

Date: 1-16-02

James Riddlesperger

Jim Riddlesperger loved to tell stories. One of his favorites related the apocryphal tale of the son of former Korean President Syngman Rhee taking a job with *Life* magazine and then becoming lost in the wilds of Korea. The magazine, it was said, dispatched a crew to locate the



Riddlesperger

wayward writer. When, after a period of time, a member of the search team found him, the searcher proclaimed, "Ah, sweet Mr. Rhee of *Life* at last I've found you."

Born on a farm in Malakoff, "mid the pine trees of east Texas," Feb. 7, 1913, James Warren Riddlesperger earned his A.A. at Lon Morris College where he formed his S.T.U.G. fraternity (Guts spelled backwards) with classmates and lifelong friends. He graduated from North Texas State Teacher's College before becoming a high school teacher in the early 1930s. He taught in the east Texas towns of Payne Springs, Emhouse, and Frankston before resigning as high school principal when he was drafted into the Army in early 1942. In the Army Air Corps, he worked his way to officer status and ultimately participated in the Pacific War where he flew as an electronic countermeasures specialist on B-24s. For his service, he earned numerous service awards, including the "Air Medal." During the war, were he met the love of his life, Carol Jertson, whom he married in 1945. About her, he would often quote poetry with a twinkle in his own brown eyes - "the light that lies in woman's eyes has been my life's undoing."

Typical of him, while part of the U.S. occupation forces in Japan, he befriended a Japanese family with whom he remained close. After the war, the young couple moved to Austin, Texas, where he completed his M.A. and doctoral course work in government. He took a faculty position at North Texas State College in the summer of 1950, just weeks before receiving a second draft notice for service during the Korean Conflict. Ultimately, he attained the rank of Major. Once the Korean War ended, he returned to Denton where he taught at North Texas until his retirement in 1978. He was an insightful master professor, receiving numerous awards for his craft, including the "Fessor Graham Award" and the Distinguished Teaching Award. He founded and sponsored the International Students Association at NT until his retirement. He acted as chair of the political science department toward the end of his career. After retirement, Mr. Riddlesperger was elected

to the Denton City Council, serving six years, and as mayor pro tem during his last term. He was appointed to several boards at the North Central Texas Council of Governments and was elected to the first Texas Silver-haired Legislature. After a stroke, he spent his last years convalescing at home under the loving care of his wife. He died Saturday, Jan. 12, 2002, at home.

A lifelong Democrat, he participated in campaigns for a number of public servants and took great pleasure from debating and discussing politics. He was a 32nd degree Mason, a past president of the Denton Kiwanis Club, and a charter member of the "Baggy Pants Club," a group of retired educators. An active member of the First United Methodist Church of Denton, he served the church in a variety of capacities, including Chairman of the Official Board. He was modest and unassuming, always quick to praise others but uncomfortable when accolades came his way.

He and his wife had four children - Carol Kirchoff of Denton, Terry Boyd of University Park, James Jr. of Fort Worth, and Lee Ann Ellington of Evansville, Ind. - who adored him. Also surviving Mr. Riddlesperger are: sons-in-law Dan Boyd and Donald Ellington, daughter-in-law Kris Riddlesperger, and grandchildren Brian Graham, Frances Kirchoff Schmidt, Karl Kirchoff, Andrew Kirchoff, Daniel Boyd, Caroline Boyd, Catherine Boyd, James Riddlesperger III, David Riddlesperger, Cora Ellington and John Ellington. He was preceded in death by son-in-law Gary Kirchoff.

A memorial service was held at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 15, at the First United Methodist Church. Gary Mueller officiated. Schmitz-Floyd-Andersen Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Memorials may be made to the Permanent Endowment Fund of the First United Methodist Church, or to the Political Science Department Scholarship Fund at the University of North Texas.

As he prepared for each day, Mr. Riddlesperger would carefully put the things he treasured in their assigned places — his wallet in his hip pocket and his reading glasses and address book in his shirt pocket. In his wallet he kept a silver dollar that his brother had flipped to him on a troop train as he set off to service in World War II — a constant reminder of the importance of family and friends. His reading glasses symbolized the educational enterprise to which he dedicated his life. His address book kept him in touch with friends. In it, typed on his old Royal manual typewriter, he kept his favorite Bible verse, the passage ending “and the greatest of these is love.”

Ah, sweet mystery of life at last I've found you.