



November 7, 2007
401 Scott Shipp Hall – 8 p.m.

Life After Language

A panel discussion for Cadets, VMI Alumni and other professionals
about the Usefulness or Not of Foreign Language Out There

Old General Smith left no doubt about it: *A Cadet begins professional life by walking through the VMI gates.* He had in mind that through the merciless vehicle of military culture “youth” (as adolescents were known in those days before the baseball cap on backwards and britches around of their knees had been invented for identification) could learn *before* graduation those skills the professions demand *after* and even then often have to teach apprentices. For that reason the Old Man yanked Latin and Greek out of his curriculum to replace them with French of all things... thinking it a *practical* necessity in diplomacy, technology, and of course for reading menus in uptown restaurants. Question is: Do we still need that stuff? French, German, Spanish? To understand our roots, our heritage? To gain insight into communication as a general principle? What if the cultures they represent have slipped into eclipse just this minute? How about the so-called “big footprint languages”: Arabic (oopsy daisy... well, yeah, *that* one got hot all of a sudden while we were out at the Mall), Japanese, Chinese, Korean? Do we need them to transact the world’s business, to project American power? To project our own?



Tower of Babel: Albrecht Durer

Speaker:

Colonel W. Patrick Lang (VMI '62) is a retired senior officer of U.S. Military Intelligence and U.S. Army Special Forces (The Green Berets). He served in the Department of Defense and then on the Defense Senior Executive Service. A highly decorated veteran of several of America’s overseas conflicts including the war in Vietnam, he was trained as a specialist in the Middle East by the U.S. Army and served in that region for many years. He was the first Professor of the Arabic Language at the United States Military Academy at West Point. In the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) he served as the “Defense Intelligence Officer for the Middle East, South Asia and Terrorism,” and later as the first “Director of the Defense Humint Service.” For his service in DIA, he was awarded the “Presidential Rank of Distinguished Executive, the equivalent of a British knighthood. He moonlights as analyst for television and radio broadcasts, among them the Jim Lehrer “Newshour.”

Moderator: Alan Farrell

The event is free and the public is welcome.