

Now & Then in Ripon ... *Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society*

Artifact unveils Ripon brothers' wartime sacrifice

America joined World War II on Dec. 8, 1941 after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor the day before.

Recently, the donation of a tan shooting jacket to the Ripon Historical Society revealed the story of two brothers from Ripon who served during World War II and gave the ultimate sacrifice for their county.

The Ripon Historical Society noted that it is appropriate for the 84th anniversary of the beginning of World War II that it honors these two brothers by telling their story.

Dan Monday of Gents, 211 Watson St., obtained a tan shooting jacket with patches from the Ripon Rifle and Pistol Club and Ripon College. Stenciled on the inside lining was "Lt. Schmidt."

Monday wondered about the jacket's owner and talked to a volunteer with the Ripon Historical Society. This volunteer discovered that the jacket belonged to Robert L. Schmidt (1921-1943) and uncovered the interesting story behind it.

Realizing the importance of the history of the jacket to the community of Ripon and Ripon College, Monday donated it to the Ripon Historical Society instead of selling it in his store.

Robert was born in Ripon, the son of Edward Schmidt (1871-1937) and Ida Berndt Schmidt (1879-1954). The Schmidts had married in 1897 and had four boys and one girl. The family lived on farms in the Ripon area and in the mid-1930s moved to a farm located at the west end of Green Lake.

In October 1937, Robert left Ripon to attend a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program at Riverside Poly High School in Riverside, Calif. He returned to Ripon for the 1939-40 school year and graduated from Ripon High School in 1940.

He was described in the Tiger yearbook as "the class militarist."

After high school, Robert attended Ripon College in 1941 and 1942, where he was a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and the rifle team. He also was a member of the Ripon Rifle & Pistol Club.

In his sophomore year at Ripon

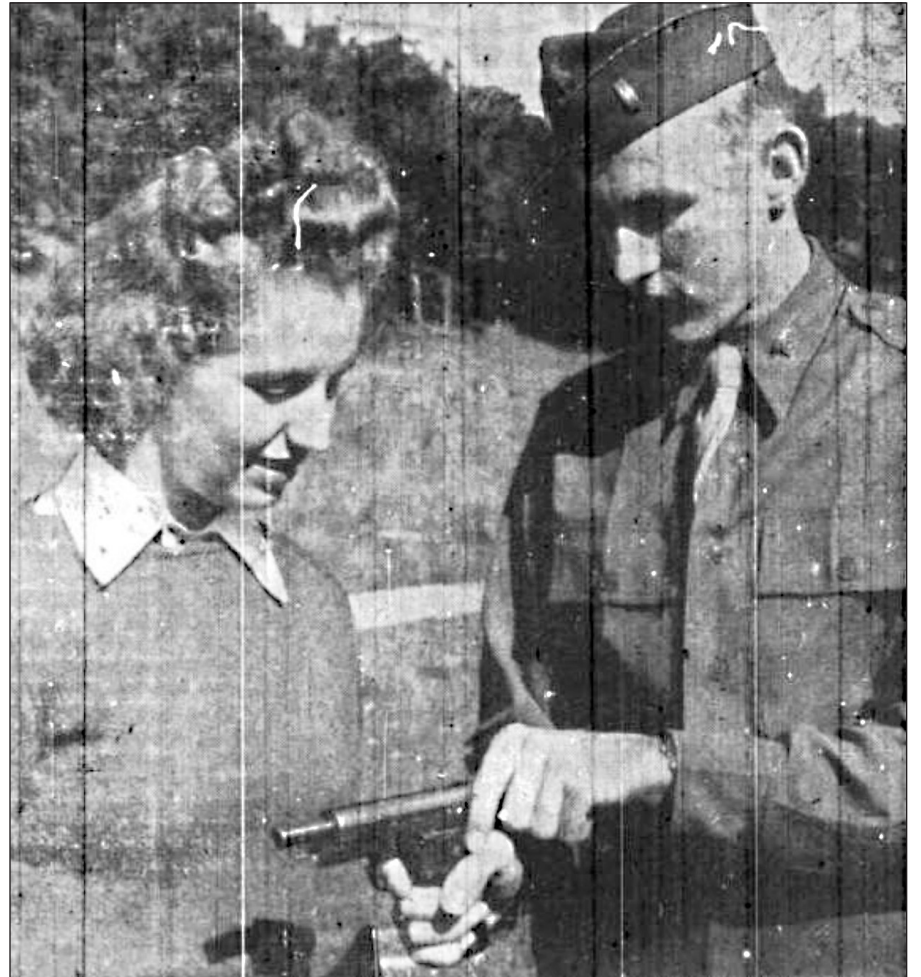


THIS CANVAS SHOOTING jacket was owned by Robert L. Schmidt. Schmidt was a member of the Ripon Rifle & Pistol Club as well as the Ripon College Rifle team in 1941 and 1942. A second lieutenant and pilot in the Army Air Corps, he was killed in a Colorado airplane crash during World War II in July 1943 at 22 years old. The jacket recently was donated to the Ripon Historical Society.

College, Robert is featured wearing the tan shooting jacket in a photograph with the rifle team in the Crimson yearbook. The yearbook noted that the team "closed the year in a blaze of glory" and an "R" sweater was awarded to Robert and four others for the highest season averages.

Robert was called to duty as an officer and the Dec. 12, 1942 *Ripon Commonwealth Press* noted that he was leaving college that week for the military. He was first stationed at Camp Roberts in California, where he was an infantry officer. He then transferred to the Army Air Corps.

The June 25, 1943 *Commonwealth* reported that Robert graduated as a military pilot. Just a month later, on July 29, 1943, the *Greeley Daily Tribune* from Greeley Colo. announced that "Second Lieutenant Robert Schmidt" had died in an airplane crash.



THE OCT. 16, 1942 *Commonwealth Press* featured this photograph of Lt. Robert L. Schmidt when he returned to Ripon on leave from the military during World War II. The caption read: "He was on hand at the annual duck shoot of the Rod and Gun and Rifle and Pistol clubs to sharpen his shooting eye. He is shown giving Bernice Schwandt, a Markesan girl, a lesson in pistol shooting." Schmidt was killed in an airplane crash in July 1943. *RCP file photo*

The article read: "Three student officers were killed yesterday when their B-25 training plane crashed into the side of a mountain west of Westcliff, Colorado."

Robert was just three months past his 22nd birthday. His body was returned to Ripon and he was buried with military honors in Ripon's Woodlawn Cemetery.

Robert's older brother, Marvin Schmidt (1906-1945), also died during World War II.

After graduating from Ripon High School, Marvin attended Ripon College for two years before he entered the war department as a clerk under the civil service. He returned to Ripon College in 1929 and graduated in 1931. He married Marie Zinzow Schmidt (1909-1961) in 1930 and had two children.

Marvin was commissioned a captain in the Army Reserve in 1941 and was called to active duty Jan. 17, 1942. He was stationed in the Philippines.

Ripon historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1963) noted in his Pedrick Genealogy Notebooks that Marvin was a chemical scientist, "and as such was an ordinance expert."

In his brother Robert's obituary from August 1943 Marvin is listed as being a prisoner of war, "being held in a Japanese prison camp."

The June 28, 1945 *Ripon Weekly Press* stated that Marvin's wife had received information through the Red Cross that he was dead.

The article reported that Marvin "Was a prisoner of war and had been placed on a ship Oct. 11, 1944 for transfer from the Philippines, where he had been in a prison camp, to be taken to Japan and that ship was torpedoed by a submarine Oct. 23, 1944. There were 1,775 prisoners on board and only nine escaped drowning."

Although his body was lost at sea, a military headstone bearing his name is located next to his wife's grave in Ripon's Hillside Cemetery.

Under his name in the 1924 Ripon High School Tiger yearbook is this quote from a poem of Thomas Moore: "How shall we rank thee upon glory's page, Thou who are more than soldier and just less than sage."

Another brother, Ervin Schmidt also served as a warrant officer during World War II.

Those who have family artifacts that they may no longer want are encouraged to consider donating them to the Ripon Historical Society. The society accepts items, papers, photographs, family histories and more from people who lived or worked in Ripon.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information, visit www.riponhistory.org, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.



ROBERT L. SCHMIDT (1921-1943) was featured in his shooting jacket in front of the Ripon College Rifle team in the 1942 *Crimson* yearbook. Schmidt, a member of the Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at the college, had attended a Junior ROTC program in California before graduating from Ripon High School. He became an active-duty officer in the Army Air Corps during World War II.

submitted photo