

RLS – VPI Memories (1939-1943)

I lived at Willow Grove during my senior year of high school because my family was living at Faraway, and I was going to Orange High School. I met Billy Lyon, the county agent in a county adjacent to Blacksburg. He talked to me about VPI; beyond that, all the credit went to my sister Jo [Sanford Perry], who had graduated in 1939 from VPI.

I finished high school in 1939 and Jo invited me to go with her to the Institute of Rural Affairs at VPI. It lasted about a week and we stayed in the dormitories. Then I found out through Jo that Sears and Roebuck offered a \$100 scholarship to VPI to a student from every county in the state. Orange County hadn't awarded theirs, so I got it (copy attached). No qualifying was involved; it was a last



minute deal. The money could only be used for tuition. At that time, tuition was \$40 per quarter for off-campus students. The first quarter was \$47, including \$7 for breaking of any items on campus. I had about \$39 or \$40 in the bank after I had taken a trip to the New York World's Fair. I went up there with a county agent from Stafford and Spotsylvania Counties along with his son. County agents tried to get you to learn agricultural education.

Four VPI folks came to Willow Grove to look at the farm, one of whom was Tom Hutcheson, head of the agronomy department (center in

photo). I was invited to sit at the table for the conversation because I was living there. I therefore had a working relationship with Tom Hutcheson, whose brother was later president of the university [John R. Hutcheson].

I left Rowes Mill where my family was then living with my little suitcase, rode the C&O train from Orange to Lynchburg, and then rode the N&W train to Christiansburg. The N&W train, loaded with students returning to VPI, dumped us off in Christiansburg at 2:30 or 3:00 p.m. Nine of us got a cab and packed our bags in it. It cost about \$1 to get to Blacksburg.

Through Jo I had met Ted Henry, whose mother and father had died from diphtheria in 1918, leaving their



RLS collection

Orange High School 1939



children to grow up in a boy's home. He was a senior in the business school at VPI, and had a job working for some professors in the 1st and 2nd Academic Buildings. He had a room on Main Street in a building with a studio downstairs and five rooms to let upstairs. The building was halfway between the light at the corner of campus [College Avenue and Main Street] and the Presbyterian Church. Ted let me live with him, and we paid \$5 a week. He had a job in the faculty dining hall, working there in the morning and eating there. I wanted a job like that.



I enrolled in 1939 in the biggest freshman class ever; there were a little over 4000 students on campus. At enrollment, there were faculty members representing business administration, soil conservation, animal husbandry, dairy husbandry, agronomy, agricultural business, and home economics. As we enrolled they asked what you wanted to do, and of course I didn't know. Dr. Hutcheson who was an elder in the Presbyterian Church was there; I could see him in the room, so I went to see him and he took care of me and got me started in agronomy. It was one of the hardest agricultural courses you could take except for agricultural engineering. I don't think I had any chemistry in high school [which would have helped]. After Thanksgiving of that year I could afford a textbook for one of my classes.

Dr. Burruss was president while I was at VPI. He was also the president of Madison when my mother went there. He spoke at my seventh grade graduation. My mother introduced Walker and me to him after the ceremony. We didn't want to meet him. Of course I picked up on who he was when I got to Blacksburg.



I got a job at the National Youth Administration; you could earn up to \$17 a month. The NYA sent me to the barns to work after finding out I had farm experience. They gave me and others jobs to do, sometimes washing windows, whatever. I did a good job, and he [my boss?] said, "Sanford, you can do more work than anyone I ever had over here." I learned some of my skills in 4H club. I clipped cows and milked cows.

I was limited as to how much I could earn, so the herdsman wanted me to try operating the milking combine. I could work that perfectly and ended up making \$35-\$40 a month. I had to work at night, starting at 7 p.m. There were 48 or 50 cows; I milked four cows at a time, three times a day. I finished at 7:30 a.m. I made \$1.20 per night. The milk went to the mess hall. I could have all the milk I wanted. I asked the herdsman if I could take a bottle of milk home. I took a quart bottle home every night to have with my cornflakes which I bought at the Mick or

Mack down the street, halfway between my room and campus. Everybody said you should get a meal ticket but you had to pay so many dollars of cash money to get it. I found out a meal ticket didn't last long and cost a hell of a lot of money.

Working at the dairy was a good job but I didn't have enough money to buy all the books. I bought second-hand books but a lot of the professors required new books and there weren't any second-hand books available. My biology book plus lab fees cost \$30 and I couldn't get the money for it. I borrowed someone else's book but it took me until the second quarter of the first year to get enough money to buy the book. I got the money from working in the dairy barns plus the NYA funds earned. I was working at the dairy, writing home, and no one at home knew what a mess I was going through.

After my freshman year, I went home to Rapidan for the first time as my family had just moved there.

My second year, I moved to another room with a boy named L.M. Jewell on the other side of campus near the Lutheran Church, near where you go to do your laundry. An old lady rented five rooms and we got a room for free for firing the furnace. Her name was Ida Dunlap, and she was the organist for the Presbyterian Church. I lived there my second year and into my third year.



After my sophomore year, I stayed in Blacksburg and worked at the barns in order to keep my job. Then during the third year we found out we could get a room down by the lake in Solitude. It's on the duck pond which is where at the end of the year four boys from the dorm would pick up another student and throw ("duck") them in the pond. Dr. Saunders, a retired dairy department professor, and his nice wife lived there. They had a son with a pilot's license who crashed in the Potomac near the airport in DC

and died. She was a good Christian woman. We had a room on the second floor and had to go down to the first floor for a shower. Her furnace was full of dust, so we cleaned it all up and also the area all around it. It was a college house and the college brought a nice grade of coal to all the professor's houses. She stayed in contact with me during the war until I got home in 1945. I have a 3-4 page letter she wrote me.

Later on, around the beginning of my third year, everyone had to line up in Burruss Hall and go by a window. I told them I didn't have any money. I was expecting a check but it wasn't there yet. I was told to go see the treasurer. I told the treasurer my story, and he said, "I'm going to have to send you down to someone to see about a loan because you have to





be admitted before you can go to class.” I described how I’d pay off a loan. The loan officer said, “You are the first person I’ve seen come up here and try to register with half a load of hay and half a bushel of wheat.” At that time the treasurer, Mr. Fogelman, got a student load approved for me so I could get in, and I had to start paying that off immediately. He was a good man. I owed him some money when I graduated. He kept up with me, writing me while I was overseas.

I was working in the faculty dining room and living in Solitude when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Everyone stopped working when Roosevelt made his great speech declaring war on Japan. I lived in Solitude until my last six months. We left the Saunders on good terms.

We lived in a civilian dormitory [Campbell Hall] to the right of the War Memorial. Next to us was an extension building [Sandy Hall], next was a biology building [Price Hall], an old building, and when you went past that, you went over to where the president lived [The Grove]. Dean Price worked in the biology building. I remember witnessing an argument between Dean Price and another professor about



the German invasion of Belgium.



Another job I had in Blacksburg was mowing grass for Hallie Hughes and Janet Cameron, special ladies in the Home Economics Department. They were the ones who got Jo to

come from Harrisonburg to Tech as a junior. These two ladies were early birds in anything that looked like home demonstration work. They wanted to get a home ec [economics] department started at VPI, so they went to Harrisonburg and picked out 12 or 13 girls based on their academic records. Twelve girls transferred at the beginning of their third year to VPI. Miss Hughes and Miss

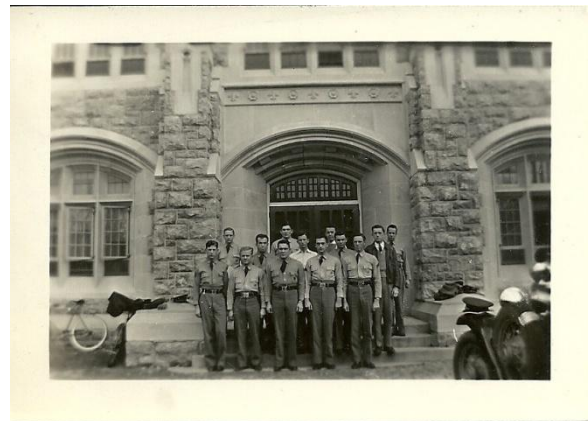


Cameron liked Jo and made arrangements for her to live in their house on old Main Street. They were renting a house and let her stay with them until she finished. When I got there, Jo was of course gone and they had moved to a new house up near the golf course. I used a push lawn mower and it was a big yard. They paid me \$5.

To get home during the holidays, I hitchhiked. Usually I went to Roanoke, then to Lynchburg, then to Charlottesville. The Huckleberry line was only used for special trips for cadets – VMI games, etc. I was not a cadet because of the money – you had to buy uniforms, etc. The civilian student body got started in my day as a money-saving thing; less than 10% of the students were civilian. World War II interrupted the cadet corps to a degree. Some students belonged to the corps because of their parents.

I started my senior classes during the summer after my junior year in order to finish quickly. Near the end of my time at VPI everything was done on an accelerated basis because of the war. Everybody was pushing to get out of school. I had my draft card from Culpeper County (Goldenrod is in Culpeper County) and they were pushing to draft me. The chairman of the draft board told me he would take me this summer [of 1942]. I said to myself, “Well, damn it, we’ll see.” I went to Blacksburg and talked to Dr. Hutcheson, my agronomy department head, elder at the Presbyterian

Church, and he said, “We’ll have your case transferred up here to the campus.” I said, “I hope you can.” He did. It was called the VPI draft board (campus draft board). I was able to stay in school, provided my grades were acceptable.



My grades were never high but they were good enough. We had a very difficult course called bacteriology – a tough course. Things were heating up on campus because everyone knew they were going into the military. We had a bacteriology professor who gave a whole bunch of us





F's on our final exam which would keep us from getting a diploma. This set up a firestorm. We all went to our departments about it. Dr. Hutcheson advised us to get together and try to get him off the campus. He also advised a meeting with Dr. Burruss. Dr. Burruss wrote up a note and sent it back to this professor to give us a re-exam and pretty much told him we should get D's. We all took the exam over, passed it, and graduated.

I graduated in early February 1943 under the accelerated program. I had a student loan when I graduated, but there was no graduation ceremony that year. I had a box of invitations but it was a waste of time. We were told to go to Burruss Hall and pay \$9 for our diploma, take it, and go home.

We hitchhiked out of Blacksburg on the coldest, snowiest day you can imagine. My friend Richardson and I went down to Roanoke and then on to a crossroads between Lynchburg and Charlottesville [Madison Heights]. We shook hands, he went towards Farmville, I went toward Charlottesville, and I never saw him again.

Post Graduate – World War II

I got home to Rapidan, and in no time I was scheduled to go to Culpeper, get on the bus, and go to Richmond for physical exams. One doctor said, "Your ears are dirty." I felt like slapping him. He washed my ears out and all kinds of wax came out. I was sent back home. Then I went back to Culpeper and got a bus to Camp Lee (near Petersburg) and Jo and Ralph came to see me there; they came to see the little boy "getting into the army". We stayed at Camp Lee for processing for maybe two or three weeks. They cut all the hair off my head.

From there I went to Petersburg. We were put on a train, and had no idea where we were going. We went by some swamps; we were going south on the Seaboard Airline Railroad, and could see the ocean. We didn't stop until we got to Florida. There they split the train, with half going to Miami and half to St. Petersburg. I went to Miami, arriving at the railroad station at 1:00 a.m.; everything was dark. We took a truck to Miami Beach where we had basic training for four months. They gave us tests to determine what you could do. I was in the Air Force. I didn't want to be a radio operator. I could do assembly work and went into aviation engineering.

I went by train to Gulfport, Mississippi, not far from Texas. We were trained there, and then sent to Keesler Field (also in Mississippi, about ten miles from Gulfport) for some extra



training. Then I went to Alliance, Nebraska, for flight training. They wanted to see how well you could do what you'd been trained to do. From there we went to Fort Wayne, Indiana. That's where I met the guy who asked me to open my mouth and stick out my tongue. I noticed he had a Virginia accent and found out he was from Waynesboro. It was Dr. James Davis, who delivered Steve Drumheller. [check on birth certificate]

Then we took a train to a place north of Boston, Camp Miles Standish, for some more testing. While we were there, I read a book that was critical of the south. I wrote a letter home about the book. A censor who read the mail came in one day and asked me, "Sanford, what the hell are you trying to do?" He thought I was trying to tell my family I was in New England and we weren't supposed to tell where we were. Plus he thought I was calling New Englanders liberal. He showed me I had misinterpreted the book.

A few days later we got in trucks and went to Boston. At 1:00 am we went up into a huge troop ship and were off to Europe. We were on the boat about a week crossing the Atlantic. It was a big boat, carrying 6500 men. We tried to avoid torpedoes and German submarines. It would go forward, then stop, then go in a different direction: diversionary tactics. Sometimes they would roll an ashcan (a 50 gallon barrel) filled with dynamite over the side. It was designed to explode at a certain depth. The idea was to deter subs. We didn't get hit, and over a week later we arrived in Liverpool.

In Liverpool we were sorted out and I went by truck to a base near Grantham railroad station, which is near the North Sea. I arrived there late in 1943. There was always lots of fog there. You will recall that Matthew Fontaine Murray discovered that when the warm Gulf Stream water meets the colder water of the English Channel and the North Sea, fog is the result.



From the base we were towing gliders and carrying supplies across the channel into northern France. One tow plane could tow two gliders. Paratroopers jumped out of the plane – other troops were carried in the gliders. Each towplane had a pilot and copilot. I was the crew chief. I had to watch the gauges and make sure we didn't run out of gas. The plane had 15-20 paratroopers sitting in benches on the side. Each plane had a jump master who was the toughest SOB to be found. He sat close to the open door watching for

a red light. When the light was red he'd yell, "Stand up, hook up!" The paratroopers would hook themselves together, and stand with their hands on each other's shoulders. The jump master would go first and then everyone else would go after him, pushing each other along. They called it a "stick". They had chutes on their chests and backs.

We had a limited number of opportunities to take troops in; those were missions to the front. When we did that successfully you got a battle star; I got three. I got the air medal twice and got an oak leaf cluster for the second time for flying in combat. Otherwise we hauled in gas and clothing, and brought back injured people to be sent to hospitals in England. There were all kinds of landing fields; most had been bombed by us while they were still behind enemy lines and we had patched them up so we could use them once we pushed the Germans back. Sometimes we could



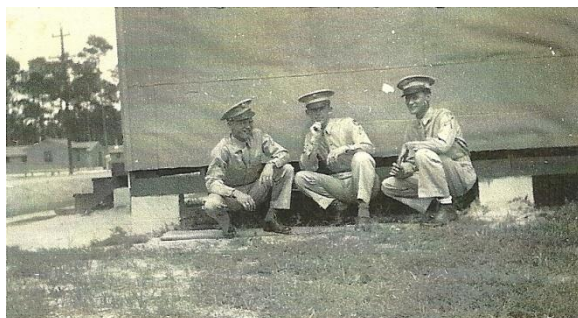
round up and pick up the glider pilots to get them out.



In England we lived in a barracks similar to the USA ones, with about 40 to 50 people in the barracks. We had to get up on time and go and do our jobs. We had inspections; they'd throw a dime on your bed and you'd get written up if it didn't bounce. A truck would take us a couple of miles to the hangar. We had a mess hall where we ate. You had to take your mess kit with you. I think we ate right much horse meat. I thought the food was alright but the Yankee boys complained about it all the time. I did have a couple of Yankee friends; I had finished

college but some of the Yankees were dumb as hell.

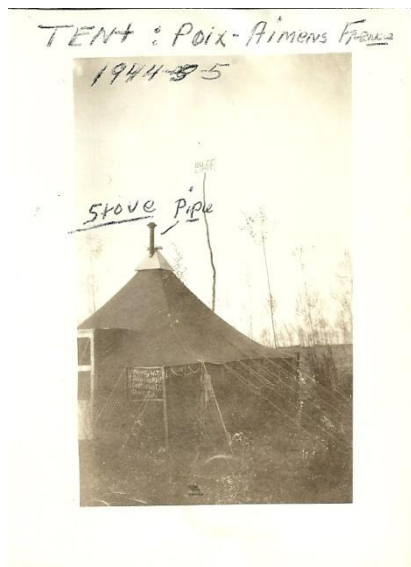
There were three of us whose last names started with "S", Sanford from Virginia, Scully from D.C., and Stanton from D.C. We were all rebels. The New Jersey and New York boys thought we were carrying big knives.



You could go north or south from Grantham Station. After I'd been at work there for a while, I got a notice from Tom [brother] who was stationed at Oxford. He wanted me to meet him in London at Picadilly Square. I got off the train and got a cab to Picadilly Square. We were

supposed to meet at a certain time. I went into a building and he was there; it was a big meeting place. I told him, "You've gotten to be a big bastard." The city was packed with people from all nations and all kinds of soldiers. We took a bus tour with a guide like any tourists. There were people in the square mouthing off about politics and religion. There was a man and his wife who would sing and play a fiddle. They sang songs like "Rock of Ages." It would tear you all to pieces. We went all over London; we had a night off. We stayed in a National Youth Administration-type building. There were lines of beds packed in there. We spent a day and a half in London. I met Tom in London another time, and we had a week to look around. We walked across the London Bridge. Once he came to Leicester. I may have seen him three times while we were in England.

I spent half my time in England and half in France. After we pushed the Germans back, we moved our operation to Poix, France. I spent the rest of my time in that area. We did the glider jobs wherever they were needed. In Steven Ambrose's book about the Rhineland Crossing there is a very good description of the battle. That's where I got my last battle star.



In France we lived in tents they had set up for us. There were eight men to a tent. We had ours fixed up like a house; we stole lumber and fixed it up. It had a small stove the size of a 5-gallon bucket. We used any wood or chips we could find to heat water in our steel helmets for shaving and washing our faces. We also had a mess hall, a French hangar bombed by Germans. They had a big stove where they'd cook the meals. The food was good. Food was brought in by trucks. One guy in our outfit had a motorcycle and he'd pick up the mail.

During 1945 I went with a small group to Switzerland on a two-week rest leave. One of the group was a good friend from upstate New York who spoke French, which was a real help. Being a farm boy, I did not feel the need for two weeks off.

I went back to England for V-E Day. We could get on a plane and go back on a pass. I have pictures of me walking down the street.

I visited Paris, but I didn't like it. I don't like big cities.





The French people were grateful to us for getting their country back from the Germans. I met some good people. We could go from our base in France to Amiens; sometimes you had to wait for a ride. I'd get on a corner, get a ride, go to Amiens, and get back before dark. There was a lady in Amiens who was looking for butter. We had GI butter; I don't know what it was made out of. I found her two one-pound blocks of butter, hid it in my overcoat, and took it to her. She gave me some things, and told me about her husband who'd been killed in the early days of the war. She had a 20-year-old son. She wanted him to come to the base to hear Tommy Dorsey and Glen Miller [records] so I took him out there. She ran a dress shop. Next to her store was a flimsy wall, and people were stealing her stock. I told her I'd throw a brick through the window of the next store. I had two bricks in my pockets. The first brick rolled up and hit the door. I hit the glass the second time. She invited me

to come to her apartment; she was dating the mayor. She offered me souvenirs; she gave me an old French coin. We corresponded for a while after that.

I was in France for V-J Day [August 1945]. I left France around the first of December, 1945, in time to get to New York for New Year's Day. The old boys in these outfits had the right to leave first to come home. You got shipped out based on the time you'd been overseas. I went from Poix in English WWI boxcars made to haul 40 men and 8 mules to Marseille. It was a mudhole. Sooner or later we got on the boat. We celebrated Christmas halfway across the ocean, singing carols. When we got in sight of New York City, we lost our rudder and couldn't do a thing. They sent a lot of tugboats out and they pushed us in. We got tied down in the dock and then we had to wait. Someone in the port authority had to pick up a foot locker with all our papers. The dock workers union wouldn't let anyone else pick it up, so these two old fat boys in turtlenecks came and picked it up. We spent one night in New York, got on the train the next day, and headed south to Fort Meade in Maryland. I was a tech sergeant, the highest rank on boat. They told me to take papers to Fort Meade. We got there at midnight, and went to a big auditorium. The guy in charge called out my name. I handed him my papers, but he told me there was a message for me at the Red Cross. They said leave your things here, and took me to the Red Cross in a jeep. The Red Cross officer talked to me. He asked me when I'd last heard from my family, and finally told me my father had died. That's where I found out I'd lost my father. The Red Cross officer got me a jeep ride to Union Station in D.C., and I got to Orange by train on the coldest night you can imagine. I was the only one who got off the train. When I got there, I asked for a phone. There was one in the tower. I called Rapidan and Jo answered. She and Ralph came and picked me up. I got back the night of the day he died and the next day was the funeral. Walker was in the Pacific; Tom was home. I had to escort mother to the funeral, and she was all to pieces.

A week after the funeral I had to report back to Fort Meade and ask for my bags. I eventually got my bags and was officially discharged; they gave me \$300 mustering out pay. I rode back on the train from Union Station to Rapidan.