

A Century and a Half of Service Camper Family Has Seen Much Change and Growth

By Mary Price

When it comes to a legacy of service to the VMI community, the Camper family is a member of the century-plus club. John Camper, who oversees house maintenance and waterproofing for Physical Plant, is the longest-serving Camper, with almost 42 years. His cousin, Larry Camper, was hired in 1987, so this year will be his 34th at the Institute. John's significant



Tracy Gordon administers keys to fellow VMI Physical Plant employee Bryan Fix in Hinty Hall.—VMI
Photo by Kelly Nye.

other, Tracy Gordon, contributes 23 years, and John's parents, the late James "Jimmy" Camper and Margie Camper, each had 30 years of service before their 1995 retirements.

Add up all of those, and you get an astounding total: 159 years. And that's not even including the service of John and Larry's grandfather, Russell Camper, who was working for a local contractor when houses were

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Black Alumni, Faculty Stress Challenges, Growth

By Mary Price

"Don't just go about VMI. Utilize your network. Utilize the people around you. Tell them your dreams and aspirations."

That's what Jamaal Walton '07 offered as advice for current cadets as he and five other Black alumni, plus a former faculty member, gathered virtually Feb. 15 for a question-and-answer panel,

"Black History Month: Through the Lens of VMI." The event, which attracted just under 90 attendees, was sponsored by the Promaji Club and moderated by Whitney Edwards-Roberson '22, cadet in charge of that club.

In addition to Walton, the president of his class, other panelists included Maj.

Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, interim superintendent; Adam Randolph '72 and Richard "Dick" Valentine '72, both among the first African-Americans to matriculate in 1968; and Dr. Gregory Mixon, the first full-time Black faculty member. Rounding out the

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Tin Can Tells Story of Brotherhood, Survival

By Mary Price

At first glance, a recent addition to the VMI Museum's collection seems to be nothing more than a piece of scrap metal.

It's a 1940s-era tin can, crudely fashioned into a drinking vessel by the addition of a handle. But if that cup could talk, it would tell stories of courage, brotherhood, loyalty, and a citizen-soldier alumna's will to survive.

On Jan. 29, Col. Keith Gibson '77, director of the VMI Museum System, did the talking for that cup as he shared its incredible story with members of the Board of Visitors External Relations Committee.

The story begins with Maj. Albert G. Lambert Jr. '38, who joined legions of VMI alumni in fighting the Axis powers during World War II. As a B-17 pilot for the Army Air Corps, he flew 25 missions successfully and thus became eligible to come home. Just as he did so, though, Lambert learned that his brother, Henry, was missing in action, and he became determined not to come home without him. He kept flying missions.

"On the 33rd and a half mission—it's the half mission, you know, that gets you in trouble—he's shot down," Gibson related.

Captured by the Germans in October 1944, Lambert was taken to Stalag Luft III, a POW camp specifically for pilots. There, miraculously, the two brothers were reunited. "I've been expecting you. What took you so long?" kidded Henry when he first saw Albert. As the Russians approached Stalag Luft III, the POWs were marched 365 miles to Stalag VII-A, Nazi Germany's largest prisoner of war camp.

Albert and Henry Lambert would remain at Stalag VII-A until the camp was liberated by the Allies on April 29, 1945. But during the dark winter of 1944-45, as rations grew more and more meager, their survival was questionable.

Salvation came in the form of a sympathetic guard, Sgt. Schultz, who smuggled in food for the starving prisoners. "He, at his own peril, snuck in half loaves of bread, a potato, onion, beer, to throw into the stew pot," said Gibson.

Sometime during that winter, one of the Lambert brothers made the cup so they could partake of that stew. The cup came home with them, and after the war, Henry Lambert had it silver plated and engraved with a dedication to his brother before giving it to him.

The fall of Nazi Germany wasn't the end of Albert Lambert's flying career. He transitioned into the U.S. Air Force when that branch of the service was established in 1947, served in the Korean War, and then retired as a highly decorated full colonel in 1953.

But those wartime experiences in Germany, of course, were not forgotten, and both Lambert brothers knew they hadn't survived because of their own efforts. During the postwar years, Albert Lambert initiated a sponsorship for Sgt. Schultz to come to the

United States and become an American citizen.

"They discover that they, too, are brothers," said Gibson of Albert Lambert and the German sergeant. The friendship would endure throughout their lives.

Decades passed, and upon Albert Lambert's death in February 2000, the cup passed into the hands of his daughter, Caroline Lambert McCready. Approximately five years ago, Gibson related, McCready died, and her husband recently came across the cup as he was preparing to move to a smaller house.

It was McCready's husband who donated it to the VMI Museum, Gibson said, along with a letter that concluded, "Colonel Lambert took a special pride in being a member of the Class of 1938 at VMI. Please take care of his cup

as there is not another one on the planet and it's being donated with the heartfelt wishes of Carol, his daughter."

The cup "is a participant in that story, just as the Lambert brothers and Sgt. Schultz were," said Gibson with emotion. "It is a witness."

At the conclusion of Gibson's story, the BOV committee members were silent for a few moments, digesting what they'd heard. "I'm not sure how to follow up," said Gene Scott '80, chair of the committee. "We should have saved you for last. I'm a little emotional right now."

For his part, Gibson was quick to point out that the cup is likely not the last object with an inspirational story that will find its way to the VMI Museum.

"This is the future of VMI as well," he predicted. "They'll be more stories like this in the future." ❀



This tin can was recently given to the VMI Museum by the family of Col. Albert G. Lambert Jr. '38.—Photo courtesy of Col. Keith Gibson '77.

INSTITUTE REPORT

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

Faculty Research Explores Grit, Fit

By Mary Price

More than four years ago, Lt. Col. Sara Whipple, associate professor of psychology, began to wonder: what factors determine a cadet's successful adjustment to the rigors of VMI, especially during the stressful yet crucial rat year?

This past fall, the results of that inquiry were published online in the journal *Psychology in the Schools*, with Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, professor of economics and business, as co-author. Their paper, "Grit, Fit, Gender, and Academic Achievement Among First-Year College Students," examines two factors as possibly influencing cadets' academic performance: grit and person/environment fit.

In this context, Whipple and Dimitrova-Grajzl defined grit as "persistence and passion toward long-term goals," a definition coined by grit researcher Dr. Angela Duckworth, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. As a proxy for person/environment fit, they used ROTC scholarships as a measure of dedication to pursuing a military career.

Whipple began a few summers ago by sending emails to all members of the incoming rat class, asking them a variety of questions about grit, self-esteem, stress,

optimism, and social connectedness, among many other factors.

"It was even before they stepped foot on VMI, which was really important to me because I didn't want them to be tainted by any sort of experiences," Whipple stated.

In November, she collected more data from members of the class, and again in the spring. She then invited Dimitrova-Grajzl, a trusted colleague and expert in statistics, to collaborate with her on the project, and together they collected data sets from that class three more times: once each in the spring of their 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Class years.

As they worked with the data, Whipple and Dimitrova-Grajzl began to wonder if the cadets' self-assessment of grit was accurate. With the permission of the cadets, the two faculty members set up a meeting with their tactical officers to get a sense of how the officers, who oversee military training, would rate those cadets when it came to grit.

"They're not as correlated as you'd think—the self-report versus the observer report," said Whipple, adding that she and Dimitrova-Grajzl are still interpreting the data from that meeting.

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Lt. Col. Sara Whipple and Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl discuss their research on grit and person/environment fit among cadets.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

panel were Maj. Katrina D. Brown '06, an early double-minority cadet, and Deuntay Diggs '07, who came out as gay while at VMI.

Throughout the hour-long presentation, panelists took questions from the audience. Topics included memories of being the first African-American to fill a particular role, what panelists might change if they could go back to being a cadet, and what advice they'd have for current cadets.

The only non-alumnus on the panel, Mixon came to VMI in 1989 shortly after earning his doctorate.

"My major objective was to make sure I did the best job I could," he stated, "by teaching African-American history, western civilization, and being accessible to the cadets."

Alumni, meanwhile, shared myriad stories of their time at the Institute. Valentine in particular talked about barrier breaking, as he was among the first African-American cohort to arrive at the Institute. He hadn't looked to do something that no one had done before; because his high school was integrated, race hadn't been much on his mind when he decided to enroll at VMI.

"The experience was basically non-eventful," he said of moving into barracks. "The

hardest part of being a Black cadet that first year was not being Black. It was being a rat."

Valentine could feel the stares, though, when he left post. "You need to understand that this was 1968," he commented. "Walking uptown, going freely about your way, this was new to everybody. To see a Black person in a VMI uniform was shocking to a lot of people, Black and white. The environment was totally different."

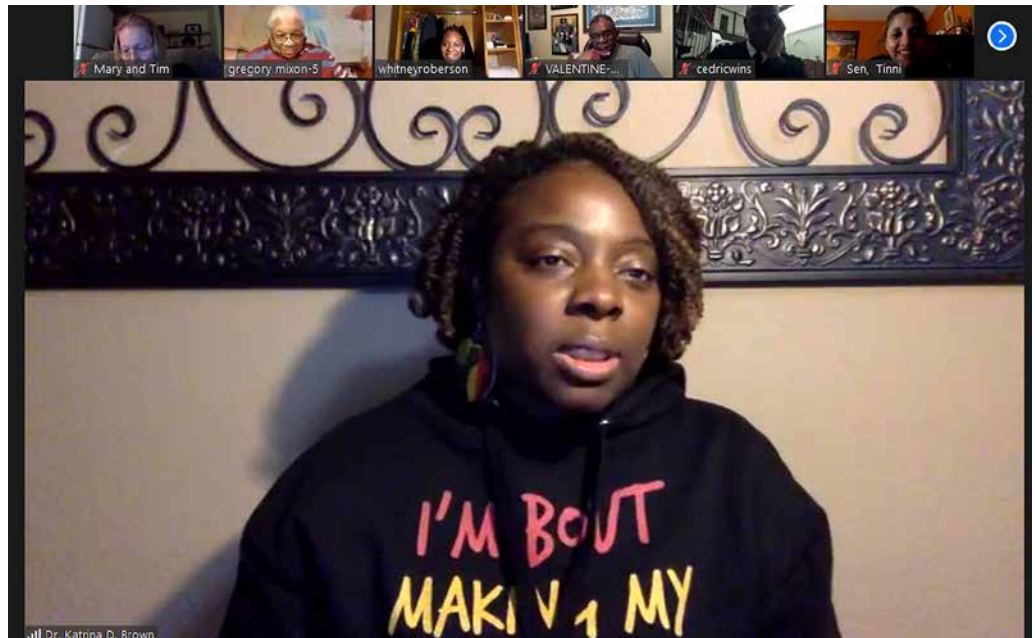
Central to helping him and others adjust was the support of Lexington's African-American community. There were standing invitations to Sunday dinners, he noted, and he and the other Black cadets had to be very conscientious about rotating among households so as not to hurt anyone's feelings.

Randolph agreed with Valentine's assessment of integration, saying, "The administration had done such a great job preparing the Corps for our arrival that it was pretty much a non-issue."

Asked what he'd change about VMI if he could go back to being a cadet, Wins replied that he'd have had female cadets as part of the Corps. "It wasn't [co-ed] when I was there, and you know, I was always fascinated by the fact that I'd chosen to come to an all-male college," he remarked.

Approximately two decades younger than Wins, Brown double majored in psychology and English at VMI. She commissioned into the Air Force and went on to earn a doctorate in clinical psychology.

"It was kind of difficult, but being around other Black females or even Black males helped out," said Brown,



Maj. Katrina D. Brown '06 was one of several alumni panelists during the Black History Month forum.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.



Dick Valentine '72 was among the first African-Americans to matriculate at VMI.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.

Continued on next page

who is now teaching a section of introductory psychology at the Institute virtually while stationed at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia.

Brown added that faculty members who taught Black history and literature also made her feel welcome.

"It kind of helped me feel more comfortable, like I belonged there," said Brown.

Also mentioning the support he'd received, this time from fellow cadets, was Walton, now associate athletic director for external communications at the College of Charleston.

"I was lucky," said Walton, explaining that he didn't have to look far to find other high-achieving Black cadets. Among them were Jason Quash '04, general committee president; Chris Perry '05, who was a member of the honor court and would go on to become

a member of the commandant's staff; and Mark Searles '06, regimental commander.

"Coming in as a rat, I saw what I wanted to be like," he commented.

A brother rat of Walton's, Diggs came out as gay during his rat year and was immediately disowned by his family. He faced some stigma from his fellow cadets as well.

"It was very difficult," said Diggs. "I felt very isolated. I had to fight through all of that and show that I did belong there and that I brought something to VMI."

Diggs persevered, graduated, and now works for a law enforcement agency in Northern Virginia. Despite the challenges he'd faced as a cadet, he didn't skip reunions, and even at the five-year mark, he found attitudes softening.

"At my five-year reunion, I had brother rats coming up to me and saying, "I

apologize for the things I said to you," he stated. By 10 years, classmates were telling him they were raising their children to be inclusive and kind.

Diggs now sees his years at the Institute as a growth experience, and one that he's incredibly grateful for.

"My time at VMI, if I'm honest—I wouldn't change anything," he said. "All of those experiences led me to where I am today and gave me the tools to deal with certain situations in the workplace."

Today, Diggs is in charge of hiring at the agency he works for, and he keeps a sharp eye out for VMI credentials. "If I see VMI on a resume, they're going to get hired," he said.

Correction: A previous version of this story incorrectly identified Jamaal Walton '07 as the first Black class president. The first Black class president was Anthony Hamilton '79. ❄

Regimental Commander Receives AMCSUS Award

By Mary Price

Troy Smith '21, regimental commander, has been selected as a 2021 Association of Military Colleges and Schools of the United States (AMCSUS) Leadership Award winner. The award, which consists of a \$1,000 check and a plaque, was presented at the organization's scholarship and awards ceremony, held virtually in late February.

This year marks the sixth time in the past decade, and the third year in a row, that a VMI cadet has won an AMCSUS leadership award. Previous recipients have included Chad Surganovich '12, Hardy Hendren '15, Luke Phillips '17, John O'Donnell '19, and Jacob Baehman '20.

Each year, this honor is awarded to two top leaders at the collegiate level and two at the preparatory school level.

Smith, who will commission into the Army and serve as a field artillery officer, is a computer science major. A native of Waxhaw, North Carolina, he first became aware of VMI when his brother, Shane Smith '15, matriculated. He'd long wanted a military career, so the Institute was a natural fit.

Over the course of his cadetship, Smith has held steadily increasing leadership roles within the Corps. He served as a clerk for Company C his 3rd Class year, and then as regimental sergeant major his 2nd Class year. This year, he's responsible for the entire Corps of Cadets.



Troy Smith '21

Smith said that among the most important skills VMI has taught him are the need to be flexible, listen to others, and communicate well. He's also learned that leadership isn't just about him as an individual.

"You've done well as an individual, in your academics, in PT, in whatnot, but to be a real leader, you have to cultivate that in your subordinates and in your organization," he commented. "It's no longer just excellence for yourself and your whole organization. It's kind of a maturity checkpoint, to stop thinking about your own achievement and start thinking about the group's achievement."

This year, of course, Smith and the entire Corps have had to navigate the myriad restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Sometimes you have to break that hard news, enforce that new standard," he commented. "Maybe we don't get to see our rats this week, or we don't get to do the PT we wanted to do or the trips we wanted to do."

Smith expressed his thanks to previous regimental commanders Ben Dixon '19 and Austin Stansberry '20, both of whom have been in touch to offer their guidance and support.

Now, as his cadetship draws to a close, Smith is looking forward to new opportunities as an Army officer.

"There's so many cross-disciplinary intersections of different organizations and professions," he stated. "I'm excited not only to get into my job as a field artillery officer, but to see where that can lead. There's just limitless opportunity, to sum it up."

AMCSUS consists of 40 military colleges and high schools, including the nation's senior and junior military colleges. Headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia, the nonprofit organization advocates on behalf of its member institutions and promotes high military and ethical standards. ❄

being built in what's now the North Institute Hill parking lot in the early 1950s.

Another yardstick is superintendents. John Camper has worked under five of the Institute's 14 superintendents, and with the possibility of a new superintendent to be hired this spring, he might work under a sixth. Then there was Gen. George R.E. Shell '31, who had retired as superintendent before Camper came to work for the Institute. In the early 1980s, John drove Shell to football games at Foster Stadium.

If the Board of Visitors names a new superintendent in the spring, John will have achieved an incredible feat: knowing nearly half of the individuals who've held the Institute's top leadership position. He's also known an array of commandants, chiefs of staff, and other senior members of the Institute leadership team.

Quite often, it's been more than just a nodding acquaintance, as John leads the team of Physical Plant employees responsible for maintaining Institute housing. The casual chats that come with repairing a leaky faucet, for example, have helped John get to know a wide swath of the VMI community.

He's been fond of many families over the years, but he was especially impressed by Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, the Institute's 14th superintendent, and his wife, Pamela Peay. "They're both very class act, just super nice," he recalled.

For John Camper, who's now 60, the path to VMI revealed itself almost before the ink was dry on his high school diploma from Rockbridge High School in Fairfield.

"I actually graduated from high school on a Friday, and Claude Hamrick was the superintendent of buildings and grounds, which is [Michelle Caruthers'] position now," said Camper. "He was at my graduation party, and he told me and a friend to come to work on Monday and we'd have a job."

The friend never showed up, but John did. It was June 6, 1979, and John has been a VMI employee ever since, working his way up from carpenter's helper to his current position, in which he's responsible not only for the maintenance of just under 30 Institute-owned houses but also several other Institute-owned properties, plus waterproofing all across post.

Tracy, meanwhile, is a relative newcomer to VMI by Camper standards. She was hired in 1998 as a part-time custodian, and by her

own admission, her first few days on the job were just plain difficult. Arriving in the dark at 5 a.m., she had trouble finding Lejeune Hall, but the building was already unlocked, so she was able to get in and clean on the first day. The second day, the fellow custodian who'd unlocked the building the day before called in sick, and she couldn't get her keys to work. A few days later she was chastised by the VMI Police for improper parking.

"At that point, I was ready to leave VMI," she related.

A chance encounter at Walmart changed her mind, though—and she remembers the conversation just like it happened yesterday. She ran into Barry McDonald, then the custodial manager, who was shopping with his son. McDonald turned to his son and said, "This is Tracy, who I work with."

Tracy didn't miss the fact that McDonald had put her on an equal footing. "He introduced me as 'who I work with, not as my employee or someone who works for me,'" she commented. "Barry McDonald's

words are what changed [my mind]. I had so much respect for him after that."

Nowadays, Tracy works as the administrative assistant in Hinty Hall, a position she's held since 2007.

Larry Camper came to VMI as a carpenter, after several years of building houses. Over the years, his responsibilities have shifted quite a bit, and he's now chief of maintenance and



Larry Camper, chief of maintenance and operations, goes over inclement weather plans with Maj. Eric Schwartz '95, deputy director of VMI Physical Plant.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

operations. As the title suggests, it's far from a small job on a daily basis, and it balloons enormously when major events take place.

"Events are huge," said John. Larry confirmed that assessment, saying, "Every year events grow, and the events we have have spread out. COVID has changed that, too."

Many Institute events, of course, are both annual and predictable: matriculation, Ring Figure, Breakout, and graduation top the list. Then there's the special occasions when dignitaries come to post, and when distinguished visitors are from the highest levels of government, Physical Plant needs to liaison with organizations such as the Secret Service and FBI.

"They're interesting to work with," said Larry of those organizations. "Each group is different in terms of what they want and

Continued on next page

what they don't want. We try to give them what they want, but also represent VMI well."

Over the years, all three have prepared for the arrival of many national-level leaders, among them President George W. Bush in 2002 and Vice President Mike Pence in 2020. Former President Jimmy Carter came to post in 2001 to receive an award, and Tracy saw him at close range, as she was working in the old Lejeune Hall at the time. Both Campers saw Carter get off the helicopter that had brought him to post.

They've seen a lot of change, too. Cell phones? Not when either Camper started. John especially remembers the technologies that preceded them.

"We've seen the first two-way radios come on post, and the first pagers," he observed.

At first, they didn't even have battery-powered tools in the carpenter's shop. Among the three of them, no one remembers exactly when computers came to their teams, but they say that change likely came with the dawn of the 21st century.

Moving heavy and unusual objects has also been part of the Campers' experience. The mounted hide of Little Sorrel, Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's war horse, has long been a part of the VMI Museum's collection, and he's been moved a handful of times over the past few decades.

Then there's the statue of Matthew Fontaine Maury which is now in Maury-Brooke Hall. Many years ago, it stood behind the circulation desk in Preston Library, and when this enormous bronze sculpture was moved up a flight of stairs to the top of a landing, John was called to assist.

"We actually rolled that thing on pipes," he recalled.

Thankfully, a contractor took on the job the next time the Maury statue needed to travel.

Sometimes, there's even construction from the ground up involved. "In the mid-'80s, we built the observatory building over at McKethan [Park]," said John. "We get to do fun stuff different places."

The Campers' friendship has deepened over the years as well. Childhood visits were scarce, they explained, because their fathers worked such long hours. They also lived at opposite ends of the county: Larry Camper, now 61, grew up in the Natural Bridge area and graduated from Natural Bridge High School. As adults, in addition to working together, they've helped each other with building projects and taken the occasional fishing trip.

"We've had fun over the years," said Larry. He added that over the past few years, he's seen many of the people he'd worked with for decades retire, so his cousin's steady presence is especially welcome. The two of them are among Physical Plant's longest-serving employees, and their dedicated service hasn't been overlooked. In 2001, John received the Institute's Distinguished Service Award, and in 2016 Larry was recognized with the VMI Achievement Award.

As for a younger generation of Campers—it's too soon to tell what Tracy and John's 12-year-old daughter, Jessica, will do when she's older, and Larry's children, Taylor and Tyler, have already settled into their career paths. Taylor

Camper interned at Physical Plant in the summer of 2014, while she was in college, and both she and her brother were extras in the 2015 film "Field of Lost Shoes," portions of which were filmed on post.

Besides, the current generation is still going strong. While many individuals his age would be looking forward to retirement, John Camper just isn't ready to say "goodbye" to VMI.

"I think it's going to be a sad day when I have to retire," he admitted. "It's the social part."

"John used to say that the first 30 years went by so fast that he decided to do 30 more," said Tracy.

Larry Camper, meanwhile, is looking down the road with anticipation. There's a time capsule on the Parade Ground that's due to be opened in 2039, when the Institute observes the 200th anniversary of its founding. John, Larry, and a few other Physical Plant employees have carved their initials on the backside of the capsule.

"I'd like to be around when they open that up," said Larry. "I'll be 80-some." ❁



John Camper helps hang a white board in a recently repainted Human Resources office, one of the many buildings on post he oversees.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Breakout 2021

Members of the rat mass of 2021+3 were awakened just before 5 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 6, as the day they would breakout of the Rat Line began. This year, Breakout was held entirely on post due to the coronavirus pandemic. Rats did physical training at North Post and at Foster Stadium before participating in a rucksack march, crawling across the Parade Ground, and then sprinting into barracks for a final sweat party. That evening, the Class of 2024 came together for its first Old Yell.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, and Mary Price.





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One finding from their research is clear: grit affects first-year grade point average (GPA) for men, but not for women. They aren't totally sure yet why that's the case, but they can speculate.

"We wonder if the women who attend VMI aren't already a select breed," Whipple noted. "You don't just choose VMI willy-nilly. That's true of everyone, but probably more likely for women. Those women probably already have a good amount of grit, so we don't likely see as much variability in the data."

The researchers also found that having an ROTC scholarship predicts a higher first-year GPA for both men and women, but interestingly, there is no association between other types of scholarships and GPA.

Both Whipple and Dimitrova-Grajzl have suggested that this finding could have implications for admissions and financial aid. "Designing scholarships to capture a close fit to the school's culture, which the literature refers to as 'person/environment fit,' or to provide career motivation might be an important way to facilitate student success," Dimitrova-Grajzl noted.

Going forward, the faculty members would like to explore several more questions arising from their data set, among them the evolution of grit over time.

"Now that we have all four years [of data], we're going to start looking at the full VMI experience," said Whipple.

"We want to see how cadets' experiences at VMI shape their perceptions of their own grit," Dimitrova-Grajzl stated. "Our preliminary results show a significant drop in perceptions of grit when cadets start their first semester at VMI, and a gradual strengthening of their perception of grit by the time they graduate from VMI."

Both Whipple and Dimitrova-Grajzl noted that their research was supported by grants-in-aid from the dean's office. They were also awarded the D. Rae Carpenter Award for best research proposal submitted to the VMI Research Committee in 2018. ❁

POST BRIEFS

ERHS Faculty Link Research to VMI Courses

Four faculty members in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies have recently published research with direct ties to their teaching.

Maj. Stephanie Hodde's chapter, "Up Close and Wide Awake: Participating in Anna Deavere Smith's Social Theatre," was published in the anthology *Teaching Critical Performance Theory: In Today's Theatre Classroom, Studio, and Communities*. Hodde draws from experiences of teaching and learning in ERH 230, *Artistic Responses to Social and Political Issues: Contemporary Playwrights*.

Maj. Michelle Iten's article "Contemplative Practices as Rhetorical Action for Democracy" was published in *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*. Iten draws in part from her experience teaching ERH 302, *Civic Discourse*, to argue the importance of self-awareness to citizens' rhetorical participation in democracy.

Maj. Polly Atwell's essay, "You Will Be Surprised to Learn that Fiction is an Art: The Language of Craft and the Legacy of Henry James," was published in *Writing for the Masses: The Rise of the Literary Advice Industry from Quill to Keyboard*. The essay connects to Atwell's teaching of ERH 223, *Genre Studies: Fiction*, in which cadets read, among many other texts, Henry James's essay "The Art of Fiction."

Dr. Duncan Richter, Charles S. Luck '55 Institute Professor, has published his third book on the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: A Student's Edition*. Richter, professor of philosophy, teaches courses in ethics, aesthetics, and comparative religion and advises the VMI Ethics Team.

VMI Community Members Complete Training

Fifteen members of the VMI community participated in a virtual training on Saturday, Feb. 20, focused on the topics of sexual assault and domestic violence. The training, which was sponsored by the VMI Building BRIDGES Service Club and led by Project Horizon staff, has been offered twice in the past, but this was the first year of a virtual format.

Project Horizon is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to eradicating domestic and sexual violence. The Building BRIDGES Club has collaborated on a number of initiatives with Project Horizon over the past five years. Cadets have volunteered for Project Horizon's Breakfast with Santa community event, Halloween party, and Deck the Halls annual fundraiser.

Cadets have also helped Project Horizon with outside garden work during Spring FTX. The Building BRIDGES Club's collaboration with Project Horizon was featured in a project by the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance on a best practice guide for campus professionals outlining trauma-informed and social justice-oriented recommendations.

Lemert Named Interim Inspector General

Susan Lemert has been named the Institute's interim inspector general and Title IX coordinator. Lemert, a Lexington native, came to work at VMI in March 2011 in the registrar's office. Later that year, she accepted a position at Preston Library. In 2014, she became a member of the Violence Prevention Committee and the Title IX Appeals Committee. In May of 2015, in addition to her responsibilities at the library, she became an assistant inspector general/ Title IX investigator in the VMI Inspector General/Title IX Office performing investigations, facilitating Bystander Invention Training, and conducting focus groups/listening sessions with cadets and employees. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Old Dominion University.



Susan Lemert

Cadet Presents at Math Conference

Johnny Vesterman '21 recently presented a research paper at the Joint Mathematics Meeting, the largest math conference in the United States and the largest annual math conference in the world. The conference was scheduled to be in Washington, D.C., but was virtual because of the pandemic. The title of his talk was "Model Analysis Techniques Applied to Shots in Roanoke College Basketball Games." Vesterman's project is a collaboration between VMI and Roanoke College. His faculty mentor is Lt. Col. John David, associate professor of applied mathematics. 🦋

Correction

A photo that went with the Marshall Museum story in the February issue was captioned incorrectly. Pictured were Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, along with Lady Bird Johnson and Katherine Tupper Marshall. Mrs. Eisenhower was not in the photo.

Auxiliary Services Rises to New Challenges

By Mary Price

College meal service is a challenging line of work as is—but factor in the COVID-19 pandemic, and cadets being kept in isolation or quarantine, many off post, and the challenge factor goes up exponentially.

As of mid-February, Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93, director of auxiliary services, was responsible for coordinating meal delivery to approximately 400 cadets in isolation or

quarantine. Some were in barracks, some at the Turman House, and others were being housed at four hotels north of Lexington.

Mondays through Fridays, cadets are provided with three meals a day. A hot breakfast and a box lunch are delivered together in the morning, and supper is provided later. The lunch consists of a sub sandwich, snack foods, fruit, and a beverage. On

Friday evenings, cadets are given a large snack box with extra food to help them through the weekends. On Saturdays and Sundays, cadets receive a midday brunch and supper.

"We give them a lot of food just to get them through the day," said Clark. He added that

Continued on next page

cadets with dietary restrictions are provided with the appropriate foods at their door step, and some cadet-athletes are receiving extra rations at their coach's request.

And it's not just cadets who've been eating what's provided: Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, interim superintendent, and Sgt. Maj. William T. Sowers, sergeant major to the Corps of Cadets, have been eating the box lunches as well. They do so on the same days they visit cadets quarantined in hotels.

Crucial to making this all flow smoothly has been the support of Parkhurst Dining, VMI's food service partner.

"The Parkhurst team has been fantastic with this," said Clark. "They are in constant communication with Sgt. Maj. [Suzanne] Rubenstein in the commandant's office. She runs the whole process of finding rooms for the cadets to quarantine and isolate, and tracks [the cadets] by name."

Those working to provide meals communicate by group text so information is passed along quickly, said Clark, and there's been a big effort to solve problems as they arise. Clark noted that the Styrofoam containers typically used for takeout food weren't working well because Styrofoam can make food soggy.

"We found a different plastic packaging container that doesn't make the food as soggy," he commented. "I've got a smart team of food service experts, and they're continually trying to improve this."

Clark and Lt. Col. Alyssa Astphan, assistant director of Auxiliary Services, have also been working hard to let parents know

that their cadets are being fed well. The two have been making short videos showing the meal preparation and delivery process.

"They've been very well received," said Clark of the videos.

The Auxiliary Services website was also recently revamped to highlight the multiple areas of cadet life the department is involved in, with an ultimate goal of making it easy for parents and others to know when operational changes that affect cadets occur, along with who to contact with questions or comments. Right now, the focus is on meal delivery for cadets on post and in quarantine and isolation. When comments come in, Clark makes sure to call parents himself. "I've had some very good conversations," he stated.

He's making it a point, though, to make sure the credit goes to those preparing the food.

"It makes for some long days for the Parkhurst team," he commented. "They're pushing hard." ❁



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 and Sgt. Maj. William T. Sowers receive their boxed lunches from Parkhurst employee Zandra Boone at the Econo Lodge in Lexington, as she and fellow employee Felice Bartle deliver meals to cadet rooms.—VMI Photo by Maj. Beth Holcomb.



Cadets receive packaged meals and snacks like this one from Parkhurst Dining.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93.



Parkhurst Dining employees Dan DeCarlo and Jon Davis load meals for cadets in isolation and quarantine onto a truck outside Crozet Hall in mid-February.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93.

Virtual Leadership Conference Focuses on Teamwork

By Mary Price

Held virtually Feb. 15–16, the 11th annual Leadership and Ethics Conference sponsored by the Center for Leadership and Ethics attracted a capacity crowd of more than 275 attendees, among them members of the VMI community and students from a wide range of secondary schools, colleges, and universities. This year's conference theme was "Strong Leaders, Strong Teams," a motif aligned with the Center's 2020–21 programming theme, "Teamwork: Out of Many, One."

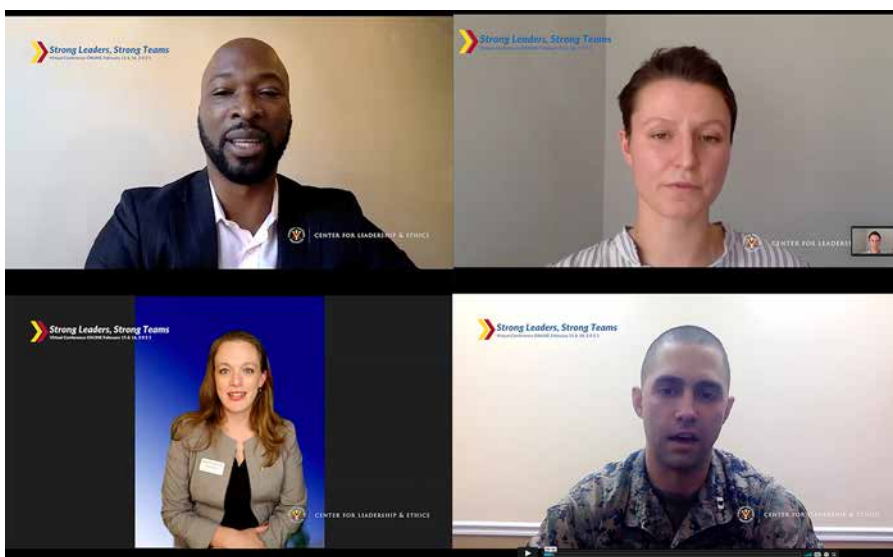
Kicking off the conference as keynote speaker was retired Marine Corps Gen. Richard "Butch" Neal, the Center's leader in residence for this academic year. Neal, a four-star general who served in both the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm, was assistant commandant of the Marine Corps from 1996 to 1998.

In his remarks, Neal discussed how he'd learned teamwork and responsibility as a child by helping out with the never-ending labor on his uncle's dairy farm. Later, in Vietnam, Neal was put in command of a company which had suffered sudden and heavy losses in combat, and in that role, he developed what he calls "eyeball-level leadership."

The cornerstones of that philosophy, he related, are moral courage, dedication, integrity, and judgment. "This creates a climate of trust and loyalty, a culture of engagement, and a commitment in your teammates," he stated.

Neal explained that his style is one of "we not me" and "us not I." With that mindset, he noted, subordinates are freed to reach their full potential. "The goal is to make people feel needed and highly valued," he said. "The leader does the molding."

Also speaking, this time on the topic of leadership and communication in the workplace, was Shari



Lester Johnson '95, 1st Lt. Samantha Shepherd '18, Elise Woodworth '07, and Joey Bishop '14 participate in the 2021 Leadership and Ethics Conference, "Strong Leaders, Strong Teams."—VMI Composite by Kelly Nye.

Harley, a specialist in business communications and the author of *How to Say Anything to Anyone: Setting Expectations for Powerful Working Relationships*. Harley was this year's Caroline Dawn Wortham '12 leadership speaker. The speaker series was established in memory of Wortham, a track and field athlete at VMI who died after being struck by a car while bicycling in 2015.

In her remarks, Harley stressed that while she never met Wortham, who was preparing to enter the Marine Corps at the time of her death, she had talked to several people who knew her to get a sense of her communication style.

"[Wortham] was direct with compassion," Harley stated. "You always knew where you stood with Carrie."

That style, she noted, establishes trust, which is the bedrock of effective communication. "Carrie reduced defensiveness because she had a relationship of trust," Harley commented.

The next day's speakers included Ben Freakley, mental performance coach for the Toronto Blue Jays and a former men's soccer coach at VMI. In his presentation, Freakley discussed dangerous assumptions about leading teams and then shared his seven lessons of leadership. Among his mantras are "hog the blame, share the glory" and, "We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience."

During his talk, Freakley had participants go into breakout rooms to discuss what assumptions they had about leadership and later, how to build trust.

Concluding the conference, and giving the H.B. Johnson '26 Distinguished Speaker Series lecture for this academic year, was retired Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal, former commander U.S. and International



Col. Dave Gray, director of the Center for Leadership and Ethics, instructs cadet facilitators the week leading up the conference in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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Security Assistance Forces, Afghanistan, and author of *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*.

Drawing from his decades of military leadership experience, McChrystal discussed what he'd learned while leading the Joint

Special Operations Command (JSOC) against al-Qaeda, a position he held from September 2003 to August 2008. Al-Qaeda, the general noted, was unlike previous enemies the U.S. military had faced in that it was not a top-down organization. Rather, its strength lay in quick communication between cells.

Compounding the problem, he stated, was the "walls between silos" that kept U.S. organizations from sharing information and working well together. Once JSOC changed its culture, he noted, success in defeating Al-Qaeda ensued.

Next, McChrystal discussed his time as director of joint staff in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010. In that position, he quickly discovered that sometimes, what was happening on the ground didn't match up with the orders he'd given from headquarters, so it was vital to trust those closest to the situation. Because of this, McChrystal developed a policy of, "Execute the order we should have given you."

In addition to the featured speakers, conference attendees heard prerecorded comments on leadership from members of the Institute faculty and staff, and they also had access to prerecorded talks by alumni 1st Lt. Samantha Shepherd '18, Elise Woodworth '07, Lester Johnson '95, and Capt. Joey Bishop '14. 🌟



Cadets listen to Gen. Stanley McChrystal deliver his talk virtually in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Aquatic Center Groundbreaking

On Friday, Feb. 5, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the Aquatic Center, officially known as Phase III of the Corps Physical Training Facility. The \$44.2 million project, to be completed in the second half of 2022, will include an indoor 50-meter swimming pool, two 1-meter springboards, two 3-meter springboards, and a 5-meter dive platform, plus seating for 570 spectators. The Knights of Pythias building, a structure with historic ties to Lexington's African-American community, will be linked to the Aquatic Center via a glass walkway and used for office space. In addition to members of the Institute's senior leadership team, those attending the groundbreaking included representatives of Whiting-Turner, general contractor, and HKS, architect.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



Load Carriage Study Utilizes VMI Resources

By Kelly Nye

Maj. Dan Baur, assistant professor of physical education, studies the thing that affects all cadets the most—exercise science. And this semester Baur is utilizing VMI's plentiful resources—ROTC equipment and able-bodied cadets—along with a grant from the Jackson-Hope Fund to research whether beetroot juice affects the energy cost of soldiers carrying heavy packs for long distances.

Baur is recruiting up to 25 cadets to participate in his study. The cadets are given two to three ounces of either a placebo or beetroot juice to drink twice a day for six days, then asked to walk on a treadmill while carrying an Army standard load consisting of body armor, a dummy rifle, and rucksack with added weight. Baur then measures their oxygen consumption and fuel metabolism.

This study came to mind while teaching a new course on military physiology.

“Load carriage is basically the most ubiquitous and important thing that all soldiers—definitely all combat soldiers—do,” said Baur.

The Army bases load carriage weights as a percentage—soldiers are expected to carry roughly 45% of their body weight. There are three categories of weight: fighting load, which averages 65 pounds; approach-march load, 100 pounds; and worst-case scenario or emergency load, which averages 135 pounds.

“The problem is if you go into combat everyone needs the same amount of ammunition, the same amount of MREs,” Baur explained. “So in practice, it's absolute loads for everyone.”

And since the heavier loads are more common for longer distances where there is no logistical support—the mountains of Afghanistan, for example—soldiers are rucking for 10 or 12 hours a day, carrying 100 to 135 pounds. Even the best-trained Olympic athletes would struggle under those conditions.



Biology major Thaddeus Wegrzyn '22 participates in Maj. Dan Baur's load carriage study in Cormack Hall earlier this semester. The project is delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, and will continue this summer or fall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Beetroot juice could provide some relief.

Preliminary studies on endurance athletes show 3% to 5% reduction in the oxygen cost of exercise, which means your body requires 3% to 5% less energy to keep the same speed.

“Which is pretty enormous potentially,” said Baur. “In endurance athletes, you're talking less than 1% is winning and losing... So you're marching for long periods of time, you add 3% to 5% up over 10 hours, it makes a big difference.”

Beetroot juice contains a form of dietary nitrate. Baur explained, “Nitrate, when it's metabolized in the body, helps in the creation of nitric oxide, which is a chemical messenger that helps the blood vessels to dilate, which is good for blood flow. The more blood you can deliver to your muscles, the more oxygen you can deliver to your muscles.”

Thanks to the Jackson-Hope Fund, Baur was able to secure beetroot juice and beetroot juice without nitrate to use as a placebo from a company based out of the United Kingdom, James White Drinks.

“It's concentrated beets, it's not delicious,” laughed Baur. Having a placebo that tastes exactly the same is critical, and beetroot juice is hard to duplicate. It has a very distinct taste and color. Using a company that also provides a nitrate-depleted version of beetroot juice is expensive, but worth it.

But so far, the drink has been the only major expense. Since Baur's study is so suitable to VMI, the cost has remained low. Army ROTC has donated equipment for the cadets to use, and the cadets are incentivized to complete the study with haydowns from the commandant's office.

The only obstacle is COVID-19. The outbreak among cadets will push the study to later this summer or fall.



Participants in the load carriage study carry 55% of their body weight while simulating a ruck on the treadmill.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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“It just became too unpredictable,” said Baur. “If it’s a chronic supplementation period and you’re getting subjects who at any moment could be quarantined, you’re wasting product, money, time.”

Whenever the study does finally take place, it will provide a valuable learning experience for the cadets assisting with and participating in the study.

“The military needs more people who understand how the human body works,” said Baur. “And if we can get cadets to think more

scientifically through experiences like this, we can hopefully better prepare them to be effective military or professional leaders in the future.” Baur hopes to continue doing research for VMI with equipment that can duplicate real-world conditions in the future, such as an altitude chamber. He has one in mind that will simulate up to 21,000 feet.

“I want to do applied studies that are relevant to cadets,” Baur concluded, “Studies that will affect them here and later.” ❀

VMI Police Move in to New Building

By Mary Price

In early February, the VMI Police headquarters returned to Letcher Avenue.

The new building, which was under construction for more than a year and a half, is designed to provide a secure, modern home for the VMI Police, who are charged with ensuring safety for all members of the VMI community and guests. With a stucco finish and Gothic revival style, the new building blends seamlessly with the rest of post.

The \$5.6 million building, with nearly 11,000 square feet of space, was constructed following demolition of the VMI Police’s former home, the Bachelor Officer Quarters, in the early summer of 2019. During the time the new building was under construction, VMI Police operated out of trailers at Hinty Hall, home of VMI’s Physical Plant, approximately one mile north of post.

The structure has been built to withstand the 180-mile-per-hour winds of a Category 4 hurricane. Inside, there’s bulletproof glass between staff and visitors, along with dedicated rooms for processing evidence

and fingerprints. Upstairs, an emergency operations center (EOC) with a smart whiteboard and televisions for news broadcasts can accommodate eight people working at once. The EOC also displays footage from webcams around post.

In addition, there’s a room nearby for the policy group, made up of the Institute’s senior leadership team, so they can be steps away during an emergency situation.

The synergy that arises from having people with a common purpose working in one location can’t be over-emphasized, expressed Col. James R. “Jay” Williams ’83, director of emergency management, whose office is now in the VMI Police building.

He explained that prior to the new building, his office was in Shell Hall, while members of the

Institute’s senior leadership team worked in Smith Hall. The VMI Police, of course, were off post at Hinty Hall.

“We had a lot of travel time,” he stated.

Now, everyone is much closer together. “Having close proximity enhances the ability to properly coordinate and stay in touch on a day-to-day basis,” Williams commented. “Having all of the resources and staff in one place is going to be really beneficial.” ❀



Office furniture arrives at its new home in the final moving stages for the VMI Police in early February.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



The atrium of the new VMI Police building features custom windows that match VMI’s architectural style.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



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VMI Defeats Furman

VMI defeated the #10 ranked Furman University Paladins 14-13 on Saturday, Feb. 27, in Foster Stadium. It was the first time since 2002 that the Keydets knocked off a ranked opponent. The NCAA Football Championship Subdivision has sanctioned a shortened spring football season due to the pandemic. Safety measures imposed for the game included limiting attendance to 250 spectators, including 35 cadets, all of whom were assigned to socially distanced sections of seating. As of early March, post remains closed to the general public.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



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