

**THE
LADY**

ISA

SPY

VIRGINIA HALL, WORLD WAR II
HERO OF THE FRENCH RESISTANCE

DON MITCHELL

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THE FIGHTING BLADE

Virginia Hall was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 6, 1906. Her grandfather, John W. Hall, stowed away on one of his father's clipper ships when he was nine years old. John would later become the master of a ship engaged with the China trade. He would go on to make his fortune in Baltimore as president of the Gas and Electric Company and president of the First National Bank. John's son, Edwin "Ned" Lee Hall, was Virginia's father. He had banking interests and owned several movie houses



Baby Virginia in her mother's lap.



Young Virginia and her brother, John, with flowers.

in Baltimore. Ned married his secretary, Barbara Virginia Hammel.

Virginia's only sibling was her brother, John, who was four years older. Family lore had it that in their childhood years, John mispronounced Virginia's name, calling her "Dindy," and the nickname stuck. They were a close-knit family.

The Halls had an apartment in Baltimore, but Edwin and Barbara

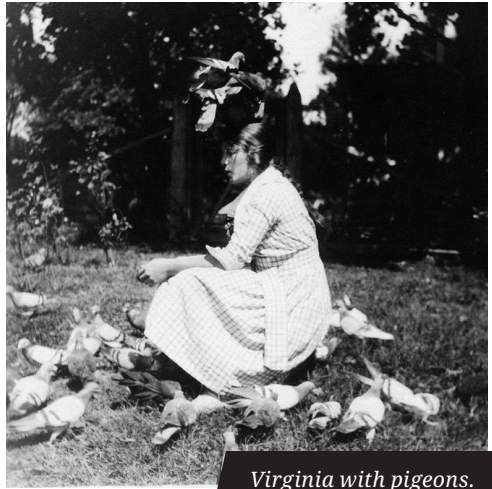
purchased a country home outside of Baltimore—Box Horn Farm—in Parkton, Maryland. Their house in the country was a welcome respite from the city, particularly in the hot summer months. The farmhouse had plumbing but no central heating until after World War II, so it was most comfortable during the spring and summer. There were woodstoves and fireplaces to provide warmth during cold weather.

In order to satisfy the children's curiosity, the home's library was filled with books. The farm had over one hundred acres and was looked



The family home at Box Horn Farm.

after by a tenant farmer who worked the property for the family. A train, called the Parkton Local, ran regularly between Baltimore and Parkton, and it made the commute easy for Edwin to attend to his business interests in Baltimore. During some parts of the school year, Virginia would also take the commuter train from the farm to her school in Baltimore.



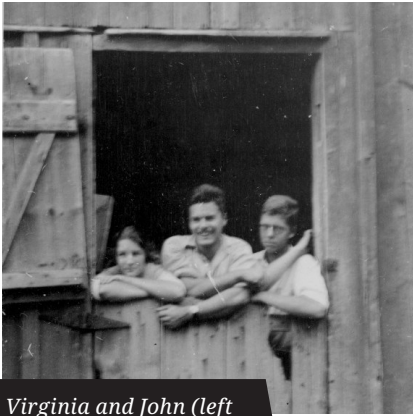
Virginia with pigeons.

Virginia and John loved spending time on the farm. There were hills, orchards, and woods to play in, and the two learned to hunt and fish. The barn was home to horses, goats, chickens, and cows.



Young Virginia riding piggyback on John.

Handling farm animals would later become valuable to Virginia in ways she could not have imagined during her childhood. Looking back at her time there, Virginia once reminded her niece, Lorna Catling, how important it was to learn everything you can. She remarked that “learning to milk the cows for fun turned out to be very handy.”



Virginia and John (left and middle) on the farm.

In 1912, six-year-old Virginia Hall began attending the prestigious Roland Park Country School in Baltimore, where she immediately distinguished herself. Virginia loved sports and was an excellent athlete, playing tennis and baseball and going on to become captain of

the school's varsity basketball and field hockey teams. She also enjoyed acting in the school's theatrical productions—where she sometimes portrayed male characters, a necessity in the all-girls' school.

Virginia also became editor in chief of *Quid Nunc*, the school's yearbook, and was elected president of her senior class. Virginia's profile in her senior yearbook stated:

The “Donna Juanita” of the class now approaches. Though professing to hold Man in contempt, Dindy is yet his closest counterpart—in costume. She is, by her own confession, cantankerous and capricious, but in spite of it all we would not do without her; for she is our class-president, the editor-in-chief of this book, and one of the mainstays of the basket-ball and hockey teams. She has been acclaimed the most original of our class, and she lives up to her reputation at all times. The one thing to expect from Dind is the unexpected.



Virginia (right) playing a man in a costume drama at Roland Park Country School.



Virginia (standing, second from right) and her teammates on the 1924 girls' varsity basketball team at Roland Park Country School.



Young Virginia at Box Horn Farm.

One of Virginia's classmates would later recall that "there was a different manner about her. She was not a typical school girl. She was low key, rather than isolated. She was tall, big-boned and striking, but not in a conventional way. She kept her own counsel but was a definite presence."

Once, Virginia went to school wearing a live garter snake wrapped around her wrist as a bracelet. Self-confident and

seemingly fearless, the school's ninth graders nicknamed her "The Fighting Blade." From an early age, it was clear that Virginia was destined to leave her mark on the world.