

Tribute to Robert Kenyon Ripley, Sr.

by Robert Kenyon Ripley, Jr.

Eulogy Delivered December 8, 1997

When I think of my father, I always have to think big, even great, not only because he was a big man with a big voice and even bigger presence, but because he was a man of great aspirations and a man of great passions.

I don't think Bob Ripley thought small in anything he did or wanted to do. When he was a teenager, excelling in writing and oratory, he wrote in grand terms and large adjectives about American freedom and our responsibility to maintain it. One of his speeches on patriotism was inserted by Sen. Mike Mansfield into the Congressional Record.

When my father joined the US Navy, he wanted more than anything to make admiral, not for the prestige but so that he could make a greater difference, play a larger role, in serving his country. Through his numerous commands at sea and in the Pentagon, my father served the Navy and his country with fierce devotion, enthusiastic loyalty, total honesty, and an outspoken vision of what he believed the Navy should be and become. Those who served with him know even better than I that he assumed every assignment, whether as CO [Commanding Officer] or XO [Executive Officer], with the same intense conviction that what he was doing mattered to the security of our nation.

My father was a proud Navy officer to the day he died -- I don't think he ever retired in spirit -- but when he retired from active duty and returned to his home state of Montana, Bob Ripley turned his sights to other high accomplishments. To him, citizenship was not just a right but another opportunity for service. That is why he twice ran for office, including once for the US Senate. That is why he worked so hard with United We Stand. In politics, as in the Navy, Bob Ripley held the same intense conviction that what he was doing made a difference. He never stopped thinking big, and he had great hopes.

My father was no different in the business world. I could never keep track of the many projects and deals he was involved with as a management consultant, always hoping for the big breakthrough and expecting great financial success. Whatever he was promoting, he believed in what he was doing, and he wanted so badly to make a difference to his nation, to his state, to his partners, and to his family.

Because of his great aspirations, my father was always a man of great energy, up early in the morning and ready to go at full throttle the rest of the day. Unless he was just sleepy, he seemed to be most peaceful and relaxed when he was fishing, just trolling along, and playing golf. He was a good teacher, and though I was a poor student of both fish and golf, I will never forget his gentleness and patience with me in the boat or on the links. He was truly happy riding along in his golf cart, and I'm sure he was just as happy out on the golf course the day he died.

It wasn't just his great aspirations, though, that made my father a big man, but also the greatness of his passions.

His passion for the Navy is reflected in his service to it and his dedication to the Retired Officers Association. But what I will always remember -- on the days he took me with him on board his commands -- is the snap of his salute as he came on board, the pride in his bearing as he strode across

the steel decks and ducked through the doorways, and the crisp assurance in his voice as he issued his commands -- the same voice in which he issued commands at home, I assure you.

I saw his passion for politics during his unsuccessful campaign for the Senate, as he crisscrossed the state of Montana trying to line up support. He truly believed he could represent everybody. I'll never forget the day I saw him recruit support from a labor union the same day he sought support from a conservative backer of Jesse Helms -- without any sense of contradiction whatsoever. He fiercely believed in what was right, regardless of what wing it flew on, and I think that is one reason he enjoyed sending letters to the newspaper I own disagreeing with the boneheaded viewpoints of its editor -- to the delight of my conservative readers who always made it a point to tell me afterward that "father knows best."

My father was greatly passionate about his friends. He made friends easier and faster than anyone else I know, and he was tenaciously loyal to all his friends. My father liked people, he liked being with people, and he liked entertaining people.

Years ago, when he was on a NATO assignment, our house was filled every weekend with fellow officers from other countries. As I remember, the delegate from England joined me on a comic book run to the drugstore, while the delegate from France was happily mowing our lawn. And, another time, you should have seen the look on my mother's face when my dad invited two Mormon missionaries going door-to-door, total strangers, to stay for supper.

Anyone who spent any time at all in my father's presence knows about his passionate sense of humor. He had a story or quip for any occasion and on any subject. He could find something funny in any situation, and though he was not concerned with being politically correct, he was never mean. His sense of humor was entwined with an even greater sense of compassion and caring that was the foundation of all his relationships and drew people to him like bees to honey.

But my father's greatest passion was his family. No wife had a more faithful or devoted husband for 48 years than my mother. His love for her was total and unreserved, and he could never bluster loud enough or complain long enough, to cover up his total dependence on her love and approval.

And no children were ever more greatly loved by anyone than my father loved me and my brother and sister. He knew the value of discipline -- we learned early that "aye, aye, sir" was an appropriate response at home as well as at sea -- and the demands of the Navy kept him away for long months and some parts of our lives. But he was always interested in what we did, became involved whenever he could, and was intensely proud of all his children.

He prodded and pushed us, sure. Each one of us contributed to his gray hair. But everything we accomplished, no matter how small, was magnified ten times by my father's beaming pride in his offspring and, later, their spouses. He was proud of my sister Martha's success as a teacher, He was proud of my brother Chip's success with Kathy in raising his most beloved granddaughter, Heather. He told me often how wonderfully I had done in finding Vickie and said that in a pinch, he'd keep her and trade me for a better draft choice.

In recent years, my father increasingly expressed his pride and love in his family, through letters and poetry that we all will cherish. The sense of family that kept us close for so many Navy moves continued to sustain him as we scattered around the country. And in very recent months, his sense of family was expanding as he met and began to bond with a new-found sister who also shares our sense of loss.

As a Christian, I take comfort from the Word of God in two ways. The first is knowing that the good news of Jesus Christ is that the God who makes lemonade out of lemons is also lord over death. For Christians, death is not a punishment but a promotion, not an end but a release. The Bible says, "And I

heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord. Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labors, for their deeds shall follow them.'"

I am confident that my father is at rest from his labor, enjoying the eternal life that comes through faith in our lord Jesus Christ. And since he is with God, we know that we have not lost him. As one preacher said before, "Someone is not lost if we know where they are."

The second comfort I take from the Word of God is that we are not alone. The burden of grief is too heavy to carry by ourselves, but God is with us and He will remain with us in the days ahead. "Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name," the Bible says. "For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

We have had the joy of my father, and through the mercy of God we will know joy again. But in the past few days, as I helped to prepare my father's obituary and as I thought about all the big and great ways he roared through his 70 years, I have come to realize that the greatest testimony to the great impact of Bob Ripley's life was the great hole he leaves behind in all our hearts, the vacuum that his absence now creates. The pain of loss, I know, will ease, but that huge hole can never be filled by anyone else.

For 47 years, my father told the world how proud he was of me. I tell you now, and wish I could tell him once again, how proud I am to be his son and bear his name.

In Memory of Bob Ripley

by Robert Johnston

[Reprinted From the Winter 97-98 IHS Newsletter]

Robert K. died of a heart attack while playing golf near his family's winter home at Sanford NC on 3 Dec 97. I have heard it said that a golfer's wish is that when his time comes he may be in the middle of a golf game. There he is enjoying the blue of the sky, the green of the grass, and the lie of that little white ball near an approach shot to the green. This must have been Bob's wish also rather than suffering a long illness.

As Captain Robert Ripley on duty in the Pentagon, he was an outstanding supporter of the hydrofoil concept for military applications. His duty there occurred while the US Navy's policy was to promote a NATO hydrofoil program. A NATO working group was formed to study advanced ship types and to select the platform best suited to perform NATO missions. Four ship types were considered. The British Navy supported the air cushion vehicle, the Swedish delegation argued strongly for their catamarans, the French group presented their concept for a SWATH vehicle, and the other nations led by the US delegation, presented a strong case for the hydrofoil. These discussions continued through several meetings of the working group in Brussels NATO headquarters. I was privileged to attend several meetings of this group, but one meeting stands out in my mind. Most of the concepts had been put aside with the exception of the catamaran and the hydrofoil. The Swedish delegation head, a Navy Captain, had the floor and his big argument was that any vehicle should be tried out under combat conditions. Then Bob Ripley took the floor with his big deep voice and in his own inimitable way said "Captain, if you would like to join a war, come join ours. You might not like it, but it is the only war we have." At that point discussions ceased, and the hydrofoil was adopted unanimously. The rest is history with the US building the PHMs, assisted in the early design by the Germans and Italians. Italy built a

smaller patrol hydrofoil, and the British evaluated the hydrofoil principle by acquiring a Boeing-built military version of the JETFOIL.

Bob was an IHS stalwart. The time came that the future of IHS was dependent upon moving the headquarters from England to the USA, Bob Ripley was one of the movers and shakers that brought this about, and IHS continues to grow and thrive with the management over here. In many of our meetings, Bob's voice was heard, always in a constructive way and adding to the knowledge of the group.

Bob was raised in Montana and was a 1949 US Naval Academy graduate. He earned a master of arts degree in education at Stanford University. He served in destroyers, cruisers, and amphibious ships, and commanded three ships, two in combat zones. After his retirement, Bob stayed active in military affairs as a member of the board of The Retired Officers Association. He also entered Montana politics to run for the US Senate. He attracted a respectable number of votes, but was not elected.

Above all, Bob was great family man. There is no better evidence of this than the profoundly moving tribute written by his son, Robert K. Ripley, Jr. (above). The tribute is well worth reading, even for those who did not know Bob personally.

To Martha, Bob Jr., and the rest of the family: we share your grief in the loss of a good friend and a wonderful colleague. The "old timers" of IHS will be the keepers of the corporate memory of what Bob did for hydrofoils world wide, for the US Navy, and for the International Hydrofoil Society.

[20 Mar 98] I just received your newsletter in the mail about my father, Bob Ripley. I just wanted to say thank you so much for your tribute to him. I remember my first time on a hydrofoil. I think working with advanced ships was the highlight of my dad's navy career. He loved the Navy and often bragged about the time he spent working on selling hydrofoils. He would be pleased to know that you thought so much of him to write about his contributions. I miss his deep voice too. God bless. -- Martha Lynne Ripley (MLRipley@aol.com)

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