



Col. John W. Ripley in 1971.
Colonel John W. Ripley, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
(1939 – 2008)

Colonel John W. Ripley served 35 years active duty in the Marines. Graduating June 1957 from Radford High School, Radford Virginia, he served for one year in the Marine Corps before entering the United States Naval Academy, obtaining an appointment from the Secretary of the Navy. In June of 1962, he graduated with a Bachelor's of Science degree in electrical engineering and was commissioned Second Lieutenant, USMC.

Upon completion of Basic School, Col. Ripley was assigned Sea Duty with Marine Detachment, USS Independence. Afterwards he joined 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, commanding a Rifle, then Weapons platoon. In May 1965 Col. Ripley was transferred to 2nd Force Reconnaissance Company where he completed Airborne, Scuba, Ranger, and Jumpmaster courses then deployed overseas with his platoon.

In October 1966, Col. Ripley joined 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines just below the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in the northern sector of South Vietnam, I Corps. Commanding "Lima" Company for a year Ripley saw much action in the famous "Leatherneck Square" area (Dong Ha, Con Tien, Khe Sanh). He was wounded in action while commanding Lima Company, then returned to action in March 1967 to complete his tour.

Following Vietnam he attended Amphibious Warfare School and on completion of the course became the Infantry Officers Monitor, Headquarters, Marine Corps. In October 1969 he was selected to serve as the Exchange Officer to the British Royal Marines. He attended the Marine Commando Course at Lympstone, England, then served in Singapore with the 3rd Commando Brigade and with 40 Commando in Northern Malaya, campaigning for several months with the famous Gurkha rifles. Col. Ripley also served with the Special Boat Service (3rd SBS) and with Zulu Company Group in northern Norway. Taking command of "Yankee" Company they deployed throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. Col. Ripley returned to Norway for his second winter to complete the Mountain and Arctic Warfare Courses at Elvegardsmoen. He also completed the Joint Warfare Course at Old Sarum, England.

Col. Ripley returned to Vietnam in 1971 and served as Senior Advisor to the 3rd Vietnamese Marine Battalion, which operated along the DMZ. He was at Dong Ha with his battalion during the 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Invasion. It was during this invasion that Col. Ripley heroically performed the action at the Dong Ha Bridge, for which he was awarded the nation's second highest honor, the Navy Cross. John G. Miller's book, *The Bridge at Dong Ha*, (Naval Institute Press) documents this action.

Returning from Vietnam in 1972, Col. Ripley became the Marine Officer Instructor at Oregon State University. In 1975 he attended American University in an Advanced Degree program, earning a Masters of Science. Upon completion of his degree he was assigned to the Office of the Chief of Staff, HQMC serving in Special Projects Directorate then later as the Administrative Assistant/Aide to the Chief of Staff.

Col. Ripley next commanded 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines from July 1979 to May 1981. During this time they deployed for Combined Arms Exercise 2-80, then to Mountain Warfare Training Center. In January 1981 the battalion deployed to Norway, becoming the first unit of its kind to conduct Arctic Warfare Training and winter operations there.

Upon completion of his tour with the 2nd Marines, Col. Ripley attended Naval War College in Newport, RI, graduating in 1982. He then reported to the Joint Staff, Joint Chief of Staff, serving there as Political-Military Planner and Branch Chief, European Division, J-5.

Col. Ripley was next assigned to the U.S. Naval Academy where he served as Senior Marine and Director, Division of English and History from 1984-1987. During this period he established a record of commissioning more than 300 Academy midshipmen into the Marine Corps. Col. Ripley next spent a year as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3 with the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, Okinawa, Japan.

In July 1988, Col. Ripley assumed command of the 2nd Marine Regiment, Camp Lejeune, NC. the 2nd Marines deployed twice as a Regiment to Norway. Upon leaving the Regiment, he commanded the Navy-Marine Corps ROTC at Virginia Military Institute. During his time at VMI, Col. Ripley created the largest, most productive NROTC unit in the country.

Col. Ripley has earned six valorous and fourteen personal decorations including the Navy Cross, the Silver Star, two awards of the Legion of Merit, two awards of the Bronze Star with Combat "V", the Purple Heart, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation, and the Navy Unit Citation, the Combat Action ribbon, The Vietnamese Distinguished Service Order and the Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star.

Col. Ripley's heroic action at the Dong Ha bridge was selected as a single act to memorialize the actions of all Naval Academy graduates during the entire Vietnam War. In Memorial Hall at the Academy, a large diorama titled "Ripley at the Bridge" represents the noble and gallant actions of all Naval Academy men who fought there.

Following his retirement in June 1992, Col Ripley became the president of Southern Virginia College in Buena Vista, VA. While there he was credited with saving the financially-troubled college. After turning the College over to new management, Col. Ripley was asked to remain as Chancellor in order to assist and supervise the conversion of the College into a coeducational, four year institution. Upon successful completion of this, he received resolution and citations from the Trustees, the City of Buena Vista, and the Governor of Virginia.

In 1997, Colonel Ripley assumed the responsibilities as President, Hargrave Military Academy in Chatham, Virginia. While serving in this capacity, he shored up parental confidence in the program of instruction, refocused the financial plan on infrastructure improvement, dormitory and classroom modernization, updated curricula to include additional offerings thereby enhancing the overall program, and established innovative sources of revenue through positive change and sound management practices.

In June 1999, Colonel Ripley was selected by the Marine Corps to serve as the Director of Marine Corps History and Museums and Director of the Marine Corps Historical Center. He returned to government service in July, 1999.

Col. Ripley has been elected to Phi Alpha Theta, a history honorary, and to Who's Who Worldwide. He also holds the distinction of having commissioned more officers in the Marine Corps than anyone on record. During his two years of Vietnam service he participated in 26 major operations which included numerous battles at the Rifle Company, Battalion, and Division level. He and one other Marine share the distinction of more combat experience at the rifle company and battalion level than any other active duty Marine. He has been the subject of, or in, over 30 books and has lectured widely on combat leadership, performance in adversity and the value of humanities, classics, and liberal arts. He was in high demand as a motivational speaker and participates in numerous national seminars. His testimonies before Congress, a Presidential Commission, and numerous writings have been entered into Congressional record.

Col. Ripley passed away October 28, 2008 leaving behind his wife, Moline and their four children: Stephen, Mary, Thomas and John Michael.