



# INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 53, Number 2, October 2024

## **Convocation Opens Academic Year**

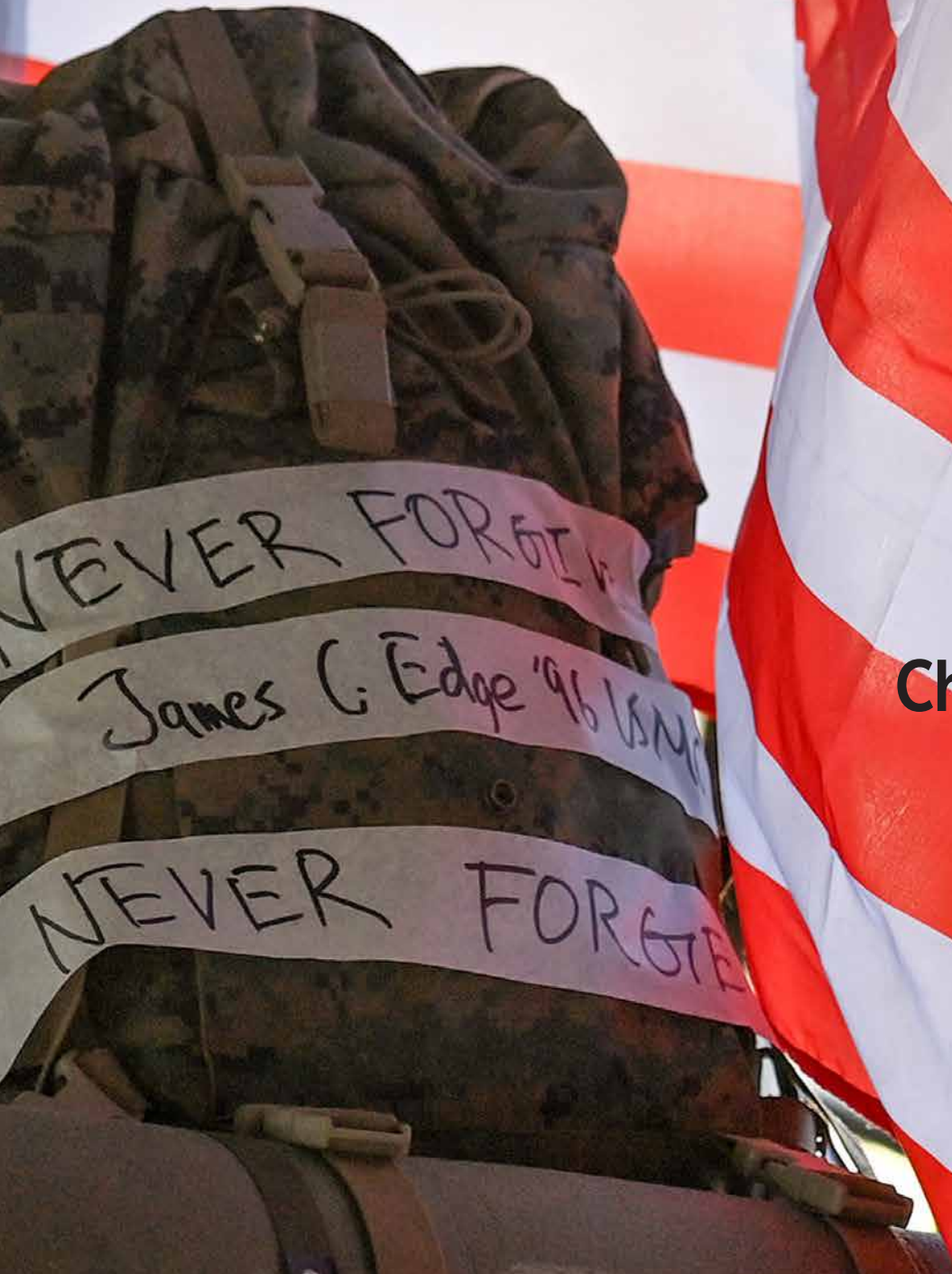
page 4

## **9/11 Memorial Stair Climb**

page 6

## **POW/MIA Chair Unveiled in Foster Stadium**

page 12



# 2024–25 New and Promoted Faculty

The Office of the Dean of the Faculty announced the promotion and granting of tenure to several faculty members, and introduced new members of the faculty for this academic year.

## Promoted \_\_\_\_\_

### English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies

- » **Dr. Reshef Agam-Segal**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.
- » **Col. Julie Brown**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.
- » **Col. Steven Knepper**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

### Psychology

- » **Col. Sara Whipple**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

## Promoted, with tenure \_\_\_\_\_

### Computer and Information Sciences

- » **Dr. Mohamed Azab**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

### Civil and Environmental Engineering

- » **Dr. Jai Jung**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

### Electrical and Computer Engineering

- » **Col. David Feinauer**—Promoted from associate professor to professor, with tenure.

### English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies

- » **Lt. Col. Patrick Eichholz**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

### Modern Languages and Cultures

- » **Lt. Col. Jason Schroepfer**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

### Psychology

- » **Lt. Col. Jillian Stuart**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

## New Full-Time Faculty \_\_\_\_\_

### Applied Math

- » **Capt. Laura Doyle**—instructor.
- » **Maj. Megan Miller**—assistant professor.

### Biology

- » **Maj. Peter Neofotis**—lecturer.
- » **Maj. Alison Burke**—assistant professor.

### Chemistry

- » **Maj. Christopher Shingledecker**—assistant professor.

### Civil and Environmental Engineering

- » **Maj. Ryan Doczy**—assistant professor.
- » **Dr. Aksel Seitlari**—assistant professor.

### Economics and Business

- » **Capt. Zebulen Riley**—instructor.
- » **Dr. Jing Ao**—assistant professor.

### Electrical and Computer Engineering

- » **Dr. Efat Fathalla**—assistant professor.

### English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies

- » **Maj. Brandon Johnson**—assistant professor.

### History

- » **Lt. Col. Joel Christenson '99**—associate professor and the George J. Collins '62 Chair in Military History and Strategic Analysis.
- » **Maj. Zachary Deibel**—assistant professor.
- » **Maj. Alex Paul**—assistant professor.

### Human Performance and Wellness

- » **Maj. Connie Bechtel**—lecturer.
- » **Maj. Katherine Baur**—assistant professor.

### International Studies and Political Science

- » **Capt. Phillip Crane '16**—Peay Fellow instructor-in-residence.

### Mechanical Engineering

- » **Lt. Col. Seyed Soltani**—associate professor.

### Modern Languages and Cultures

- » **Dr. Barbara X. Franca**—assistant professor.

## New Adjunct/Part-Time Faculty \_\_\_\_\_

### Computer and Information Sciences

- » **Dr. Raveendra Ponnuru.**
- » **Wes Wollner.**

### English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies

- » **Dr. Rosemary Pinney.**

### Economics and Business

- » **Dr. Michael Hicks '84**—Economics, Mary Moody Northen Chair of Economics and Business.

### History

- » **Jack Morris.**

Also joining VMI, reporting to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, include:

### CyDef

- » **Lt. Col. Brian Afanyu**—security operations center engineer/analyst.

### Miller Academic Center

- » **Lt. Col. Allyson Pierce**—director.
- » **Capt. Kristen Tyree**—academic support coordinator.
- » **Capt. Trey Copenhaver '12**—academic support coordinator.
- » **Capt. Meghan Ferguson**—academic support coordinator.

### Registrar's Office

- » **Col. Niccole Gatliff**—registrar.
- » **Capt. Heather Wood**—assistant registrar.
- » **Capt. Chantelle Eversole**—assistant registrar.

### Institutional Effectiveness

- » **Col. Andrew Luna**—director.

### Writing Center

- » **Maj. Stephen Hoyle**—coordinator, Institute Writing Program. ✨

## 2014 Reunion Gift

Sam Guidry '14, Cory Reinecke '14, Abby (Dawson) Waterbury '14, and Johnny Partin '14, celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> Reunion, presented the Class of 2014 reunion gift of \$602,014.14 to the Institute during the football game against Norfolk State University Sept. 21. Accepting the check with them on the field were Sgt. Maj. Tom Sowers, Institute and Corps sergeant major; Meade B. King '85, VMI Foundation chief operating officer and Alumni Agencies director of advancement; and Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



# INSTITUTE REPORT

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The Institute Report, VMI's news magazine, publishes eight issues during each academic year. Inquiries, suggestions, news items, and address changes should be directed to Editor, Institute Report, VMI Communications and Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450-0304; 540-464-7207; or [VMIRreport@vmi.edu](mailto:VMIRreport@vmi.edu).  
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Career opportunities are available across post. Learn more about faculty, staff, and hourly career opportunities at [www.vmi.edu/jobs](http://www.vmi.edu/jobs).




## Contents

2024–25 New and Promoted Faculty	2
2014 Reunion Gift	2
Four-Star Admiral Kicks Off Academic Year	4
Cadets Continue Tradition of 9/11 Stair Climb	6
Post Briefs	7
CAVU Appointed Brigadier General	7
Senior Military College Conference Returns to VMI	8
Braver Angels Events	9
First Parade and Football Game	10
Wellness Fairs Promote Resources Available to All	11
Reserved Seat in Foster Stadium Added for POW/MIAs	12
Scholarships Allow Lessons in Arabic Language, Culture, and Arts	13
Constitution Day Event Looks Back at Contested Elections	14
VMI Climbs in National Liberal Arts College Rankings	15
Twelve Alumni Commission	15
Bolton and Ramaswamy Draw Huge Crowd	16
Adams Center Receives Book Donation	18
New Institutional Effectiveness Director Selected	18

On the cover: A cadet carries the American flag and wears the name of U.S. Marine Corps Capt. James C. Edge '96 on his ruck who was killed in Iraq in 2005.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.


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Additional photos and videos can be found on Flickr and YouTube.

For the most accurate information and event updates, please visit [www.vmi.edu](http://www.vmi.edu).

# Four-Star Admiral Kicks Off Academic Year Speaks of Paradigm Shifts in a Changing World

By Marianne Hause

On a morning with a trace of fall in the air, VMI kicked off its 185<sup>th</sup> academic year with a convocation ceremony Sept. 4 in Cameron Hall. Retired U.S. Navy Adm. James Stavridis, the H.B. Johnson Jr., Class of 1926, Distinguished Speaker, addressed the entire Corps of Cadets, members of the academic board, faculty and staff.

Brig. Gen. Robert Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, welcomed those assembled, especially the Rat Mass to their first convocation, marking a moment to reflect on a fresh start and a clean slate. He thanked the alumni and other benefactors for their ongoing generous support of VMI programs and initiatives, and recognized the cadets distinguished in academic merit, as well as the many contributions of the faculty over the past academic year.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, shared that VMI is privileged to have excellent facilities and resources to complement the academic programs, and cited the Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) as an example. "The CLE provides opportunities to listen and engage with many leaders through conferences and leadership training. This year, their theme is 'paradigm shifts,' and during the year, the CLE will explore three important paradigm shifts: disruption of the current world order; cultural change; and widespread use and impact of digital technologies, especially social media and artificial intelligence (AI). These paradigm shifts challenge the way leaders interact with and influence their followers. Each shift necessitates leaders who are authentic, ethically grounded, intellectually astute, and spiritually and physically resilient," stated Wins. He then introduced the keynote speaker by describing him as, "one of the premier thought leaders



Adm. James Stavridis speaks in Cameron Hall during Academic Convocation.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

on international relations and global security in our country, and who has a great deal of real world experience executing several of the paradigm shifts we will examine this year."

Stavridis framed his talk around the ever shifting world, and what the cadets need to do to become effective leaders, either in the military or as civilians, as they confront a world full of violence and difficulty, and the paradigm shifts they will encounter.

He discussed how the conflict in the Middle East is polarizing, and that it is possible for two things to be true at the same time. "Israel was viciously attacked using rape, kidnap, and mutilation as tools of war. It is also true that the conflict has created a humanitarian

crisis affecting 2.2 million people caught between Israel's absolute right to defend itself and retaliate." It was at this point Stavridis described a paradigm shift, that the military center of gravity is not the Gaza Strip, but the 400 miles of tunnels built beneath Gaza. "This is where Hamas and its owner and operator, Iran, managed to construct, train, equip, organize, and launch these horrific attacks. The Israelis will decommission these tunnels."

He cited another paradigm shift, that of a new



During a lunch in Marshall Hall, Adm. James Stavridis talks to cadets.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

*Continued on next page*

international coalition that can step in and ease the conflict and discord in Gaza. He predicted it will be some combination of the Palestinian Authority; the United Nations; Israel, who will maintain some level of engagement; and the Arab League. “Some number of Arab peacekeepers from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan will be the muscle. But lurking like a Death Star is Iran, which owns and operates not only Hamas, but the Houthi terrorists operating in the Red Sea, attacking our destroyers, and crushing international commerce. How will it be resolved in the Middle East? We don’t know, but building on the accomplishments of the Abraham Accords, we should watch for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to step up and recognize Israel over the coming months, and watch for a U.S. specific security guarantee,” Stavridis advised.

The admiral then talked about Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine. “It’s really the war of Putin’s ego. He wants to rebuild the old USSR, and the only things stopping him are a combination of sanctions, heavily arming the Ukrainians, coupling that with their fighting spirit, and another paradigm shift of using unmanned vehicles. The Russian Black Sea Fleet at the start of this war had 60 warships. Twenty-five of them have been sunk. Yet Ukraine has no navy. They did it with exquisite intelligence, and unmanned vehicles.”

He stated that NATO has never been wealthier and stronger, which is another paradigm shift. “We’ve just added Finland and Sweden, and although they are small countries, they punch above their weight.” But he warned not to discount Putin, who is conducting massive bombing raids, and recruiting around the world. “The largest Russian military recruiting station in the world is in Havana, Cuba. Putin still has what remains of the Black Sea Fleet which gives him capability. He can also go after critical European infrastructure pipelines, and the use of cyber, another paradigm shift. Putin seeks to divide the citizens of the U.S. and to exploit the divisions. He’ll go after North Korea and China to resupply him. Russian and China are drawing closer and closer together.” Stavridis predicted another paradigm shift, that Ukraine will join NATO and the European Union.

Stavridis turned his attention to another paradigm shift, China and its competition with the U.S. as China builds a geoeconomic strategy in order to dominate Asia. “China believes it owns the South China Sea, which puts the U.S. in a maritime state of high tension. Put cyber alongside it, put North Korea in the mix, and you see this bubbling cauldron in the Pacific.” He mentioned Taiwan, an island with only 23 million people, but the 25<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, and a leading manufacturer of high-end microchips. “That’s the good news about Taiwan. The bad news is their military is out of date. They must prepare for China. How does this come out between the U.S. and China? Could we stumble into a war with China? You bet, but on the other hand, we could arrive to a ‘modus vivendi,’ which is a Latin term for a way of living together, but this paradigm of a surging China will challenge us.”

He shared some tools of leadership that matter at every level, and are relevant in the shifting world. “The first thing you should do is study history and creative leaders. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was



Adm. James Stavridis salutes the Corps after receiving a shako as a gift.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

a grand strategist, a master of detail, and a master communicator who could captivate and comfort the nation during his fireside chats, in the midst of the Great Depression and the throes of the Second World War. Another great leader was your very own George Marshall, who exemplified those same qualities.” Stavridis continued to describe great leaders as those who listen more than they talk, are well-read, great communicators, resilient, and innovators. He singled out the innovation of AI as being the greatest of all the paradigm shifts. “AI is coming, and in the business of war, AI is going to be huge. We must continue to innovate because our enemies are innovators, and we must stay ahead.”

Stavridis warned that all the leadership tools he mentioned are useless if they do not rest on a bedrock of values. “Our values are democracy, liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of education, gender equality, and racial equality. We execute them imperfectly, but they are the right values. That is not a paradigm shift.”

Finally, he reminded his audience to remain optimistic, and quoted Napoleon Bonaparte, “A leader is a dealer in hope.’ Be that kind of leader.”

As a token of thanks for his inspiring message, Stavridis was presented with a VMI shako with plume, the head cover worn by officers in coatee uniform. He placed the shako upon his head and rendered a salute, to which the Corps returned a spirited cheer.

Stavridis served 37 years in the Navy. Among his many commands were four years as the 16<sup>th</sup> Supreme Allied Commander at NATO, and the U.S. Southern Command in Miami. He was the longest serving combatant commander in recent U.S. history. He served as senior military assistant to the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense, and led the Navy’s premier operational think tank for innovation, Deep Blue, immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Following his military career, he served for five years as the 12<sup>th</sup> dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Stavridis has published 13 books. Two of his most popular are, “To Risk It All: Nine Conflicts and the Crucible of Decision” and “2034: A Novel of the Next World War,” a New York Times bestseller co-authored with Elliot Ackerman. His most recent novel, “2054,” takes place in the future, and deals with AI and geopolitics. ❄

# Cadets Continue Tradition of 9/11 Stair Climb

By Marianne Hause

Nearly 800 cadets honored those who perished in the 9/11 terrorist attacks by energetically ascending and descending the steps in barracks from 1<sup>st</sup> stoop to 4<sup>th</sup> stoop 37 times, replicating the 110 stories the first responders at the World Trade Center climbed during the rescue attempt that fateful day 23 years ago.

Participating cadets carried the name of a 9/11 or Global War on Terror victim taped on the back of their rucks, which were loaded with an average weight of 45 pounds. In addition, some cadets carried firefighting tools, rifles, and flags. Others took turns carrying a fragment of glass recovered from the rubble of the Twin Towers, as well as an American flag recovered from ground zero.

Before the climb began, Institute chaplain Col. John P. Casper '04 led the Corps in prayer and a moment of silence. Casper, who was a 20-year-old 3<sup>rd</sup> Class cadet on September 11, 2001, shared a memory of that day. "I remember going to English class, where they turned the

TV on, and we watched the towers fall in real time. I don't think we quite realized the full gravity of what was happening,

but as the day unfolded, it became evident. I distinctly remember thinking, 'I should call my parents,' as a lot of people across the nation called their loved ones and family. In barracks at that time, there was a phone room, which had about 16 pay phones, because not every cadet had a cell phone. I remember rounding the corner in the hall leading to the phone room and seeing a massive line of cadets that extended into the courtyard. It was at that moment that it dawned on me that this event was life-altering for so many people."

According to Col. Lawrence Havird '90, commandant, such an event provides cadets an opportunity to reflect on the moments of the past and the sacrifice of others, and this anchors them around VMI values of service above self. "I'm very proud of the cadets today for their enthusiasm in carrying out this laborious task."

Heaton Lawrence '26, firefighting club president and cadet in charge of the stair climb stated that the day meant a lot to him. "It's not about us, it's not about me, it's about the 343 firefighters and 2,977 Americans who died that day."

Two alumni who perished on 9/11 were Charles Mathers '62, a civilian who died when the plane hit the first tower of the World Trade Center; and Lt. Cmdr. David Williams '91, an officer in the Navy, who died when the plane struck the Pentagon. ❄️



Cadets climb the stairs in Third Barracks Sept. 11.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Cadets with firefighting gear and packs climb the stairs in New Barracks Sept. 11.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Cadets gather in New Barracks before the start of the September 11 stair climb.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

# POST BRIEFS

## Professors Featured on With Good Reason

Maj. Molly Kent, assistant professor in the Department of Biology, discussed the level of stress in rats based on their home and lifestyle, and what these lessons have taught her about human stress, on the public radio program, "With Good Reason." Later in September, Col. Atin Basuchoudhary, professor in the Department of Economics and Business,

discussed how artificial intelligence (AI) does not have moral judgment, and so military education must emphasize the humanities to ensure people display moral character as AI is more widely used, on the episode entitled, "Coexist."

## Bakich Discusses New Book

Col. Spencer Bakich, professor of international studies and director of the National Security Program at VMI, joined Tim Benson on The Heartland Institute podcast to discuss Bakich's new book "The Gulf War: George H. W. Bush and American Grand Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era." The

conversation centered around the strategy of a New World Order to transform international politics. The full podcast episode can be heard on The Heartland Institute website. 🎧



## CAVU Appointed Brigadier General

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, appointed the rank of honorary brigadier general upon CAVU, the chaplain's office facility dog, in a ceremony Sept. 3 in New Barracks. As the Corps of Cadets stood at attention, Sgt. Maj. Tom Sowers read aloud the orders, followed by Wins securing one star on CAVU's vest. The Corps then erupted into cheers as CAVU acknowledged their accolade with a tail wag. —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



# Senior Military College Conference Returns to VMI

By Marianne Hause

VMI hosted the Senior Military College (SMC) Conference of the Association of Military Colleges & Schools of the United States (AMCSUS), Sept. 23-25. Commandants, senior leadership and cadets from the six SMCs which include The Citadel, Norwich University, Texas A&M, University of North Georgia, Virginia Tech, and VMI attended. In addition, representatives from Tarleton State University, Texas A&M Maritime Academy in Galveston, Louisiana State University, and the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership at Mary Baldwin University were also present.

VMI opened the conference with a welcome to their guests from Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, and Col. Lawrence Havird '90, commandant.

Cadets from all the schools spent a large portion of their time networking with their peers through physical training, team-building exercises, meals, and sharing their respective schools' history, tradition, organizational structure, systems of leadership and daily life as a cadet through slide show presentations.



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 welcomes guests from senior military colleges Sept. 24 in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Lin St. Clair, deputy director of accession policy at the Department of Defense, speaks to attendees of the SMC Conference in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Leadership from the schools also networked, shared ideas, and discussed common problems and solutions. "I enjoyed getting to know my counterparts from the other schools. It was great to meet folks with whom we share a common bond," stated Havird.

Retired Air Force Col. Ray Rottman, executive director of AMCSUS, stated that seeing the cadets from the various schools work together and give polished presentations to their leadership was inspiring. "We all have great traditions, and we are stronger together. These cadets are making a difference, not just for us, but for our nation."

*Continued on next page*



Elijah Alberti '25 explains the VMI Honor Code to cadets from other senior military colleges during a presentation in the Arsenal Sept. 24.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Col. Tom Gordon, commandant of The Citadel, discusses senior military college policies with his peers in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



AMCSUS was founded in 1914 and serves as an advocate for the nation's premier military colleges and schools. The six SMCs rotate hosting the annual conference. Next year, the event will be held at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. 🌟



Cadet leadership from several senior military colleges present their findings on their differences and similarities between their programs.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Attendees of the SMC Conference gather on the stairs in Marshall Hall for a group photo.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



## Braver Angels Events

The VMI Building BRIDGES Club and the Center for Leadership and Ethics hosted a debate workshop with the College Debates and Discourse Alliance and SCHEV Sept. 13. Participants discussed the state of dialogue on campuses and how Braver Angels debates can help bridge divides in the classroom and beyond. Faculty from various colleges joined in this important conversation. Later in the month, VMI hosted a Braver Angels debate that was open to the public. The debate topic was, "Should undocumented immigrants to the U.S. be accommodated or deported?" More than 100 attendees were in Marshall Hall for the event.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.





## First Parade and Football Game

The Keydets played their first home football game of the season against the Bucknell University Bison in Foster Stadium Sept. 7. The Bison came away with the win, 35-28. The game was preceded by the first parade of the year and members of All Veterans Group parachuting onto the field with the game ball. The VMI Classes of 1979, 1989, and 1999 were on post to celebrate their reunions over the weekend, as well. The Class of 1999 presented their 25<sup>th</sup> reunion gift of \$1,399,999.99 to VMI during the game. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and courtesy of VMI Alumni Agencies.





## Wellness Fairs Promote Resources Available to All

A cadet wellness fair was held Oct. 1 in Cocke Hall, in conjunction with the annual flu shot clinic. The fair, sponsored by the Center for Cadet Counseling, hosted community and VMI organizations available to help cadets with physical and mental well-being. Later in the week, an employee wellness fair was held in Marshall Hall, with lunch provided by Parkhurst Dining. Faculty and staff had the opportunity to participate in fitness class demonstrations, get health screenings, and engage with local health service organizations. —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



# Reserved Seat in Foster Stadium Added for POW/MIAs

By Marianne Hause

A POW/MIA Chair of Honor was dedicated in Foster Stadium before the football game against Norfolk State Saturday, Sept. 21, the day after National POW/MIA Recognition Day, which is the third Friday of September. These chairs are found all over the United States in stadiums, arenas, and government buildings. They are meant to represent those service members who are unable to fill them because of their sacrifices. They also serve as a tribute to the men and women who serve the country every day.

Jamaal Walton '07, director of intercollegiate athletics, stated that installing the chair was the right thing to do. "It's a no-brainer that it should be in our stadium, so when I learned that there was a way to do it, it made sense that it needed to reside here at VMI. This group is very important and leaving that seat open shows how we are always honoring those prisoners of war and missing in action."

Twenty-six alumni have been prisoners of war, and all alumni who were missing in action have been located. Col. Thomas H. Kirk Jr. '50B, one of the most decorated living alumni who is a former POW, was highlighted at the dedication. Kirk, currently 95 years old, is originally from Portsmouth, Virginia, and now lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

During a Zoom interview, Kirk shared that upon graduating, he commissioned into the Air Force and became a pilot. He flew



Vietnam veteran Jimmy Eubanks, Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, and Jamaal Walton '07 unveil the POW/MIA Chair of Honor in Foster Stadium Sept. 21.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

50 missions during the Korean War, and extended his career into the Vietnam War. "I had become a colonel by that time, and I felt that as a career officer, I should be in the war, so I went to Vietnam and flew the F-105, a fighter-bomber. On my 67<sup>th</sup> mission over Hanoi, I was struck by anti-aircraft and my airplane caught fire. I dropped my bombs and completed the mission, but the controls froze, and I was forced to eject from 15,000 feet."

Kirk landed in a pasture, unconscious.

When he came to, he was surrounded by a group of Vietnamese men, women, and children who beat him mercilessly. "They would have killed me, but the Vietnamese army arrived and took me prisoner." Kirk was taken to the Hanoi Hilton and kept there from October 1967 until his liberation in March 1973. "We were all tortured initially for military information, and treated very badly. Life in the camp was very difficult. We were totally isolated, never allowed outside. I was in a 7-by-8-foot masonry cell with three other people. Meals consisted of a couple bowls of soup a day and a piece of bread. I lost 100 pounds and got down to 90 pounds. After 14 months, I had an altercation with a guard, and was placed in solitary confinement for two years. I was later placed in a larger cell that held 50 people. That's where I met John McCain, and we became friends. When the war ended in 1973, 591 of us came home from that POW camp."

Kirk stayed in the Air Force eight more years and became the commander of a pilot training wing in Selma, Alabama. After that

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The POW/MIA chair as it sits in Foster Stadium.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Col. Thomas H. Kirk Jr. '50B speaks during a Zoom call.—VMI Photo by Lexie West.

he was vice commander of an air base in Denver. He then went on to the United States European Command in Germany before retiring from the military.

Kirk said that having the POW/MIA chair installed at VMI means a great deal to him.

“It serves in reminding people when they come into Foster Stadium of those who served, sacrificed, were wounded or killed for our freedoms, and that young men and women are currently serving and defending our country. We should stop and reflect on the wonderful life we have here, and I hope that would encourage each cadet to be a better student, a better person, and a better American.”

Kirk’s autobiography, “Hits, Wins and Misses-A Fighter Pilot’s Life Story,” may be purchased on Amazon. ❀



Jesse Wood secures the POW/MIA chair in Foster Stadium.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

## Scholarships Allow Lessons in Arabic Language, Culture, and Arts

By Lt. Col. Jason Schroepfer

This past summer, several high school students, along with two VMI cadets, were offered STARTALK scholarships to study college-level Arabic at VMI. The Institute received a \$144,000 National Security Agency-funded STARTALK grant for students to complete both Arabic 101 and Arabic 102 from late June to mid-July. Scholarships covered books, cultural activities, and all tuition costs for in-state and out-of-state students. Students studied both dialect and Modern Standard Arabic. The program also has continued weekly Zoom meetings. Lt. Col. Jason Schroepfer, the program director and associate professor in modern languages and cultures, commented about the innovative pedagogical approach saying, “Learning an Arabic dialect allows students to communicate with people, and simultaneously learning Modern Standard Arabic enables them to interact with texts and media. This method provides them an authentic and practical education since that is how Arabic functions in the real world.”

The cultural theme of the program was a simulated trip to Morocco. Students learned to communicate about activities they would like to do, sites they would like visit in Morocco, their likes and dislikes, and daily routines, to name a few learning outcomes.

The teaching team was led by Dr. Mohammed Abu Shuleh of Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, along with VMI’s Mohammed Shihab and Mohamed



STARTALK participants practice writing Arabic characters during class.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Jason Schroepfer.

Echkaou. Students learned calligraphy and Henna as a part of recreating a Moroccan Moussem festival from Shihab, a skilled Arabic calligrapher and artist. Students also learned about Arab music in a lecture from guest speaker Hasan Minawi, who competed in “Arab Idol” and “Britain’s Got Talent.” He highlighted similarities and differences between Arab and Western music, and played Arab music for the students.

Schroepfer added, “This program provides an excellent foundation for students to learn Arabic language and culture and explore government career possibilities. Moreover, the program encourages students to continue learning.” ❀



Mohammed Y. Shihab teaches students in Arabic on the proper way to prepare hummus.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Jason Schroepfer.

# Constitution Day Event Looks Back at Contested Elections

By Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft

A Constitution Day commemoration was held in Marshall Hall Sept. 19, observing the signing of the U.S. Constitution, Sept. 17, 1787.

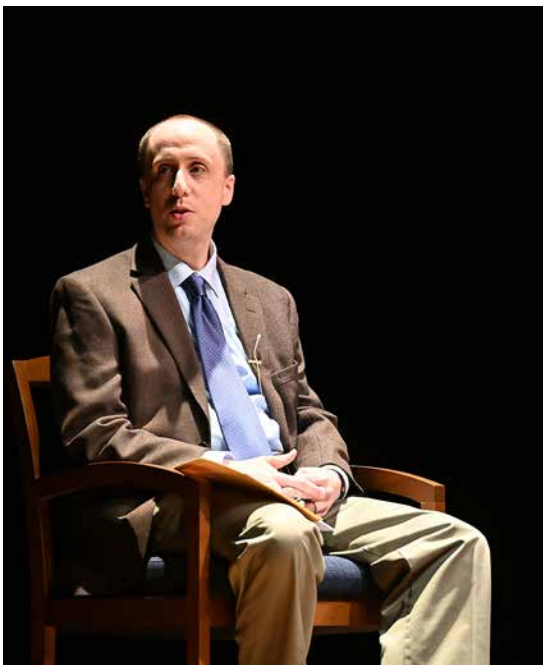
This year's event consisted of a dinner followed by a panel discussion focused on "The Election of 1824 and the History of Contested Presidential Elections." Col. M. Houston Johnson V, professor and head of the Department of History, moderated the event, which featured Michael E. Woods, professor of history and director of The Papers of Andrew Jackson at the University of Tennessee, and Reeve Huston, associate professor of history at Duke University.

Approximately 150 cadets and a few local residents attended the panel discussion, which used the topsy-turvy presidential election of 1824 to examine broader questions about how the structure of presidential elections under the Constitution influences the practice of American political culture, democracy, and partisanship.



Col. M. Houston Johnson V asks Reeve Huston questions during the Constitution Day event.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

The event, sponsored by the Department of History and the Jackson-Hope Fund, was part of the ongoing series of co-curricular events that support the Institute's Program in American Constitutional History. 🌿



During the Sept. 19 Constitution Day commemoration, Michael E. Woods speaks about past elections.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft introduces the speakers in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

# VMI Climbs in National Liberal Arts College Rankings

By Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood

VMI maintained its reputation as one of the nation's best colleges, according to the 2025 Best Colleges rankings released Sept. 24 by U.S. News and World Report.

VMI ranked No. 59 among more than 200 national liberal arts colleges, up from No. 63 last year and 70 in 2023. Among public liberal arts colleges, the Institute ranked fourth behind only the United States Naval Academy, the United States Air Force Academy, and the United States Military Academy.

Unlike many other publications that issue college rankings, U.S. News also ranks certain programs found at numerous

colleges and universities. This year, VMI ranked 30<sup>th</sup> out of more than 280 institutions nationwide that have an accredited engineering program but do not offer a doctorate. The Institute's undergraduate computer science program and economics program were also recognized in this year's rankings.

More than 97% of VMI graduates are employed or enrolled in a graduate program within five months of commencement. U.S. News reports the median salary of a VMI alumnus is \$63,545 six years after graduation.

U.S. News analysts work to enable students and their families to identify colleges that meet their needs. With only slight changes reported by U.S. News regarding the methodology this year, more than half of a school's rank is made up of outcome measures related to a school's success in enrolling and graduating students with manageable debt and post-graduation success.

Washington Monthly also released its 2024 College Rankings list in September, putting VMI at No. 74 in liberal arts colleges, and No. 1 in liberal arts colleges for ROTC rank. 🇺🇸

## Twelve Alumni Commission

A ceremony in Memorial Hall Sept. 14 celebrated the commissioning of 12 new second lieutenants from the Class of 2024. Capt. Maurice Dawson, instructor in the Army ROTC program, stated, "The ceremony not only highlighted the culmination of their hard work, dedication, and training, but also underscored their commitment to serve and lead in the armed forces. Each of these individuals has shown remarkable resilience and skill, equipping them for the challenges and responsibilities that lie ahead in their new roles."

Alumni returned to post in support of their brother rats, among other family member and friends. Dawson continued, "This moment is a testament to the support of their families, mentors, and peers, all of whom have played a crucial role in their success."—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



# Bolton and Ramaswamy Draw Huge Crowd

By Marianne Hause

It was standing room only in Gillis Theater Oct. 3 as John Bolton, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and former U.S. National Security Advisor, and Vivek Ramaswamy, former 2024 Republican U.S. Presidential candidate and New York Times best-selling author, met for the first time in person. They were there to debate as part of Steamboat Institute's Campus Liberty Tour, co-hosted by VMI's Center for Leadership and Ethics. The full capacity audience was a combination of cadets, faculty and staff, and members of the community.

The debate explored the resolution: The U.S. should use its diplomatic and military power around the globe to ensure America's national security. Bolton argued the affirmative, while Ramaswamy argued the negative. It was moderated by Tom Rogan, a foreign policy/national security writer for the Washington Examiner, and a Tony Blankley Senior Fellow at Steamboat Institute.

Each speaker gave an opening statement. In his, Bolton said that he is a very strong proponent of the resolution, and until recent years, it would have been considered common sense, and a



Vivek Ramaswamy and John Bolton argue their position on the Gillis Theater stage.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

reflection of American history. "For a number of reasons, I think we've lost a real understanding of American national security. The underlying cause for that was the victory in the Cold War won by the American-led alliance. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, many people in the U.S., Europe, and around the world thought there would be

no more global geopolitical confrontation. Economics would take care of everything. We had a peace dividend. Because there would be no more international conflict, we could cut defense budgets, and increase domestic welfare programs. The U.S. and Europe did exactly that, and we have lived to regret it."

Bolton continued by stating that the lack of understanding of national security has led to the reemergence within the last five to 10 years of the concept of isolationism, which he believes is a problem that is growing worse. "It rests on mythology about American



John Bolton addresses an issue on the Gillis Theater stage.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

*Continued on next page*



history that there was a time when we were happily separate from the rest of the world, free from any involvement in their conflicts, happy to do our own thing. Some people believe this idea has its historical roots in George Washington's Farewell Address, where he talked about avoiding entangling alliances. I would make the argument that the U.S. has never been an isolationist. We have always been part of the wider world. We have had interests around the world from our beginning, and George Washington himself knew that better than anybody else. It is a fact that the U.S. would never have been independent were it not for French aid and military force, and then later, from Spain and the Netherlands. Washington's Farewell Address was a very carefully thought out legacy that Washington wanted to leave to tell this new and perilously weak nation to avoid getting involved in European conflicts where we didn't have a real interest because he had a longer range vision, which we have now achieved."

Ramaswamy used his opening remarks to state he thinks the path to truth runs through free speech and open debate, and the resolution is hard to disagree with as drafted. "But I think the essence of what's at stake is whether or not the U.S. has a role to



Vivek Ramaswamy speaks at the podium in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

to interest payments on our national debt being the largest line on our federal budget. But it's not just the financial cost of those wars, of course, it's the human cost. Nearly 7,000 to 8,000 American lives were lost, 53,000 were wounded, and 30,000 more deaths if you count the suicides after the wars. And if the financial and human costs weren't persuasive enough, I would further add that the mass migration crisis in Europe today is actually, in part, a direct function of our veiled intervention in the Middle East. We cannot, in good conscience, send America's sons and daughters to go die in war if we haven't identified what the objective of that war really is. The reason I'm against the resolution, as I see it, which is whether or

not the U.S. should be the world's global police, is the evidence suggests that we have failed miserably."

play as global police, and the answer to that question for me is an absolute no." He continued that he has no doubt that he and Bolton share the same goal for the U.S. foreign policy, to make it a stronger nation. Where they disagree is in how that goal is achieved. "I appreciate Bolton's reference to American history, but I'd like to refer to the history of the last 25 years, and the results of the interventionist foreign policy. Let's start with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. There's the financial cost of \$8 trillion on those two wars alone, and that doesn't include other engagements in other parts of the world, including the recent Ukraine costs or other parts of the Middle East. That's at a moment where our national debt is \$34 trillion, well on our way

to interest payments on our national debt being the largest line on our federal budget. But it's not just the financial cost of those wars, of course, it's the human cost. Nearly 7,000 to 8,000 American lives were lost, 53,000 were wounded, and 30,000 more deaths if you count the suicides after the wars. And if the financial and human costs weren't persuasive enough, I would further add that the mass migration crisis in Europe today is actually, in part, a direct function of our veiled intervention in the Middle East. We cannot, in good conscience, send America's sons and daughters to go die in war if we haven't identified what the objective of that war really is. The reason I'm against the resolution, as I see it, which is whether or

not the U.S. should be the world's global police, is the evidence suggests that we have failed miserably."

The moderator asked questions, and allowed audience members—both in person and watching the livestream—to ask questions to the speakers on varying topics including the growing relationship between China and Russia, the Russo-Ukrainian war, the Israel-Hamas war, the current White House administration, and the upcoming election. The two orators answered the questions intelligently, thoughtfully, sometimes heated, but mostly respectfully and civilly. They each gave brief closing statements.

The audience had the opportunity to record their stance on the debate topic in the pre- and post-debate polls. Prior



John Bolton speaks to cadets in the Hall of Valor.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

See Bolton and Ramaswamy, page 19

# Adams Center Receives Book Donation

By Marianne Hause

The John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis (Adams Center), a specialized element of VMI dedicated to Cold War military history, recently received a significant donation of nearly 600 books from the library of Malcolm Muir Jr., founding director of the center and former professor of history at VMI.

According to Lt. Col. Joel Christenson '99, associate professor in the Department of History and current director of the Adams Center, the most valuable books in the collection are the first edition "Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant," published in 1885, and Alfred Thayer Mahan's, "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History," dating to 1890. Together, the volumes are worth thousands of dollars.



The inside cover of "Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant."—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Muir served at VMI from 2003 to 2011. "He took the Adams Center from an agreement on paper to a living, breathing organization dedicated to producing, preserving, and perpetuating knowledge about Cold War history. Within the profession, he was dedicated to developing scholars. He put the cadets in touch with the past, and often spent his spring furloughs traveling with them to World War I and World War II battle sites in Europe and Japan. His endowment of these books is a very generous gift, and we are extremely grateful," shared Christenson.

Many of Muir's books have been shelved in the common room for cadets to take. The more valuable ones will remain behind locked doors, and a process is

being established by which the cadets and other scholars may access them.

The Adams Center offers an annual essay contest on any aspect of the Cold War for scholars around the world, and a dissertation grant for graduate students. It organizes conferences, symposia, and lectures to heighten awareness



Lt. Col. Joel Christenson '99 holds a copy of "Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant" in the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

of the enduring importance of Cold War military history and strategic analysis. Events are designed to promote interaction among VMI cadets, Cold War scholars, and national security professionals. ❁

# New Institutional Effectiveness Director Selected

By Marianne Hause

Andrew Luna has been named director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and will hold the rank of colonel in the Virginia Militia. He replaced Lee Rakes, who served in the role prior to Luna before accepting a position at another higher education program.

According to Luna, the primary responsibilities are collecting data and assessment. "Because VMI offers financial aid to its students, we are required to collect and submit data to the state and federal governments. Likewise, we collect data for VMI administration for planning purposes. VMI is also required by various assessment agencies to have academic learning outcomes, and to show we are measuring the outcomes properly through

testing, papers, and other types of scholastic exercises. So, we help the academic departments do that, and based upon the results of those outcomes, we know that either changes need to be made, or that we can stay the course to succeed. Additionally, we assess goals and outcomes of non-academic departments, and based on assessment results, we assist them on how to move forward," he explained.

Luna's short-term goals for his office are to create a stronger data structure with consistency throughout post, and to ramp up the institutional research and data component. "I would like to

*Continued on next page*

have more data dashboards and research reports that will help the administration move forward.”

Luna has more than 25 years of experience in institutional effectiveness, institutional research, assessment, and quality improvement in higher education, serving most recently as executive director in the Office of Decision Support and Institutional Research at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. He also served as director in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia; director in the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment at the University of North Alabama in Florence; and director of the Department of Institutional Research and Planning at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton.

He brings to VMI extensive experience with accreditation, including service as an institutional liaison and participation on multiple review committees for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which VMI has been accredited with since 1926. He is active in the institutional research community and has received multiple citations and awards from the Southern Association for Institutional Research.



Andrew Luna

Brig. Gen. Robert Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, shared that he is delighted to have Luna as a senior staff member of the academic program. “After only a few weeks at VMI, Luna has already made significant contributions to the SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation process, strategic enrollment management, and admissions,” he said.

Luna earned a bachelor’s degree in mass communications, a master’s degree in journalism, a second master’s in administration of higher education, and a doctorate in administration of higher education, all from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

He is thrilled to be at VMI. “When I got my Ph.D. 31 years ago, I listed some institutions of which I wanted to be part, and VMI was one of those. When you walk on post, you get a totally unique feel. The fact that General Patton walked on that Parade Ground, and General Marshall and Chesty Puller came here. It’s mind boggling. This is going to be a really good way to cap off my career.”

Luna enjoys gardening, reading, writing, and photography. His wife, Danita, is a singer who has recorded a contemporary Christian CD. They have grown twins: Jay, a guitarist in Nashville, and Jessica, who has a career in public relations at the Potter College of Arts & Letters at Western Kentucky University. Luna and Danita will reside in Lexington with their 14-year-old rescue Bichon Frisé, “Pup-pup.” ❁

## Bolton and Ramaswamy *continued from page 17*

to the debate, 65% agreed with the resolution, 19% disagreed, and 16% were undecided. After the debate, 41% agreed, 55% disagreed, and only 4% remained undecided.

Following the debate, the audience was invited to a brief reception in the Hall of Valor to meet Bolton and Ramaswamy.

The Steamboat Institute Campus Liberty Tour continues through November with debates at the University of Texas at Austin, Harvard University, University of Maryland, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and New College of Florida. All debates are livestreamed. The livestream from the VMI debate is available on YouTube. ❁



Vivek Ramaswamy meets with cadets in the Hall of Valor Oct. 3.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



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