NEW MARKET — The true story of a Civil War battle fought nearly 150 years ago in New Market will come alive in movie theaters nationwide later this year.

The story is about seven teenage cadets from Virginia Military Institute who decide to put their lives on the line in the May 15, 1864, battle, said the film’s director, Sean McNamara.

The movie, “Field of Lost Shoes,” was filmed last year in late spring and early summer in Virginia. It has been in postproduction in Los Angeles since, and should be finished this week, said co-producer and co-writer Tom Farrell.

Filming took place over the course of 5½ weeks, including at Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Westover Plantation outside Richmond, and an old prison near the James River between Goochland and Powhatan counties.

The cast and crew spent a week at VMI for filming, including in the barracks and on post in general, as well as at an old house as a stand-in for a home in New Market, said Stewart MacInnis, spokesman for the Virginia Military Institute.

“What the cadets did in 1864 in New Market is really central to the VMI heritage that we teach cadets today. We are thrilled to have a movie in production and soon to be released that tells that story,” he said.

“Field of Lost Shoes” is likely to premier in Richmond in the spring, and a wide release is anticipated in theaters this fall, but the dates and venues are not final.

Farrell, who wrote and produced the film with Dave Kennedy, said many Valley residents may know that VMI cadets fought in the Battle of New Market, but most probably don’t know much more than that.

“We both thought it was a good story. I have never been involved with making a movie before,” said Farrell, who is CEO of the energy company Dominion Resources based in Richmond. “The foundation of a movie is a good story. Everything flows from that.”

Farrell confirmed the film’s budget was an estimated $5 million to $10 million, but he would not be more specific. The movie features actors David Arquette, Lauren Holly, Jason Isaacs and Tom Skerritt.

McNamara, known for directing “Soul Surfer” and “Space Warriors,” said he decided to make “Field of Lost Shoes” after reading the script.

“I have three sons, ages 4, 5 and 10,” he said. “I could not imagine the idea that in a few years they could be going off to war. So, I wanted to explore that.”

The title “Field of Lost Shoes” describes the battle conditions along a split rail fence near Bushong Farm House in New Market. The title was chosen to emphasize that the story is about the cadets, rather than the battle, Farrell said.
“Cadets were lined up along the fence line,” he said. “The area in front of them was a sea of mud. They kicked over the fence and charged up the hill, and it sucked the shoes off their feet.”

Troy Marshall, director of the Virginia Museum of the Civil War and New Market Battlefield State Historical Park, said he hopes visitors will see the film and then go to Virginia Military Institute and the battlefield for a closer look at the places that inspired the movie.

Contact Jonathon Shacat at 574-6286 or jshacat@dnronline.com