

The Cadet

1871 - 1873

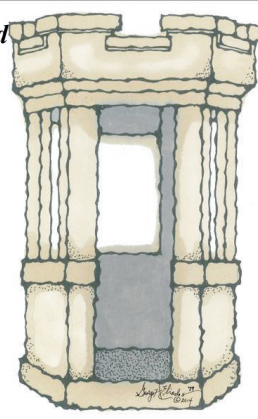
1890 - 1892

1907 - 1934

1994 - 2016

2021 - Today

THE



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Oct. 1907The VMI Cadet
1934 - 1994*The Independent Voice of the Corps and Alumni since 1871*

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The moon rises over Old Barracks where ghosts and other forces continue to roam the stoops to the present day

- Photo by VMIalumni

Ghosts, ghouls, and the guard team

- By Cadets Adam Cioffi '26 and Alex Dieffenbach '26

Editor's note: Did you have a ghostly or other strange encounter while at VMI? The Cadet wants to know!

Contact us at:
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For nearly two centuries, the barracks of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) bore witness to the passage of countless souls, each leaving behind a trace of themselves—whether in the form of physical graffiti or in the ethereal realm. VMI stands as an institution where cadets are broken down and remolded under the crucible of peer accountability and an adversarial system.

"There are many energies that make up our world, and humans are a manifestation of only one kind," said Colonel Keith Gibson '77, current Director of the VMI Museum. While he, at first, seemed skeptical of the paranormal, his elaboration revealed a much more logical way of thinking about something inherently illogical. He believes that different energies have the potential to exist on other planes of existence and that the occasional "crossover" is not entirely impossible.

This metaphysical crucible, filled with pain and anger, etched its mark upon the very bricks and mortar of the barracks. Over the years, this spiritual energy coalesced, empowering the restless spirits of those who died or suffered within these walls to manifest themselves, often causing disquiet among the cadets who've encountered them.

VMI lore is replete with tales of these ghostly apparitions that infiltrated the

collective memory of the Corps, injecting a sense of dread and mystery. While VMI primarily serves as an institution of honor and intellectual pursuit, many of these stories deviate from the realms of facts and science, plunging into the abyss of fear and the unknown.

These anecdotes recount a myriad of unique experiences involving ghosts and ghouls, but they all share a common thread: **the Guard team**. Few places in the country compel their student body to stand vigilant 24 hours over their living quarters, especially in non-military settings. This enforced duty provides a rare opportunity to interact with the paranormal.

As we celebrate VMI's enduring legacy of producing cadets and commissioned officers over one hundred and eighty-nine years, the past and present generations all share a common bond in their encounters with these otherworldly trespassers.

Dylan Jacobik '23: Scared asleep

To start this story, RAH '23. Barracks isn't the same since you all graduated.

During the night, 3rd class Jacobik awoke from his sleep for a call of nature that took him from his comfortable rack on a frosty journey to the Old Barracks bathrooms. The walk was only forty feet, but the air felt near zero, and the tiredness had his muscles moving in slow motion. Blinded by the ever-constant fluorescent light in the bathroom, he slid in to do his business.

Looking in the mirror on his way out, a sad and tired third looked back at him. A cadet stuck in a year between being a

lowly Rat and a second classman with a ring. Nothing was going on in his life besides the occasional dinner out in town.

Turning away with a sigh, he walked towards the door and started to open it, but the first slivers of air that hit him felt colder than before. It stung the bare skin that wasn't covered by the robe as he opened the heavy metal door wider. He assumed his hand just got used to the warmth of the bathroom, so he decided to brave the cold and trudge back to the heat of his hay.

Body shivering and face half buried in his robe, he made his way back to his room, yet he wasn't alone on the stoop. There was someone walking in the same direction just a little ways ahead of him. With his eyes still adjusting, he didn't notice the yellow hue of the person until he was much closer.

The sight of what looked to be a cadet in parade uniform set every nerve in his body ablaze. Panic replaced rational thought, and he darted as silently as possible back to his room. Carefully, he opened the door and slipped inside to what he thought was safety, but as he closed the door, his numb fingers let it slip from his grasp, and the door "**thudded**" shut. It sounded like a gunshot. Even without seeing the yellow apparition, he knew it heard the door.

Diving into his hay, he started to pull the heavy wool blanket up to his face, but before he managed to cover his face, he caught a glimpse of a silhouette in his door's window.

Under his blanket, he didn't hear the door open, but he felt a presence had just

entered the room. This pressure in his skull grew as it got closer and closer. Fear gripped his brain, and his body tensed every muscle to the point that he was shaking. Adrenaline pumped through his veins to prepare for his inevitable fight or flight.

He felt the thing watch him, his skin erupting in goosebumps and hairs standing on end. He lay there frozen under his covers for what felt like hours. He thought about running, but the idea of facing the entity kept him from moving.

Eventually, the adrenaline wore off, and his exhausted body fell into a deep sleep, his dreams free from the terrors of the night. He woke to nothing but his roommates in the room and the sound of cadets complaining about their classes. The encounter never left him, and he remains a true believer in the fact that barracks house people of the material and immaterial world.

Doug Wainwright '83: In defense of the Institute

In the bitterly cold winter of '79, there was some sort of commotion between the cadets and Washington and Lee (W&L) fraternity guys at the bars in town, which led to rumors of a raid on barracks by the frats. Even though it was only a rumor, the threat of invasion was taken seriously by the Guard team that placed rat arch guards outside the barracks to watch for any unauthorized group trying to make their way inside.

As a proud rat of the class of '80s ratmass, Wainwright took his position

Ghosts, ghouls, and the guard team

From A1

outside the barracks with his M-14 in hand. At the moment, his resolution of making it out of the Rat Line was being tested. The cold November night was testing his mettle; not even the ushanka given to him before his shift provided any respite from his plight.

He thought this was possibly the lowest he'd ever felt in his whole time at VMI. He'd willingly take getting worked out by his cadre if it meant getting to warm up and doing something besides standing alone out in the dark and cold.

Frozen and in near darkness, he stood there, occasionally walking his post to warm up his numb limbs. He'd given up on trying to bring blood back into his fingers by the time he started seeing something on the parade deck's far end.

He picked up his rifle from parade rest and slowly crept from the arch to the start of the grass. As he got closer, he was able to make out the shape of a horse grazing and a rider on top. The sight made no sense to Wainwright. Who would be dumb enough to take their horse out in these temperatures?

The longer Wainwright stared, the more he could make out. He saw that the rider had on what appeared to be a cowboy hat, that wouldn't match the style of the preppy W&L guys, and he saw a long sliver glint at the rider's hip, that must've been a sword or something. So, this observation only sparked more questions.

He noticed the horse's mane and tail looking like freshly fallen snow, something he had rarely ever seen in town, as the horses Wainwright saw

confused curiosity and desire to find out who it was.

When his replacement came to relieve him, he asked his fellow rat if he saw it too, and the Rat responded, saying, "What the hell is that guy doing out there at this time of night?" To this, Wainwright said, "I have no idea. The horse has not moved from that spot during my whole time out here."

This interaction confirmed that it wasn't just Wainwright seeing it, so as he walked back into the barracks, he reported his observation to the Corporal of Guard, and the corporal said he'd investigate it later.

Wainwright doubted the third classman ever left the heated guard room to look at the horse and rider, but the validation in what he saw by his brother Rat is all he needed to trust what he saw that night.

The next day, he discussed it with the other Rat that saw it, and they put their heads together to think of what it could've been. The thought that some frat guy chose to stand out in the cold for hours on end to mess with some rats was too far-fetched. Some more ideas were tossed around, but nothing stuck until the Rat suggested it was General Jackson coming back to protect the school.

George Mayforth '82: The Melting Man

Mr. Mayforth, Class of '82, was a 3rd Classman at the time of his encounter. During his interview, he wanted it expressly stated that he, George Mayforth, is not a 'nutcase' whatsoever, and never mind what his Brother Rats might say.

On a moonless night in late October, 3/C Mayforth was trudging his way back



- Photo by www.scaryforkids.com

thought that some Washington & Lee pranksters were attempting to break into the barracks. Spinning a full 360 degrees, he saw nothing but Stonewall Jackson and his cannons.

Just as he was on the brink of dismissing the feeling as late-night jitters, his gaze passed over Jackson once more, and that's where he froze. Jackson was no longer gazing across the parade deck; instead, he was looking directly at Mayforth. The feeling of being watched transformed into a gut-wrenching sense of dread and impending doom.

Whatever spirit had possessed Jackson had no goodwill towards this cadet. Mayforth felt the darkness somehow growing even darker, and what little light emanated from the underpowered lamp in Jackson Arch disappeared utterly. He was isolated, alone, and at the mercy of whatever force was currently imposing its will on him.

As he began to sink deeper into fear, he felt a growing heat around his neck. Mayforth thought it was some demon from Dante's Inferno grabbing him by the throat. But in a moment of unprecedented clarity, he realized it was his crucifix. The heat from this holy symbol banished the bone-chilling cold from his body and gave him the strength he needed to flee and save himself.

He sprinted back into the barracks and up to his room above Marshall Arch faster than a rat being goaded by its cadre. Upon reaching his room, he found all three of his roommates, Jack Wainwright, Rob Petty, and Jeff Goodair, fast asleep on their bunks, undisturbed by anything strange enough to wake them.

Mayforth took a moment to reflect on the scare, but decided it wasn't worth losing more sleep over. He stripped out of his uniform and unceremoniously tossed it on his chair, falling into bed and falling asleep almost immediately.

In his dreams, he recalled nothing, but a sense of weight and emptiness occupied his mind, like a piece of darkness out of place. This mental pressure was soon accompanied by something settling down on his legs with such force that it jolted him awake.

After a breathless second to focus his eyes, Mayforth made out the figure of a man no older than himself. This trespasser had clean-cut blond hair and was dressed in a preppy outfit of a flannel

shirt and khaki slacks. Seeing this intruder so clearly, Mayforth attempted to scream, but only a weak grunt escaped his throat.

He tried to move to put some distance between himself and the intruder, but what felt like a thousand hands held him down. Voiceless and immobile, Mayforth watched as the man began to deteriorate. The intruder's skull caved in as if struck by a hammer, and his eyes and skin shriveled up like a sun-dried tomato.

Horrendous screams and bile-filled Mayforth's mouth, but still, nothing escaped. The intruder's clothes appeared to be devoured by moths in a matter of seconds, leaving a bony frame, free of skin and organs, bare on his bed.

Thoughts of hellish torment filled Mayforth's mind, and with one last attempt at a cry for help, he managed to utter the "J" sound from Jack Wainwright's name as he felt his chest compress for the last time.

Wainwright moved in his rack and responded without looking over, 'Dammit, George, I'm trying to sleep,' and he rolled over to return to slumber.

Mayforth's hope for salvation died as he saw the ghastly figure put its fleshless finger to its bare teeth and shake its head. He passed out from the supernatural suffocation and woke up once more, but the specter was no longer there.

When his roommates eventually woke up, Mayforth shared his experience with them, but they all began to doubt his sanity—weeks passed with people making fun of his story.

He started to believe it was just a terrible dream until one upperclassman mentioned that a cadet had died in the barracks in a construction accident during the summer session, matching the description of the specter Mayforth saw on that fateful night.

Final Note

In the shadowed depths of the VMI barracks, sinister presences linger, refusing to be forgotten. These chilling tales shall continue to unfold within these hallowed halls, where cadets have encountered spectral entities that defy reason for years. Yet we will continue to endure and use these stories of paranormal activities to show the connection that we all who've slept in barracks can attest to.



Henry K. Burgwyn, as VMI Cadet and Confederate Officer, 1861-1863

- Photo by VMI Archives

riding on the trails were the regular chestnut color with brown manes and tails, and maybe the odd white star on their heads.

He stood there for the rest of his shift, waiting for the horse and rider to move, but only the flicking of the horse's tail indicated they were real. He truly felt no fear or apprehension at the sight, just

through the biting breeze after a late-night study session for an upcoming Civil Engineering test. His mind was filled with calculations, worry, and the longing for some sleep.

As he crossed Letcher Road onto the bricks outside of Old Barracks, a peculiar sensation of being watched washed over him like a million little needles pricking along his spine. In a moment of fright, he



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