



RIPCORD REPORT



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

Number 108

November 2016

The 2016 Ripcord Reunion

**Welcomed over 160 veterans and family members to the
University Plaza Hotel in Springfield, Missouri.**

By Wednesday more than 60percent of the signups had arrived. A number of people were force to change their plans due to the impending hurricane on the east coast. Others were dealing with family matters and unexpected health issues. But that has become the norm as our group ages in years and health.

The accommodations were once more really great and appreciated by all the attendees. Springfield makes certain we are welcomed as shown by the Ripcord welcome sign at the airport!

What made this event more memorable was the high number of siblings of men killed at Ripcord who were able to attend. Both of Virgil Bixby's sisters (Evelyn and Linda), were able to come and had a great time talking with members of his company and platoon. Barbara Zoller whose brother Robert Zoller, served with C 2/506 when he was killed on 2 July, was present. She like many other relatives and veterans was concerned about how she would be accepted. From her comments that was never an issue and she plans to return and visit with us again next year!

Continued on page 6



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.

John Hewitt C 2/506 (brother)

Billy Helvey A 2/506

Larry Hulsey 426 S&S Bn

Bob Lemon C 2/506

Jim Harris HHC 2/506

Jackie Wallace C 2/506

Lee Trembly E 2/506

Pete Meloro C 2/506

Bill Williams B 2/506

Leigh Freeman C 2/506

Rick Blyth (A 2/506) in the Memory of

Chip Collins (B 2/506)

Andy Hegedus (C 2/506) to welcome Dennis Figley (C 2/506)

Audrey Wrightsell (A 2/11 FA) and Mary Murphy (B 2/320 FA) to the memory of Sammie Johnson

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

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

LILLIAN PETERS

A long time member and avid attendee of the reunions, Lillian Peters, wife of Ben Peters has passed away. She was always a friendly smile and good person. She will be missed by Association members who were lucky enough to know her. She asked that any donations in her memory be sent to the Anna Britt Nolan Trust Fund.

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

Please continue to send your letters and send your comments or articles to:
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
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JERSEY RAMBLINGS

by Lee Widjeskog A/2-506



November is upon us!! The weather here in NJ and many other places is very mild for this time of year and I suspect most of us are enjoying it. We'll see what the future holds as the days get shorter.

The 2016 Reunion in Springfield went well as attested by many of those who attended. The facilities were great and there were no floods or bad weather. We passed some of the time checking on Frank Marshall who stayed home in the Myrtle Beach area worrying about his house and searching for a place to stay after being evacuated. As he will tell you he traveled many miles looking for a motel that was not full and could take him, Dee and their dog. His plight found relief in the person of Bruce Brady (A 2/506) who was at the reunion and allowed Frank and company to use their house in North Carolina. The Philly boy was saved once again!!

The Association, under the leadership of President Peter Meloro, has finally submitted the paperwork and received non-profit, tax exempt status with the IRS. This means that donations made to our organization can be deducted from your tax returns if you happen to make enough money. This will save the Association hundreds of dollars in the future during our reunions when we do not have to pay sales tax.

Our finances for 2016 since the reunion in 2015 are as follows:

EXPENSES

Newsletter: \$911.95
Web site: \$239.40
Membership form: \$119.40
Ink for photo albums: \$52.15
Misc.: \$83.43
Hospitality room refreshments: \$1,122.18
Banquet and hot snacks (Friday & Saturday): \$12,261.07
Store items (books, shirts, hats etc.): \$2,165.27
TOTAL EXPENSES: \$16,954.75

INCOME

Donations: \$3,795
Registration: \$12,985
Store: \$ 2,506.95
Ladies Auction: \$ 2,217
Haircuts: \$481
TOTAL INCOME: \$21,984.95

Our ending balance at the end of October 2016 is \$44,772.68

This was the last year that Mike (The Barber) Chiarelli did haircuts at the reunion for donations to the association. When he was with Bravo 2/506, he gave haircuts to the troops on FSB Ripcord in between incoming explosions. After joining us at the reunions in 2002, he began giving haircuts at the reunion and giving the donations to the association. With the \$481 donated this year he has added over \$4,000 to the Ripcord account. Mike, we thank you for all your efforts and hope you will continue to attend even if you leave your razors home!!

Start planning now!! Next year's reunion will be in **Laughlin, Nevada** and will start on Monday rather than Wednesday so plan accordingly!! For the west coast members this will be the closest a reunion will get for some years to come. Hope to see you there!

REUNION DATES:

2017 LAUGHLIN, NEVADA
MONDAY 2 OCT TO THURSDAY 5 OCT
LEAVE FRIDAY 6 OCT.

2018 MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA
WEDNESDAY OCT. 31 TO SATURDAY NOV. 3
LEAVE SUNDAY NOV. 4

Anna Britt Nolan Trust

by Mary Murphy



Hello,

I have heard from Ulla Nolan and several Ripcord friends that the Trust Fund Raffle went very well this year, thanks to all of you who donated items and bought raffle tickets. George would have been thrilled.

I spoke to Ulla yesterday and she said Britt is now looking into various colleges. It seems just yesterday she was a 9-year-old.

I want to apologize for not making this year's reunion. I took a spill the week before – can you believe I slipped on walnuts hidden in the grass – and sprained my ankle good and wrenched my knee. Needless to say, driving five hours from Illinois was not possible and I had to cancel. The ankle is slowly improving with time. I think sprains are worse than broken bones. At any rate, I hope to see all of you again in the future.

Everyone here has Cubs fever and that has made our enjoyable fall season even better.

Take care and God Bless!

Mary C. Murphy

The address where donations may be sent
for the trust fund is:

Anna Britt Nolan Trust
c/o First Bank
6211 Mid Rivers Mall Drive
Saint Charles, MO 63304-1102

Ripcord on Facebook

by Anthony Chritchlow



[https://www.facebook.com/
groups/ripcordassociation/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ripcordassociation/)

Yeaaaaaa. Halloween is over. Now on to turkey day.

I hope that you all are having a good fall. Mine not so well. In October I had a wreck. I will be getting it back from repairs 10 November. It will cost almost 10k to do repairs. That's 1/3 the value of the truck. So much for me.

It looks like this year's reunion was a hit. But aren't the always? My wife and I are looking forward to next year.

We are up to 629 members now on facebook. I'm still getting 3 or 4 member requests a month. I think we are doing great on Face book. I want to thank each and every one of you for your contributions to the content of our page. Without you I would not have any pictures to put on our header. Keep up the good work folks.

Have a best holiday season ever. See you in Nevada.

Thank you to everyone for the card presented to us at the reunion and for all the expressions of appreciation. So many of you help us and help make events run more smoothly.



I wish I dared try to name all of you in this letter. Bob is thanking Bob & Jackie Wallace and Paul Buhr for their labor intensive assistance with the flags.

We are looking forward to next year in Nevada and another great reunion with our Ripcord family.
Currahee,
Bob & Red Judd

Kathy and I would like to thank all those at the reunion for their generous gift which we received. Such a gift is not necessary because we do what we do for the Association as way of feeling good.

Kathy and I have been fortunate in our life and am pleased to share some of that good fortune by making the reunions as pleasant as we can!

Thank you for your generosity and support for the association.

Kathy and Lee Widjeskog

A 2/506

Long-awaited Purple Heart for Wayne “Flash” Gourdon *by Jerry Rodgers*

Recently I had the privilege and honor of presenting the Purple Heart to Recon Wayne “Flash” Gourdon, for injuries he received on 26 May 1970 near Fire Support Base Ripcord.

After receiving combat injuries as part of a recon mission, Flash was being extracted from the jungle by hoist from a Huey helicopter being flown by a brave crew from Eagle Dustoff when the helicopter was hit by enemy RPG fire. The helicopter crashed and burned, killing all four crew members: Aircraft Commander WO1 Edward Terry O’Brien, Co-pilot WO1 Bruce Elliot Graham, Crew Chief SGT David Keith Johnson and Medic SGT William Edward Hawkins. Before the burning aircraft plummeted helplessly into the jungle, the heroic crew was able to cut the cable and allow Flash to fall safely to the ground, undoubtedly saving his life.

Flash’s Purple Heart was delayed for 46 years due to a tragic mix-up in paperwork, but a campaign launched by friends and fellow Ripcord Veterans on his behalf finally achieved success after much letter writing and eye-witness evidence provided to the Department of the Army.

Those involved in the Purple Heart campaign included Recons Van Walker, John Schnarr, Steve Mulcahy, Ralph Matta, Bob Romig, Bob Seitz, Lennie Long and Recon Marine Grant Bowden, of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs. As a member of Eagle Dustoff at the time, I was also able to provide further evidence which included an article co-written by the late Recon John Mihalko and me for the “Ripcord Report” in 1987 that documented the circumstances surrounding the Dustoff crash and recovery of the crew members’ remains days later.

Congratulations to Wayne who thanks all of those who served with him and supported him, including his dear wife Peggy.

Jerry Rodgers

Eagle Dustoff 1970-71

Honorary Member 506th Infantry Regiment



Jerry congratulates Wayne, 9-29-2016

Ripcord Association Newest Members

Last Name	First Name	Unit
Barnes	Allen	A/2-501
Bryan	Heather	Associate member
Evans	Carnell	101st
Majoria	Phyllis	Associate member
Majoria	Murphy	Associate member
Oliver	Thomas	B/2-506
Rayburn	David	C/158 Avn Bn
Stephens	Jimmy	2/506

Deceased in 2016

Dorian Alexander	2016	A 2/506
Dick Ames	2016	A 2/506
Terry Cowan	2016	B 2/506
Ron Gunyon	2016	B 2/506
Greg Mitacek	2016	A & E 2/506
Mike Mueller	2016	C 2/506
George Murphy	2016	B 2/320 FA
Harvey Neal		A 2/506
Roger Newland	2016	A 2/506
Robert Pressley	2016	B 2/506

2016 Ripcord Reunion continued from page 1

John Hewitt, brother of Capt. Tom Hewitt of Charlie Company, met with many of his brother's men. He has been trying for years to get a better understanding of what happened leading up the devastating assault on Charlie Company. It appears he now has a better feel for the event.

Also present was John Rich, brother of Captain David Rich of B Battery 2/319 FA who recently passed away. John enjoyed meeting the gunners of the unit and seeing another side of his brother he of which he was not keenly aware.

All these new people joined the Bohan brothers Tim and David who brought their wives as they remembered their pathfinder brother Patrick Bohan. All in all a great gang of siblings!

Friday night after the food and raffles were completed who suddenly appeared but two new guys from E 1/506 Recon, Jim Joice and Alan Carmack. After signing in they were hooked up with members of D 1/506 where they could swap stories.

This year's first timers included: **HHC 1/501:** Jeff Stam, **B 2/320 FA:** Robert Misner, **E 1/506:** Jim Joice & Alan Carmack, **B 2/506:** Everett Slaughter, Jr., **and C 2/506:** Jerone Buffington & Barbara Zoller, **E 2/506:** Rick Hahn, **D 2/506:** Elwood Hall, Wayne Skaggs & Tommy Wilcox, **A 2/506:** Jody Smith, Linda Bixby Krug & Evelyn Bixby. We were pleased to have all the new and "old" attendees show up and all seemed to have a great time!



INCOMING MAIL

Hey all. Hope everyone is having a wonderful day. I'm in need of some help if possible.

My father was John Lawrence. I'm trying to find some photographs of the chopper he was on and ripcord base. Know his chopper was a Huey and had the Royal Coachman on the door.

I'm a 100% disabled vet myself and have gotten into building models to pass my time. Want to do a diorama

of ripcord with his hilo coming in over it. First I would like your thoughts and input on this as well as your permission to move forward with it. Just something I want to make to remember pops by.

Thank you all in advance.

God Bless.

Jason Lawrence

Soulpainter06@yahoo.com.

INCOMING MAIL

I was a little hesitant about going to the reunion because I didn't know what to expect. When my sister and I walked into that room and this guy, Lee Widjeskog and his wife said, "There's the Bixby family"...we wondered how in the world he knew who we were. Made us feel pretty darn good. Lee took us around and introduced us to some people and explained what was happening. He made us feel so welcomed (his wife too).

I had talked to Bruce Brady and his wife Karolyn Kruger on facebook so I sort of felt like I knew them. I think they took us under their wing...they were so nice to us....Jody Smith was also very kind to us. He said he was with my brother Virgil Bixby the whole time....they all said very nice things about him...met a lot of guys but I can't remember their names..they were all so nice.

I would love to go the reunion again next year. My oldest son Steve wants to go with me. He was only 5 yrs old when Virgil died but he still remembers him.....

The entire reunion was an awesome experience.... you should be very proud of the Association for including families of the fallen soldiers.....the coin ceremony brought tears to my eyes.....I kept thinking, our brother should be here, not my sister and I....A big thank you to the association for a very warm welcome..

*Linda Krug
Brother of Virgil Bixby A/2-506
KIA July 22, 1970*



In your last newsletter, you had an article by Tom Weides called "Captain Tom Hewitt". I am John Hewitt, Captain Hewitt's twin from Alaska and I will correct the article in a few places.

I was not in Vietnam 30 days prior to Tom's death. He died on 2 July 1970. I was wounded (in I corps) 12 August 1968. I was out of the Marine Corps in graduate school at the time due to a head wound. I was declared 55% disabled and was put out of the Marine Corps on disability like I had served in the Marine Corps for 20 years.

The "someone from Alaska" was not Tom's nephew, it was my daughter's boyfriend traveling with my daughter between duty stations. He is in the Air Force.

I have visited Tom's gravesite in St. Katherine's cemetery at least once a year since 1970, but I have not tarried enough there to meet Vince Rachta. Tom was married in Belleville on the 10th of August 1967 and I

was the best man, drunk than I may have been.

I would like thank Kieth Nolan for putting together his book "Ripcord" and making the facts plain for everyone to see. I formally had a lot of questions about Tom's death, but I have none now.

*Sincerely
John Hewitt
L Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines*



Request

I would love to know if anyone remembers serving with my uncle SGT. Mark Joel Bush, 101st Airborne 1/506th who was KIA June 22, 1970. You may contact me at jjbbp@aol.com

*Thank you
Karen Prieto
jjbbp@aol.com*



To all of you, my respect and thanks for your service to our Country. I have just finished reading "Ripcord" by K.W. Nolan. Do I recall correctly that a Medic was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery in this Battle? If so, can you identify him for me?

*Clark P Thompson
USN 1970-74*

(Reply)

Clark,

There was only one Medal of Honor issued directly from the Battlle of Ripcord and that went to Andre Lucas. However, on nearby FSB Maurine, D 1/506 was engaged by sappers on 7 May. During this fight medic Kenneth Kays rushed about tending to the wounded and saving a number while getting wounded himself. He survived and was medi-vaced out. While the Association does not consider that area as part of Ripcord, it was surely engaging some of the same units we saw in the Ripcord area of operations (AO). By July, D 1/506 was op-conned to the 2/506 and worked the Ripcord area. Units came and went to the Ripcord AO depending on the needs of the 2nd Battalion or the Third Brigade and what the Division Commander felt was needed. We pulled out of he AO when it was decided that it would cost more lives than was reasonable to continue the fight,

*Lee Widjeskog
A 2/506 1970*

Springfield 2016 Reunion Attendees

Floyd & Diane Alexander B 2/319 & A 2/506
Bill, Pam & Adam Baldwin A 2/506
Lin, Pinkey & Kurt Bashford D 2/506
Evelyn Bixby & Linda Krug A 2/506
Dan & Carol Bohan Pathfinder Fam.
Timothy & Elaine Bohan Pathfinder Fam.
Bill Boles D 2/506
Bruce Brady & Karolyn Kruger A 2/506
Jerone Buffington C 2/506
Paul Buhr A 2/506
Dick & Debbie Cable E 2/506
Jim & Mary Campbell C 2/506
Tex Campbell D 2/506
Allen Carmack E 1/506 (Recon)
Mike & Cathy Chiarelli B 2/506
Howard & Diana Colbert C 2/506
Dale & Sue Cooper C 2/506
Tommy & Judy Counts D 2/506
Harold Day D Troop 2/17
Merle & Ruth DeLagrange D 1/506
Russ & Maryann Dixon B 2/319 FA
Rex Flansburg D 2/506
Rudy & Linda Forsman D 2/506
John & Debbie Fowler C 2/506
Leigh & Vicki Freeman C 2/506
Steve & Cindy Gunn D 2/501
Rick & Janet Hahn E 2/506
Elwood Hall & Johnnie Patterson D 2/506
Bill & Lynn Hand B 2/506
Paul & Laura Hansmann B 2/506
Jim Harris HHC 2/506
Bill & Linda Heath A & HHC 2/506
John & Barbara Hedrick E 2/506
Billy & Margaret Helvey A & HHC 2/506
John Hewitt C 2/506 Guest
Lisa Hill Guest D 2/506
Charles & Jean Holmen A 159 AVN
Don & Linda Holthausen C 2/506
Ronald & Linda Hudson A 1/39 FA
Jim Joice E 1/506 (Recon)
Bob & Red Judd B 2/506
Don Kiefer A 2/506
John Kuennen C 2/506
Dale Lane & Dianne Grote A & HHC 2/506
Bob Leibecke C 2/506
Charles & Janet Lieb C 2/506
Murphy & Phyllis Majoria Guests
Steve Manthei C 2/506
Gene & Star Marshall B 2/319 FA
Fred & Sondra Martin A 2/11 FA
Jim & Michelle McCoy D 1/506
Ron & Linda McCrory E 2/506
Peter & Chris Meloro C 2/506
Uwe & Diane Meyer B 2/506
Robert & Doreen Misener B 2/320 FA
Leonard & Carol Moore Mini Cav
Jerry & Mariella Moyer C 2/506
Clem Neiderer HHC 2/501
Bruce & Ramona Nelson B 2/319 FA
Ulla Nolan Guest
Tom & Jan Pack B 2/319 FA
Robert Pagano & Rachel Springer B 2/506
Greg & Krystal Phillips D 1/506
Troy & Barbara Porter C 2/506
George & Sheila Potts B 2/319 FA
Doug & Iris Puffer D 2/506
Gary & Patty Radford D 2/506
John Rich 2/319 FA guest
Steve, Karen & Carmen Ruby D 1/506
Fred Shuttleworth E 2/506
Wayne & Carla Skaggs D 2/506
Mark Skinner D 2/506
Everett Slaughter, Jr. B 2/506
Jody, Julie, & Jamie Smith A 2/506
Jim Smither, Grand Valley State Univ.
Dave & Lisa Snyder A 2/11 FA
Fred & Micki Spaulding 3 BDE
Jeff & Denise Stam HHC 1/501
Terry Stanger & Carol Keilmen A 159 AVN
Dale & Janet Tauer D 1/506
Bob Tarbuck & Paige Corkhill C 2/506
Lee & Debra Tremblay 3rd Bde Air
Craig & Sandy VanHout B 2/506
Bob & Jackie Wallace C 2/506
Steve & Susan Wallace B 2/506
Lee & Kathy Widjeskog A 2/506
Jeff Wilcox A&C 2/506
Tommy Wilcox, D 2/506
David, Linda, Wendy & David Jr. Yonts A 2/506
Ron Zahn A 2/11
Barbara Zoller C 2/506

(Coins presented to those in bold letters)