

John C. Reppert

Kansas State '63

Oxford Cup Roll No. 058

In the summer of 1959, John Reppert, *Kansas State '63*, was working at a Manhattan, Kansas, swimming pool as a lifeguard. Head Lifeguard Gary E. Luck, *Kansas State '59*, encouraged him to pledge Beta Theta Pi. "It was great advice," remarks Reppert with a tight-lipped grin.

"One of the aspects of Gamma Epsilon in particular was to prepare people for leadership positions and to provide them opportunities to do that," he adds. As a young man, Reppert served in his church and in the Boy Scouts, but had never been a popularly elected leader. His fraternity experience changed that. During his college years, he served as chapter president, president of the professional journalism society and editor of the college newspaper.

Having completed his bachelor's degree in journalism, Reppert remained in Manhattan to earn a masters degree and continued courting the lovely Patricia Ann Rash, who was a year behind him in school. The couple married and moved to Illinois, where Reppert planned to take up the family business. He ran the family newspaper and had just purchased a second when a trip to the mailbox in November 1965 changed his life.

He had been drafted into the U.S. Army and was required to report in January 1966. Despite the fact that military service did not run in the Reppert family — the last military man in his father's line had been a general in the Civil War — Reppert never considered alternatives such as joining the Reserves, moving to Canada or accepting a scholarship to return to the classroom.

With a sense of patriotism and obligation, he reported for duty and signed up for Officer Candidate School. Reppert was four years older than most of his peers, held two degrees and had three years of experience as a newspaper editor under his belt. He was prepared to take on the mantle of leadership. "If I was going to Vietnam, I wanted to do so in a leadership role," he recalls.

Reppert was assigned to the Signal Corps and was to be stationed in Korea. He immediately expressed an interest in going to Vietnam. "If you're going to lead, you should go where the action is," he said. Reppert went to Saigon, where he directed communication for General Westmoreland's headquarters, the American Embassy and the largest Air Force base in Vietnam. He was present during the 1968 Tet Offensive, during which more than 100 people were killed.

As his 12 months in Vietnam came to a close, Reppert had to decide if he would remain in the military. He was approached with the idea of participating in the Foreign Area Officer program. The program entailed four years of paid schooling on a particular geographic region, followed by another four years of service on assignments in that area.

Shortly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Brigadier General Reppert became the first U.S. diplomatic representative to visit Kyrgyzstan since it became independent. Anomalies in the system prevented State Department officials from visiting the new country, but the Department of Defense — for which Reppert had been serving as a military attaché in Moscow — had no such restrictions.

Reppert and his wife Pat were greeted by the new country's national security advisor and the deputy minister of foreign affairs. The men spoke little English, but Reppert's calm manner and ability to speak Russian fluently set the stage for a memorable visit. Taken with Reppert's extensive knowledge in foreign affairs and a willingness to share his wisdom, the national security advisor insisted that Reppert meet with the fledgling nation's vice president. He was asked to explain U.S. foreign relations and how the U.S. works with other countries.

Reppert holds bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Kansas State and a master's in Soviet area studies from the University of Kansas. He also holds a Ph.D. in international relations from The George Washington University in Washington, DC. Having attended or taught classes during all but three of his 33 years in the military, Reppert qualifies as a lifelong learner. The General is a graduate of the Army War College, an honor graduate of the U.S. Naval War College, the Armed Forces Staff College, the U.S. Army Russian Institute and the U.S. Army Signal Corps Officer Advanced Course.

— Thomas C. Olver, *Central Michigan '98*, editor, *The Beta Theta Pi*