

A Tribute to George Ritchie – Eagle Scout and Hero of World War II

BY JOE O'BRIEN, [TARHEEL SCOUTER NEWSLETTER](#), JULY 7, 2015 ISSUE

I first met George John Ritchie and his charming wife, June, while sitting in the first row, right side of Saint Mildred Catholic Church, Swansboro. We introduced ourselves after Mass and I discovered that George (95 yrs. old) was a WWII veteran and an Eagle Scout. I also learned all four sons were Eagle Scouts. I thought to myself, "Now, here is someone truly special."

However, it wasn't until just two weeks ago when I read George's extensive obituary that I learned just how special a life George Ritchie lived; and it gave me chills !

A decorated bombardier on the B-17 and B-24 in WWII, George had been shot down over Germany, captured and interned in a POW camp from which he escaped – twice ! His second attempt was successful and he spent 21 days behind German lines traveling in the dark of night before reaching France and freedom. "We were under forced march," he recalled, "so the Germans didn't know if we died or escaped."

After the war George attended Syracuse University, NY where he met June Anne Paul. He graduated in January, 1948 with a degree in Business and Journalism; she graduated six months earlier with a degree in Music Education. They married July 17, 1948 at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, White Plains, NY. They had five children: Susan (1951), John (1953), George Jeffrey (1956), Thomas (1958) and Michael (1961) and were blessed with 66 years of marriage.

I remember visiting George during his last hospitalization. Several of his children were at the bedside and his wife, June, was at the foot of the bed. George had been dozing, but when he opened his eyes and saw June, his first words were: "Hi, honey! I love you!" I was truly touched by what a special bond they shared.

I learned later that George's sons (the four Eagle Scouts!) each attended Boy Scout Summer Camp at [Sabattis Adventure Camp, Long Lake, NY](#) in the Adirondacks.

In July 1969 Astronaut [Neil Armstrong](#), while traveling to the moon aboard [Apollo 11](#), extended a greeting to all the scouts attending the BSA National Jamboree in Idaho. Armstrong was an [Eagle Scout](#) from Ohio.

George's eldest son, John, vividly recalls that event: "In July, 1969, I was at the Boy Scout National Jamboree at Farragut National Park, Idaho. We watched the moon landing on tape delay and to this day, whenever I see a full moon, I remember that experience being there with 40,000 of my closest Scout friends," he said with emotion.

John added: "Just this week my brother Tom's son, Mike is home from attending [Philmont Boy Scout Ranch](#), NM. Mike is also working on his Eagle Scout rank."

There are so many other amazing facets of George's life, a book could (and should) be written, but suffice it to say he was wholly dedicated to God, Country and his Family.

Those who met George or who were privileged to call him a friend, realized they were in the presence of an exemplary individual who was an Eagle Scout through and through. His favorite expression and life motto was "Do your best, and do it well." He certainly lived by those words.



George and June enjoyed 66 years of marriage and raised four children: Susan, John, George Jeffrey, Thomas and Michael. Pictured here they are a young engaged couple in Antrim, NH where June served as a Senior Counselor at Camp Birchmere.



George J. Ritchie married June Anne Paul on July 17, 1948 at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church, White Plains, NY. Their family grew with (left to right) daughter Susan (1951), Thomas (1958), George Jeffrey(1956) and John (1953). Michael (not pictured) would be born in 1961.



152 Boy Scouts Cub Scouts

Serving greater Fayetteville-Manlius, NY
and the Eastern Suburbs for over 55 years.

In 1956 George was asked by Msgr. M. Shields Dwyer of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Fayetteville, NY to establish Boy Scout Troop 152. George became the first Scoutmaster even though his eldest son John, was only three at the time. Like their father, all four of George's sons went on to become Eagle Scouts.



George was rightly proud of his military service as a bombardier during World War II and his array of medals attests to his valor, dedication and service to the U.S.A. Last November – just a month before his 95th birthday – George asked his son to take this photo of him outside his Cape Carteret home against the backdrop of his American flag, flanked by his medal/ribbon case and a painting of a B-24 bomber from George's WWII days. His son Thomas, purchased the painting in Korea on his way back from Okinawa. George originally flew in the B-17 bomber and later the B-24 bomber.



In July, 1998, June and George celebrated their Golden (50th) Wedding Anniversary along with their family, friends and many well-wishers.

+++++

On Wednesday, June 24, George's son, John, emailed members of the parish: "Just wanted you all to know that God has called Dad to heaven this morning at about 5:00 AM. Thank-you to all the Knights, Parishioners, Women's Guild members and all who have prayed for his soul. I can't thank you enough for your support, love and prayers during this time. He had one lesson left to teach, and it was love that he emitted during this time of struggle for life! He may be missed but never forgotten."

Francine Sabisch, Director of Religious Education, St. Mildred Catholic Church, Swansboro pointed out:

"Many of you may remember 95yr. old George Ritchie as the vibrant, full-of-life-and-love man who sat in the front row on the right with his amazing wife June. He was truly one of the GREATEST of the Greatest Generation. Their son, Michael, also sat with them. Their other son, John, is a Eucharistic Minister and has served in various positions within our parish. John's wife, Diane, is our female acolyte who regularly serves with our pastor Father Don (Baribeau)."

"George and June (and the entire family) have done everything they do and continue to do for the sole purpose of giving Glory to God. I can assure you George, June and family have prayed for every member of this Parish. They attended Daily Mass, always supported all our youth events, as well as our Living Rosaries, Stations of the Cross and all the wonderful events we have here at Saint Mildred parish."



OBITUARY

George John Ritchie, 95, passed away Wednesday, June 24, 2015. A funeral mass was celebrated at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 27, at St. Mildred Catholic Church with Father Don Baribeau officiating. Interment services with military honors was held Monday, June 29 at Coastal Carolina State Veterans Cemetery in Jacksonville.

Born in Wilkes Barre, PA on December 18, 1919, he was raised in Flushing, NY and entered the Army Air Corps during WWII. He served with distinction as Bombardier, 7th Bomb Squadron, 34th Bomb Group operating out of Mendelsham AAC Base, UK. He flew 27 combat missions in the B-24 and B-17 and was shot down over Germany on October 17, 1944. He was a Prisoner of War interned in Stalig Luft III and successfully escaped. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal (with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters), and the European Theater Combat Medal with five Battle Stars among many other medals, citations and ribbons.

George resigned his commission as a Major. After the war, he graduated from Syracuse University and married June Anne Paul from White Plains, NY. They settled in Fayetteville, NY and raised a family of five children. He started a small business and was President of the Ritchie-Royal Corp.

He was very active in his Parish serving as President of the Holy Name Society. Himself an Eagle Scout, he started Boy Scout Troop 152, served as Scout Master where all four sons obtained the rank of Eagle Scout.

George sold his business and retired in Cape Carteret where he was a very active member of St. Mildred's Catholic Church in Swansboro. He was active in Prison Ministry at Camp Lejeune and was honored with a lifetime membership as a 4th Degree in the Knights of Columbus. He served as founding National Board Member for the Missionary Image of our Lady of Guadalupe.

George served as president of the 34th Bomb Group Association and president of the Izaak Walton League. He was also a key member of the Carteret Community College Foundation Board during a time of campus expansion and growth.

George is survived by his wife of 66 years, June (Paul) Ritchie; daughter, Susan Ritchie Pinch (Jerry) of Albuquerque, NM; four sons, John Paul Ritchie (Diane) of Cape Carteret, George Jeffery Ritchie (Midge) of Syracuse, NY, Thomas Edwin Ritchie (Jennifer) of Havelock, and Michael Francis Ritchie of Cape Carteret. He is also survived by 14 grandchildren, five great-granddaughters; and several nieces and nephews.