

RAUL RIES HONORED

Compiled by Tom Price
Photos by Cameron DeQuilettes

NOTE: This article contains descriptions of combat violence from the Vietnam War.

Raul Ries, wearing a U.S. Marine Corps uniform, stood at attention at the edge of the infield at Dodger Stadium this past August. The Calvary Chapel Golden Springs senior pastor saluted the American flag. He was being honored as the “Military Hero of the Game,” part of the Los Angeles Dodgers’ ongoing program to pay tribute to members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Raul acknowledged the fans’ cheers as the announcer introduced him: “Pastor Raul Ries was a U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal from 1966 to 1968 during the Vietnam War. Pastor Ries served in Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. ... His awards include the Vietnamese Service and Campaign medals and two Purple Hearts. Today, Pastor Ries is senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Golden Springs, [with] more than 14,000 people. His daily syndicated radio program called ‘Somebody Loves You’ is heard on more than 350 radio stations internationally. ... Thank you for your service, sacrifice, and dedication to our country.”



Pastor Raul Ries

Chu Lai, Vietnam 1967

Nineteen-year-old Lance Corporal Raul Ries aimed his rifle at an enemy soldier shouldering a bazooka 100 yards away. He slowed his breathing and calmly pulled the trigger. Raul could see the man’s head jerk as the bullet found its mark. Initially elated by his first combat kill, he soon



felt a deep emptiness. But as the fighting wore on, his empathy was reserved only for his comrades, not his enemies.

Months and many firefights later, Raul signaled a newly-arrived 18-year-old Marine from Texas to be careful because of the dangerous trip wires. Raul recalled, “Then I heard the sickening swish of a pin being pulled out of a hand grenade, and I rushed to push him out of the way.” But Raul was too late—the blast took off the young man’s left arm and both legs. As a firefight erupted, Raul fired his weapon without ceasing until he felt weak. Shrapnel from the blast had embedded in his back and legs. Medevacked to a hospital ship, Raul was horrified: Onboard there were countless wounded young men—some severely burned by napalm and others missing limbs.

Another Battle Begins

After returning to his unit, the once gung-ho Marine began to question the mission. Back on patrol, a close friend from Fresno, CA, walked ahead of Raul through a field. A land mine exploded. “When I got to him, both of his legs were gone,” Raul recalled. They rushed their friend to a waiting helicopter. Not knowing what else to do, Raul placed his friend’s boots and legs alongside of him. Threatening violence toward his superior officers, Raul was sent to a psychiatrist in Da Nang and later to a Navy hospital in Oakland, CA. “Being in constant battle for nine months will get to you—it got to me,” Raul admitted.

While deployed, Raul corresponded with a pretty redhead from high school named Sharon. After being honorably discharged, he was determined to marry her. The daughter of two longtime missionaries soon found herself pregnant. Horrified to let God and her parents down, she consented, and they were married. But soon Raul’s lifetime of rage—caused by having an alcoholic father and fueled by combat—drove her away. In 1972, after four turbulent and violent years and another child, Sharon packed her bags to leave. When Raul realized her plan, he loaded his .22 rifle and waited for his family to come home. Raul confessed, “I was planning to kill my wife and kids and then myself.”

A New Life in Christ

While waiting for his family to return, he hit the television with the butt of his rifle. The TV came on, and what Raul



described as a bald, middle-aged man appeared, talking about God’s love. Raul admitted, “I wanted to shoot this guy through the screen, but I was unable to pull the trigger.” As the man on the TV spoke, there was something about his smile that made Raul stop and listen. Talking about the young hippies in Southern California, the man said, “When these young folks accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, all the past is gone. They realize the slate is clean, and they begin a new life with Jesus.” The man’s name flickered on the screen: CHUCK SMITH. Pastor Chuck’s words penetrated Raul’s heart, piercing through the pain and anger that had instigated his violent actions. As the truth of God’s love began to sink in, Raul thought, *God gave His Son for me*. Putting down his rifle, Raul got on his knees and surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

He said, “I began to cry for the first time in my life. I prayed, ‘Forgive me, God, for everything I have done against You.’” Later, he joyfully told Sharon he was born again.

Sharon recalled, “I was still afraid of him. It took a year before I actually trusted that it was real.” She soon witnessed him studying God’s Word. Attending CC Costa Mesa, Raul started a small Bible study in the dojo where he used to train for martial arts. Soon the Bible study grew

into a church. Raul was ordained by Pastor Chuck Smith at CC Costa Mesa in November of 1975.

For decades, Raul has ceaselessly ministered to active duty and former military and their families through Bible studies, pastoral care, and two documentaries that point the wounded to healing in Christ. ✨

Raul desires to help those who have experienced combat to find healing in Christ. His documentary, Taking the Hill, is available to veterans at no cost. Contact: Somebody Loves You Radio at 1-800-634-9165.



**Pastor Raul Ries’
Video Testimony**
[www.calvarygs.org/media/movies/
raul-ries-biography/](http://www.calvarygs.org/media/movies/raul-ries-biography/)

Above: Honored by the Los Angeles Dodgers as “Military Hero of the Game,” Pastor Raul Ries of Calvary Chapel Golden Springs salutes the American flag in Dodger Stadium last August.

Left: Pastor Raul waves to the cheering fans.