

Col. John W. Ripley, USMC (ret.)

I would like to start my remarks with one of our father's favorite prayers – God, Please do not let screw this up. Amen.

As I look out in this chamber I see some of our nations greatest warriors and patriots. Our father addressed each of you as his friend, family, and fellow Marine. All equal terms in his book. I want to thank all of you for coming to honor our father. Our family is deeply humbled by the outpouring of support and your condolences. Our father taught me that leadership is “a contact sport”. You have to personally engage your Marines. This turnout is a testament to John Ripley's style of leadership and for that matter his style of friendship.

My father is part of two great institutions. The US Marine Corps, and the US Naval Academy. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commandant Gen Conway, and the Superintendent of the Naval Academy Vice Adm. Fowler.

When I was a newly minted 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. one of my Basic School instructors told me that my father is worth 1000 men. He could see from my expression that I did not understand – a look that I mastered as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. He responded, that if there was a fight and your father was going then 1000 men would immediately join him. It appears that instructor underestimated John Ripley.

Family was always the most important thing in John Ripley's life. My siblings and I are living proof of this. We made plenty of mistakes as children, and if it were not for the bond of family none of us would not have seen 18. Our father gave everything to us. He never had a nice car, took individual vacations, or had lavish things – all of that went to our education and betterment. He was a selfless parent. Despite all of his achievements we always knew that we were his greatest accomplishment.

Our father loved history. A life long student, and son of Virginia, he often closed his messages, notes, and speeches with a quote from Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart, or Robert E. Lee. Every road trip as a child included a sudden stop to read a battlefield marker, or pause for a quick history lesson. This knowledge gave him a sense of perspective. He believed that he was located at Dong Ha for a reason, and that he had the tools and the training to blow that bridge. He passed on this perspective at every opportunity. When he would speak in public or private it was always built on stories and lessons of the past. How many of you have walked a battlefield, toured a museum, a monument, or cemetery with John Ripley – the emotion was overwhelming and was only matched by his passion for the topic. History inspired our father, and his passion was focused on the courageous acts of Marines carrying out their orders. The tactics and details of history were simply a baseline to teach us about the more important things. Our father's knowledge of the Corporal, the PFC, and those overlooked acts of heroism was unmatched. It tells a great deal about John Ripley's character that he spent the time to uncover these facts, and

choose to use them instead of other more well known examples of courage and heroism.

Faith always played a powerful role in our father's decisions. Faith is why John Ripley was always incredibly optimistic. When the odds were long John Ripley wanted to be with you, and you wanted the same thing. His parting words to my brother and I as we matriculated into VMI were "Just remember – they can't kill you". He took particular pride getting the underdog, the student athlete with the questionable academics, but great leadership potential into the Academy. John Ripley loved a good fight, and he was good at it.

There are so many incredible memories and lessons that I have from our father. I want to leave you with a few of our favorites.

- Trouser pockets are not for hands.
- Officers with facial hair love to stand weekend duty
- Always take the hard road. You will be tired, but you will be alive.
- There are two seats on the John Ripley train – on it or under it
- When you use the kneeler today, do not rest your bottom on the pew. Kneel or sit – not both.
- The term Skipper is only to be used for Commanding Officers of Rifle Companies in Combat, and Ships at Sea.

I want to share with you the concept of "A nickel a run". We never took normal vacations as children. In our house it was 100% all the time and this held true for vacations. We would drive all night to the beach and arrive at 2AM. In the

middle of the night we did what every normal family would do – we would go for a swim. When we went to Martha Vineyard for a day trip our father rented 5 bicycles, and we peddled around the island. My entire family found out first hand that it's 27 miles around Martha's Vineyard. I was 10 years old. While visiting Yosemite in the early spring we all had to swim across the Merced River. And when we would go skiing, Dad would buy us all lift tickets at \$20 each. The key was to get as many runs down the hill as possible so that at the end of the day you were at a "nickel a run". I was 25 years old when I discovered that that ski resorts serve food, and have warm lodges.

In John Ripley's house everyone had a job and whining was not allowed. Idle hands are the devils playthings. One summer our father found us watching TV in the basement. He promptly cut the power cord off the TV closest the set so that we could not splice the wires. Many of you do not know that my father is also a dentist - after years of complaining about the fact that I had to wear braces, I demanded that they be remove. To my surprise, my father obliged and removed them that day with a pair of pliers .

You all know that our father loved being a US Marine. Over and over in his notes he says the same thing – To be a Marine is to be blessed. My emblem is the same as yours and the same as the hundreds of thousands that went before me – they are watching me perform. I have to uphold the standards. My fathers style of leadership was summed up on a card he gave me when commissioned.

A Marine Leader must have:

- The Spirit of the Attack – *March to the sound of the guns*
- Boldness – *You are part of the finest fighting force in the world – act like it.*
- A receptiveness for risk taking – *Risk comes with the job, and if you are not comfortable operating with risk then you need to get into a new line of work.*
- Endurance, mental & physical – *Mental is far more important than physical*
- Decisiveness – *Make a decision Lieutenant!*
- A sense of mission, a sense of duty. - *Mission first, Marines Always*

In recent years the Marine Corps saved our fathers life – twice. The first time our 32nd Commandant, Gen Jones, provided a helicopter so that our father could receive a transplant. Time was short, and when John Ripley needed the Corps they came through in a way only the Corps could. The second time few people know about. The road to recovery from the transplant was a long one. Our father was struggling. There was a commotion outside his hospital room as an Army orderly tried to stop the 4 Marines from entering. Moments later the Color Sergeant of the Marine Corps entered with the Battle Colors of the Marine Corps. The message was simple. “Sir, the Commandant says that these colors are not to leave this room until you do”. Those colors saved his life.

While stationed here in 1985, the Commandant of the Naval Academy Leslie Palmer died suddenly. Our father came to visit his friend prior to internment. He was shocked when he entered the room to find no honor guard with Capt. Palmer. As the Senior Marine at the Naval Academy our father stood at Parade

Rest by Capt. Palmer for 10 hours. It was only after our mother called another Marine to replace him that our father would leave his friends side.

While serving as the Director of History for the Marine Corps our father was contacted by an officer from a Regimental staff in Iraq. The Regimental CP was hit by a mortar round and the Regimental colors had blood on them and were burned in several spots. The officers question was what do we do these Colors and how do we get new ones. Our father's response was classic John Ripley – "Nothing. They are called BATTLE COLORS".

There is little question that John Ripley was a winner. Most of you do not know the secret of our father's success. If you have ever attended one of his change of command's, a promotion, or an awards ceremony, you will know that at the end he always thanked one person for his achievements – our mother, Moline. As many of you know our mother is not able to attend today's funeral service. It is said that behind every successful man is a woman that expects it. This was never more accurate than in our home. My Mom loved being married to a Marine, and she loved the Corps. I remember in Camp Lejeune when our father would come home for dinner she would politely ask him to go upstairs and change out of his uniform. I always thought this was odd. I finally figured it out. When passing out orders in the house Moline did not want to embarrass him. Mom outranked Dad. Our mother, Moline, has always been the driving force behind John Ripley.

In the future I will tell my son about his grandfather, John Walter Ripley. I will tell him that John Ripley was everything that is good about being an American. He gave everything he had to his family, and he loved his wife above all things. He was driven, and eternally optimistic. John Ripley was a patriot, and he remains my hero. His one defining trait – above all others – was that John Walter Ripley is a US Marine.