



# RIPCORD REPORT



For Friends and Survivors of the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord  
Republic of Vietnam 12 March - 23 July, 1970

Issue # 112

November 2017

## Friends and Games in Laughlin *by Lee Widjeskog*

As early as Friday before the reunion, we had Ripcord members showing up for the 2017 Reunion! With anticipation of a great event people started rolling in early this year so by Monday we had 70 percent already shown up. Once there, groups and couples took the river cruise dinner, rode the jet boat to lunch and shopping at the London Bridge across the Colorado River, fed the roaming burros in Oatman, AZ, played golf, visited the desert, checked out Hoover dam and Lake Mead, viewed the marvelous Grand Canyon and gambled on the casino floor. As they completed one item, they returned to the hospitality room to seek friends and get refreshments before moving on.



It appeared from comments that a great time was had by all as the days quickly moved to the Ladies Event with delicious food and interesting prizes. This year the gifts were handed out by Fred and Carol Gilbert's lovely granddaughters Maddy and Nichole. They move a lot faster than most of us present and did a great job.

The banquet was held on Thursday evening in the Palladium room. The room was excellent and had the best sound system we have ever used! Once pictures were taken for the Yearbook and introductory comments made by President Peter Meloro, dinner was served. Everyone enjoyed the well prepared food served at a leisurely pace.

This year we had 15 people who were attending their first reunion. They were John Johnson A 4/77 ARA, Robert Barrowcliff A 159 ASHC, Sam Brown B 1/506, Terry Hodges D 1506, Michael Dicken B 2/506, and Robert Brower E 2/506. From A 2/506 we greeted John Brown, Ken Gainer, John Koozer and the sister of Bill Pahissa, Chris VanMeerden. Then from D 2/501 came the brother, sister and daughter of Paul Guimond Everal Guimond, Judy Berkowski and Laura Guimond. We always very pleased to have fellows attend their first event and even more so when we get relatives of those killed in the Ripcord battle. Great to meet all of you! Be certain to find time to attend again!

With the coin presentation completed we drew for the free registration and the shy winner was Iris Puffer! Quickly we formed up for the pictures of the men and another of the women. This was followed by pictures of the units represented. When all was completed all returned to the hospitality suites for a last chance to buy Ripcord items and say goodbye to our old and new friends. A time of relaxation and some parting comments!

By Friday at noon most of our members had left for home. See you all in Myrtle Beach next year the end of October!

## Donations

*the life blood of our Association*

The following have given donations to the Ripcord Association since the last newsletter. These donations help keep the website and newsletters published to keep all our Ripcord members up to date.

- Larry Hulsey 426 S&S BN
- Fred Edward B 326 ENG
- Audrey Wrightsell in memory of David Johnson A 2/11 FA
- Bob Patterson Assoc. Member
- Clem Neiderer HHC 2/501
- Leigh Freeman C 2/506
- Ben Harrison 3rd BDE
- Jim Harris HHC 2/506
- Howard Colbert C /506
- Mike Womack C 2/506
- Peter Meloro C 2/506
- Joe Connelly D 1/506
- Johanna Koozer Schmidt A 2/506

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

**Lee Widjeskog,  
493 Stillman Ave.  
Bridgeton, NJ 08302**

### 2018 REUNION DATE:

***Please note that the normal dates of the  
reunion have been changed for this year!***

**2018 MYRTLE BEACH, SC**

**Wednesday Oct. 31 to Saturday Nov. 3**

**Leave Sunday Nov. 4**

Opinions expressed in submitted material are not necessarily those of the editorial staff. We reserve the right to reject any material deemed to be inappropriate. We also reserve the right to edit all submissions, but we will make every effort to maintain the writer's concept and meaning. Please be brief and concise.



Join us on Facebook group  
Ripcord Association

**Visit our website at  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)**

Please continue to send your letters and  
send your comments or articles to:  
[frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)

or postal mail to:  
**Frank Marshall  
567 Circle Drive  
Surfside Beach, SC 29575**

Everyone would love to hear from you.

## RIPCORD REPORT

**Ripcord Report** is a publication of the **Ripcord Association**, and is the authoritative voice of history for the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord.

**Ripcord Report**  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)

Editor: Frank Marshall  
E-mail: [mail@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:mail@ripcordassociation.com)

Writer: Lee Widjeskog  
Phone: 856-451-1108  
E-mail: [ltwidjeskog@aol.com](mailto:ltwidjeskog@aol.com)



**Ripcord Veterans 2017 Laughlin, NV**

### Ripcord on Facebook

by Anthony Chritchlow



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ripcordassociation/>

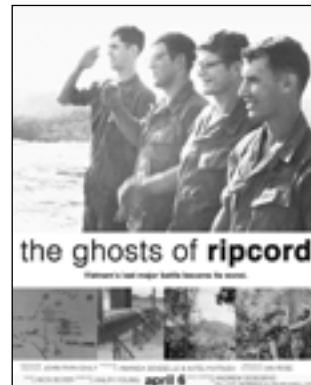


First this year's reunion was great. The wife and I had a great time. We both are glad we went on the river boat dinner. Laughlin was a fun place to go to. I'm kind of sad this is the last time we will be going to Laughlin.

Well we are up to 680 members on our Face book page. I am still working on the return to Vietnam. I have a total of 10 of our veterans that have asked to be on this trip. I'm hoping if this goes well we can get a few more to go back. Time will tell if we get a few more trips back.

Now I'm looking forward to Indianapolis. I will be there in 2020. And I'm hoping for 2019. Be safe this fall and winter.

### **The Ghosts of Ripcord" Documentary**



The producers of the documentary are pleased to announce that new DVDs of the film entitled, The Ghosts of Ripcord, will be available for purchase later this month. For more information please visit our official Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/firebasefilm/>. You can also visit the Ripcord Association website to find out where and how to purchase a DVD. Thank you.

# INCOMING MAIL



Dear Lee,

Don't know how to thank you and everyone else for welcoming me with such warmth and kindness at the reunion dinner in Laughlin a few weeks ago, sure Bill was smiling on you all from heaven. When I returned home someone asked how it went and I replied it was a very happy/very sad time but something you wouldn't have missed for the world.

After being in a room with an incredible group of survivors, hearing stories, looking into sad eyes - it was a bit overwhelming. The pain and sadness came to the Pahissa family in one devastating blow the day we lost Bill but over time wonderful memories have been slowly replacing the what if's. We still remember and cry, especially when meeting incredible people like you all, but it's a happy cry because Bill wasn't forgotten by the men who were with him. Can't imagine the long hard road back for you all, physical and emotional scars, must have been so much more difficult for you and your families. Speaking with some of the gentlemen and watching others it was apparent the strength and resiliency of these men and their families, they are made stronger by the association and comradery.

When notified of Bill's death there were all the standard things handled per military protocol except the one piece my parents wanted and needed, an answer to the question of what happened to their son. Chuck Hawkins reached out to my parents (as he did for all his men) and from that first letter came 46 years of friendship - even though it could be years between communications a connection was made. After attending the reunion and meeting so many wonderful people am hoping that the Pahissa Clan will be lucky enough to forge more connections and friendships with this amazing group of men.

It was an honor and a pleasure, thank you again.

Sincerely,

Chris Pahissa Van Meenen

to Oregon State U. They have a journalism program. 3.5 grade average - 16 hours / semester, but 92% have jobs when they graduate. Hope I stay alive! Starting to feel my age (81).

Have a good life!

*Ulla Nolan*

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At the Ripcord reunion this year we received a special Thank-You card. It was not lacking in any way but full of what means the most to us, your signatures and expressions of appreciation. Ruth, you are so kind and thoughtful to circulate the card.

We are not the only volunteers. So many of you pitch in. Bob was very grateful for so many helping with flags. It seems to go smoother every year. There were also ladies helping with the auction, table flags and my rescue ladies for sales after the banquet! All of us together make the reunions special so it's our turn to Thank all of you.

Until next year,

*Currahee,*

*Bob & Red Judd*

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My wife was in a terrible car accident Sept 21st it was touch and go for awhile in ICU for 3 weeks with multiple broken bones. She is now going to a Rehab facility here at Home. I would just like to Thank everyone from Ripcord Family for all the Prayers and Kind words. I would also like to Thank all the people who signed a card at the Reunion this year. Prayers do work.

*Bill Boles*

*D 2/506th*

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Visit our website at  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)

Read the **Ripcord Report** on line  
Daily updates • History  
and much more

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Dear Lee & Kathy,

Thank you for the pictures from Red Judd. Fun! Anna Britt is coming in December. I was in Oregon in August visiting her. Had a grand time! She is very much like Keith! Anyway, she is thinking of applying

# JERSEY RAMBLINGS

by Lee Widjeskog A/2-506



Once more it is the end of October and I am writing about the latest Ripcord Reunion! This is not a bad thing, because as we get older, attending and writing about events will become harder to accomplish!

Just a month ago we were in Laughlin, Nevada getting things together for the reunion. The room prices were about as low as we will ever see even if we did not get free breakfast every day. The hospitality room was actually two rooms. Not the most desirable situation but our people made the best of the situation. One room was primarily drinking and snacking and the other was quiet chats, store items and the video of the "Ghosts of Ripcord". We could not use posters this year due to restrictions by the hotel, but it was OK.

In all everyone seemed to have a good time and enjoyed the local sights the camaraderie of seeing old squad or platoon members. I was very fortunate as I got to see three new members of my platoon for the first time since 1970. The best thing about the reunion is renewing old friendships and acquaintances. I had a great time seeing members of the Second Platoon, A/506.



Ken Gainer, John Kooser, John Brown and Lee Widjeskog

At the business meeting, President Peter Meloro, mentioned that all the paperwork for the non-profit status have been completed as well as all tax issues taken care of. We ended up hiring an accountant who had a lot of experience with these issue. It was well worth the money we paid.

Next year's reunion will be back in Myrtle Beach, SC at the Sands Ocean Club as in the past. The dates will be later in October than in the past. It will start on

Wednesday 31 October and finish up with the banquet on Saturday 3 November. The price before tax will be \$62 which includes a breakfast each morning. Plan now!!

At the annual meeting it was announced that there will be an election of Board of Directors for the Ripcord Association next annual reunion. At this time there are three positions open for nominations. So far the nominees are Peter Meloro, Frank Marshall and Lee Widjeskog. Other nominees can be submitted to Lee Widjeskog before August. Voting will take place at the annual meeting. The positions have terms of three years.

In other items covered, there was discussion about the reunion in 2019 and 2020. Since 2020 will be 50 years since the battle it was stated that the reunion in those two years will be held in July around the 23rd since that was the evacuation date. After that we expect the reunions to return to the fall of the year.

## Ripcord Association Newest Members

- Ball Wayne A/2-506
- Erickson Robert D/1-506
- Rosenberg Dale 2-11 Arty
- Lacy Clifton B/101 Can Bn
- Paul William 3/187
- Lockwood David A/2-11 Arty
- Berger Charles B/159 Avn Bn
- Ramirez Trinidad C & E /2-501
- Wood Don A/2-501
- Van Meenen Chris Associate Member



## CHARLIE COMPANY ICON CROSSES OVER

by Jim Campbell



S/Sgt Paul Burkey passed away at his home in New Middletown, Ohio on September, 7, 2017 after a lengthy bout with cancer. Paul arrived in Vietnam sometime in November of 1969 after graduating from the NCO school at Ft. Benning as a Buck Sergeant. He briefly served in the Headquarters Company before being assigned as a new squad leader in the newly formed fourth platoon of Charlie Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 506th Infantry regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. I well remember the first day I met him when he climbed off a chopper and reported in to me. He looked like he was about 15 years old.

Captain Vazquez was the then Company Commander of Charlie Company. The platoon was operating in the mountains southwest of Camp Evans in squad size teams at the time, moving during the day and ambushing at night. It was not long before we were engaged in a series of enemy sapper night attacks. Sgt. Burkey was fearless in these fights and quickly earned the respect of the soldiers serving with him. In late March of 1970, Captain Vazquez reorganized Charlie Company back into three platoons, and Paul was promoted to Staff Sergeant and assigned to be the platoon sergeant of the third platoon. The third platoon was soon commanded by Chuck Hawkins as its new platoon leader. Paul served as the platoon sergeant of third platoon until such time in early June that Chuck Hawkins was promoted to Captain and reassigned to be the Company Commander of Alpha Company. Paul then assumed the position of acting platoon leader of the third platoon, and served in this capacity through the remainder of the Ripcord battle. Paul was present at most of the company combat actions during the months of June and July of 1970, except that the third platoon was on Firebase Ripcord when the attack at Hill 902 occurred. His great courage and leadership abilities in combat were evident to all of

his great soldiers in these combat actions.

On July 7th 1970, Paul led a portion of third platoon with three soldiers from Bravo Company to retrieve a mechanical ambush that had been set out by Bravo Company, but never recovered. This unit was heavily engaged by NVA soldiers when the point element from Bravo Company was ambushed, which precipitated a fierce fire fight. Both the point man Dennis Bloomingdale and the slack man Bob Judd were terribly wounded. Dennis was not able to walk as a result of his grave injuries and was left alone on the ground as the fire fight raged around and below his location with the rest of Paul's unit that was cut off from his position. Paul courageously fought his way forward alone under intense enemy fire to save the life of Dennis and drag him down the hill to a safer location. This action was the subject of the TV show "Hero's with John Kasich" prepared by producer Martin Hinton at Fox News. The show recaptured the poignant moment when Dennis and his family traveled to Gettysburg to meet for the first time the man who had saved his life some 35 years earlier.

The following day Charlie Company (which was down to 30 men) and Delta Company were given the mission to attack and take the two knolls at the top of Hill 1000. The mission given to Charlie Company was to attack and take the far knoll west of Ripcord (the "far knoll"), and the mission given to Delta Company was to attack and take the closer knoll to Ripcord (the "closer knoll"). Paul Burkey led the attack of Charlie Company on the far knoll under heavy fire from the enemy as we reached our objective and secured the top of the far knoll of Hill 1000. After securing the objective given to us, we were then given a direct order by Lt. Colonel Lucas to assault across the saddle between the two knolls and take the closer knoll at the top of Hill 1000, since the attack of Delta Company had stalled. Paul and Jeff Wilcox bravely led their gallant troopers in this assault, which was unsuccessful because of the withering plunging fire placed on the attacking troopers. Paul's courage that day in battle in the face of the enemy was incredible. After our withdrawal that afternoon from Hill 1000, Charlie Company was down to only 22 men. Paul Burkey's finest hour as a combat soldier and leader of men was on this day. It was almost surreal. It was the epitome of what combat leadership and courage is all about.

After the Ripcord battle was over, Paul continued to  
**(Continued on page 7)**

*(Charlie Company Icon continued)*

serve as the acting platoon leader of third platoon until such time that a new lieutenant was finally assigned to that position, shortly after which Paul returned to the States and separated from the army.

Paul returned from Vietnam and married his wonderful wife Patty and resumed life in the Youngstown area, where he owned and operated a body shop up until a few years before his death. He was survived by Patty, one daughter Heather, and his two grandchildren, Delaney and Audrey.

Paul was a rock to myself and Chuck Hawkins the lieutenants he served under, and to Captain Vazquez and Captain Wilcox, his company commanders. All of us admired and respected him as a courageous and brave “fighting man” who never shirked a duty. Paul would tell you that he revered Cpt. Vazquez as his mentor and as a magnificent combat leader who taught him the skills of a combat leader. Paul had a unique sense of humor and especially enjoyed telling stories about the frequent ass chewings I received from Cpt. Vazquez. Paul and I were close friends and after 28 years were reunited at a Ripcord reunion in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Thereafter we always enjoyed special times together raising a glass or two and recalling our days with the other magnificent Charlie Company warriors with whom we served in battle. Paul was most at ease hanging out with his Charlie Company buddies and was forever giving Howie Colbert, “Doc” Cafferty, and Frank Bort the hardest of times. He loved to come down and visit me in Shreveport where I enjoyed taking him on his first duck hunts. He loved hanging at my cabin in the woods in East Texas and howling at the moon with myself and our buddies from Vietnam.

I don't know for sure, but I have always suspected that Paul was a descendent of the great Spartan Warrior King Leonidas. They both were fearless in battle and had a passion for soldiering and fighting the enemies of their respective countries. Paul had the heart of a lion and was as brave as any soldier that I served with in battle. He enriched my life and made me a better soldier and man. He was my brother in arms.

*Currahee,*

*LT*

*(Jim Campbell)*

## INCOMING MAIL



A mutual friend, Bruce Bond, shared your e-mail address and information about your association. Thank you for all you do, then and now.

I 'met' Sgt William C. Ray when I moved into the Fiskburg area in 1998 and discovered stories of so many of our Gold Star Heroes from our small rural community.

With your assistance, we helped find some closure for the Ray Family. Bill's mother is in poor health and the whole family had endured their loss for so many years.

We are currently working with our county to find ways to honor these sacrifices, specifically Scout Dog Fritz and Sgt. Ray. Hope to announce details this Fall.

I hope to keep in touch with you and Bruce. I feel humbled by your dedication to these heroes. But I share your pain in remembering the sacrifices of those who served in Vietnam.

I helped in Operation Babylift (April 1975), just weeks before Saigon fell...landing twice during cargo missions.

*Lest we forget!*

*Bill Schneider*

*“The Science Guider”*

*859-250-3449*

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Dear Lee & Kathy,

Thank you so much for all the hard work you put in to make the reunion a success. My dad (John Koozer, A 2/506) and I had a really great time and it was so good for him! It really could not have been a better experience... much appreciated, and it was so nice to meet you both and so many of the wonderful people too. Hope to see you next year!

*Johanna Schmidt*



John Koozer & Lee Widjeskog

## Ripcord 2017 Reunion Attendees



- Bill & Pam Baldwin A 2/506
- Robert & Michele Barrowcliff A 159 AVN
- Lin & Pinkey Bashford D 2/506
- David & Carol Bohan Pathfinder
- Bruce Brady & Karolyn Kruger A 2/506
- Robert Brower E 2/506
- John & Kelli Brown A 2/506
- Sam & Jan Brown B 1/506
- Paul Buhr A 2/506
- Gumecondo & Elia Cano D 2/506
- Howard, Diana & Bobbi Colbert C 2/506
- Dale and Sue Cooper C 2/506
- Robert & Janice Counts A 2/506
- Tommy Counts D 2/506
- Anthony & Dennise Critchlow HHC 2/506
- Merle & Ruth DeLagrange D 1/506
- Thomas DeWulf D 1/506
- Michael & Christine Dicken B 2/506
- Richard Doyle D 1/506
- Richard & Pat Drury D 1/506
- Rex Flansburg & Tom Wenman D 2/506
- Rudy & Linda Forsman D 2/506
- John & Debbie Fowler C 2/506
- Kenneth & Saralyn Gainer A 2/506
- Fred & Carol Gilbert D 2/506
- Martin Glennon A 2/506
- Robin Graham HHC 2/506
- Everal & Laura Guimond, Judy Berkowski & Jim Dorr D 2/501
- Steve & Cindy Gunn D 2/506
- Barbara Gunyan, Dana Cooke & Destiny Provence B 2/506
- Ricky & Janet Hahn E 2/506
- Elwood Hall & Johnnie Patterson D 2/506
- Chuck Hawkins C&A 2/506
- Bill & Linda Heath A & HHC 2/506
- Billy & Maggie Helvey A & HHC 2/506
- Raymond Hines 2/319 FA LNO
- Terry Hodges D 1/506
- Chuck & Jean Holman A 159 AVN
- Larry & Susan Hulsey 426 S&S BN
- Paul & Lisa Jensen B 2/506
- John Johnson A 4/77 ARA
- Bob & Red Judd B 2/506
- Dave & Sophia Kenyon 326 ENG
- Donald Kiefer A 2/506
- Kris Kiltz Guest
- John & Annett Kuennen C 2/506
- John Koozer & Johnna Schmidt A 2/506
- Bob Layton B 2/501
- Robert & Mabel Lemon C 2/506
- Walter & Kathie Lyssy HHC 2/506
- Murphy & Phyllis Majoria Assoc. Mem.
- Dean, Cary, Madi & Natalie Mandolado Guests
- Gene & Star Marshall B 2/319 FA
- Bruce & Carolyn McCorkle D 2/506
- Jim & Michelle McCoy D 1/506
- Ron & Linda McCrory E 2/506
- Pete & Christi Meloro C 2/506
- Uwe & Diane Meyer B 2/506
- David Mitchell D 2/501
- Bob Pagano & Rachel Springer B 2/506
- Tom & Barbara Peacock D 2/506
- Philip Prince Guest
- Doug & Iris Puffer D 2/506
- Sam & Luree Rawlinson Assoc. Mem.
- John Rich Guest 2/319
- Bill Rose A 2/506
- Kent Rowland C&D 2/506
- Charles Schilero D 2/506
- George & Cheryl Scott A 2/11 FA
- Larry & Annabelle Sena A 2/506
- Fred Shuttleworth & Victoria Rayle E 2/506
- Marc Skinner D 2/506
- Everett Slaughter, Jr. B 2/506
- James Smither Grand Valley State Univ.
- Fred & Micki Spaulding HHC 3rd BDE
- Terry Stanger A 159 ASHB
- Dennis & Jane Stortz D 2/506
- Bob Tarbuck & Paige Corkhill C 2/506
- Dale & Janet Tauer D 1/506
- Chris Pahissa Van Meerden A 2/506
- Bob & Jackie Wallace C 2/506
- Raulend Whiteis B 2/506
- Lee & Kathy Widjeskog A 2/506
- Mike & Liz Womack C 2/506
- Bob & Betty Worrall B 2/501
- David & Linda Yonts A 2/506
- David & Wendy Yonts Guests