



RIPCORD REPORT

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



Number 70

Summer, 2006

News Update from New Jersey

By Lee Widjeskog

It is now the middle of June. Here in New Jersey it has been relatively dry with only a couple of good rains. But the weather has been mild and even cool so in my mind it has been a nice Spring. The 80 degree weather is fast approaching and we will soon be reminded of our time in Vietnam when it was hot and very humid. But for now, the weather is just fine! Hockey is over, basketball is winding down and baseball is in full swing. The reunion is just around the corner.

With this issue we are coming down to the wire for the 2006 Reunion. We have over 70 people committed to attend so far, but don't delay any longer if that is your goal. Elsewhere in this issue you will find the list of those who have registered. If you are not on that list, we hope to add your name soon!

In this issue you will also find an application for the reunion as well as for a **room reservation**. Your room must be reserved **no later than 1 July** if you want the Ripcord rates. Call them at **800-334-6660** and use the group code **RIPCRD** to get your discount.

Speaking of the reunion, we have received a number of donated gifts that will be offered in the raffles this



Bill Edminster at Shreveport Reunion



Ray and Judy Williams at the Charleston Reunion

year. SGM Mikel Dawson has hand crafted and donated a knife with a Currahee logo on the handle. It is a great tool or gift. Dave Kreckle, brother of John Kreckle (a 2/506) has donated a gorgeous wooden replica of a Huey. We have a third gift that may find its way to the reunion if it is ready by July. These added to the ladies raffle should make a number of attendees happy.

On a more somber note, since the last newsletter we have been informed of the passing of two of our Ripcord Survivors and supporters. Raymond Williams formerly of HHC 2/319 Artillery passed away March 30, 2006, some days following open-heart surgery. He and his wife, Judy, were planning to attend again this year in

Charleston. I am certain he will be missed by all of those who knew him.

On April 29, 2006, William (Bill) Edminster of Alpha 2/506 passed away from lung cancer. As I considered Bill a friend from Alpha Company, I made time to attend his service up in Elmira, NY. Fred Spaulding's poem "Just a Simple Soldier" was read and it seemed quite fitting for Bill. His relatives, daughter and mother were all quite gracious. The service was simple and pleasant much like Bill. He too had planned to come to this years reunion!

FROM THE EDITOR

Time is really flying by. The 2006 Reunion is only a month away. I really hope that you can make it to this one. Please read the "Letters to the Editor" this issue and see how important it is to your family members once you come to our reunions. We had 2 of our members pass away since our last reunion. William Edminster and Raymond Williams. Both will be missed this year.

This year has been my busiest year ever in Real Estate. It has been said that the housing market is slowing up to a halt, but not in my case. The long hours are taking a toll, but I have to continue while I am young. With this said, I have to ask for someone else to pick up the task of doing the newsletter. I just do not have enough time. This will be discussed at the reunion and I hope there is someone that will take over putting the newsletter together, publishing and distribution of mailing. I will continue to host the website and plan on updating it soon. If there is someone interested in doing that also, I would not mind passing that on.

If any one has any questions, please contact me at 856-273-4426 or e-mail at frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com.

Frank Marshall

Donations, the life blood of our Association

Donations came from the following generous members during the past three months:

Walter Lyssy

Bill and Sheila Williams

Lloyd Rahlf

Desmond McClare, Jr.

William Baldwin

Raymond & Judy Williams

William Hand

Chuck Hawkins

Sidney Berry

Jim Neff

Randy Kirby

We thank all these and others who have helped to keep our organization in the black.

DONATIONS

Checks should be made payable to "Ripcord Association". Please send all donations to:

Lee Widjeskog
493 Stillman Ave., Bridgeton, NJ 08302
E-mail: leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com

ARTICLES

Deadline for next issue: August 18, 2006

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

RIPCORD BIOGRAPHIES...THEN AND NOW

Send us a brief bio on yourself about your time in Vietnam and since. Photos are great. Send to:

Lee Widjeskog,
493 Stillman Ave., Bridgeton, NJ 08302
e-mail: leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com

E-MAIL ADDRESS

To receive immediate Ripcord updates send your e-mail address to: frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com

THE RIPCORD ASSOCIATION WEBSITE

Check in often for all the latest Association news at: www.ripcordassociation.com

Ripcord Reunion 2006 Charleston, SC July 26 - 30, 2006

The Town & Country Inn & Conference Center

2008 Savannah Highway

Charleston, SC 29407

Phone 800-334-6660

Fax 843-766-9444

Guest Room rate

\$89.00 plus 12.5% tax per day

Please Call NOW

and make your reservation
Mention Group Code RIPCORD

Remember to send your registration form
to Lee Widjeskog

Members Registered for the 2006 Reunion

Lee & Kathy Widjeskog (A 2/506)
Bob & Redd Judd (B 2/506)
Al & Bonnie Martin (2/11th Arty)
Ben & Carolyn Harrison (3rd Bde)
John & Debbie Sherba (E 2/506 Recon)
Isabelino & Uthoomporn Vazquez (C 2/506 and HQHC)
Ben & Lillian Peters (B 2/506)
Craig & Sandy Van Hout (B 2/506)
Uwe & Diane Meyer (B 2/506)
Frank Marshall (A 2/506)
Kent & Janice Rowland (C/D 2-506)
John & Cathryn Buessler (326 Med. BN)
Lawrence, Maria & William Rosen (326 Med. BN)
Fred & Mikki Spaulding (3 BDE, S3 AIR)
Fredrick & Carol Gilbert (D 2/506)
Bill & Sheila Williams (B 2/506)
Layne & Sandra Hammons (C 2/506)
Tommy & Judy Counts (D 2/506)
Joseph Pojrdinec (Navy vet)
David Snyder (A 2/11 Arty)
Gary Goulah (E 2/506 Recon)
Rick Kellogg (B 2/506)
George & Mary Murphy (B 2/320th Arty)
Dale Lane (A 2/506 & HHC 2/506)
James and Roxanne Neff (E/2/506)
Tiny and Irene Aanonsen (A 2/506)
Frank & Peggy Delfino (1/506 and HHC).
Audrey Wrightsell
James & Gwen Cobb (2/11th ARTY)
Dan Esposito (B Battery 2/11 Arty)
Steve Wallace (B 2/506)
Robin Graham (HHC, 2/506)
Kenneth Miller (3rd BDE Air Cav)
Terry Cowan (B 2/506)
Brian & Susan Reppe (B 2/506)
James C. Smith (E 2/506)
William Hand (B 2/506 & E 2/506)
Randy Trayer (C/158th AVN)
Chuck Hawkins (A 2/506)
William Baldwin (A 2/506)

INCOMING MAIL

I was on Ripcord when it blew up. I was one of the last ones to leave. I've spent the last 35+ years trying to keep from remembering. I think now I must try to remember. I came across your organization while trying to find out more information on Ripcord. I think I recognized some of the names of those coming to the next reunion. If possible I think I would like to come too. Could you send me more information. Thanks. After all this time I don't know if anyone would remember me but I am

Raulend (Ron) Whiteis
Co. B 2/506th, 101st Airborne Division
rwhiteis@austin.rr.com

Dear Frank:

Thank you again for your sincere concern over my dad's passing. I'm not sure if you know that Lee Widjeskog showed up at the funeral. I was so touched. At a moment's notice, he read a poem (one that you'll probably recognize) and gave some wonderful thoughts on my dad. It worked out so perfectly and was really special to the entire family.

I can't thank you and the other members of the association enough. Even just a few weeks before he died, my dad talked about doing his best to get to the reunion this summer if he could possibly make it. That's how much you meant to him. And, he wanted to bring my grandmother. Of course, that never happened, but I would like to come to the banquet if that's appropriate. I will ask my grandma if she wants to come as well, if that's OK.

You didn't have to know my dad for a long time to know that yes, he was a little rough around the edges, that he could have fun especially if in a group who appreciated a good joke or a motorcycle ride, or that he was the kind of person who would go out of his way to help you out of a jam. My dad was only passionate about a few things - me, his trucks and motorcycles, and being a member of the Ripcord Association. It was so good to see him find people he could identify with, because as much as I tried to understand, I could not. The only thing I knew how to do was show him acceptance, love and compassion. For years, as with many men I imagine, he couldn't talk about it. It was the forbidden subject that was rarely even grazed in conversation. Only since he found you all did he begin to share pictures and stories (still only the better ones, never the difficult or painful ones.) For the first time in his life, I believe he was able to feel a deep pride in the service he gave to our country.

Continued on page 4

INCOMING MAIL

Continued from page 3

There were years when he probably couldn't afford to come to the reunions, but nothing would stop him. He planned for it as soon as the last reunion was over. In fact, last May after he was diagnosed with Stage IIIB lung cancer and given a very dire prognosis, he opted to push off treatment until after the reunion (and a cross-country motorcycle ride!) No one could convince him otherwise – if cancer was going to get him, he wanted to see you all first. I now know that he didn't share his news with you, perhaps because he was too proud, or humble, or most likely because he was scared. Regardless, you gave him comfort without knowing, and for that I am eternally grateful.

About ten minutes before my dad's funeral, I spotted a tall, bearded man in the parking lot. It sure looked like a face I remembered from the reunion I went to in Charleston a few years back, but I couldn't imagine that someone would come all this way. Sure enough, it was Lee Widjeskog, who drove 290 miles to be there. Coincidentally, I had been having a hard time finding the appropriate person to read the poem I selected for his service, entitled "Just a Simple Soldier" by Fred Spaulding. How perfect that a member of the association, a comrade, and a friend would read it. Lee did so graciously, and spoke of my dad so eloquently and honestly. As Lee and the poem both stated, my dad was indeed just a simple soldier. He may not have stood out, but he did his job well and could be counted on in tough times. And although he died without fanfare, he will be greatly missed.

I admire all of you for your bravery and loyalty, and for your perseverance in the face of an unappreciative country. I pray that you have blessed lives and that you may find some healing and pride through your friendship with each other and the strong bond that holds you together. And, I wish you luck in finding more men and their families to attend the reunions so that they too can begin the healing process.

Gratefully,
Julie Sadtler
Daughter of William (Bill) Edmister,
who died April 29, 2006

"From The Internet"

Hoping to locate anyone who may have served w/ Robert "Sparky" Journell, A Co 2 Bat in 1970 FB Ripcord; Sparky was KIA on 7-22-70. I read a piece on the "Vietnam Guntrucks" site by a guy named Trav that described the battle. He had married a pals sister and used to look after us growing up. I later served w/ A Co 1/327. Please e-mail

me if you knew Sparky...thanks.

Rik
Rik Peery
E-Mail: saltfish1@msn.com

Frank,

Thanks for the reply! I received an e-mail from Lt. Widjeskog detailing that day, and am grateful for all of you that maintain contact. Sparky still has some family here (Salem, Va.), and I'll pass along the info. His Dad and my Dad worked for General Electric; Mr. Journell passed away a few years ago, my Dad died this past January. I'm not sure if his Mom is still living, but Sparky had a baby girl that should be 36 or so now, and his wife is still in the area, though I think she recently remarried less than a year ago. I'll see how things go, as some folks are receptive to the past, and I guess some would rather forget; hopefully some family members will be excited to know that you guys are keeping memories and never forgetting the sacrifices made...

Thanks again for the reply Frank, and I'd like to personally THANK YOU for your service. At 52 and having served w/ the 101st at a later date, I'm proud to have been a part of the best the Army has to offer, and I'm grateful to know that as Sparky covered for us "youngsters" way back then, you all did the same for one another; rest assured that this family will never forget your service and sacrifice...

Rik, Monica and Cade Peery

To Ripcord Association

Just recently I became aware of the existence of the Ripcord Association which I found on line. I was a SSG in the 1/506th who, after experiencing the horrors on FB Granite on 20MAR70, moved to HHC of the 101st Div at Camp Eagle. There my job was to prepare briefing reports for the generals and the daily intel summary for the generals' briefing. My part in Ripcord was merely to receive the reports from the field and report them. I'll never forget the night of July 2nd when we tuned to the push of the unit on a nearby hilltop which was being overrun by the NVA and finally hearing the a soldier calling for help saying his CO was killed and NVA were everywhere.

At nightshift at the TOC on Eagle we could go outside and see the illumination above Ripcord to the NW. I knew how bad it was by the reports constantly coming in (I was night shift G2 NCO) but could only imagine how bad it was for the guys out there. Nolan's book was a revelation for me and I treasure it and him for writing it. The American

INCOMING MAIL

public never knew the blunder that was Ripcord. I say blunder because command staff knew the NVA troop strength there and proceeded anyway without a plan which was realistic. I could never understand why Command didn't commit enough units to relieve those embattled troops or at least make the withdrawal less bloody.

Just writing to let you and the troops know I think of them often. I'm a dairy farmer in Uniontown, PA.

Warmest regards,
John Piwowar
vmdairy@earthlink.net

Mr. Marshall-

I am a senior at Martin County West and I am working on a research paper on the Battle of Ripcord and I am not finding anything in our school's library about it. The only really reliable source on the internet is your website so, I was wondering if you could give me links or book names. Anything would be appreciated. My e-mail address is lg_inthestix@msn.com

Thank you-
Lacey

Sir,

I just completed the General's book. Was very excellent!!! The undertaking of this research was tremendous, and I am thankful he went to such lengths to obtain what he could.

It gave me a new understanding of the situation, especially the giving of the NVA political views and what was laid down by the politburo to them. By looking more into the background of Vietnam and their situation makes me look at the situation we currently have in Iraq. From being there (Jan 03 - Feb 04), I can fully see "WE" didn't really understand our enemy or research their background or culture very well. Not enough was done to win the hearts and minds of the people from the beginning (from my stand point). The General's book has helped me see things I never thought of which hold true to the situation of today.

I would please ask you relay to the General my deepest thanks for all his hard work and research which made the book possible. I have learned a lot from both the past and the present due to his hard work.

Mikel Dawson

Dear Frank:
Just want to let you know how much I enjoyed the last,

and my first reunion. I got to spend a lot of time with Captain Rich my first CO. I was later sent to Barbara, then O'Reilly. I am reading General Harrison book for the second time. Once you start you can't put it down. There is so much information that the ordinary guy didn't know. There is a map on page xiii. Can I buy a copy? Also I would like to buy a copy of the short film taken on Ripcord. There were photos taken of all the units and the guys who received there Ripcord Coins, I would like to buy some of these as well. Any direction you can point me or tell me who to contact would be appreciated.

stevenmorgan@mvn.net

Hi Frank,

You don't know me, but I was with C. Co. 158th avn. bn. Phoenix Until Nov of 1970, when I was shot flying a mission in the A Shau Valley. My name is Randy Trayer, and I look forward to meeting you, and all the guys I flew air-support for at Ripcord. I continued my military career as an M.P. and retired in 2001 as a Major from a military police reserve unit in Ohio. My wife, Janet and I own a law enforcement equipment store and I am a deputy sheriff in Ohio. We will be attending the reunion July 26th thru July 29th. Hope to see you there. Thank you Ripcord vets for all that you've done Airborne all the way....hooa

Randy T. Phoenix

Hello Frank,

I got your name from Peter Cook. I am looking for anyone who may have known my father-in-law Stephen Wedding. He served with the 506th from Nov. 1968 to Nov. 1969.

He served with C Company at 1st then switched to B Co. He also served in Vietnam in 1966-1967 with the 27th Inf. 25th Inf. Div. He retired in 1970 and passed away a few short years later from cancer. My husband and his family are hoping to hear from anyone who knew him and can tell them about him. They would also like to know about his time in Vietnam. I have heard from eight great men that were over there during his tours. A couple remembered him, but most didn't know him. But they have all been so helpful and are trying to help me find people who did. Please contact me and let me know.

Thank You,
Sincerely,
Terri Wedding
teacups5@verizon.net

Lee Widjeskog, A 2/506, HHC 3rd Bde.

I grew up in southern New Jersey near the little town of Rosenhayn. Following graduation from Bridgeton High School I attended Colorado State University where I majored in Wildlife Biology and enlisted in the Army ROTC program. My basic training was held at Fort Riley, KS during the summer of 1968. By March 1969 I had graduated and received my bachelor degree, a commission and orders for Fort Benning, GA with eventual overseas assignment. Fort Benning meant 9 weeks of Infantry Officer Basic Course and for the heck of it and the \$11 per day TDY pay, volunteered for 3 weeks of airborne training. This was followed by an assignment to lovely Fort Polk Louisiana.

At Fort Polk I met with the Colonel to receive my assignment. My fellow officers talked about the possible good and bad assignments to be had on post. All seemed to agree that assignment to Tiger Ridge, 32 miles from the main post was the least desirable place to be. As the people around me got training company's assignments and range assignments the colonel finally got to the name Widjeskog. He remarked that seeing as how I had a degree in wildlife biology, it was only fitting that I should be assigned to work where there was a lot of wildlife... Tiger Ridge. (To my knowledge, this is probably only the second or third time in the history of the Army that someone was assigned based on his or her pre-Army knowledge). In spite of the rumors to the contrary, I found the Tiger Ridge assignment good and was sorry to see it end when it came time to report to the Canal Zone for Jungle Survival Training. Between Fort Polk and Panama, my wife Kathy gave birth to our daughter, Denise. I got to see her for a few weeks before having to ship out to Vietnam.

Once in country, I soon learned I was assigned to the 101st. Following SERTS I met Col. Lucas and walked over to my assigned company, Alpha 2/506. Within a day or two I was on a helicopter heading over the jungle to join Alpha and Capt. Burkert somewhere east of Ripcord. It was now late April. I replaced Lt. Kelly as platoon leader of the 2nd

Platoon and quickly came to depend on my platoon Sergeant, Leverett.

My first true exposure to gunfire took place on May 14 when Robert Lowe of first Platoon was killed and Tiny Aanonsen was wounded. I remember moving up to the

front to try and spot the bunker used by the NVA and hit it with a LAW. We found it and hit it but it was empty which is why I didn't get killed or wounded. That was the first of a number of times I found myself frightened but doing what I was trained to do in spite of the fear.

During this time we moved through the jungle looking for NVA and usually finding none. As a wildlife biologist I found the jungle interesting when I had time to notice. Within two weeks my radioman, Sgt. Michaels (?), behind me, was wounded by a trail watcher and shipped home. Sometime after in the end of May we crossed the Rao Trang and were flown onto



Lee Widjeskog in October 1970 following Ripcord

FSB Ripcord for a brief one-night visit. The next day on the 3rd of June headed out to Hill 1000 in search of more NVA but by now we were under the command of Capt. Hawkins. He is a graduate of West Point and the troops had mixed feelings about him. Some felt he would be good and others were concerned he was out for glory and would put us at risk to get there. The average GI by this time of the war was only interested in getting home intact.

As we went up the hill our point man spotted three NVA sitting in the trail eating. He fired one shot and either stopped or his gun jammed. Regardless, his slack man failed to back him up and they both beat a hasty retreat. We brought in artillery and then prepared to move forward. The point and slack team would not go. Weiland Norris and Sgt. Koger moved up to the job. Shortly after they moved forward the NVA opened fire killing Norris, wounding the Sgt. and nicking another Sgt. Bill Wagnon. After the shooting was over we medevaced the two Sgts. And SP4 McVay for wounds. Six days later we were in Camp Evans for Stand Down and re-fitting.

Our next assignment was to secure FSB O'Riley, which had a battery of ARVN artillery on top of the steep sided hill. While there a wounded NVA soldier surrendered after failing to find his unit. On a more deadly note a Recon unit walking onto O'Riley, hit a mechanical ambush our company had set up when they missed the guide who was supposed to lead them around it. One trooper was killed and several injured when only one of the claymores went off.

Things were quiet on O'Riley but by the end of the month things were heating up around Ripcord. During the early morning of June 2, C 2/506 was hit at their NDP (night defensive position). This resulted in 8 dead including Capt. and ___ wounded. We felt certain we would soon be getting orders to head into the jungle around Ripcord. Finally on July 10 we CA'd into the jungle east of Ripcord and on 12 July we assaulted Hill 805 with D 1/506 after an artillery barrage and tear gas. Conveniently the NVA had not chosen to contest the hill at this time. That night they decided to come back and they attacked Delta. They apparently didn't realize Alpha was on their flank so the two companies had the NVA in a bit of crossfire. In spite of this Delta still took some wounded.

The next day, 13 July, we moved off the hill and moved into the valley south and east of Ripcord. For much of this time we worked as one or two units moving in support of each other but only once in a while joining together. We were nervous most of the time and always expected to make contact. By the 18th the entire unit was with the company CP as we waited for re-supply. As we watched from the LZ we heard and saw the Chinook take .51 cal rounds from an NVA gun and crash to the ground atop the ammo depot on Ripcord. Tremendous series of explosions ensued and we heard shrapnel hitting the trees near our LZ two kilometers from the firebase. We were certain many were being killed on the hill but were more concerned that our mail might be on that hill getting destroyed. Later we received re-supply, mail and three or four new guys who got to see the explosions as they flew to join us for their first day in the field. So in all things were fine for us in the jungle even as the hill continued to smolder.

The next day two NVA walked up on the middle of our column much to the surprise of Capt. Hawkins and his RTO. The Captain was quick and has shot both of the NVA before they could get their rifles off their shoulders. One of the two had been wounded on Hill 805 earlier and was returning to his unit when they ran into us. The other was a tall man who appeared to be a replacement or perhaps a Chinese advisor.

On 20 July, First Platoon found and tapped into a commo line deep in a valley SE of Ripcord. ARVN SSgt Long listened in and told us it was a line between their mortar and Regimental HQ. Ambushes were set to intercept anyone who was coming to repair the line. This led to a number of NVA blood trails as the ambush was sprung. SP4 Miller of 2nd Platoon later spotted an NVA coming

onto a rock to scout us. He killed the man with a well-placed M-79 grenade. Shortly after these encounters Hawkins had us move out of the deep ravine and onto the hillside for the night.

The next morning the lead platoon encountered two NVA soldiers moving up the trail towards our company, probably to scout our position. The point man fired them up killing one and wounding the other whom fled for his life. He was not found in spite of the blood trail. After regrouping the lead platoon returned to the site of the dead NVA soldier on the rock. His body had been removed. It was decided to move northwest to a new NDP. Captain Hawkins had 2nd Platoon drop back to pick up any NVA that might be following. We in turn had Sparky Journell and another GI drop back to pick off any trail followers. After a 1/2 hour wait or so, they spotted two NVA soldiers coming up the trail. They were fired on by the two GI's without returning fire. One was killed and the other escaped. The dead man proved to be a recon Sergeant who had drawn a layout of the Ripcord Firebase in preparation for an assault.

We soon moved into a new NDP and around 2300 hours heard an explosion in the vicinity of the NVA body we left behind. We had attached a grenade in hopes of injuring additional NVA.

The sun rose on the 22nd of July. I anticipated getting mail this day with re-supply or relocation since it was my 24th birthday. Other people had plans for us, which I did not appreciate. As we moved about, we caught the odor of fish and rice that was typical of the NVA. Patrols sent out from the NDP did not spot anything but all were on edge. We attributed the odor to all the captured NVA equipment we were now carrying from the NVA killed over the past few days. Apparently higher HQ was in a flux about what to do with Ripcord and us. All the other units had been pulled from the AO (area of operations) except those on Ripcord and Alpha Company. Hawkins had decided to move to the southwest for extraction and had First Platoon move there to secure a LZ. Lt. Col. Lucas had other ideas and wanted us to move north to a LZ that he felt could be better covered by artillery. First Platoon was called back as the rest of us waited on the NDP to move out.

Once they returned, it was decided to have 2nd Platoon lead the way to the LZ to the north. It was now almost 1300 hours, much later than we normally left a NDP. (The longer you stay in place the greater your chance of being hit.)

I only had 16 men in the field with me this day. I don't recall all that were there but beside the point man I remember our medic Martin Glennon, Platoon Sgt. Johnny Brown, Larry Keys, Robert Counts, Anthony Galindo, Tom Schultz, Sparky Journell, a new guy SSgt. Gary Foster, RTO Mulvey, grenadier Sp4 Miller, my RTO whose name is lost to me, Rifleman McVay as well as five others whose names elude me after all these years.

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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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Ripcord Reunion 2006 Charleston, SC July 26 - 30, 2006

Make Reservation Now!



Address Correction Requested

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