

12-21-1990

Letters Home: 216 W. Holmes Street 'Dick' Dickson, H.H.S. Class of '43

William Dickson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly>



Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dickson, William (1990) "Letters Home: 216 W. Holmes Street 'Dick' Dickson, H.H.S. Class of '43," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 17: No. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol17/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Historic Huntsville Quarterly by an authorized editor of LOUIS.



**LETTERS HOME: 216 W. Holmes Street
'Dick' Dickson,
H.H.S. Class of '43**

6/3/43

I'm writing on an improvised desk which does very well. It's my new gas mask box. We have been issued a gas mask and 1 pr. pants and 1 shirt which are called fatigues. They are lovely stuff, green herringbone twill. ... They cause a condition similar to a Turkish bath. They keep us taking salt pills. The sun's ruthless. You can't tell when it's going to rain. The camp's built on sand and sea shells. When the sun's out and its dry the sand blows and makes you itch. You slip in the dry sand when you walk. When it's wet you track it in your tent when you come in. When it's wetter you bog down. The mosquitoes have multiplied and grown. ... We march everywhere we go. The mess hall, the supply room or wherever it may be. They had me measuring men for uniforms. Some fun! J & M's specialty (expert fitting service). [Dick had worked at Johnson & Mahoney Men Clothiers.]

I ain't never been so hot. I ain't never sweated so much. I ain't never marched so much. I ain't never ate so much. I like it.

Lights out.

Love, *Dick*



7/6/43

Hi Mom,

... We are either marching on crunching roads made of dead oyster shells or on dusty sand that you sink in up to at least 3 inches and the dust gets so thick you can't see the front of the colume (sic) ... You choke up with dust and heat and sweat by the buckets. We've actually sweated so much that our fatigues are covered with white streaks of salt that is left when the sweat dries out. We eat salt tablets

about 10 a day. Sand gets in your clothes and sticks to your sweaty body. The place is made of Sand, Sun, Shells, and dust. The temperature reaches 120° ...

... I never knew I had as much resistance to pain, soreness, fatigue, and misery. It's great to find it out and I'm happy. Of course, I'll always miss home but I've got lots of new and swell pals. I just looked out the back of the tent and there's the most beautiful sunset that I've seen since last year at camp. It makes me happier than ever. ... I'm happy that this hectic day is over, I'm happy that I've had enough to eat, I'm happy that I'm in the air corps, I'm happy that I'm an American and everything else.

The Army herds me around all day but all through it, the Lord is my shepherd still.

Love to all,

Dick



A letter from the November 12, 1943 issue of the Huntsville High School paper, The Red and Blue, to Annie Merts..

Oct. 15, 1943

Dear Miss Annie,

Here I am in a grand little town of sixty thousand people who attend seventy-five churches. The people are very nice to us and we all like it very much.

I've been hoping to find time to write to you. We really have a hard time finding time for anything, even writing home.

There are so many things I'd like to tell you, but that would take pages and hours. I've improved quite a bit about being on time. In fact I've been late for only one formation and only then because I stayed after a lab period to finish an experiment. I don't ever sleep or even doze or dream in class — I know that must seem remarkable to you. Once you get a little idea of the acceleration of the course we're taking you will easily understand why.

We changed from B to C squadron and started Geometry with a new teacher — then things began to happen. Mr. Sanders, our new teacher, is the most remarkable teacher I have ever seen. He teaches to live and lives to teach. The first day he had us we were hit by a bombshell — his words come out in machinegun rapidity, but in precise order. His English is excellent and you can understand everything he says. If you don't think very, very fast, however, at the end of the period you will be thirty minutes behind him. He isn't like most people who run off rapidly at the mouth — everything he says counts and "Lord help the guy who misses a few seconds."

The first day in his class we covered the first six weeks of Plane Geometry. The next day he knew everyone's name. He then started descriptive Geometry of the types used in navigation. This is one thing that is stressed. We did a great deal of practice work on these things. Mr. Sanders buzzes off a fast, but clear and complete explanation of a new type of problem and we go to work with rule, compass, and protractor. Nine days out of ten he greets us with a short test on previous work — and after about a minute he starts buzzing around the room grading and collecting the papers all at once and, when the last man finishes, the tests are all graded and we start something new (only 5 minutes gone and forty-five to go).

Sanders comes over to the study hall when he has no class and helps anyone he can. At night he comes through the dormitory and visits and helps the boys; between classes he does the same thing. He always looks neat. He is short and quick moving, wears glasses and invariably he wears his

Sunday morning smile. We're all crazy about him. He never stops digging out things that will help us at the classification center. He makes his class such a picnic with his interesting way of explanation, his jokes, quips and tall tales — We can hardly wait to get there. He throws in all kinds of extra aids to Algebra, fundamentals, etc., without charge. He has helped us a lot on problems. These by the way are very important. One day he gave us a time test on addition and deliberately tried to heckle us and break up our concentration by making lots of noise and by counting each 10th second out loud. At the end of the time most of our nerves were on edge, so as soon as we checked the papers he held the waste paper basket over his head and had us have a basketball game with the papers. It took about one minute to get all the papers in the basket and we went on our merry way with our nerves fully relaxed. His free hand straight lines, right angles, and circles on the black board are better than I could draw with chalk, string, and rulers.

We started trig this morning. Within the first ten minutes one of the boys asked a question. Sanders said, "I'll get to that in a few minutes; we're supposed to cover a month's work this morning anyway." And away we went again — in a few minutes the question was answered.

Our Physical Training is as regular as the afternoon and it is plenty rugged — but Okay!

We start our first flying in two weeks. We are due to fly ten hours in a light plane before we leave here.

Miss Annie, tell the boys to go after all the Math and Physics they can get. And then if they are about to get into service — tell them the Air Corps can't be beat in any way. I'm thankful every day for the excellent foundation you and Mrs. Dark gave me in Math and Physics. So far it has been easy for me, but plenty of the other fellows haven't been as lucky as I have in the matter of these foundations.

"Dick" Dickson



1 Feb. '46

Dear Mom,

Since I began to realize that I shall soon be free again I have been hysterical with a strange excitement. I am now on duty at surgery for the last night. Much is passing through my weary brain. I wish I weren't leaving Miss Palmer in such a predicament. I'm the last scrub man she has. ... I am to leave Buckley on Thurs. the 7th & I believe I'll go to Lowry Field to be separated — How long that will take I cannot say. ...

I have a crop of G.I. clothing which I am going to make use of in civilian life. You may be getting all sorts of junk soon.

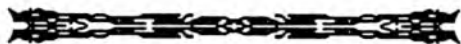
Last night we had an appendectomy. I got to bed at 3:30 ... I must admit that I fear some aspects of return to civilian — we never are free from fear — not completely.

Now however I'll be free to run my own life. I cannot but agree with Dad in the conviction that Army life is a lousy way for a man to live in that it makes a complete puppet of him — no more than a stupid sheep. It seems to me I'm talking big — especially since I'm not sure that I can make a success but I still think I would have more respect for myself if I knew that I'm responsible for my life.

In less than three weeks perhaps I shall see you —

I Love you,

Richard



The young man, William Richard Dickson, whose letters are quoted here graduated with the Huntsville High School Class of '43, an Eagle Scout and his classmates' selection as Most Handsome Senior. Quick to enlist, Dick Dickson joined the U.S. Army Air Corps. After basic training at Keesler Field in Gulf Port, Mississippi, he was detailed to a college "crash" course training unit in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Pilot training followed, but the closest young Dickson got to the fighting was the mission to Bangor, Maine as waist gunner. V.E. Day came just in time to keep him stateside. The Army, taking note of his First Aid Merit badge, promptly reclassified him as a medic and shipped him off to Buckley Field, Colorado where he completed his enlistment.

Upon return to civilian life in 1946, Dickson joined the swelling numbers of college students availing themselves of the G.I. Bill. His pre-med career at the University of Ala-