway," Brashears noted. "While we're not physically active, we're very active on the phone, email, and social media, staying connected. This pandemic has forced us to find new and exciting ways to do things so we can stay in constant touch, which is good." ❁



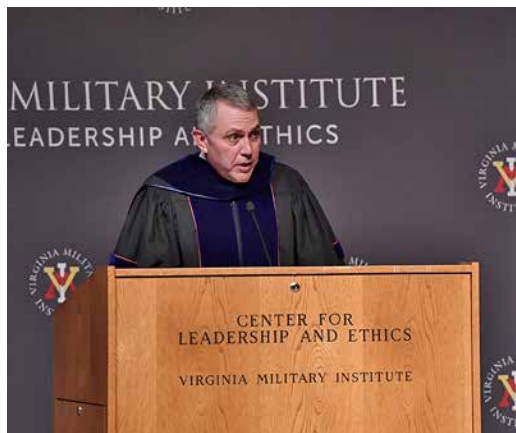
More than 90 brother rats from the Class of 1975 met via Zoom to celebrate their 45th reunion Sept. 19.—Photo courtesy of VMI Alumni Agencies.



Thom Brashears '95 helps lead a Zoom call with members of the Class of 1975.—Photo courtesy of VMI Alumni Agencies.

Virtual Academic Convocation

Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, marks the beginning of the academic year during a virtual convocation ceremony in Gillis Theater. Afterwards, cadets, faculty, and staff were recognized for achievements made during the 2019–20 academic year.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



styles,” said Col. Bill Wyatt, director of communications and marketing at VMI.

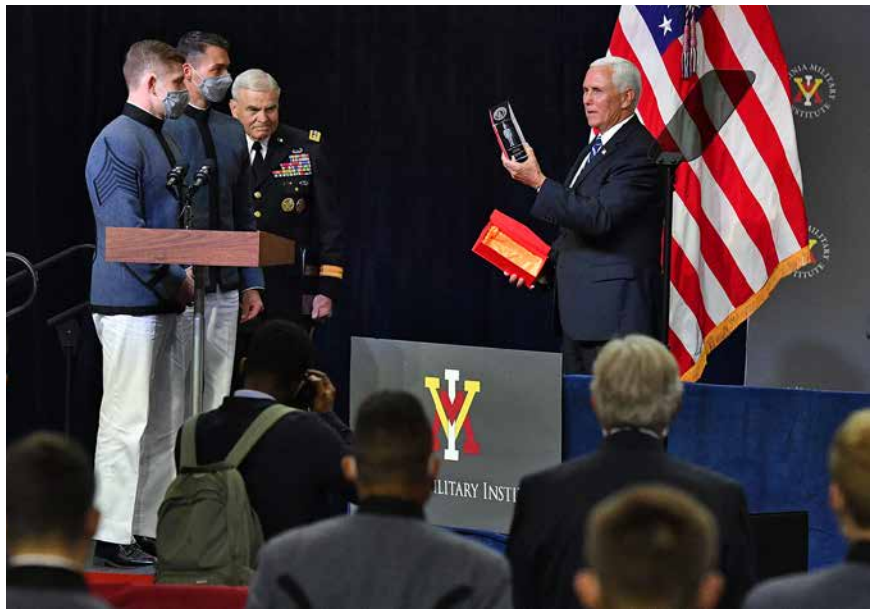
Due to the coronavirus pandemic, attendance was limited to members of the VMI community. Seating was socially distanced, and masks were required for all attendees. After his remarks, Pence met privately with about 10 cadets from his home state of Indiana, where he served as governor before being inaugurated as vice president in 2017.

Accompanied by Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, VMI superintendent, Pence, McCarthy, and Waltz then toured the George C. Marshall Museum before departing post with their crew in two MV-22 Ospreys, while onlookers crowded onto the balcony of Moody Hall to watch them walk across the Parade Ground to the aircraft.

While at least four presidents of the United States have visited VMI—both Lyndon B. Johnson and George W. Bush did so while in office—Thursday’s visit was only the second by a vice president to the Institute. Vice President Dick Cheney, who served under George W. Bush, came on Dec. 8, 2008.

In the past 10 years, speakers who’ve come to post have included former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, U.S. Senator and former Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, and the late congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis, all of whom addressed issues of national importance.

Pence did likewise, speaking on international affairs and defense issues. Before delving into those subjects, though, he praised VMI’s commitment to producing leaders such as Jonathan M. Daniels '61 and Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901, both of whom Pence mentioned by name.



Troy Smith '21, regimental commander, and Dylan Stoltzfus '21, general committee president, present Mike Pence a gift from VMI just prior to his talk.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

“For 181 years, this institution has been training up citizen-soldiers, who are educated, confident, capable leaders who have a love of learning and a high sense of public service,” the vice president said.

He specifically praised VMI’s commitment to honor as its bedrock value. “At VMI, honor is at the core of what you do,” Pence stated. “And thanks to the extraordinary education and training you are learning here today, honor will be the central characteristic of who you become.”

Pence also took the occasion to remind his listeners that he was speaking on the eve of the 19th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, in which nearly 3,000 Americans lost their lives, including two VMI alumni. At the time, Pence was a recently elected member of the U.S. House of Representatives, and in Washington that day, he could see the black smoke rising from the Pentagon.

That night, he returned home to his wife and young children. As he was heading back out the door to meetings on Capitol Hill, he recalled, his 5-year-old daughter, Audrey, stopped him with a question: “If we have to make a war, do you have to go?”

Pence’s reaction was to give his little girl a hug and reassure her that he was too old to go to war. “It was on that day that I thought of those who did have to



Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy '96 waves to the audience as Vice President Mike Pence introduces him.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



The Marines who flew the MV-22 Osprey to the parade ground.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Continued on next page

go,” Pence commented. Many thousands of American servicemen and women, including many from VMI, went on to serve in the war on terrorism in the years that followed the terrorist attacks, and 12 Institute alumni died in that war.

“We took the fight to the enemy,” said Pence, adding that since Sept. 11, 2001, there have been no major terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

Pence touted the record of the current administration, where service men and women have seen their largest pay increase in 10 years, and the Department of Defense has seen its largest budget increase since Ronald Reagan was in the White House. He also noted the administration’s creation of the first new military branch in 70 years, the U.S. Space Force.

“We’ve made the strongest military in the history of the world stronger still,” said Pence.

This commitment to military strength has paid dividends in the form of peace, Pence argued. He said that the administration has been guided by the rule, “If you want peace, prepare for war.” ISIS has been crushed, Pence said, and Syria’s use of chemical weapons against its own people has been brought to an end through the use of cruise missiles.

Pence also had some life lessons for cadets, regardless of their career plans. Essential qualities for success in life, he stated, are humility, an orientation to authority, and self-control. The vice president told cadets to consider others more important than themselves, respect the chain of command, and focus on discipline as the foundation of self-control.

“If you develop and maintain those virtues ... you will lead lives of consequence and distinction,” he stated. “America needs leaders like the ones from VMI to lead this nation forward.” ✪



Cadets pose with Pence just before taking off Sept. 10.—VMI Photo by H.

Indiana Cadets Meet Vice President

As the applause continued after Vice President of the United States Mike Pence finished speaking in Cameron Hall Sept. 10, a small group of cadets could be seen making their way hurriedly down the ramp from the seating on the floor. Those cadets—all from Pence’s home state of Indiana—had been selected to meet the vice president personally.

Three of them—Luke Nicksic ’22, Andrew Broecker ’22, and Amber Hamil ’21—talked later about what it was like to stand on the racquetball courts and meet such a high-profile leader.

“There was a cool little photo opportunity we had with the vice president,” said Nicksic. “He seemed genuinely happy to meet us.”

The cadets were told not to bring cell phones or smart watches—a security requirement for all attending Pence’s speech—but to come prepared with questions about leadership.



Mike Pence meets with cadets from Indiana, his home state, in addition to cadet leadership.—Official White House Photo by Delano T. Scott, Jr.

One cadet asked Pence which books he’d recommend. The answers were the Bible and *A Soldier of the Great War*, a work of historical fiction. The next questioner asked the vice president what he’d wanted to do when he was younger.

“He said he always felt a sense of service,” said Broecker. “He thought about serving his community.” Broecker added that Pence had mentioned President John F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. as figures who inspired him as a young man.

All too soon, though, Pence’s 10 minutes with the cadets were up. Plans had originally called for the vice president to meet the cadets before his speech, but a late arrival on post had precluded that.

“They were behind schedule, so it was kind of rushed,” Hamil noted.

“I was pretty excited,” said Broecker of the encounter. “It’s an honor to meet the vice president of the United States, even if you do or don’t agree with the political views.”

Hamil likewise reported a sense of awe and honor. “We didn’t even know he was coming until a couple days before,” she commented. “Not many people can say they’ve met the vice president of the United States.”

— Mary Price

“I was pretty upset because I’d worked my tail off this summer,” said Warren Dabney ’22, a defensive lineman and psychology major. “It was really heartbreaking, but there’s always a light at the end of the tunnel, so we’ll eventually play.”

Thankfully, the Southern Conference has not banned practices, so members of the football team are still practicing regularly, although broken up into smaller groups than they normally would be.

Dabney related that the team’s defensive line coach, Pat Kuntz, has been telling his players, “This is a marathon, not a sprint. Take it at a nice and easy pace and eventually, you’ll get there.”

Head coach Scott Wachenheim has echoed that message, according to Dabney, telling his team, “We’ve just got to keep it slow and steady because eventually we’re going to be able to play. We need to stay focused on what we want, on our team goals, and stay persistent.”

Like Dabney, offensive lineman Nick Hartnett ’22 sees a silver lining in the COVID-19 pandemic’s dark cloud.

“Coach Wachenheim and the team, very early on, even before I got here, instilled team values of grit, brotherhood, and purpose, and I think that’s very relevant today, given the circumstances,” said Hartnett, a computer science major. “We almost see this as an opportunity to make up for lost time.”

Missing the spring season was challenging enough, Hartnett explained—and then when cadets were sent home in March, most gyms and other fitness facilities were closed, leaving players with few options for weightlifting.

“I had to buy used weights and build my own squat rack in our driveway,” said Hartnett.

But when he came back to VMI in early August, Hartnett could see that others had been working just as hard while they were away as he had.

“I saw a huge improvement in the team,” Hartnett noted. “The difference between the team my freshman year and the team now, just from a purely physical, dialed-in perspective—it’s night and day.”

Playing in the spring, Hartnett believes, will give the team time to improve even more—and rats will be out of the Rat Line by then, thus giving them an increased ability to focus.

The pandemic, Hartnett commented, has taught him the importance of leading by example when it comes to following public health recommendations.

“A lot of people don’t enjoy wearing the masks, and staying on top of each other about this, but if anyone on the team tests positive, the whole team is done with practice and lifting for two weeks,” he explained. “[Mask wearing] is the rule. I’ll follow it.”

Men’s soccer midfielder Richie Quispe ’21 has also drawn strength from his coaches this fall—and like the football team, the men’s and women’s soccer teams are also practicing this fall in preparation for a spring season.

“[Head coach Max Watson] shows no lack of confidence that we’ll be able to compete,” said Quispe, who’s majoring in biology and hopes to commission into the Marine Corps.

On a personal level, Quispe has chosen to let go of what he can’t control.



Members of the women’s soccer team participate in a scrimmage Sept. 18.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

“Some of these things are out of my control, and so I’m understanding that and moving forward the best I can with the things I can control,” he stated. “We’re in a time where everything is changing, and you can’t get too caught up with the small details.”

Women’s soccer midfielder Natalie Carpenter ’21 is also waiting to see what the spring season brings. She’s played soccer since she was 4 years old, and the ups and downs of August weighed on her heavily.

Continued on next page

Carpenter and her teammates received the news that there would be no fall season approximately two weeks after they'd arrived. A normally laid-back assistant coach suddenly turned serious, Carpenter recalled, and told players to report to the Corps Physical Training Facility for a meeting with Dr. David Diles, athletic director.

"We kind of all knew," Carpenter recalled. "It was pouring down rain, too, which had a very dramatic effect."

Diles told the players that they'd need to head home before reporting back to VMI Aug. 26, but Carpenter was able to stay because she's a member of the S6 staff, which oversees cadet NCAA athletes.

Eventually, the team was able to reunite and resume practice. Carpenter finds it helps her mental state.

"It's kind of a stress relief from this place," the international studies major said of playing soccer. "It clears my head a lot. I love all of my teammates. Being with them is my favorite thing."

One of seven seniors on the women's soccer team, Carpenter is grateful that now she has a chance to play her favorite sport until possibly April, rather than November, which is when the season would have ended if the team had been able to play its regular season. But at the same time, there's the gnawing worry there won't be a season at all.

"We know we'll practice, but we don't know if we'll ever play soccer again," she commented. "But I think we're doing a pretty good job of handling it, and I don't think our level of practice has dropped or anything. We're all just playing right now for the hope of spring." ❄️

Rifle Team Preps for SoCon Championships

"We're the only show in town."

That's what Lt. Col. Bill Bither, coach of VMI's NCAA rifle team, has to say about his team's status this fall. With all other NCAA fall sports on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, the rifle team is the only team competing this fall—and as of early September, team members were gearing up for their first competition, to be held Sept. 26 at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

In mid-August, the Southern Conference postponed most fall sports but did not include rifle. "Certain sports were deemed low risk for COVID," Bither explained. "We were one of those."

The cancellation of other sports, plus Bither's decision to recruit incoming cadets at the Matriculation Fair for the first time this year, resulted in a problem many coaches would like to have: a surge of

interest in their sport. At the Matriculation Fair, Bither reported, over 70 rats put their names on a list showing interest in joining the rifle team.

That was more than VMI's facilities or the rifle team's budget could possibly allow—ammunition alone runs approximately \$20,000 per year—so Bither invited only those with previous shooting experience to try out. Approximately 26 rats tried out, and nine made the team. Of those nine, four were women.

"It's really tough recruiting women to shoot here at VMI because a lot of women are recruited for other teams," Bither commented. This year, he noted, he was lucky to find some who'd been on shooting teams in high school or had trained with a junior ROTC program.

That's creating a sense of optimism about the upcoming season as the 11 men and 11 women on the team prepare for fall competitions.

"We're coming off a really good year last year," said Bither, calling last year's third place finish at the Southern Conference championships "a remarkable performance."

He said that although the team had lost five seniors to graduation, many team members, particularly among the women, are only in their 3rd Class year.

"A couple of them are shooting really good small bore. ... We're going to have a really good team," Bither commented.

VMI is set to host the Southern Conference men's and women's rifle team championships in early March at the Kilbourne Hall rifle range.

— Mary Price



James Doucett '23 practices air rifle on the range in Kilbourne Hall before the Keydets' Sept. 26 match.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

'It's a People Game'

Cadet EMTs, Now Approaching Record Number, Help Those in Need

By Mary Price

Easily recognizable in their navy blue shirts, VMI's cadet emergency medical technicians (EMTs) seem to be everywhere at certain times of the year. During Matriculation Week, the period of time immediately following the arrival of rats, some of them are working almost 18 hours a day as the new cadets and their cadre train in the August heat.

But even when life at the Institute is quieter, the EMTs are there, ready to step up and step in should an injury or illness strike.



Cadet EMT Noah Kirk '22 checks the temperature of Mary Stuart Harlow before she enters Marshall Hall on Rat Sunday, Aug. 23. —VMI Photo by Mary Price.

"As cadet EMTs, we make sure the entire Corps is covered," said Allen Xu '21, cadet in charge of the cadet EMTs.

He quickly added, though, that the EMTs aren't just there for cadets. They also help faculty, staff, and visitors to post when necessary. "At any events, we're making sure the public is covered," he commented. "A lot of it is accident prevention and response to an accident."

And thankfully, there's no shortage of EMTs: cadet interest is strong, and this year, once all cadets currently in the pipeline have finished their training, there will be 71 cadet EMTs, a record number. Ten years ago, for example, there were only about 25.

"It's the largest it's ever been," said Samantha Schwegel '21, a cadet EMT and physics major who hopes to become a Naval flight officer. "We're very excited about those numbers."

VMI has had cadet EMTs since the 1990s, explained Donnie McBrayer, EMT advisor, but back in those days, there were only a handful—perhaps four to six. In the spring of 2016, they became certified by the state as a non-transport emergency medical service (EMS) agency.

Thanks to that certification, VMI's cadet EMTs can now handle 911 calls on post rather than waiting for the Lexington Fire Department's EMTs to arrive. Now, Lexington only gets called if the patient in question needs transportation to a hospital.

That does happen, of course, but most often, cadet injuries and illnesses can be treated on post. During Matriculation Week, EMTs assigned to each company follow the rats throughout all their activities and treat everything from panic attacks and upset stomachs to orthopedic injuries.

"There are tons of sports injury problems, and this year especially we've had to make appointments with the infirmary because of COVID," said cadet EMT Austin Wagner '21. He explained that because the VMI infirmary is no longer accepting walk-ins, cadet EMTs are usually the ones who call the infirmary to make appointments for rats.

To say that the cadet EMTs have long days during Matriculation Week is an understatement. "We need to be awake before the cadre," said Schwegel, adding that during that week, she's usually up around 5:40 a.m. "We're on our feet all day with very minimal breaks, and we don't go to bed until everyone else has gone to bed, which is around 11:30."

Perhaps appropriately, the EMT-B (basic) course that all aspiring cadet EMTs must take and pass in order to earn their certification is likewise arduous. In the summer of 2018, Xu, Schwegel, and Wagner all took the course together. For four weeks, the three were in class each weekday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"When you do have your breaks, you're using your time to study and catch up, and you also have to do ride-alongs in town," Schwegel commented. Ride-alongs, she explained, are when an EMT in training accompanies EMTs from an agency such as the Lexington Fire Department on their calls. Ten ride-alongs are required for EMT certification, as are passing a national-level exam and holding CPR certification.

During much of the school year, the EMTs aren't as visible as they are during Matriculation Week, but they're still there to assist as needed. They're at each football and basketball game, and when the entire Corps travels to an event, the EMTs always accompany them. At parades, they're there for everyone, members of the VMI community and visitors to post alike.

"We don't wear these uniforms [at parades]," said Schwegel. "We blend in with the crowd, but we carry backpacks and radios."

Of course, there's also been COVID-19-specific education needed. "We got PowerPoint trainings from Carilion Patient Transport, and we used that to do some training on the precautions and also the

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signs and symptoms of COVID,” said McBrayer. He added that the commandant’s office has made sure that the cadet EMTs have plenty of personal protective equipment (PPE), including N95 masks.

So far, COVID-19 hasn’t greatly changed life on post for cadet EMTs, but there are a few extra duties. During Rat Sunday, for example, cadet EMTs were stationed outside Marshall Hall to take the temperatures of community members coming to the event, and on Matriculation Day, they performed health screenings for all incoming rats and those accompanying them.

But despite the coronavirus pandemic, the long days each August, and the summertime heat—sometimes followed by the extreme cold of Breakout in winter—the cadet EMTs love their jobs.

“It’s a people game,” said Xu, who plans to become an Army doctor. “It’s interacting with patients. One day your patient might want to become an EMT based off how you interact with them.”

For Wagner, the EMT experience has changed his future plans. He had once wanted to commission into the Marine Corps, but now he plans to enlist in the Air Force and do combat rescue instead.

“You have to work together to succeed ... [and] make sure the Corps and everyone is safe,” he said.

He’s even found time to volunteer with the Fairfield Volunteer Rescue Squad, which has given him a unique perspective on how Rockbridge area community members view VMI.

“They’re always interested in seeing how VMI works, and you get to hear their viewpoints,” he commented.

Schwegel enjoys the bond she’s developed with fellow EMTs like Xu and Wagner.

“We’re kind of like a big family almost,” she said. “I’m with these guys every day. We took the class together back in the summer of 2018 so we’ve all grown...Plus I love helping people. Col. [Bill] Wanovich [commandant] describes us as citizen-soldiers.” ❄



Savannah Diamond '22, one of VMI's many cadet EMTs, applies sunscreen to a rat during Matriculation Week.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.

VMI Highly Ranked by Major Publications

By Mary Price

For the sixth year in a row, VMI placed favorably in the fall college rankings, maintaining its status among the top liberal arts colleges nationwide. Three publications—*U.S. News & World Report*, *Money* magazine, and *Washington Monthly*—released their college rankings in August and September.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, VMI rose to No. 69 among national liberal arts colleges, up from No. 72 last year. Among public liberal arts colleges, the Institute ranked fourth only behind the United States Military Academy, the United States Naval Academy, and the United States Air Force Academy.

VMI’s engineering program was ranked 29th out of 220 schools nationwide that have an accredited engineering program but do not grant a doctoral degree.



Rats march donated food to the Rockbridge Area Relief Association food pantry in January for the annual Rat Unity event. VMI takes the No. 1 spot for promotion of public service in *Washington Monthly*'s college rankings.—VMI File Photo by Kelly Nye.

For the first time this year, *U.S. News* included rankings of undergraduate computer science programs. VMI’s computer

science program came in at 210 out of nearly 500 accredited computer science programs nationally.

VMI also placed highly in *Washington Monthly*'s recently released college rankings, taking the No. 1 spot for promotion of public service. The Institute ranked 35th out of 218 liberal arts colleges nationwide, the top ranked public liberal arts college in Virginia.

Money magazine ranked VMI 26th among colleges and universities nationwide, a jump of more than 20 placings from 2019's rankings.

Money ranked the Institute 16th among public universities nationwide and third among schools in Virginia. ❄

9/11 Memorial Stair Climb

More than 300 cadets and local EMTs took time to participate in the 9/11 memorial stair climb in barracks. Led by the VMI Firefighting Club, this climb honors the service and sacrifice of first responders who climbed 110 floors in the World Trade Center 19 years ago.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



Food Service Changes Focus on Convenience

By Mary Price

As with everything else at VMI this fall, food service has undergone numerous changes in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

In Crozet Hall, in addition to three separate formations for breakfast roll call (BRC) and supper roll call (SRC), there's been the addition of a grab-and-go lunch option in the Sub's Mess, which is located on the side

of Crozet facing Main Street. The to-go lunch includes the hot entrée of the day and a vegetable, plus chips and a dessert. Bottles of water are available as well.

"They literally just grab it, and they're in one door and out the next," said Mary Davis, resident district manager for Parkhurst Dining, VMI's food service partner.

The first day the grab-and-go lunch was offered, Monday, Aug. 31, only 25 cadets chose that option. Two days later, that number had swelled to an astonishing 400, a response that Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93, director of auxiliary services, deemed "fantastic."

The Post Exchange (PX) has also been the site of many changes designed to move cadets along more quickly and reduce personal contact. All of last year's options—a hot grill line and Starbucks coffee, plus Freshens Fresh Food Studio, which serves rice bowls, sandwiches, smoothies and more—are available, but there's now online ordering and a self-checkout system as well.

Online ordering began in early September. "It was a little slow, to be honest with you," said Donna Hart, assistant director of retail for Parkhurst Dining. "But I have a feeling it's going to go insane. My staff would much rather know they have 50 burgers to fry."

The self-checkout system works exactly like such a system in a grocery store. Anything with a bar code can scan, and the buyer



Parkhurst Dining employees prepare chicken wings in a concession stand of Foster Stadium to sell to cadets for an on-the-go option.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

then pays with a credit card. "It's just like walking into Walmart," said Hart.

To reduce the number of people in the PX at any given time, seating capacity has been cut by approximately 75 percent, and the televisions have been turned off. Traffic flow, too, has changed: cadets are encouraged to enter the PX via Third Barracks and exit via the side doors.

And while both Crozet Hall and the PX offer a multitude of food options for cadets, everyone gets a yearning for something new and different every once in a while. Since cadets currently are allowed

off post on a very limited basis, Clark and others have worked to bring them a new concept: the DCC at Foster Stadium. The letters stand for Dan's Concession Cart, and the namesake is Dan Decarlo, Parkhurst's concessions supervisor at VMI.

It's meant to be a food truck without the truck, serving fare that can't be found elsewhere on post. At lunchtime on Wednesday, Sept. 9, the first trial run of "concept food" was offered on post, with chicken wings and cole slaw served at the visitor's concession stand.

As of early September, Clark was planning on offering concept food on Wednesdays and Fridays at lunchtime. "It's dependent on staffing, really, as well as interest from the cadets," he said. "We've put so many restrictions on [cadets], we want to give them something."



Cadets select toppings for their nachos at Foster Stadium on Sept. 23.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

And while everyone is eager for the pandemic to be over, Clark hopes that some of the dining service changes made this fall, particularly the PX's online ordering and self-checkout system, will become a permanent change.

"Those are kind of key to getting more traffic, with staff and employees coming into the PX," he noted. 🍷



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Retirement Ceremony

Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, honors recently retired faculty and staff during a ceremony in Jackson Memorial Hall Sept. 18. The honorees include Col. Stewart MacInnis, Communications & Marketing; Col. Mike Wawrzyniak, Army ROTC; Col. Mark Wilkinson, Department of History; and Col. David Williams, Auxiliary Services.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



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