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# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

Founded in 1839, Virginia Military Institute is the nation's first state-supported military college.

U.S. News & World Report has ranked VMI among the nation's top undergraduate public liberal arts colleges since 2001. VMI's engineering program is ranked 25th among all engineering schools whose highest degree is a bachelor's or master's degree.

VMI is part of the state-supported system of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Governor appoints the Board of Visitors, the Institute's governing body. The Superintendent is the chief executive officer.

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U.S. Army (retired)

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April 2017

## VMI NEW MARKET CEREMONY

*Held on the VMI Parade Ground every May 15<sup>th</sup> (weather permitting)*

### Order of the Ceremony

The Ceremonial Formation: The Corps of Cadets will march from Barracks to the parade ground, forming two battalions centered on "Virginia Mourning Her Dead," the monument given to the Institute in memory of the New Market Cadets.

The Roll Call: The ceremony begins with the historic roll call of the 10 cadets who died in the Battle, each name called by the commander of the company in which the New Market Cadet served. In response to each name called, a cadet appointed for the ceremony gives the traditional reply "Died on the Field of Honor." In turn, each company commander reports the names to the regimental commander, who then gives the full report to the commandant.

The Ceremony and Review: Floral tributes are laid at the monument and grave markers of the 10 cadets who died in the battle, six of whom are buried here. The chaplain recites the New Market Prayer, and a 21-gun salute is fired. After the gun salute, trumpeters play an echo rendition of Taps, and the VMI Regimental Band plays Amazing Grace. The Corps of Cadets then passes in review, marching from the Parade Ground down Letcher Avenue with each unit presenting an "eyes-right" salute as it passes in front of the monument.

### The Battle of New Market

The source for this information is *The Battle of New Market* by William C. Davis, Doubleday & Co., 1975. Page references are indicated in parentheses.

May, 1864, the VMI Corps of Cadets was called by Gen. John C. Breckinridge to join his veteran troops to defend the Valley of Virginia against the onslaught of superior Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel.

The Union advance on the Valley was a key element in the grand strategy of Gen. Ulysses Grant to press the Confederates into submission. While he confronted Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in the eastern portion of the state, Sigel's army would secure the Valley and threaten Lee's left flank.<sup>(20-22)</sup> It was Breckinridge, a former vice president of the United States, who was entrusted by Lee to protect the Valley and also defend Lee's left flank.<sup>(26)</sup>

Pressed on all sides, the Confederates were undermanned.<sup>(26-27)</sup> When Superintendent Francis H. Smith first tendered the services of the Corps, made up of boys from 14 to 18 years old and half of them first-year cadets, Breckinridge declined. Later, he called them to come, but only as a reserve. "Gentlemen from VMI," he shouted from horseback, "I trust I will not need your services

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today, but if I do, I know you will do your duty.”<sup>(28)</sup>

On the day of the battle, after taking massed fire from federal muskets, the Confederate front line was split by a gap of 350 feet, a clear advantage should Sigel order an attack. Facing near disaster, their forces disrupted, a Confederate officer urged sending in the cadets, to which Breckinridge replied, “...This will not do...I cannot expose them to such a fire as our center will receive,”<sup>(121)</sup> but the officer was desperate, “General, you have no choice.”

“Put the boys in,” Breckinridge decided, “and may God forgive the order....”<sup>(121-22)</sup>

With the Institute flag in tow, riddled with shot and balls,<sup>(122)</sup> the cadets closed the gap,<sup>(123)</sup> the Confederate forces met the Union charge

and turned it back.<sup>(133-35)</sup> In drenching rain, the Confederate line moved forward over the rain soaked and recently plowed wheat field, called the “Field of Lost Shoes” by the cadets because the suction of the mud pulled the footwear off their feet. Soon, Sigel staged a rapid retreat northward, leaving the field and the Valley to Breckinridge’s army, and the VMI cadets.<sup>(144-45)</sup>

The battle was not without cost to the cadet corps. There were 57 casualties, and ten cadets were killed.

The annual New Market Ceremony and Review commemorates the bravery and sacrifice of the Cadets called to the battle at New Market in 1864 and all of the Institute’s alumni who have served our nation.

### The Ten Cadets Who Died at New Market

Corporal Atwill, Samuel Francis	A Company, Virginia
Private Haynes, Luther Cary	B Company, Virginia
Private Jefferson, Thomas Garland	B Company, Virginia
Private McDowell, William Hugh	B Company, North Carolina
Private Stanard, J. Beverly	B Company, Virginia
Private Wheelwright, Joseph Christopher	C Company, Virginia
Sergeant Cabell, William Henry	D Company, Virginia
Private Crockett, Charles G.	D Company, Virginia
Private Hartsfield, A. Curtis	D Company, North Carolina
Private Jones, Henry Jenner	D Company, Virginia

#### **Non-discrimination Statement**

*The Virginia Military Institute is committed to providing an environment that emphasizes the dignity and worth of every member of its community and that is free from harassment and discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, pregnancy, genetic information, against otherwise qualified persons with disabilities, or based on any other status protected by law. Every VMI staff member, faculty member and cadet has the right to work and study in an environment free from discrimination and should be treated with dignity and respect. VMI complaint and grievance procedures provide employees and cadets with the means for resolving complaints when this Statement has been violated. VMI is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Anyone having questions concerning discrimination or the application of Title IX regulations should contact Title IX Coordinator, 212 Carroll Hall, VMI, Lexington, Va. 24450, (540) 464-7072. Any cadet or prospective cadet having questions about disability services for students should contact the Director of the Center for Cadet Counseling and Disability Services, 448 Institute Hill, 2nd floor, Post Infirmary, Lexington, Va. 24450, (540) 464-7667. For employment-related disability services, contact the Employee Disability Services Coordinator in the VMI Human Resources Office, Lexington, Va. 24450, (540) 464-7322.*