



Hearts & Minds

An Appreciation of Dale Voorhees

- ▶ **He piloted 55 missions in World War II** without losing a man to injury or death, so he never won the Purple Heart.
- ▶ **He mentored hundreds of students,** published dozens of papers, and became a full professor at a leading university—but he never earned a PhD.

In their home on a tree-lined street near the Iowa State Center, Mary Voorhees pages through her late husband’s memoir, written not for publication but, in his words, “to set down some memories that might be of interest to our family and reflect information that otherwise could die with me.”

The memoir reflects the man: straightforward and utterly lacking affectation, the life of an ordinary man who, like so many of his generation, did extraordinary things, despite his desire to live simply as an Iowa farmer. Mary Voorhees turns from the volume

to share something her husband would probably have kept to himself.

“No one ever got the Purple Heart on a mission with him,” she reminds. “So every time a colonel or general came to do their mandatory run, they wanted to fly with Voorhees.”

▶ **A SEARING MEMORY**

Roy Dale Voorhees was born near his parents’ southeastern Iowa farm on March 21, 1921. His father raised corn and oats, as well as hogs, cattle and chickens, which afforded the family a modest but secure living.

All that ended 11 years later when, in the depths of the Great Depression, the family lost the farm. Loading their worldly goods onto a horse-drawn wagon for the eight-mile journey to a rented farmstead, the experience was burned into the young boy’s memory.

“I looked back up that road and swore that I’d come back and buy that farm if it was the last thing I ever did,” Voorhees wrote. “I felt humiliated, and I don’t think I have ever gotten over that feeling and have never forgotten that day.”

Voorhees’ parents struggled through the Depression, moving several times from one place to another. But by 1939, they got back on their feet enough to send their son to the University of Iowa. On a visit home, though, he fell in love with Mary Peck, and enrolled in the local community college to be near his future wife.

Yet the war would enforce a greater separation. On December 8, 1941—one day after Pearl Harbor—Voorhees reported for his preinduction physical, and soon began basic training, followed by flight school. Married in September



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1942, the young couple would enjoy life together as he trained pilots until May 1943, when Voorhees left for England and the war.

► A SELF-MADE SCHOLAR

After the war, Voorhees finished his bachelor's degree at Georgetown University, then earned an MBA from George Washington University while assigned to the Department of Defense in the late 1960s. The military, however, would provide Dale Voorhees' "PhD" program.

"Dale had no PhD," notes Raisbeck Endowed Dean Labh Hira. "But one thing our military knows is logistics, and he brought that experience to the college."

Indeed, it was just that expertise that in 1971 inspired Dr. William Thompson, chair of the industrial administration department, to turn to the Pentagon for someone to take Iowa State's fledgling program to a higher level. That a military candidate was

unlikely to have a PhD seemed, at the time, a reasonable trade-off.

"A master's degree allowed them to teach back then, but they couldn't advance very far," Thompson recalls, adding: "Of course, he was an exception to that."

Thompson's remark is an exercise in understatement: this unassuming, academically "uncredentialed" farmer-turned-war hero would become a leader in transportation and logistics, transforming an academic backwater into one of the nation's premier programs. By his 1991 retirement, Voorhees had accomplished in 20 years more than most academics could achieve in 40.

"In my military days, an enlisted person who rose through the ranks to officer was called a 'mustang,'" recalls Charles Handy, the college's founding dean. "Dale achieved much of his academic training through 'the college of hard knocks' as opposed to graduate study. I thought of him as an academic 'mustang'."

► THE PLEASURE OF HIS COMPANY

Yet despite his professional accomplishments, it is for his personal generosity as a teacher and colleague that Voorhees will best be remembered. "He was beloved by many," Associate Dean Kay Palan states simply.

"A true gentleman, a true scholar, and a true friend," adds Associate Dean Mike Crum. "He's already missed, and

will be missed only more in the future."

Former dean Ben Allen, now president of the University of Northern Iowa, acknowledges Voorhees' professional accomplishments, recognized today by the annual Voorhees Supply Chain Conference. But the simpler pleasures of having Voorhees as a friend and colleague, he says, were equally important.

"We often traveled together to St. Paul to meet with people in the barge industry," Allen remembers. "Dale always arranged for us to take a break in our travels and stop by the Mississippi, enjoy the view of the barges, discuss our goals for the meetings, and enjoy some cheese, bread freshly baked by Mary, and a glass of good wine."

"We enjoyed each other's company tremendously," he adds.

► AN ENDURING LEGACY

Dale Voorhees departed on his final mission May 24, 2009.

A man who simply wanted to farm, he was true to his word as a boy, and in later years bought the farm his family lost in the Depression. And though he never worked the land himself, the work he put his hand to—from fighting for the freedom of millions to educating a new generation—will endure as the land endures.

He was a scholar who never earned the PhD, yet whose learning made a lasting mark on the minds of his students; an airman who never won the Purple Heart, but whose life touched the hearts of his family, friends, and colleagues.

Not just colonels and generals, Mary would remind you, but these as well—they all "wanted to fly with Voorhees."

They all did. ■

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