



# RIPTCORD REPORT

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



Number 85

Spring, 2011

## Jersey Ramblings

by Lee Widjeskog

Here it is, March 2011! Just about everyone reading this has experienced some serious weather patterns different from those in the past. The results of global warming are not just hot weather, but also significant changes in the way the air flows around the world. Whenever there are changes in the airflow (the jet stream) we see unusual weather events throughout much of the world.

There is evidence that in the past the jet stream previously shifted due to changes in the amount of sunspots on the surface of the sun. Fewer sunspots, which mean less heat sent toward the earth, possibly led to the Little Ice Age from 1300 to 1850. (Even in those early years people were watching the sun and keeping track of things like sunspots.) This combined with unusual volcano activity, which sent tons of ash and dust into the atmosphere, blocking the sun. When the jet stream shifted back, and the dust settled, the weather warmed up once more.

Since then due to the industrial revolution, there has been a vast amount of carbon released in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels (oil, natural gas and coal) while huge areas of forest have been removed to provide fuel and farmlands. This gas does not block the sun like volcano ash, but retains heat on the planet and appears to be causing the changes in the jet stream we see today. The results are more severe weather patterns both in the winter as well as the summer. What we are seeing this year may be the start of patterns we will probably see for a long time to come. The winters and summers of our earlier life may be things of the past.

So what does this weather report have to do with the Ripcord Association? Well, the weather is not the issue. What is important is the history of the weather and what people have learned as a result of history.

Those of us who were in the Ripcord battle whether it be in March or July, whether you were there one day or every day, whether you were wounded or not, you are part of the history of the event. No matter how little or much you remember, what happened to you is important to the story of the battle for Ripcord.

For that reason, we would like all of you to record your

memories of time you spent in and around Ripcord in 1970. Write it down, record it on tape, give me a call or talk with me at the reunions and I will record it. We are all aging faster than we wish to believe and there may come a time when you will want someone to know what you went through. This will be a way to set your record straight and it will help all of us better understand exactly what happened. People in the future can use that knowledge to avoid similar events or improve upon events. Maybe we will not repeat history!

See you in Indianapolis!!!



**Ripcord Reunion 2011  
Oct 5, 2011 thru Oct 9th 2011**

**will be held at  
Indianapolis Marriott East  
Indianapolis, IN**

**More information in the next newsletter  
and on our website**

**Check out the Ripcord website at  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)**

# FROM THE EDITOR

It is 41 years since the start of Firebase Ripcord and over 25 years since the start of the Ripcord Association. We are still getting new members into the Association that are finding us by Googling "Ripcord" on the Internet and going to our website. You will see a list of new names in another part of this newsletter.

You can always check out our website and get all the past Ripcord Report newsletters since 1985.

I am also looking for any video / film footage that you may have from Ripcord for future documentaries. It seems there are production companies that would love to do a show about Ripcord, but need some new video footage to do it.

Our next two Reunions will be in Indianapolis and the following two years will be in Myrtle Beach. These are 4 Reunions you do not want to miss.

Hope to see you all at the next reunion.

## E-mail address

I need your e-mail address. If you are not receiving updates and information about the Ripcord Association via e-mail, you may be missing out on a lot of news. Please go to our website and update your information.

## Postal Mail Delivery

If you get the newsletter by Postal mail, and you DID NOT send the postcard enclosed in the mailed newsletter. back to us, then you ARE NOT receiving this newsletter! If you wish to continue receiving the newsletter by postal mail, please contact me at [frank@ripcordassociation](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation) or at my address below.

## Biographies on our website.

I still need a lot of you to send me your biography for our website. Let me know about your Ripcord experience, and you can also tell us about your family and life after Ripcord. Send them to: [frank@ripcordassociation](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation) or at my address below.

## ARTICLES

Deadline for the next issue will be June 1, 2011. Please send all articles, photos, incoming mail and interesting reading to:

**Frank Marshall**  
5 Taconia Ct  
Mt Laurel, NJ 08054  
or e-mail to: [frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation)

## 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.

Bill Williams  
George Murphy  
Marc Aronson  
Terrance Vroniak  
Wilburn Wall  
Gary Hatley  
Phillip Kallas  
Gary Madson  
Brian Eveleth

## DONATIONS:

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

Lee Widjeskog,  
493 Stillman Ave.  
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

## 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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# INCOMING MAIL

Hi, Mr. Marshall.

My name is Ashlyn Brandenburg and I'm a junior at Westlake High School in Austin, TX. This email was also sent to my English teacher, Rebecca Stucky. Every year, the junior AP English classes read "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien and do a project involving the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Each student is assigned a Vietnam soldier whose name is on the wall and creates a virtual contribution to him in the form of a video/slideshow. You can find students' projects from the previous years here:  
<http://www4.eanesisd.net/vietnam/>

I have been assigned Sgt. Mark Gregory Draper and I used [www.virtualwall.org](http://www.virtualwall.org) to locate his memorial online. I sent an email to the contact left on his memorial page there. I wanted to find as much information as possible about Sgt. Draper, so I Googled his name and got to the Ripcord Association website where I found your comment with his name included in it. I was wondering if you could tell me anything about Sgt. Draper. Anything would be helpful--stories, pictures--whatever you feel comfortable sharing with me would be wonderful.

Thank you!

Ashlyn Brandenburg

ab23695@eanesisd.netab23695@eanesisd.net

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Frank

Was reading in my VFW magazine the article on FSB Ripcord, remembered talking to some the guys at Week of the Eagles when I was with the Pathfinders there in the early 80's. Decided to look at it today with Acme Mapper. Not sure of it accuracy. You can zoom out (see Hue) play with the Topo. You guys would know better than I. Looks like the jungle has claimed most of it back (if it is the right location) <http://mapper.acme.com/>

You guys were all my Sergeants and heroes when I joined the Army in 79 and built the Army I served in for 20 years and that my Son and Daughter serve in today. Please let me know if the link is accurate?

God Bless

Steve Acton

Maddog Actons Dad

sactonusa@gmail.com

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Please, I am sure someone can help!

Frank last fall I sent you a request to locate some troopers that were wounded during the evac. You published it for me in the RC Report. I'm sorry to report I have heard nothing. I guess I had this episode built up to be bigger than it apparently was.

I figure these guys are not part of your assn., they have died or they just don't care. Having been around a lot of VN Vets it is very surprising to me.

Any way thank you for publishing my story for me. We tried.

Ken Mayberry

"Phoenix 50"

C/158 101 ABN

70-71 Camp Evans

69-25 Tan Hats

kensue@neb.rr.com

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Visit my website at [www.whipstour@yahoo.com](mailto:www.whipstour@yahoo.com). all pictures from my tour including ripcord. articles and equipment from that era. we travel to veterans events and fundraisers and high schools in michigan to educate and keep our brothers memories alive.

curahee whip

Bruce Whipple

E 2/506

[www.whipstour@yahoo.com](mailto:www.whipstour@yahoo.com)

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The Sensor Platoon was a 26 man unit out of Division. It was broken up into 2 and 3 man teams that were placed in strategic locations throughout the Division AO. I operated with most of the Division Battalions during my tour. I was wounded during the fight for FB Granite on April 29th, 1970. After a month in the hospital at Cam Ranh, I was reassigned to FB Birmingham. We had a Sensor team on Ripcord during most of intense fighting.

I did not realize one could become a member of the Ripcord Association without having been assigned to the actual AO. I look forward to belonging.

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To all Addresses, I salute you.

I am a classmate of Thomas J. Brennan, West Point '69, and I'm taking the lead on writing his memorial article for a graduate publication called TAPS. Personnel records center info shows Tom Brennan was XO, B Battery, 2-319 FA, from 6 July to 12 Nov, 1970, so he would have been 1LT Brennan at the time of the attack on and evacuation of FSB Ripcord, July '70.

I'm trying to confirm if he was actually on FSB Ripcord at the time. I know he was awarded the Silver Star, and his wife is checking to see if she can locate the citation, but right now I don't know if he was awarded that or something else for Ripcord. He was an FO for six months (in the

*Continued on Page 4*

# INCOMING MAIL

A Shau Valley??) prior to being an XO, and he was also awarded the Bronze Star w/3 OLC and V device, plus the Purple Heart, so I'm trying to piece it all together. If any of you recall 1LT Thomas J. Brennan, I would appreciate so very much if you could share with me what you remember about him. My contact info is below.

FYI-Tom did a second tour in Vietnam with MACV in the Delta, and left the service in '74, later becoming an anesthesiologist. He died in Vero Beach, FL, in July 2003, so honoring him is long overdue.

I am amazed so many of you guys are still around, particularly after going thru such deep doo-doo. (I was in 3rd Bde, 101st the next year, but it was quiet compared to what you guys saw.) Again, I salute you, and any info on Tom would be great.

Pete Skells  
pskells3@cfl.rr.com

*(This is a follow up from Pete Skells after being contacted)*

Bruce, Floyd and Russ-

I cannot thank you enough for helping me put together a picture of Tom Brennan's life for his memorial article. Forty years is such a long time, but you guys helped me cut through the fog for a clear idea of what my friend experienced.

Nolan's book on Ripcord says the battle lasted from March 12-July 23 1970. I have Tom's Silver Star order that puts him on Ripcord from the very first day with a combat assault on Mar 12 as Fwd Observer to Alpha 2-506th, and orders for a Bronze Star w/"V" device and Purple Heart that places him at Ripcord on Jul 16 as XO, B/2-319 FA, during the siege.

I've attached the unedited draft of his memorial, thinking you might be interested in what happened to the young man you once knew. I wish I could write more about all of you, but I'm limited to 1000 words for the final article, so what I'm sending you will have to be condensed even further, (not sure how I'm going to do that) based on magazine editor guidance.

God bless you all, and thank you for your service.

Pete Skells

My name is Arthur Samel. I am a 25 year old male in a wheelchair with Muscular Dystrophy. I live in the Philadelphia area. I would really appreciate any signed military memorabilia that you could send me.

Thank you very much.  
Arthur Samel  
Avram911@aol.com

Would like to hear from other brothers, on what happened July 23, I was seriously wounded and don't really know or understand! All information would be appreciated.

Roger Newland  
A/2/506  
roger19681950@hotmail.com

The attached YouTube link is sent to you for possible posting to your websites or other distribution to the membership of your fine veteran organizations (both of which I am proud to be a member of).

I received this YouTube clip of a song originally written by Virginia Briner 42 years ago during Vietnam, but sung by Shavonne in this video.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3ldTeDVLZs>  
Bob Worrall  
bob@thewoodagency.com

I just came across the website and was very happy to see it. I was a RTO with headquarters and left the base around the 1st of July to move to FSB O'Reilly and then back to Evans. I have had mixed feelings all these years about leaving the base just as the heavy shelling started. I would really appreciate hearing from Gary Watrous as I carried the radio for him in Recon before we were on Ripcord with headquarters.

Phillip Schneider  
philsch505@yahoo.com

Frank,

Most of my family and friends know I prefer to avoid anything about Viet Nam, but one day, as I was perusing the bargain books and one of the bookstores I frequent, I happened to pick up a copy of "Airborne in Viet Nam." For unknown reason it intrigued me and the price was right so I bought it. After some reading of bits and pieces of the book I happened across three paragraphs about the siege of Ripcord.

This was the first indication, since I had returned, that someone other than myself had ever heard of Ripcord. I must have read those three paragraphs dozens of times. Because of the lack of knowledge of the siege I thought it was a typical event for grunts and all my hangups were nothing more than irrational hangups. Those three paragraphs gave my first validation of my experience. It was two or three months before I realized that if it was in one book it would be in others. I began searching the web for

# INCOMING MAIL

more books and it wasn't long before I found <http://rip-cordassociation.com>.

I was one of the cherries sent out to A Co. on the last resupply. On the 22nd I was in the point platoon when we moved out. An AK round hit me in the arm during the first few minutes of the battle and things went downhill from there. Later, in the hospital, I couldn't believe anyone could possibly live through and entire tour.

Oddly, the 23rd was my remembrance day rather than the 22nd. That was when I got to see another day; the day I counted our dead; and the day Delta came to get us out of the hellhole. For years I lit a candle on the 23rd to remember those fallen soldiers.

After forty years of trying to forget all that I came across this website and it was like coming home. Now it's OK to remember. Thanks to all of you.

On another note, while I don't have any pictures of Ripcord, I have attached one that I think everyone will remember.

Best regards,

Don

DONALD KIEFER [oberbee@usa.net]

A/2-506



Frank, I wanted to thank you and Lee for all you did to put together the 40th Ripcord Reunion. It being mine and my wife Teresa's first it was SPECIAL !!!!!! It also made a big impression on the two guest that we brought. You could feel the Ripcord Brotherhood every time you walked into the day room. I am not going to miss another reunion if at all possible.

Well I just wanted to think you "Nau Nau" guys  
Benny Milkman" Mulkey  
101st Pathfinders

Hi Frank

My name is Bob Horsch and was with the CO B 2nd 506th infantry. I was the one in the picture with the dog name Bingo who was our mascot. I picked him up in Cam Ranh Bay, traveled with me to Camp Evans. My first sergeant was Theo Reeves who just passed. On our info board was a picture of a helmet that was on Firebase Ripcord. Please send me your address and I will be glad to forward a copy of this picture to put in you report

BoBo0216@aol.com



Search request from new Member

I believe my father served at FB Ripcord from 1969 - 1970. He was with Company A, 501st Signal Battalion. I found a letter of appreciation to him from Cpt. Robert E. Gray. My father passed away in 2005 and have recently received his military records, etc. Guess I'm just hoping that someone on here knew him. He spoke very little of his experience in Vietnam.

Katherine Smith  
acecopsmith@yahoo.com

The Ripcord Reunion in Ft. Worth was an absolutely amazing experience. Until July of this year I had never even heard of the Ripcord siege. I did know that my husband's brother, John Kuennen, had been in Vietnam and it had been so horrible that no one ever asked him about what happened there or tried to find out about his experiences. The family seemed to feel that he did not need or want any reminders of that time. However, this summer my husband and I were visiting in Iowa and were able to spend some time with John. He began to talk a bit about

*Continued on Page 8*

# Ripcord Reunion Registration 2011

## Firebase Ripcord Association Reunion, October 5 – 9, 2011

Indianapolis Marriot East, Indianapolis, IN

Yes, I'll be there!

I have not attended a Reunion since 1997 and have not received a Ripcord Coin.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ UNIT IN 'NAM \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Will a family member(s) or guest be sharing your accommodations?  Yes  No

How many including you? \_\_\_\_\_. If yes what are their names? (For name tag purposes only).

Arrival Date \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NO COMPLEMENTARY TRANSPORTATION FROM THE AIRPORT AVAILABLE.**

Registration fee of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed for #\_\_\_\_\_ Adults and #\_\_\_\_\_ children under 18.  
**\$50 for children under 18. For adults see discounts below !**

### **DISCOUNTS FOR EARLY REGISTRATION:**

Before June 30, 2011 – \$75 per adult

July 1 through 31, 2011 – \$80 per adult

August 1 through September 1, 2011 – \$85 per adult

After September 1, 2011 – \$90 per adult

Your registration fee covers the cost of the hospitality room, snacks and beverages, and dinner on Saturday.

**Registration fee is due no later than September 30, 2011.**

Make your check payable to "RIPCORD ASSOCIATION"

Mail your check with this form to:

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

If you have questions call Lee at 856-451-1108 before 30 September 2011

### **AGENDA**

**Wednesday, October 5:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Self guided tours and shopping)

**Thursday, October 6:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Golf in the AM) (Self guided tours)

**Friday, October 7:** Hospitality 1200 Hours. Ladies raffle 1900 hours (7 PM)

**Saturday, October 8:** Business meeting for association business in Hospitality room.

Dinner with cash bar starting at 1730 hours done by 2200 hours.

**Sunday, October 9:** Homeward bound

**Thursday Golf Outing (not included in the registration fee) Check here if you will play**

**HOTEL RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY AND BY SEPTEMBER 5, 2011**

USE THE OTHER FORM OR CALL 317-352-1231 or 800 -228-9290,

ASK FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS AND REFER TO THE GROUP CODE: "RIPCORD"

# Hotel Registration 2011

**Firebase Ripcord Association Reunion, October 5 - 9, 2011**

*Hotel Reservation form for  
Indianapolis Marriot East  
7202 East 21<sup>st</sup> Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46219*

**Phone: (800) 228-9290 (Central Reservations)  
317-352-1231 (Direct Hotel Reservation)  
Group code: RIPCORD**

Group Room Rate: \$82 per day + 17% tax.  
A deposit for the first night's room and tax or a Credit Card Number  
is required to guarantee this reservation.

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Arrival Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Date: \_\_\_\_\_ No. of Rooms \_\_\_\_\_

Roommate Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Room needs\*: \_\_\_\_\_

*\* Although we cannot guarantee special requests, every effort will be made to meet your request.*

**THIS IS A NON-SMOKING HOTEL (SMOKERS SHOULD GET A GROUND FLOOR ROOM SO  
THEY CAN STEP OUTSIDE.)**

Deposit Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_ Credit Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp: \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder Signature Authorizing Hotel's Use of Credit Card: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE NOTE:** Those guests sending a cash deposit should be aware that a credit card imprint and valid, state-issued ID will be necessary upon check in. Should you wish to pay for your stay with cash, a credit card imprint and valid ID will still be required upon arrival to secure your accommodations.

All cash payments are accepted upon departure.

Check-in time: 4:00 PM (1600 hrs) Check-out Time: 12:00 PM (1200 hrs)

**To confirm reservations, please return form to the hotel or call by September 5, 2011.  
We look forward to seeing you in October!**

# INCOMING MAIL

## *Continued from Page 5*

Vietnam and he told us about some specific things that happened there, things I could not begin to imagine having witnessed or experienced. I was totally shocked and full of guilt for having been so oblivious about what he and so many others had been through. John told us about Keith Nolan's wonderful book and when we returned to our home in Texas I began to read it and to try to imagine what it must have been like for him and for all the others who were there.

At home I did some searching on the internet and found the wonderful Ripcord Association web site put together by Frank Marshall. I found out that John had been radioman for Lt. Jim Campbell and had tried to find Lt. Campbell after the war, but didn't know enough detail to track him down. Frank made the connection with Jim Campbell possible and Jim told me more about Ripcord. He encouraged us to talk to John about attending the reunion and called John himself. Thanks to Frank and Jim, as well as the encouragement of his wife Annette, John came to the reunion this year. He was able, for the first time, to talk with other men who truly understood what he had experienced and to reconnect with some of the men he had known.

The reunion was very special to my husband and to me, not only for the opportunity it gave John to be together with others from that difficult time, but because we felt so privileged to meet many of the men who went through the siege of Ripcord. What amazing guys each of you are - making such sacrifices and giving so much while some of us did so little and knew almost nothing of what was happening a world away. Just thinking about the things each of you went through, the fear and pain and loss makes me feel so grateful and thankful. At the reunion I was able to meet some of the outstanding men I'd read about in Keith Nolan's book-Captain Vasquez-Rodriguez who was described as "the ultimate soldier" with combat experience that was "awe inspiring" and Capt. Jeff Wilcox who, despite any personal consequences, had been willing to stand up to higher command and question expectations of his exhausted and dehydrated men during the days after the attacks on Hills 902 and 1000. I met grenadier Frank Marshall of A company who was wounded numerous times over a period of days before final rescue by Delta Company at their "last stand" position, and Lt. Jim Campbell who is described throughout the book as a skilled leader greatly respected and always willing to stand with his men in the worst of times. There were so many more brave men I read about who were walking

around the reunion, almost as if they were just ordinary people, giving no clues as to the extraordinary tasks they had accomplished together, the indescribable events they experienced.

As I said initially, the Ripcord Reunion was absolutely amazing. It was truly a privilege to be there.

Deborah Kuennen  
[debkuennen@verizon.net]

## Newest Members to Ripcord Association

Jenkins	Scott	
Brandenburg	Ashlyn	
Garrett	Daymon	1/506
Fox	Janie	
Donnell III	N	Sensor Plt
Sodergren	Alan	3rd Bde Avn
Morris	Denny	265th RRU / 8th RRFS
Goss	Warren	81mm Mortars
Wardosky	Phillip	A/2-11
Harrell	Rupert	A/158 AHB
Alexander	Alan	A/158 AHB
Smith	Katherine	A/501 Signal
Eveleth	Brian	A/2-501 E/2-501
Yonts	David	A/2-506
Puffer	Douglas	D/2-506

## 506th Association: Special White T-Shirt Sale

Choice of 8 full-front designs for only \$6 each  
Sizes S, M, L, XL, 2XL (limited to quantity in stock)

Special White T-Shirt Sales Order Form:  
[www.506infantry.org/quartermaster/specialsalesorder-form.html](http://www.506infantry.org/quartermaster/specialsalesorder-form.html)

## Now on the Ripcord website . . .

45 minutes of video film never saw before.  
Shot by Walt Juszczak of Delta Company 2/506  
Video of Delta Company on and around Firebase Ripcord