

Lieutenant General Paul K. Van Riper, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

General Van Riper was born on July 5, 1938, in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, and graduated from high school in Dormont, Pennsylvania, in June 1956. He enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve and underwent recruit training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, in the fall of 1956. After completing infantry training in April 1957, he was released from active duty and returned home to serve in the 12th Infantry Battalion of the Marine Corps Reserve. He graduated in June 1963, from California State College, California, Pennsylvania, with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He then entered the 34th Officer Candidate Course and was commissioned a second lieutenant in November 1963.

After completing The Basic School at Quantico, Virginia, in June 1964, General Van Riper reported to the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, 2d Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. While with the 1st Battalion, he served as a Platoon Commander, Company Executive Officer, and Assistant Operations Officer. He was with the 1st Battalion when it was committed to Santo Domingo during the Dominican Republic crisis in the spring of 1965.

In late 1965, he was ordered to the Republic of Viet Nam for duty as an Advisor with the Vietnamese Marine Corps. He was wounded in action on February 7, 1966, and was evacuated to the United States Naval Hospital in Philadelphia. After recovering from his wounds in April 1966, General Van Riper returned to The Basic School as an instructor. Upon completion of his tour in February 1968, he remained at Quantico as a student at Amphibious Warfare School.

General Van Riper returned to Viet Nam in September 1968, where he served as a Company Commander and an Assistant Operations Officer with the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division. Upon his return to the U.S. in September 1969, he was assigned as an instructor at the U.S. Army's John F. Kennedy Institute of Military Assistance at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was transferred to Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, DC, in July 1971, where he served initially as a Special Projects Officer in the Office of the Chief of Staff and then as a Training Specialist in the Training Division until August 1974.

Ordered to the 2d Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, in September 1974, he was assigned as the Operations Officer of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines. He became the Regimental Operations Officer in September 1975 and the Executive Officer for the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in December 1976.

From August 1977 until June 1978, General Van Riper was a student in the College of Naval Command and Staff at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. Subsequently, he was assigned as a Military Observer with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine. During this tour he served in Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon.

Upon completion of his overseas tour in September 1979, General Van Riper was assigned as the Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Naval Air Station, Cecil Field, Florida, until July 1981. From August 1981, until June 1982, he was a student at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

General Van Riper was transferred to the 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton, California, in June 1982, and served as Regimental Executive Officer until May 1983, when he assumed command of 2d Battalion, 7th Marines. In August 1984, he was assigned to the Exercise, Readiness and Training Branch of the G-3 Section, I Marine Amphibious Force.

General Van Riper was transferred to the 3rd Marine Division on Okinawa in June 1985, where he commanded the 4th Marines until December 1986. He served as the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 3d Marine Division from December 1986 until reassigned as the Division Chief of Staff in June 1987.

During July 1988, General Van Riper returned to Quantico, where he was assigned until July 1989 as the Director of the Command and Staff College. He became the first President of Marine Corps University, Marine Air-Ground Training and Education Center in July 1989. In July 1990, he was assigned as Deputy Commander for Training and Education and Director, Marine Air-Ground Training and Education Center, Marine Corps Combat Development Command. General Van Riper served temporarily as a member of the Marine Forces, United States Central Command/I Marine Expeditionary Force staff during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm from January to March 1991. From June 1991 to April 1993, he was the Commanding General, 2d Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Returning to Washington, DC, General Van Riper served as Assistant Chief of Staff, Command, Control, Communications and Computers and as Director of Intelligence, Headquarters Marine Corps from April 1993, until July 1995. He was advanced to Lieutenant General and became Commanding General Marine Corps Combat Development Command in July 1995. Lieutenant General Van Riper retired on 1 October 1997, after more than 41 years of service.

General Van Riper's personal decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal; Silver Star Medal with gold star; Legion of Merit; Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V"; Purple Heart; Meritorious Service Medal; Joint Service Commendation Medal; Army Commendation Medal; Navy Achievement Medal; and the Combat Action Ribbon with gold star. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army's Airborne and Ranger Schools.

After retirement Lieutenant General Van Riper served at various times as a member of several defense and service advisory boards and panels, including the National Defense University Board of Visitors, the National Research Council's Naval Studies Board, and the Army Science Board. He served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation from 2001 to 2007. In January 2010 he was asked by the Secretary of Defense to serve as a member of the congressionally mandated Independent Panel to assess the Department of Defense's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report. He held a part-time teaching Chair at Marine Corps University from 2005 to 2017.

Lieutenant General Van Riper also continued to participate in an array of defense and security related war games, seminars, and conferences, both in the United States and overseas, and he lectured frequently at military colleges. In addition, he consulted on national security issues for several U.S. Government organizations and agencies as well as commercial firms. A student of military history, he spends his leisure hours reading. In addition, he writes for pleasure and publication.

General Van Riper was married to the late Lillie Catherine Alford of Dillion, South Carolina. They have a son, Stephen, who is a retired Marine Corps colonel, and a daughter, Cynthia.