



# RIPCORD REPORT

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



Number 65

Winter, 2005

## So What's A Hoosier?

### Ripcord Reunion 2005

Indianapolis, IN

July 17, 2005 thru July 22, 2005

Do not miss this Reunion,  
a Registration Form is included  
in this newsletter.

*Points of Interest in Indianapolis:*

Medal of Honor Memorial

Soldiers' & Sailors' Monument

War Memorial Plaza and American Legion Mall

Crown Hill Cemetery

Military Park

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum

Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Indianapolis Zoo

Indianapolis Motor Speedway

James Dean Museum

(For the answer to the headline question, see page 3)

### '05 Reunion Update

The Reunion in Indianapolis is shaping up nicely. A few last minute changes and all will be ready when you get here in July. You have 2 numbers to choose from to call for Hotel reservations. The Central Reservations Number is 1-800-228-9290 or you can call the Hotel direct at 317-322-3716, extension 1101 or extension 1274. Make sure, regardless of what number you call, TO MENTION RIP-CORD, otherwise you will not get the Reunion Rates!

Get your reservations in as early as possible. You'll save money and it is easier for me, for planning purposes.

As of this writing, we have sold 95 hardbacks and 59 paperbacks of Gen Harrison's book "Hell on a Hilltop".

I hope everyone had a nice Christmas and New Year's. I'll see you all in July, in Indy.

Fred Spaulding.



*Top: Indianapolis Skyline*



*Left: War Memorial Plaza and American Legion Mall*



*"Indianapolis, some boast, is second only to Washington D.C. in its number of memorials."*

Source: The Associated Press: May 29, 2000

# FROM THE EDITOR

I hope everyone will have a great New Year. Fred's plans for the 2005 Reunion seem to be pretty exciting. I hope to see a lot of new faces as well as the regulars. If you have not been to a Ripcord Reunion yet, this should be the one you go to. Since this is Fred's last reunion that he is setting up, he has big plans for it.

Please order Ben Harrison's book "Hell On A Hilltop" thru the Ripcord Association. Read the reviews from noted Authors in this newsletter.

*We have 450 members receiving the Ripcord Report Newsletter, of those 94 members receive it electronically thru e-mail. This saves the association on postage, so if you have an e-mail address and have not sent it to me, please send it now to:*

[frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)

## DONATIONS

**Donations are very important!** Donations pay for the printing and mailing of the newsletter. All checks should be made payable to "Ripcord Association". Please send all donations to:

Fred Spaulding  
7702 White Dove Drive  
Indianapolis, IN 46256-1750

## ARTICLES

**DEADLINE for next issue: April 1, 2005**

Please send all articles, photos, incoming mail, and interesting reading to:

Frank Marshall  
224 Derry Hill Ct  
Mt Laurel, NJ 08054-3709  
e-mail: [frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)

## RIPCORD BIOGRAPHIES...THEN AND NOW

Please send us a brief bio on yourself to be included in the newsletter. Include which company you served with, the dates you were in the service, the dates you were in Vietnam, your rank, any interesting facts about your involvement with FSB Ripcord, what you did after Vietnam, career, family, and some comments of your choice. You may include a picture if desired. Send all information to:

Lee Widjeskog  
493 Stillman Ave  
Bridgeton, NJ 08302  
e-mail: [leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com)

## We need your E-mail address

Send us your e-mail address and receive all the updates and new information on The Ripcord Association immediately. We do not send junk mail, only important information and news. If you are not currently receiving updates, please send your e-mail address to:

[frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)

## Electronic Newsletter

A lot of members are receiving the newsletter via e-mail. If you have *Adobe Acrobat Reader* on your computer (most computers do) you can receive the newsletter by e-mail, just open it and read it, print it or save it. But, we must have your e-mail address to send it to you.

This saves the cost of postage and you receive the newsletter before anyone in the snail mail.

You can download *Adobe Acrobat Reader* FREE at: [www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html)

## Ripcord Association Website

The Ripcord Association website is on line and very informative. You can check it out now at:

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

## Donations

The following have sent donations since the last newsletter:

Floyd and Diane Alexander, Ray and Judy Williams, Marc Aronson, Murphy Majora, Bob and Gloria Mullauser, Tom and Judy Counts, Chaplain Fox, Richard Blythe, Tommy Webster, Ralph Motta, Ken Hamilton, Bill and Sheila Williams, David Kreckel, Mike McFadden, George Westervelt, Lloyd and Dee Rahlf, Fred Shuttleworth, Mg Bobby Porter, Dick Gable, Bob and Jackie Wallace, Ben and Carolyn Harrison

Our heartfelt thanks to the people listed above for their generous donations given to the Ripcord Association.

## Registered Reunion names will be published on website.

By popular demand, members who have sent their registration in for the Indianapolis reunion this year will be published on our website [www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com). If you do not wish to have your name on the list, please let me know right away at [frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)

# INCOMING MAIL

My daughter asked me to address her 6th grade Language Arts class on Veterans Day. I talked to 2 of her classes. I told them about Ripcord, waved the flag a bit and what it means to me to be a veteran. Some of the kids wrote me thank you letters. They are really special and it made me aware of how easy it is to make an impression on youngsters even though I didn't consider especially significant that I spent a couple of hours with them. It was a neat experience.

Craig Van Hout

Hello,

I just found your association website, and wondered about the membership requirements for the association. I was D/1/506th commander from Jan-April 1970, and worked in the Ripcord area around Granite, Rakkasan, Maureen, and Kathryn, and, I think Gladiator. I was the commander before Don Workman. Great site, by the way.

I left Vietnam on 9 July, so wasn't around for the bulk of the operation.

Pat Skinner [justpls@yahoo.com]

Enjoyed the website. I was with 2/506th Charlie Co. 3rd plt. Sgt Burkey was my squad leader, later it was Sgt Moore. I remember Ripcord, the AO like it was yesterday. Was hit somewhere off Hill 902 days after our guys were hit hard. It was a helpless feeling watching a "4th of July" happen before our eyes. I know we were ready to "hump" to that hill in the darkness, but they would not let us.

Ruben Yanez [rubyannez@yahoo.com]

Glad to find out about this site. I was the artillery FO who went up Hill 1000. I actually got to the top and got a good look at the bunker positions and the saddle between the two hill tops. I was also the Fire Direction Officer on Ripcord during the first few days of shelling, before I was pulled off Ripcord to be a FO again. It was me that got hit by lightning, not Andreason, as in the book. I replaced LT VanCleve as FO after he was overrun by sappers and wounded, wasn't that C Company on Hill 805? At the time I was 1LT Mike Anthony 2/319 Arty.

James\_M\_Anthony@dom.com

# What's A Hoosier?

That's the question most asked by Indiana visitors. No one seems to know exactly where the word "Hoosier" (hoo-zhur) came from but there are plenty of stories on its origin — 30 at last count. Here are some of the more popular theories:

- Hoosiers are well-known for their questioning and it is possible the nickname originated because they could not pass a house without pulling the latch-string and crying out "Who's here?"
- In 1851 Amelia M. Murray reported that she heard the name Hoosier originate when settlers shouted "Huzza!" when gaining victory over a marauding party from a neighboring state.
- Kentucky contractor Samuel Hoosier hired Indiana workers to build the Portland canal at Louisville. These superior laborers became known as "Hoosier's Men" or "Hoosiers" and carried the nickname back north with them. Unfortunately, no one has ever been able to prove the existence of Mr. Hoosier.
- Before its use in America, Hoosier was used in England to refer to someone who lived in the hills or mountains. It may be related to the French osier meaning someone from the countryside. This term is still commonly used in Eastern Canada.
- Indiana poet James Whitcomb Riley said the origin of the title "Hoosier" came from the pugnacious habits of the early settlers. "They were vicious fighters ... [and] frequently bit off noses and ears. This happened so often that a settler coming into the bar-room after a fight would see an ear on the floor and ask, 'Whose ear?'"

Today the word is used to denote an Indiana native or resident. Although the origin is uncertain, one thing is clear about the word — "Hoosier" and Hospitality go hand in hand.

## Famous Hoosiers with Indianapolis Connections

**Larry Bird,**  
President of Basketball Operations and former coach of the Indiana Pacers

**David Letterman,**  
late night talk show host

**Jane Pauley,**  
news personality

**Oscar Robertson,**  
basketball legend

**Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds,**  
Grammy-winning songwriter

**James Whitcomb Riley,**  
poet

**Michael Graves,**  
architect

**Benjamin Harrison,**  
23rd President of the United States

# HELL ON A HILL TOP

America's Last Major Battle In Vietnam

By Major General Benjamin L. Harrison  
iUniverse Press

Over the past quarter century I have been asked to review, comment upon, or edit, literally hundreds of Viet Nam-related books and manuscripts. To my chagrin, for reasons of time or family or sloth, I have only read and respond to about half. My apologies to those authors to whom I did not respond. All that I have read —novels, histories, short stories and poems—have had some merit. Some were superb — well written, enlightening, touching mind, heart and soul. Ben Harrison's *Hell On A Hill Top* falls into this last category. It is truly an impressive and epic work of historical significance.

*Hill Top* — with the inclusion of data and anecdotes from North Viet Name histories and documents, and Harrison's first person interviews of PAVN (NVA) commanders — presents the full picture — the whats, whys, whos and hows — not only of the battle for Firebase Ripcord, but far much more. The book gives us an understanding of the skirmishes, the battle, the supporting units, logistics and politics, all in the perspective of the Cold War era. In doing so, the Commander of the Third Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), has given meaning to the sacrifices of many.

Ripcord, from it's opening, "...had a major impact on the enemy... disrupted the orderly flow of supplies and reinforcements down the Ho Chi Minh Trail... [it's] artillery firing into the Trail complex, the Air Force had placed a Directional Beacon on Ripcord, and the Navy and Marines had installed a Tactical Aircraft Antenna for 'beacon bombing' in the A Shau Valley, the Warehouse Area..." (pg 66)

On meaning and tactical/strategic success (much of this is lacking in earlier Ripcord books): "...the price the North Vietnamese paid during the siege of Ripcord from at least

## HELL ON A HILL TOP

### America's Last Major Battle In Vietnam

On The East Flank Of The A Shau Valley March-July 1970  
The 324B Division Surrounds The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne's Currahee Battalion



Major General Benjamin L. Harrison  
US Army, Retired

eight infantry battalions, four artillery battalions, four 120mm mortar companies, one anti-aircraft battalion, one sapper battalion (reinforced)... was a minimum of 2400 killed and several thousand more wounded..." "...Ripcord stands as a monument of success... a very major contributor to the [NVA's] second offensive of the war (the *Nguyen Hue* or Easter Offensive) being delayed until March 1972... Without the success of Ripcord, that offensive would have been advanced a full year..." (pg 216)

If one had any criticism of *Hill Top* it might be that much of the work is a compilation of PAVN and US/ARVN documents presented verbatim. This is a wonderful and authoritative history, but, at times, difficult reading. *Hill Top* is best when Harrison uses his own voice to describe and/or explain actions. That being noted, I personally would like to thank Ben Harrison for enlightening — for casting light upon, and bringing meaning to — the battles of Operation TEXAS STAR.

John M. Del Vecchio, Author of *The 13th Valley*

# Hell On A Hill Top: The Reviews —

Considering all that has been written about the Vietnam War in the last thirty years it would seem that the subject has been covered completely. Not so. Benjamin Harrison's *Hell on a Hill Top* breaks new ground — and does it in an unusual way. Harrison's book rescues the battle from obscurity, restoring it to its rightful place in the storied annals of the 101st Airborne Division. Ben Harrison tells the story of the prolonged struggle in clear, crisp prose, giving full credit to the heroism of the men and the professionalism of the units engaged there. *Hell on a Hill Top* is a rarity among battle studies — it paints a vivid combat scene from the perspective of both antagonists.

Dave R. Palmer, Lieutenant General,  
U.S.Army, Retired, Author of *Summons of the Trumpet*

Through the author's many research travels, trials and tribulations, Harrison has finally captured and published answers to the questions many veterans have had in the back of their mind for years.

Marty Heuer, Author of *Pioneers Of Ahnapee*

By reporting the North Vietnamese side of the March-July 1970 battle for Fire Support Base Ripcord plus his own perspective as responsible brigade commander, Major General Ben Harrison's *HELL ON A HILL TOP*, adds welcome dimension to Keith Nolan's *RIPCORD*. Taken together, these two superb books record the battle for the jungled mountain called Ripcord and illuminate the courage and tenacity of the soldiers that fought on opposing sides of the hill. Harrison's distinguished career as Army Aviator enables him to highlight with rare understanding the vital role of Army Aviation and Aviation Crews during the Ripcord campaign. What Harrison learned provides remarkable insight into the enemy's strategy and tactics during their March-July 1970 campaign to destroy the Americans operating on and around Fire Support Base Ripcord, the mountain peak that towered 927 meters above the surrounding jungle and stood eye-to-eye with nearby enemy-held mountains. Harrison's findings illuminate the magnificence of the performance of duty of the young American soldiers who fought the Ripcord campaign and the dogged determination of the opposing enemy soldiers. Harrison's interviews of opposing commanders and analysis of official records on both sides in the Ripcord battle, buttressed by his personal knowledge, reveal that: (1) the Communist North Vietnamese were determined to take Ripcord regardless of the cost in human life; (2) attacking Communist strength was greater than our intelligence reported or than we realized

at the time of battle; (3) our Infantry units fighting in the mountains around Ripcord and their supporting firepower provided by artillery, armed helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and virtually destroyed eight of nine enemy battalions.

Sidney B. Berry, Lieutenant General,  
U.S.Army, Retired, former Commanding General,  
101st Airborne Division and 5th US Corps, Germany.

This authentic first-hand account of 1970 battles in the A Shau provides valuable insight into the difficult tasks facing those American forces then remaining in Vietnam as the unilateral U.S. withdrawal inexorably proceeded. The author's persistence and diligence in overcoming many obstacles to develop some of the enemy perspective on this encounter provides another useful dimension. The included accounts from several helicopter crewmen were among the most arresting I have read.

Lewis Sorley, Author of *A Better War*

In the February 2001 US Naval Institute *Proceedings*, I reviewed Keith Nolan's *Ripcord: Screaming Eagles Under Siege, Vietnam 1970*, calling it "a searing narrative of soldiers and small units in battle." In this new book, the commander of the 101st Airborne Division's 3d Brigade that endured the Ripcord fight has written a gripping and more complete account of how both sides fought. It is a classic. General Harrison tells how for four years he sought the North Vietnamese Army's side of that story. Persevering, in due time he gained full access to Hanoi's military archives, then finally met to exchange memories with the 324B division commander himself, retired major general equivalent Chu Phuong Doi, at his remote home near the Chinese border. He has crafted his narrative of the Ripcord battle using the official records of both sides in a side by side comparison. The 101st Airborne Division set a high standard of performance throughout the Vietnam War, and the 3d Brigade at Ripcord was one of the very best, displaying in 1970 none of the morale problems and reluctance to engage that afflicted many units toward the end of the Vietnam War. General Harrison's story is replete with examples of leadership, tactical skill, the fighting heart, and soldierly heroism from brigade down to squad and trooper level. Seeded with his terse and pungent comments on war, leadership, and strategy, General Harrison's unique and valuable book tells the full story of a battle of surpassing interest, unheralded at the time and almost forgotten today.

Lieutenant General John H. Cushman,  
U.S. Army, Retired, former Commanding General  
101st Airborne Division and I Corps Group, Korea.

## Gary Radford, Delta 2/506

After a year and a half humping up and down the 101st Area of Operations west of Hue and Camp Evans, and being wounded twice, Gary Radford returned to his home town of Pittsburgh, PA in the summer of 1970. Not too long after coming home he and his future wife, Patti decided to get married. (Gary swears that she was attracted to his Corvette more than him and maybe that's why it has stayed in the family with them.) Today they are still together having raised two sons (Brian and Gary). Gary continues today working as a truck driver with an interest in motorcycles. He and Patti continue to assist the Ripcord Association in getting out the quarterly newsletter.

Gary, like many others grew up and graduated from high school expecting to serve in the armed forces by either volunteering or waiting to get drafted. In the Radford household this was the expected. What was not expected was the early death of Gary's father. As a result his older brother was considered sole support of the family and the younger worked on a newspaper so Gary joined up in hopes of keeping the draft away from his younger brother. As those of us who have had dealings with the government bureaucracy, Gary's plan did not work. After he joined both of his brothers were later drafted and all three served during some of the same time.

The first stop for Gary was to the Reception Center at Fort Jackson followed by Basis Training at Fort Gordon and Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) at Fort McClellon. From there he received orders for NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) School at Fort Benning even though he had not volunteered for it. By the time his orders were straightened out he had finished half of the training and decided to complete it. Not wanting to end up pushing AIT troops at some base or working a range, he volunteered for Ranger and Airborne Schools. During this period he was promoted to E-6 (Staff Sergeant) and shipped out for Vietnam in January 1969.

Following in country training he was assigned to Delta Company, 2/506 of the 101st Airborne Division with whom he served until leaving in July 1970.

Being with the 101st in 1969 he was present for "Hamburger Hill". Fortunately, Delta was not involved in the assault on Dong Ap Bai and merely observed the action from afar. After the NVA had been forced off the hill,



**Gary Radford**

Delta Company continued to work the area near the Ashau Valley. Gary received his first wound in June 1969, as well as a Silver Star. While recovering the First Sergeant arranged for him to spend his recuperation time at Camp Holloway where one of his brothers was stationed. Gary felt this was one of the best times he had while in Vietnam.

As time went by the heavy ruck-sack and climbing in the rugged hill near the Ashau Valley took its toll on Radford resulting in a hernia. He was sent to the hospital to have the rupture repaired in October 1969 but by March 1970 it had torn open once more causing Gary to miss the opening of Ripcord. He returned to the field in late April / early May when he rejoined Delta once more.

As May melted into the heat of June and then the humidity of July, the war activities of the NVA in the Ripcord area heated up as well. By early July Delta Company and a re-constructed Charlie Company found themselves involved in an assault on Hill 1000 that had been started by a recon unit directed from the air by Col. Lucas, the battalion commander. Two of Radford's men, Charles E. Beal and Lewis Howard, Jr. were killed as the unit attempted to take the hill. Efforts that day and the next to retrieve their bodies were fruitless. In the process Radford was again wounded and shipped back to the hospital for repair. He got back to his unit in time for the memorial service after the evacuation of Ripcord and then shortly left Vietnam and the Army.

For many of us once we left Vietnam we considered that part of our life to be over even if we still think about it most, if not all of the time. For Gary Radford there was guilt in his mind for not being able to retrieve his buddies bodies from the hill. After 26 years he was able to get permission to lead an MIA Team onto Hill 1000 in hopes of finding some remains of his fallen comrades. As the team and Gary moved into the area, now heavily overgrown with jungle vegetation, they found an old 105 mm round, the rusted remains of an M-60, a GI helmet and a size 10 jungle boot, the size worn by one of the missing. But no remains of their bodies. As the MIA team worked and searched, Gary dug a hole and buried two copper MIA bracelets he had worn for years in memory of his two men. He and the team members offered prayers to the two men who lost their lives fighting for their friends and country. He will never forget those two men.

# ELECTRIC CRAPPER... REVISITED

By Craig Van Hout

Many of you may have heard Phil Tolson, B 2/506, tell the story of the electric crapper at past reunions. I witnessed to first execution of that diabolical device and would like to pass on my version of the escapade.

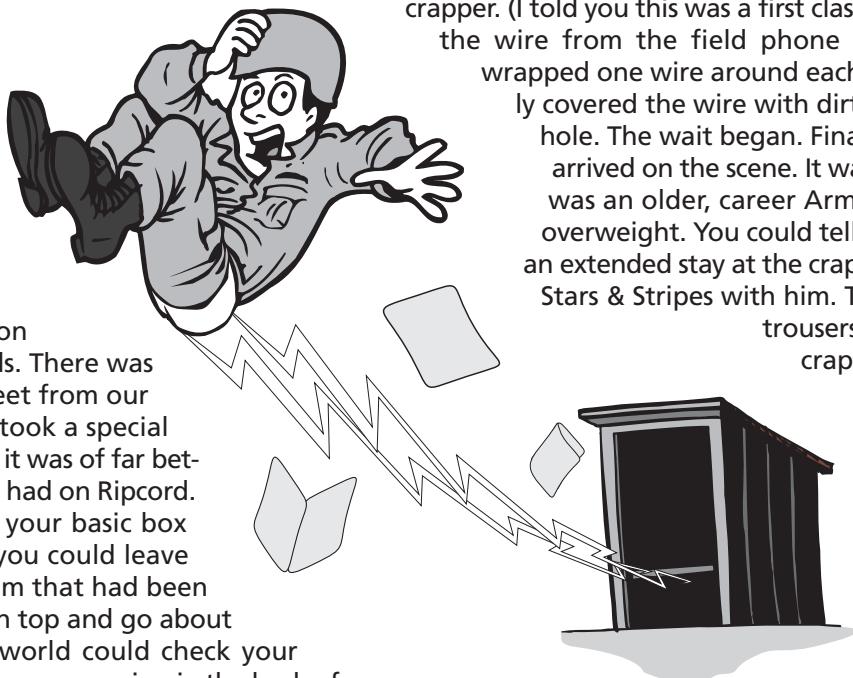
We were on Firebase Rakkasan and, obviously, Tolson had too much time on his hands. There was a crapper approximately 100 feet from our position. For some reason Phil took a special interest in the crapper. Granted, it was of far better design than the crappers we had on Ripcord. The crappers on Ripcord were your basic box with a hole cut out on top so you could leave your deposit in a 50 gallon drum that had been cut in half. You would just sit on top and go about your business and the whole world could check your progress if they wished. There was an opening in the back of the crapper so the drum could be extracted whenever necessary so the deposits could be burned. Now this crapper on Rakkasan was a deluxe model compared to those on Ripcord. This one had walls on three sides and even had a roof to keep the sun or rain off your head while conducting your transaction. It was situated so while seated you had a lovely panoramic view of the mountains. I always wondered about that. The crapper was constructed so nobody on the firebase could see if anybody was using the facility but an NVA sniper had a clear shot at you while you were exposed and in a vulnerable situation. I figured it was probably designed by an officer who was a graduate of an ROTC program at a state supported institution of higher learning.

Bravo Company was pulling perimeter guard duty on Rakkasan at the time, probably in the September/October 1970 timeframe. The company had already been deployed to Rakkasan when I arrived at the firebase. I was assigned to a position that included Tolson and 2 others guys, who I can't remember. As I said earlier, by the time I had reported to Rakkasan, Tolson had taken a real liking to that crapper. I don't know what his affinity to the crapper was but he was like a proud papa when it came to the use of that crapper. He established himself as the keeper of the crapper. It was his self appointed duty to insure that nobody but the Bravo Company grunts were grunting in the crapper. Sort of like

the restricted membership in a Credit Union. And if somebody other than grunts utilized the crapper Tolson would confront the offender and threaten them with bodily harm if they ever used the crapper again. That alone was humorous because back then Tolson was about as big as a noodle. The violators usually came from the artillery battery above us. One repeat offender was an NCO, probably an E6 or E7, who was a cook for the artillery battery.

Finally, Tolson had enough. His devious and perverted mind went to work and he came up with a solution. A little electric shock treatment to the offender would do the trick. There was a toilet seat that was nailed to the top of the crapper. (I told you this was a first class facility.) Tolson took the wire from the field phone in our position and wrapped one wire around each nail. He meticulously covered the wire with dirt as it led back to our hole. The wait began. Finally, the first offender arrived on the scene. It was the cook! The cook was an older, career Army man. He was a tad overweight. You could tell he was prepared for an extended stay at the crapper, he had a copy of Stars & Stripes with him. The cook dropped his trousers and backed into the crapper to commence his business. (For the record, let me say that I told Tolson not to do it. Not to a senior member of the cook cadre! Not to a career Army man! Hopefully that covers me in the event of any litigation

that may evolve from this story.) Tolson got that gleam in his eye, that devilish smile creased his lips. He attached the wires to the field phone and waited until the porcine cook was settled in. Then he gave that field phone 5 or 6 spins of the dial. Ladies and gentlemen, we had lift off! That cook launched out of the crapper, trousers down around his ankles and Stars & Stripes flying in all directions. He proceeded to do a poor imitation of an Arapahoe rain dance for a minute or two. When the tingling ceased the cook pulled up his trousers and headed back to the electric crapper. He had bad intentions. He found the wires and started to rip them out of the crapper. Tolson's eyes bugged out. This wasn't part of his plan. I don't know which was funnier, watching the cook uproot the wire leading back to our position or Tolson unhooking the wires and trying to bury them outside our hole. The cook finally made his way to our position and had a few words with Tolson about his creative genius. Tolson made some lame excuse like Captain Peters told him to do it. The cook headed back to his mess hall rubbing his posterior every few steps. Needless to say I never used that crapper as long as Tolson was on the firebase, even though he promised he would never jolt a grunt. That's the true story of the first run of the Electric Crapper, as I remember it.



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## Hell On A Hill Top

Ben Harrison's book, *Hell On A Hill Top*, is available for ordering from Fred Spaulding. Paperback \$19.95 and Hardcover \$29.95. It will help the association if you buy the book from Fred, no tax and shipping is free. You can see the book on [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com) and [BarnesandNoble.com](http://BarnesandNoble.com)

## 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

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