

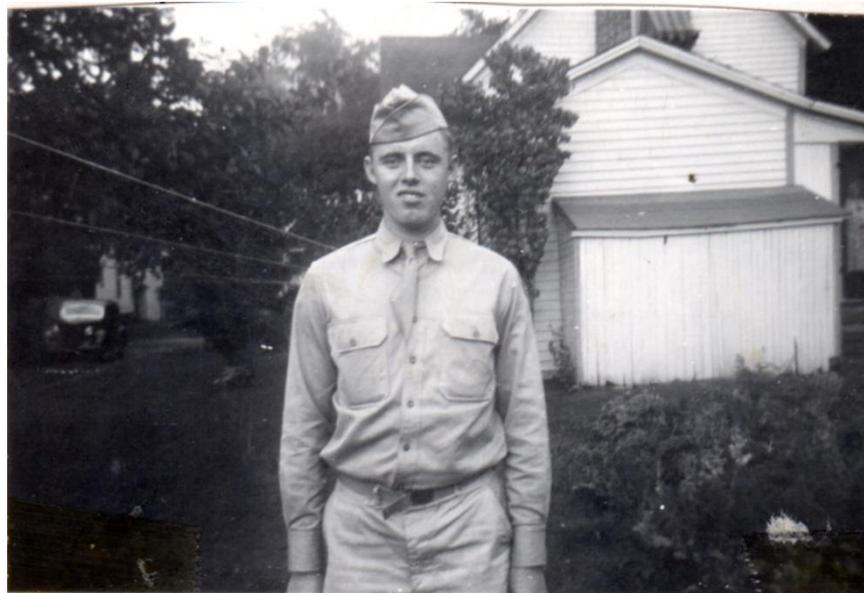
A Fine Line Between Being Decorated and Court Martialed

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

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Thanks to the volunteer effort of Perinton resident Diana Batchelor, we know that Ronald Williams of Fairport was decorated for his actions in Germany in WWII, although he could have just as easily been court martialed. Diana is a Fairport alumni and recently graduated from Nazareth College with a degree in History. While a full time student and holding down a job, she found time to volunteer at the town historian's office, digitizing an enormous archive of World War II Perinton soldier records. I previously wrote of the effort to digitize these records, first created by Charlotte Clapp, Perinton Town Clerk and Historian. Soldiers and their families provided information and photographs to Clapp, who added thousands of newspaper clippings to the archive. Lost for many years, the collection was rediscovered by town historian Sue Roberts in 1986.

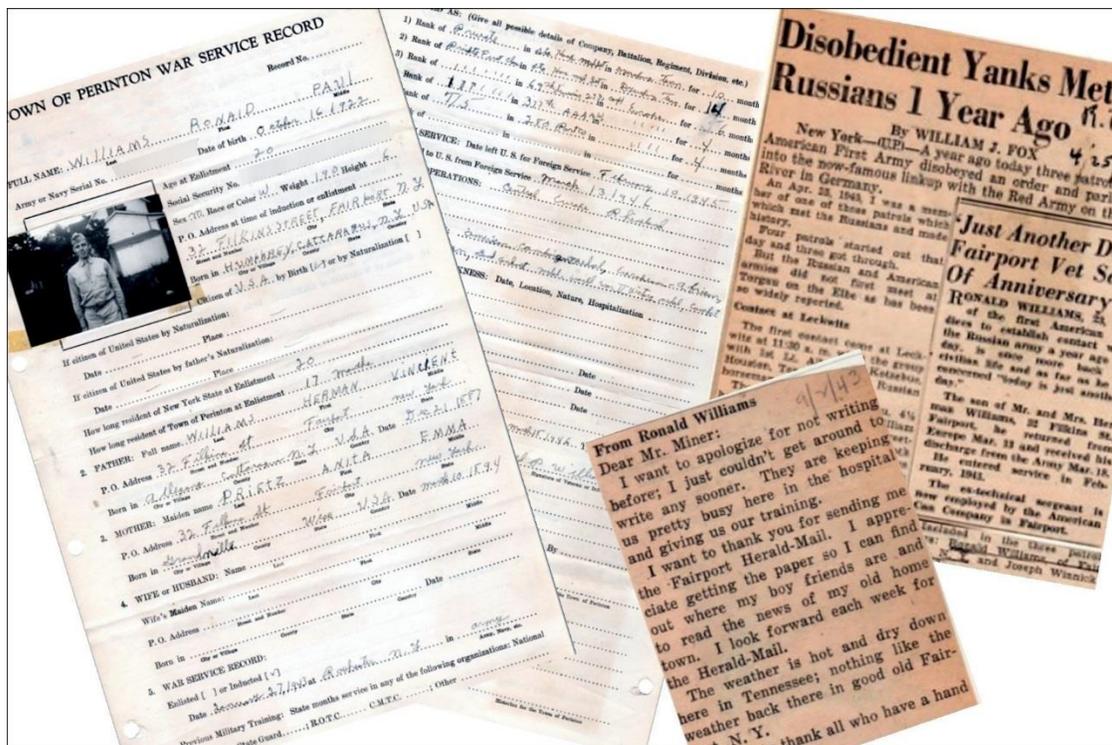
The effort to digitize the collection began over a year ago, with Diana accomplishing the bulk of the work. The records of 936 soldiers are included. Her effort allows us to share documents with families and others interested in learning of the contributions of our town's citizens to the war effort.



Private Ronald Williams behind the family home at 32 Filkins Street

An example: The archive reveals that four Filkins Street brothers served their country. The story of one of the brothers, Ronald Williams, provides an illustration of the depth of information

found within the collection. Private Williams was among the first Americans to encounter their allies, the Russian Army, on April 25, 1945. This essentially cut Germany in half, and helped end the war. The American patrols had been instructed to find the Russians, but not make contact in any way. Newspaper reports of the incident stated that “the orders had come from very high up. They involved high political considerations.” The patrols ignored their orders, captured companies of German soldiers and a military hospital, turning it into a holding point for their prisoners. Although badly outnumbered, they took town after town, bluffing that non-existent supporting artillery would decimate the enemy’s encampments. Soon Fairport’s Private Williams and his patrol saw a group of soldiers on horseback on the horizon – the Russians allies they had been ordered to find but under no circumstances fraternize with. But fraternize they did, swapping cigarettes for vodka, and enjoying a marathon of eating and drinking.



Examples from the archive related to Ronald Williams of Fairport

The actions of the patrols which included Fairport’s Ronald Williams upstaged a carefully orchestrated meeting of Russian and American troops. Major General Edwin F. Reinhardt later said that his first inclination “was to court martial the whole crowd.” Upon further review, Reinhardt reconsidered: “That’s the way it goes. Things go well, you get decorated; if they go wrong, you get court martialed.” And thanks to Diana Batchelor, we know the story.