

Sergeant E-5 Norbert A. Ricker

**U.S. Marine Corp., Camp Lejeune: G company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division.
Vietnam: L Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division.**

Medals: Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, National Defense, Vietnam Service Medal



Attended Memorial High School

Norbert A. Ricker was born in Ottoville, Ohio on October 15, 1943. Unfortunately, his mother passed when he was only three-months-old. Norb's father, Herman Ricker, was raising three sons and a daughter and eventually got re-married to Lilian Poppe. The family soon moved to St. Marys and took up residence on Columbia Street. Norb attended school in St. Marys but left high school for farm work. He would have graduated with the class of 1961 but later attained his GED in the service.

Norb worked alongside his brother-in-law, producing 800 bales of hay and straw per week and delivering them to Lexington, Kentucky to feed and bed race horses. When he was old enough, Norb and good friend, Jim Clark, decided they would join the Marines. They had to wait almost a year until Jim turned 18. Soon after, the Marine Recruiter was summoned and came to see them. "It was Marines all the way!"

On October 1, 1963, Norb and Jim joined the Marines and departed by train, eventually arriving in Youngstown where they took the oath. From Youngstown, they boarded a bus for the trip to Paris Island, South Carolina. They got off the bus and Norb immediately thought "what am I gonna do here?" The first 12 hours were horrible.

Early the next morning it was off to basic training. According to Norb, the experience wasn't bad as he was in the best shape of his life because of baling and throwing hay bales. He was in better shape than his instructors.

The Drill Instructors stayed with the platoon 24/7. One of the DIs had a girlfriend on base and would sneak out



Norb while in Basic Training.

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Norb with his parents.



Norb enjoying the sights in Italy.

at night. He told Norb to keep order while he was gone. Norb said he was green as any of them and questioned this to himself. When the DI got back everyone was having a good time. The DI was pissed and hit Norb in the stomach once, twice, three times. Norb thought he probably could have whipped him, but you didn't do that. After graduation, Norb found out that particular DI was in the hospital, so Norb and his buddies went to visit him and the guy apologized, explaining that it was all part of the job.

The next stop for Norb was Camp Geiger where Marines learn to be riflemen. Norb came out the other end and was assigned to G company, Second Battalion, Second Marines, Second Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in a Weapons Platoon. He was responsible for handling a rocket launcher but often carried a machine gun as well. While in G Company, Norb went on three different cruises, two in the Caribbean, and one to the Mediterranean, part of a Marine Amphibious Forces (MAF). The cruise to the Med was aboard the Amphibious Assault Ship, USS Boxer.

While onboard ship, Norb stayed in a compartment along with other Marines. Their bunks were sometimes stacked six high. The Marines kept busy with physical training, marksmanship and classes. In the latter months of 1964, ports of call included Italy, where he visited Rome and Sicily, Valencia, Palmar, and El Ferrol, Spain; and the Island of Malta.



The USS Boxer.

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Ship life and buddies aboard the USS Boxer.

a non-military flat bottom boat and proceeded up a river to join up with the Seventh Marines. The USG General William Wiegel landed at Vung Tau on March 11, 1966, and disembarked replacement troops (Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS online) 1959-1991). Vung Tau is located at the mouth of the Dinh and Song Co May Rivers. The boat ended up stranded for several hours on a sandbar. There they were, in a river, in Vietnam, with only their seabags! Once free, they spent the night in an old Missionary, departing the next morning for Chu Lai.

On March 12, 1966, Norb joined Company L, Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, Third Marine Division, everything was in disarray, and he was only there for a few hours, enough time to collect



Marines prepare to evacuate killed and wounded from battle area in Operation Texas. The Troops are collecting extra ammunition and equipment from the casualties. (Marine Corps Photo A 186822)

While off the ship, the Marines had plenty of training opportunities.

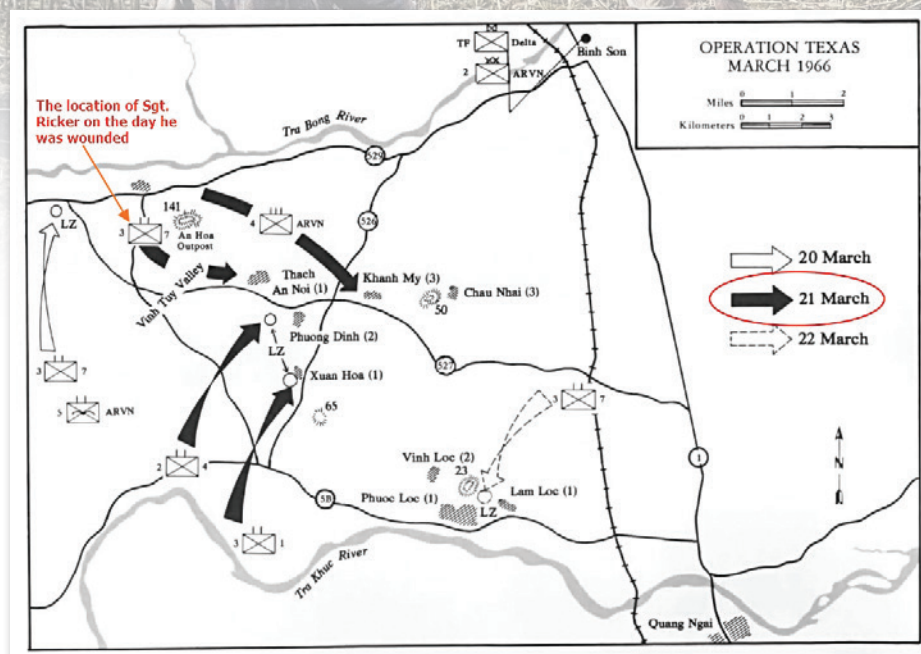
Norb was getting a little tired of Lejeune and had the chance to go somewhere else. There was a sign-up sheet floating around for a station at Adak, Alaska. Norb signed up and later received orders to Adak. He was still holding the orders in hand when they were cancelled and replaced with orders for Vietnam. By now, Norb had achieved the rank of Corporal. A short time later, he flew to Camp Pendleton, California for 30 days of Guerilla training, then shipped out to Vietnam aboard the USG General William Wiegel, a troop carrier. The ship stopped for four hours of liberty in Hawaii but none of them had any money. They saw the USS Arizona before reboarding the ship to Vietnam.

Once in Vietnamese waters, Norb didn't actually land at a tradition harbor, he and several other replacement Marines boarded

his field gear, leaving his seabag behind before the entire Company boarded helicopters. They were dropped off in the jungle and spent the next week looking for the enemy.

On March 21, they were told that they were going to take a hill. The Marines watched the Jets pound the hill, dropping 500-pound bombs on it for hours, then they got word to saddle up. Norb was part of an effort, known as Operation Texas, to drive a large force of

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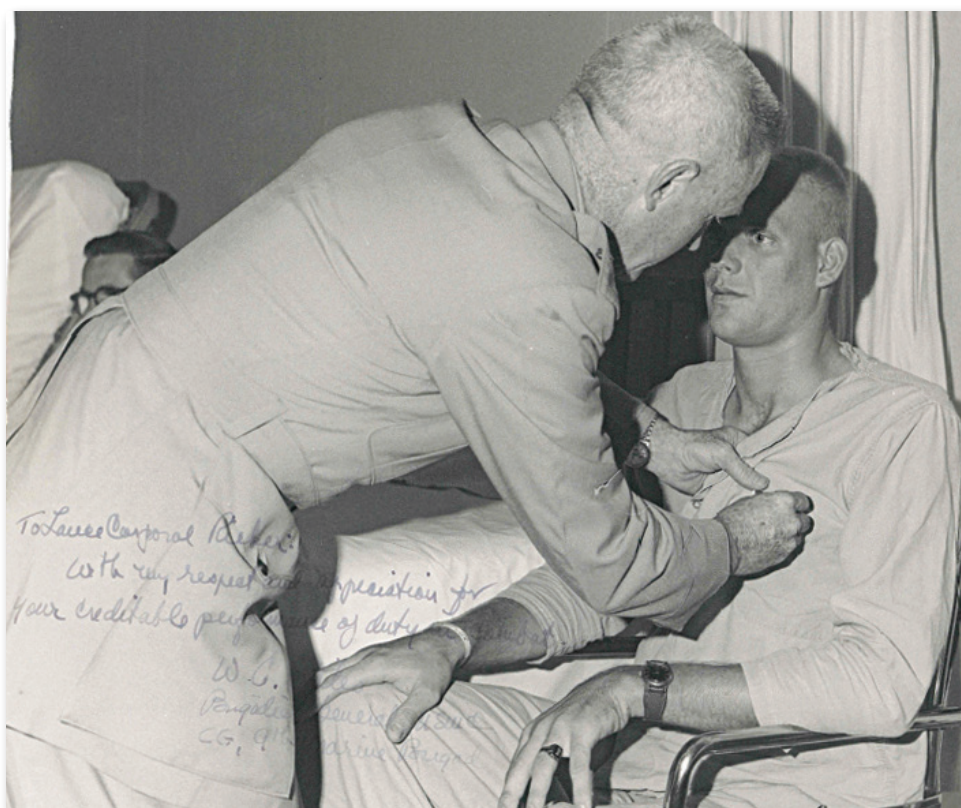


the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong out of the Vinh Tuy Valley. There were two Battalions from the Seventh Marines, joined by a Regiment of ARVN (Army of South Vietnam) troops. The Second and Third Battalions of the Seventh Marines encountered large enemy forces in strongly fortified positions. (US Marines in Vietnam, An Expanding War 1966. Shulimson, Jack: 1982).

Near the village of Quang Ngai, Norb's squad came under intense enemy fire. "We didn't find the NVA, they found us." The NVA were probably hiding in tunnels waiting on the

Marines. "It was a "nightmare." On that day, out of Norb's squad of ten Marines, seven were killed. Norb was wounded by small arms fire in the right thigh. He had been in country less than nine days.

Norb was thrust onto a Medevac helicopter while still under enemy fire. Norb couldn't say enough about the bravery of those pilots. He was taken to B-med (Third Medical Battalion Aid Station) where he was patched up. His memory is hazy from there on. He remembers getting x-rays and one of the doctors asked him if he was hit anywhere else other than his leg, after which, they cut his uniform and boots off. Norb's flak jacket was shredded and the doctors discovered that he had been hit in the chest also.



The pinning of Norb's Purple Heart medal.

On March 23, 1966, Norb was flown out to the Air Force Hospital on Clark Airbase in the Philippines. "That place was full." The doctor said, "I have bad news for you, we're

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Navy WAVE Rose Prichard.

going to send you home.” This was because Norb needed more than 30 days to recover, so he had to go back to the States. He was flown to Chicago’s Great Lakes Naval Hospital on March 26 where he received “A-1” care.

Meanwhile, Rose M. Prichard was born on February 16, 1947, in Ida Grove, Iowa, to Donald and Mary (Bye) Prichard, the third of six children. Her dad was a World War II veteran, having served in the 99th Infantry at the Battle of the Bulge. He worked at the local body shop repairing car bodies while Rose attended Odebolt-Arthur High School in Ida Grove. She graduated in 1965.

Rose enlisted in WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) that same year. WAVES were part of the U.S. Navy and allowed women to serve on a comparable status to men who served in the Reserves. In 1978, WAVES became a permanent component of the Navy and women were integrated with formerly all-male units. Rose trained as a nurse’s aide and was assigned to Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. There, she worked in the hospital, helping care for those who had been wounded in Vietnam and shipped to the Naval Hospital for treatment, as well as other patients.

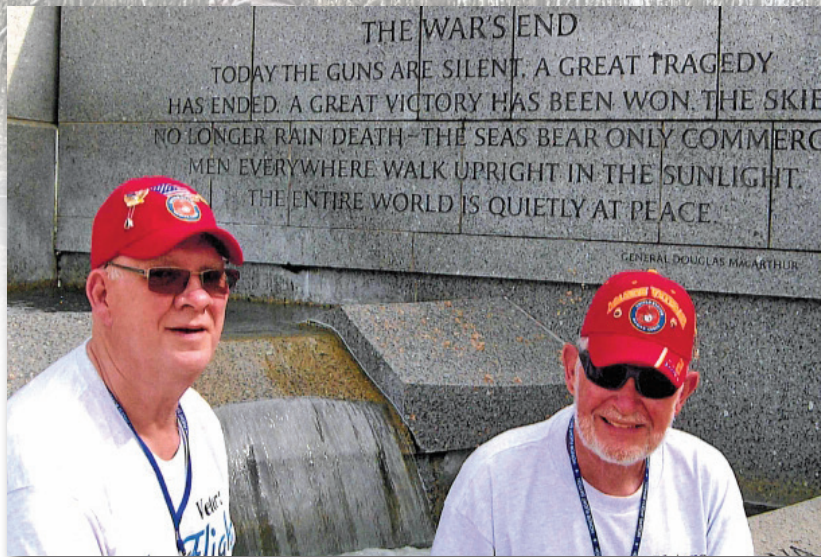
She was in the hospital cafeteria one day when she spied a tall, attractive Marine in the chow line. According to Norb Ricker, the Marine in question, Rose picked him out, but he admits the attraction was mutual. They fell in love and married on October 1, 1966, in Chicago.

Norb was in the hospital for a few months but still had thirteen months left to serve. After recovering from his wounds, he was told that he could pick his next duty station. “I thought this ain’t the Marine Corps I know!” Since he had kept in touch with Jim Clark and knew that he was in the Marine Corps Supply Center in Albany, Ga., he put in his request. Norb got the duty station as an MP Sergeant. It was a polished unit and Norb commented that he had never been in charge of so many men. His boss was the post Provost Marshall who took Norb under his wing and helped him out. The duty cycle was one day on and two days off. During those two days, Norb served on a military funeral detail, traveling around the area, paying respects to fallen soldiers. Norb spent his free time driving back and forth to Chicago to see Rose.

Rose was pregnant with their first child and left the WAVES in 1967, moving to Georgia where she and Norb lived in base housing. Their son, Michael was born just ten days before Norb’s enlistment was up. Since Norb and Jim Clark had enlisted on the same day, Jim’s enlistment was also up. Since Jim had a car, he drove Norb, Rose, and



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Norb with Jim Clark on their Honor Flight in 2017.

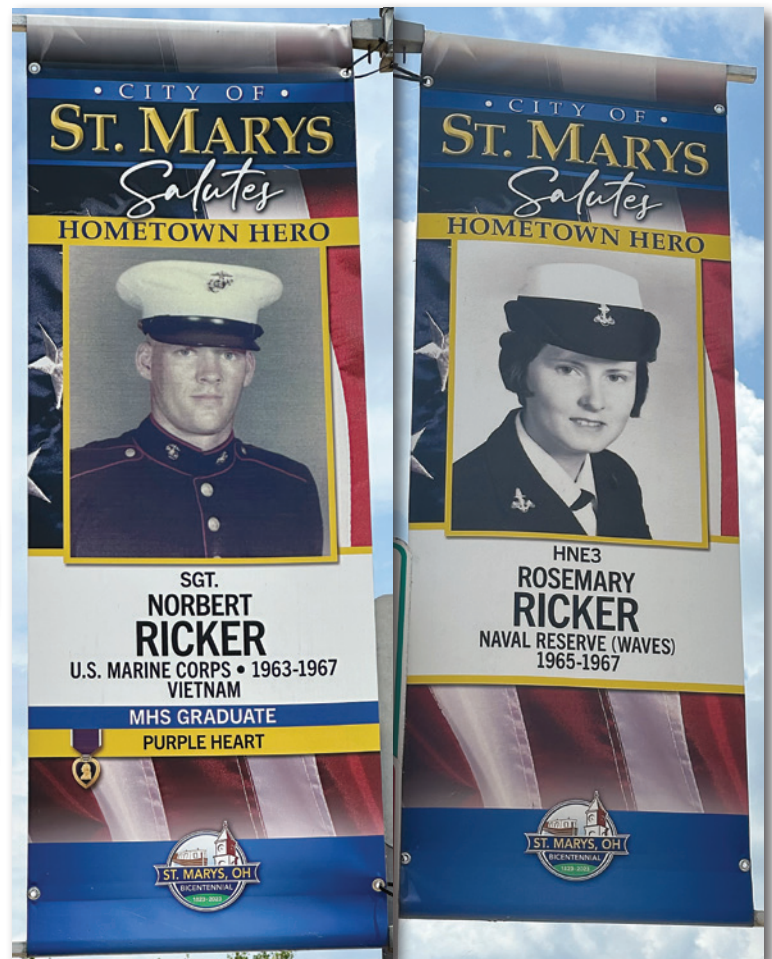
Michael home from Georgia. It was Rose's first time in St. Marys.

Rose and Norb raised three children in St. Marys over the next five decades and enjoyed being grandparents to their seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Rose was a proud mother and wife and spent many years being a homemaker, preparing meals and unconditionally caring for her family. She passed away on May 26, 2020, and was buried at Gethsemane Catholic Cemetery in St. Marys.

Norb's combat wound caused life-long nerve damage which causes numbness in his foot and sometimes makes it difficult to walk.

During a 2025 interview, Norb reflected on his combat experience in Vietnam and what it feels like to take someone's life. "You wonder if you could do that, but when you see your buddy drop, your mind flips. We weren't out there wanting to kill anyone, but when you're put in that position, you have no choice."

On a lighter note, just before Norb was ready to end his enlistment, a truck pulled up at the post in Albany to deliver his seabag!



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