

William K. Merrill

William K. Merrill, 80, a retired Army Colonel with 43 and a half years' active military service through six decades, 1940's-1990's, died of cardiac arrest April 20, 2006 at INOVA Fairfax Hospital in Falls Church, VA. He was the husband of Alice Voskuhl Merrill, a 1960 graduate of Minster High School. She is the daughter of the late Al and Irma Voskuhl who are laid to rest in St. Augustine's Cemetery, Minster.

Col. Merrill was born in Twin Falls, ID, graduated from high school at age 16 and attended the University of Idaho until he could join the United States Marines fighting World War II at age 17. He served throughout the Pacific in the battles of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, Saipan in the Mariana Islands, and Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands. He was then sent to Officer Candidate School (OCS) but since the war had ended by the time he arrived, he elected to leave service and resume his education,

receiving his BA degree from the College of Idaho in May, 1950. Recalled to active duty in July, 1950 for the Korean Conflict, he was assigned to OCS and commissioned an officer in the US Army on May 5, 1951.

Over the next 15 years, he commanded an antiaircraft artillery battery at Camp Hanford, WA; served as Chief of a Special Operations Intelligence Team in Frankfurt and Berlin, Germany; served in various command, staff and training assignments at Ft. Ord, CA; Ft. Riley, KS; Ft. Bliss, TX; Ft. Sill, OK; Ft. Bragg, NC; Ft. Lee, VA; Ft. Leavenworth, KS; and in Vietnam. He earned his MBA degree from the University of Miami in May, 1962.

In 1966, he was assigned to the Pentagon to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel for a three-year tour on completion of which he expected to return to field duty. However, after two and a half years, he was "pulled upstairs" to work for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) where he was repeatedly asked to remain, Chief of Military Personnel Policy for the Army.

During those years, he worked for and advised seven Secretaries of the Army and 10 Assistant Secretaries of the Army (M&RA), and served during the tenure of 8 Chiefs of Staff of the Army. In the process, he became and institution, the source of authority for every kind of personnel matter. His policy was "take care of soldiers". He was often the haven of last resort and frequently formulated new policies or revised existing ones so as to personally assist soldiers facing problems unsolvable elsewhere. His humanitarian, compassionate, and commonsense approach to personnel problems was renowned both within and outside the Army. Many who worked for him went on to become General Officers, and credited what they learned from him for much of their success. According to the Congressional Record of Senate proceedings of June 19, 1991, which lauded his service before his retirement on June 30, 1991, Colonel Merrill was the

one who invented the Army's slogan "Put the person in personnel".

Colonel Merrill was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, four awards of the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal, two awards of the Air Medal, the Army Commendation Medal and numerous service and campaign medals. Highly decorated for service in war and peace, he was recognized throughout his military career as a giant of a man - physically, professionally, and spiritually. On his death, a colleague said of him, "Bill Merrill did more for the Army than anyone will ever know". He was named to the Army OCS Hall of Fame in 1995.

Colonel Merrill lived in Springfield, VA since 1966. He was a member of VFW Post 7327 and American Legion Post 173 of Springfield, VA, and of Disabled American Veterans Chapter 10 of Arlington-Fairfax, VA. He was also a member of St. Lawrence Catholic Church, Springfield, VA.

Survivors include his wife of nearly 25 years, Alice Voskuhl Merrill, also a former Army officer, of Springfield, VA; two children, Junia A. Merrill of Boise, ID and Merrilee A. Burns of MT. Arlington, NJ; a brother, Sergeant Major Warren H. Merrill, USMC-Retired, of Jerome, ID; a sister, Joyce Claycomb of Boise, ID; a granddaughter and two great grandchildren. His first wife, Madge Burchfield Merrill, predeceased him in 1977.