

# RIPCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

## A Newsletter

No. 33 August 1994

### WE'RE BACK!

After a two-year absence, Ripcord Report is back in circulation. Many thanks for the patience and support shown by all the Ripcord Association members for the past 24-months.

#### Newsletter Board

Publisher

Frank Marshall



Editor

Charles F. Hawkins



Contributing Editors

John "Custer" Mihalko



Ray "Blackie" Blackman



### FRIENDLY FIRE REMEMBERED

By Robert C. Lorbeer

OAKLAND, Calif.--I think that there were two reasons for the number of friendly fire casualties in Desert Storm: (1) the troops were in armored personnel carriers (APCs), and (2) the short duration of the fighting did not give the troops an opportunity to learn the sound of incoming.

APCs are a large target carrying several troops, ammunition, explosives and fuel. When a round hit one of these vehicles it caused a number of casualties.

In Vietnam, I did not have any personal experience with APCs, but it is my understanding that the troops learned to ride on the outside of the vehicles to prevent a large number of casualties should the APC be hit by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG). Those of us who were walking in the jungles received some protection from the trees and terrain was well as being more spread out than those riding in or on an APC.

Hearing the sound of incoming is something that probably cannot be taught in Basic, AIT or at the Infantry School. One has to get shot at a few times before one learns the differences in the sound of a round that is coming in that is going to land close or is going to pass overhead.

Shortly after I arrived in Vietnam in September 1970, I was at Camp Evans and a buck sergeant and I went over to the cleaners to pick up our laundry. Just as we entered the laundry, the VC started launching some mortars and rockets at the Camp Evans airstrip. The rounds were passing directly over our heads, and my immediate reaction was to run for the nearest bunker. The sergeant gave me my first combat lesson.

He hollered at me to stop and listen. He knew instinctively that the

Continued on page 9

The Ripcord Report is still published and mailed free of charge to members of the association. There are no membership dues, and the only membership requirement is an interest in the Battle of Ripcord and the veterans who served there.

To cover publishing costs we rely solely on your contributions.

Submissions of articles, retrospectives, book reviews, and other items of interest are encouraged. Please include return postage for items (photographs, etc.) that you want back.

Advertising is accepted on a limited basis at NO CHARGE. Current mailing list recipients number about 200.

Unless otherwise protected by copyright, reprints of newsletter articles and other information is authorized so long as the source is appropriately credited.

Please make checks or money orders payable to: RIPCORD Association, 

## In the News, Then; Analysis, Now

The following article comes courtesy of George Pourchot (D/1-506) of Arlington, Virginia. George didn't have the date or source of the article, but it made the AP wire and was probably written sometime around 23 July 1970.

### How It Was At Ripcord

CAMPEVANS, Vietnam (AP)--A twin-rotor Chinook helicopter hovered over Fire Base Ripcord, its sling of artillery shells swaying over the ammunition dump. Rifle fire tore through the fuselage, and the big bird caught fire.

It fell, rolled on its side and burned. One crewman was trapped, screaming for aid. Seven soldiers dashed over to try to dig him out, but the heat was too much for them.

---

**It was farther out than the 101st had been in more than a year, and the enemy objected to Ripcord's presence from the start.**

---

Then the ammunition dump started to go. The explosions knocked out all six 105mm howitzers nearby and most of the shells for them, including some tear gas crystals whose fumes made the men on Ripcord miserable. Most of them had lost their gas masks in the weeks of incessant shelling.

That was last Saturday. Brig. Gen. Sidney B. Berry, acting commander of the 101st Airborne Division began thinking about pulling his men off the bare 1,000-foot peak they called Ripcord. Without the 105s, officers said, the base would be hard to defend.

The 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry, 3d Brigade moved into Ripcord April 1 to fight the North Vietnamese army on its own ground, the mountainous jungles north of the A Shau Valley, 25 miles west of Hue.

It was farther out than the 101st had been in more than a year, and the enemy objected to Ripcord's presence from the start.

They began mortaring the base the first day and didn't stop. In the past three

weeks, the effort became more determined.

North Vietnamese battalions moved in close, hugging the base so jet fighter-bombers couldn't attack them without threatening the men on Ripcord.

U.S. troops patrolling outside the base encountered increasingly tough fighting in the jungle.

Then heavy enemy shelling and a disastrous ambush of a paratrooper patrol Wednesday prompted officers to abandon Ripcord.

### Analysis:

#### How It Was (Not) At Ripcord

The AP story outline is basically correct, but the details are skewed, showing 101st troops and leadership in a negative vein.

A Chinook was shot down on 18 July 1970, which caused the ammunition dump to explode. Six 105mm howitzers and other important fire base elements were destroyed.

Soldiers on Ripcord, however, had not lost their protective masks because of enemy action. Most men either never had gas masks or kept them in the rear because the North Vietnamese rarely used chemical munitions. (The enemy did use CS--"tear gas"--in mortar shells from time to time, but it was rarely effective.)

Ripcord's first line of defense was Bravo Company, 2/506th. Any ground attack by enemy soldiers would probably have failed, with or without the 105mm howitzers. From 10 April to the evacuation on 23 July, intelligence intercepts and G.I. sweeps of Ripcord's perimeter showed unsuccessful enemy sapper attempts to penetrate base defenses on 20 occasions.

The importance of the artillery on Ripcord was that it provided necessary fire support to units on other fire bases and particularly those patrolling in the triple canopy rain forest. Two sections of 155mm howitzers on Ripcord were not destroyed in the ammunition bunker explosion.

Another problem faced by Ripcord's defenders was a chronic shortage of mortar and artillery rounds. However, thanks to intervention by senior com-

manders and intense efforts at resupply, there was never a lack of ammunition for fire missions.

Acting Division Commander Sidney Berry may have begun thinking about evacuation on the 18th, but many other factors--including the true nature of enemy dispositions around the fire base--came into play. The decision to evacuate was not made until it was learned on 20 July that an enemy division surrounded the mountain top. Even then the order was not given until sometime on the 21st.

North Vietnamese "battalions" did not move in close, "hugging the base so jet fighter-bombers couldn't attack them without threatening the men on Ripcord." This is just plain silly, and wrong. So-called "hugging tactics" were used by the enemy, mostly in thick jungle or in nighttime actions, but for Ripcord itself the terrain, lack of vegetation and extensive defense works would have made hugging tactics very costly.

---

**The importance of the artillery on Ripcord was that it provided necessary fire support to units on other fire bases and particularly those patrolling in the triple canopy rain forest.**

---

In the last paragraph: An enemy battalion and a U.S. rifle company engaged in a six-hour battle on 22 July, two kilometers southeast of Ripcord. The G.I.s had run roughshod over North Vietnamese elements for more than a week, in what the enemy considered their "rear area." When the enemy finally found the American unit, G.I.s started the fight as a meeting engagement, not an ambush. The much larger North Vietnamese force tried to overwhelm Alpha Company, 2/506th, but thanks to quick response by aerial gunships, mortar fire from Ripcord and artillery and close air support, the enemy was beaten off. Losses were severe on both sides. While this battle was raging in the jungle, plans to extract U.S. units from Ripcord and vicinity had already been put into motion.

That's "how it was at Ripcord."--Editor

## STAFF JOURNAL: LZ OAKTON

The last newsletter (No. 32, July 1992) drew some interesting and welcome responses. My analytical report on friendly fire caught the attention of Bob Lorbeer (1/506) in Oakland, Calif., and Wayne (Flash) Gourdon (Recon, 2/506) in Floydada, Texas. Their letter responses are printed herein.

Art Witnik (2/506 Hamburger Hill)--a regular correspondent--provided hard copy of his Memorial Day speech given earlier this year at Haddam, Conn. We also heard from Frank Gonzales (E, 2/506, Recon Medic) of Tucson, Ariz.

For those of you who have missed the Ripcord Report over the past two years, and the many of you who have written to encourage starting it up again--many thanks for your support. I plead "No excuse, sir!", but hope that my explanation of difficulties in the job market will be understood.

In getting started again I have enlisted the able assistance of Philadelphia-based Frank Marshall (A/2-506) as publisher. Frank publishes the monthly, Voice of Liberty for Vietnam Veterans of America Liberty Bell Chapter #266, and has full, state-of-the-art production facilities in his home office. Yours truly will continue as editor with editorial assistance from John "Custer" Mihalko (Recon, 2/506) from Lakewood, Colo., and Ray "Blackie" Blackman (Delta Raiders, 2/501), Valparaiso, Nebraska.

Gotta run. Enjoy, and Curraheel!

Chuck Hawkins, LZ Oakton



### RIPCORD REUNION '95

Who remembers Rocket Ridge?  
Who can forget?

### ONE-YEAR COUNTDOWN

Start clearing up next summer's schedule to allow some time to get together with friends, family and fellow Ripcord veterans at the 25-year reunion. Tentative location: Colorado, at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains outside of Denver--a "Rocket Ridge" sort of place. More information in the next issue.

**"IT IS OUR DUTY  
TO REMEMBER"**

**RIPCORD REPORT WILL BE PUBLISHING THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP LIST IN FUTURE ISSUES. KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR OLD FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES.**

**KNOW ANYONE WHO SHOULD BELONG TO THE ASSOCIATION? SEND HIS OR HER NAME TO: CHUCK HAWKINS, 11614 HELMONT DR., OAKTON, VA 22124.**

**DONATIONS ARE WELCOME!  
REMEMBER, THE NEWSLETTER DOESN'T PUBLISH ITSELF FOR FREE. EACH TIME YOU RECEIVE AN ISSUE IT COSTS ABOUT 50-CENTS PER PERSON, OR ABOUT \$100 OVERALL... AND THAT ONLY COUNTS EXPENSES FOR PAPER, COPYING AND MAILING.**

### GOT A STORY TO TELL, OR A BIT OF RIPCORD HISTORY TO SHARE?

All submissions of topical written or pictorial material will be considered for publication. True stories, personal accounts, or news items about Ripcord or related events are welcome. Commentary, opinion and analysis pieces--contemporary or otherwise--will also be considered.

Just send a letter with typed or clearly written material to:  
Ripcord Association  
c/o Chuck Hawkins



### FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

Frank Gonzales;  
Art Witnik;  
Wayne (Flash) Gourdon;  
James "Sneaky" White--

Thanks, and a tip of the Currahee steel pot for your support.



# INCOMING



Dear Chuck,

I know it's been a while since I last talked to you; I'd just like to thank you for the fine job you've done on the Ripcord Report. Your insight and memories about the "Ripcord Saga" are very meaningful to me.

I served as a field medic with E Co., 2/506 Recon under the command of Capt. Richard Scaglione. My wife and I have many wonderful memories of the reunion we attended in Washington, D.C. about five years ago.

I have a nine year old boy (Max) who thinks his old man is "Superman." My boy is very interested in the Vietnam War and what it was like to be a combat soldier during that time. I've allowed him to read certain excerpts from the Ripcord Report. I've had many conversations with my boy of what it actually takes to survive such a difficult and dangerous situation. I hope he learns from listening to his father the lessons of life that must be observed, and practiced, so as to survive just about any situation that any human being can come up against. Please give my regards to your wife, keep "trucking," take care and God bless.

Sincerely, "Currahee"  
Frank A. Gonzales (Doc),  
Tucson, Ariz.



Dear Chuck,

I received the Ripcord Report and a copy of American Sentinel today and I read both at one sitting. The story of Ripcord in the Sentinel was well done and reminded me of my own days in the 101st on Hamburger Hill in 1969.

The Vietnam War is long over but I don't know of anyone who was there that can claim to have forgotten their experiences. The bond of men who fought in combat is something that those at home will probably never comprehend.

Included in this letter is a copy of the Memorial Day speech I gave in our town. My experiences in Vietnam helped me to make this speech so moving. I hope you enjoy it. You may share some of it with the Ripcord readers if it's of interest. Keep the Ripcord Report coming!

Art Witnik, Jr., Higganum, Conn.



Dear Chuck,

Have been receiving the Ripcord newsletter for awhile. I do appreciate very much what you are doing. The last issue was about friendly fire. I'm a victim of friendly fire.

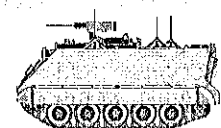
The day it happened, Bravo Team, 2/506 Recon, was approximately one klick from Ripcord. The cobra fired us up even though we had smoke on our position. We called them in. I was wounded and a buddy of mine was broken up all over. The medevac finally came in. We were being extracted by jungle penetrator and about six to eight feet off the ground when the NVA put a rocket into the chopper. We hung there awhile and the chopper started to nose-dive, but

someone on that chopper medevac cut the cable on me and my buddy. They crashed off the ridge from us, and as far as I know, no one got off. We were evacuated sometime later the same way, but made it out. The sky was full of air cover. Just had to relate that to you.

Everyone in Nam had nicknames. Mine is "Flash" Gourdon. I can't remember any given names. Not many, that is. I still have a lot of trouble coping with that war (everyday). For several years I did go to a rap group in Lubbock. Myself and a few more vets formed it through the help of a fellow vet in the V.A. But after awhile that all ran together. I still can get on with what's expected of me.

I live on the borderline everyday. Think I'd better stop spilling beans. I do appreciate what you've done and hope it can continue. If there is something I can do please call me or write.

Thanks again,  
Flash Gourdon, Floydada, Texas  
P.S. John (Custer) Mihalko and I were team mates at one time.



Dear Chuck,

Your latest Ripcord Report arrived today, and I note that you need to change my address to the one listed above.

Also, your comments about friendly fire casualties brought to mind some past memories and a recent conversation that I want to relay to you and your readers.

Sincerely,  
Bob Lorbeer, Oakland, Calif.

See the lead story: Friendly Fire Remembered, by Bob Lorbeer on page one.

--Editor

## Vietnam Vet Imposters Exposed

The popular perception of Vietnam veterans as potentially violent social outcasts is a faulty stereotype encouraged by the media, says the May 1994 Reader's Digest.

"Vietnam veterans are among the most well-adjusted groups in America," says investigative journalist, author and Reader's Digest roving editor, Malcolm McConnell, in "True Face of the Vietnam Vet." "They have a much higher level of employment than the national average and very low rates of criminality and incarceration. They also have one of the lowest suicide rates in America—even lower than their non-veteran peers, and are more likely to own their homes, and are just as likely to have stable marriages."

The much-publicized post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is greatly overblown, McConnell says. Of the 2.5 million Americans who served in Vietnam, only 45,000 have received any compensation for exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, and only 10,000 of those have been severely disabled.

### Dan Rather

Yet to most Americans, the typical Vietnam veteran is much like those portrayed by CBS's Dan Rather in an acclaimed 1988 documentary, The Wall Within.

Rather profiles six veterans so traumatized by Vietnam that they sought refuge in the wilderness of Washington state.

As B. G. Burkett, a Texas-based stockbroker and Vietnam veteran, discovered when he obtained the featured men's

military records, the most sensational of the Vietnam experiences described by several of what Rather called "outcasts with broken spirits" never happened. The Reader's Digest article exposes some of the men as imposters.

For example, "Steve," portrayed as a former Navy SEAL, claimed he had been forced to massacre Vietnamese villagers, then disguise his crimes as the work of the enemy.

Another veteran, Terry Bradley,

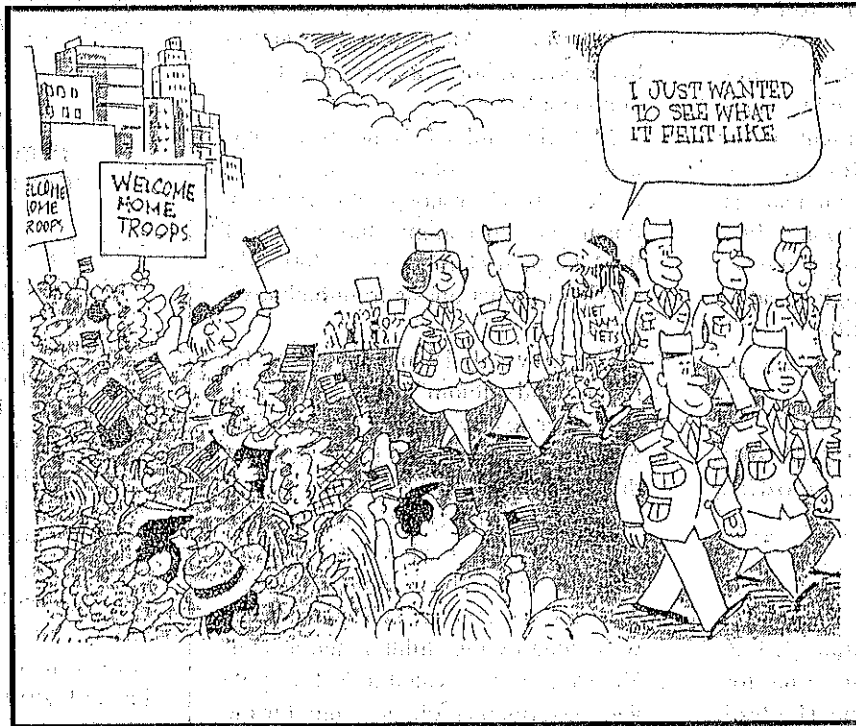
compiled 300 days either AWOL or in confinement. There is no record of large numbers of civilians killed near his unit, which was stationed outside Saigon.

Two other featured veterans had been security guards, not "grunts" exposed to heavy combat, according to Reader's Digest.

Despite these discrepancies, CBS stands by its story. The documentary is being bought by schools throughout the country.

Another imposter exposed in the article is David Goff, former president of a Vietnam Veterans of America chapter in New York state. Goff was recently charged by the U.S. attorney in Syracuse for falsely obtaining nine of the military's highest awards, which a congressman personally pinned on him during a 1989 ceremony.

Goff claimed to be a combat veteran and CIA assassin, but actually he was a clerk in Okinawa, Burkett discovered. Goff pleaded guilty to the charge that he "knowingly wore medals he was



not authorized to wear."

claimed to have skinned alive up to 50 Vietnamese an hour. He was shown in the dark forest, howling like a stricken animal.

### Exposed

Instead, Reader's Digest reveals, "Steve" was Steven Earnest Southards whose records show he was not a Navy SEAL but a fireman's apprentice in rear-area bases. Upon transfer to the Philippines, he repeated went AWOL.

Bradley's career was marked by misconduct. In three and one-half years of service as an Army artilleryman, he

not authorized to wear."

Concerning the mistaken perceptions about Vietnam veterans, Burkett asks:

"We're all around you; but no one seems to see us: We go to work, pay our mortgages, keep our kids in school. We're a factory foreman, a postal worker, a doctor, an airline pilot. Isn't it time the country recognizes the true face of the Vietnam vet?"

This summary of Malcolm McConnell's article appeared in the July 1994 issue of Military, published in Sacramento, California.

## Tet Trung Thu

By SP4 Anthony Loiero

(Reprinted from the Fall 1970 issue of Rendezvous With Destiny, a publication of the 101st Airborne Division. Courtesy, George Pourchot, D/I-506)

Under the autumn moonlight they meet their friends with cleverly shaped paper lanterns and go from house to house and street to street singing their autumn song.

Their laughter breaks the stillness of the night. Smiling faces can be seen illuminated by the twinkling light of the colorful lanterns. Children are everywhere. Tet Trung Thu has arrived.

Tet Trung Thu, the Vietnamese mid-autumn festival, is celebrated throughout the Republic of Vietnam. Often called the "Children's Holiday," the mid-autumn festival takes on a special meaning for the young, although both young and old alike take part in the festivities. It is a time for singing, eating sweets and the giving of gifts.

### **This year a mid-autumn celebration was held in Hue and was supported by Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile).**

The holiday had its beginning in 1526 when the Vietnamese king, Trinh, formally established the Trung Thu festival. It evolved from the king's love of the outdoors and his custom of sailing around his palace lake, leaving flowers, fruits, wine and meat piled along the shore for his subjects. Each villager lighted his way with a highly decorated lantern.

This year a mid-autumn celebration was held in Hue and was supported by Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile).

Troopers from the 101st donated a total of \$3,365.85 and truck loads of candy, gum, peanuts, soap and assorted canned goods. The money was taken to Saigon and exchanged for toys. All the contributions for this year's festival

went to the children of soldiers in the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN). It was the first time soldiers of the 101st individually participated in the holiday.

Maj. H. W. Hinnison, Bowling Green, Ky., assistant G-5 for the 101st, said, "I feel the men were particularly successful in their all-out effort to make the Vietnamese festival a happy one. The troopers' concern for the children of our comrades-in-arms was beyond any measurement in kindness." He went on to explain the enthusiasm of the men by giving an example of a soldier who was going on his R&R and put his hand in his pocket, withdrew a \$20 bill, and said, "I hope it helps."

Maj. Gen. John J. Hennessey, commanding general of the 101st, attended the festival in Hue along with Brig. Gen. Pham Van Phu, commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN) and a number of other guests from both divisions.

The ARVN division band played familiar "mid-autumn" songs while Maj. Gen. Hennessey and Brig. Gen. Phu walked among the children who were dressed in blue and gold costumes.

After a brief speech by Brig. Gen. Phu, the honored guests viewed a customary dance performed by the children in their hand-made costumes. Traditional songs were sung by the children and a small Vietnamese boy scaled a 20-foot pole and performed acrobatic stunts for the delight of the crowd. The entertainment was completed with the appearance of several small boys disguised as a Vietnamese dragon.

At the conclusion of the festival, Maj. Gen. Hennessey and Brig. Gen. Phu, along with their fellow officers, presented gifts to the anxiously awaiting children.

The celebration concluded, children returned to their homes with their gifts and prepared for the festivities that would continue into the night. As they left, the smiles on their faces expressed their gratitude for the benevolence of Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile).

## NEWS BRIEFS

### **MUHAMMAD ALI FINALLY GOES TO VIETNAM**

Phila. Inquirer--Muhammad Ali is in Hanoi with five other Americans seeking info on missing U.S. servicemen. "I've allowed myself to be used in this cause," the ex-champ said yesterday at a breakfast in the Vietnamese government guest house. He said that he wanted "to help the families of the soldiers." The famed boxer refused to fight in the Vietnam War. His conviction for draft evasion eventually was unanimously overturned by the Supreme Court.

### **U.S. MINT IS MAKING MONEY HONORING VETERANS**

Using July 4 as its cue, the U.S. Mint has announced that its silver three-coin set honoring veterans will be put on sale July 29.

The three \$1 coins celebrate women in the military, prisoners of war and Vietnam veterans.

The Vietnam veterans coin, shows a hand touching names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial's wall, and, on the reverse, three medals awarded during the war.

The prisoner of war dollar, shows an eagle breaking out of a barbed wire circle, and a view of the proposed Prisoner of War Museum to be built at Andersonville Ga., site of a Civil War prison.

The women in the military dollar, shows women from the five branches of service and the proposed memorial for Arlington National Cemetery.

Surcharges on the coins will benefit the prisoner of war memorial, the women's memorial and fund repairs to the Vietnam memorial wall.

Orders go to 800-777-8387 or to the Mint, U.S. Veterans' Silver Dollars, 10001 Aero-space Rd., Lanham, Md. 20706.

## The 1992 Memorial Day

### Address

By Arthur Witnik, Jr.

HADDAM, Conn.--There was a quote that came out of the Vietnam War that goes like this: "You've never lived until you almost died; for those who fought for it, life has a flavor that the protected will never know."

That quote is an example of the unique bond and perspective on life that wartime veterans share. Its meaning is not limited to those who fought, for it also reflects the feelings of those who waited at home. Both witnessed the grim reality of how fragile life can be. The true cost of protecting our freedom, or freedom of the oppressed, is the highest cost--life itself.

On Memorial Day we should not debate which war was right, or which was wrong. To do so would cloud the meaning of this day. We observe Memorial Day because anyone who dies in the service of our country deserves our endless respect and gratitude. They deserve this day of recognition because a wartime death carries with it a unique significance.

It is we as a nation, we as a community, as we as family and friends that send men and women off to war. We let them go, fully aware of what the consequences could be. And, unfortunately, the town of Haddam has suffered the ultimate loss of 15 war deaths. In a small town like ours, when the sad news of each death was announced, everyone knew it, everyone felt it, no one was untouched.

Today, as we honor the sacrifice of the war dead, that honor must also be extended to the families and friends who knew and loved them. Each time the roll call of the war dead is spoken, those left behind feel an emotional tug, and for an instant, they see a vivid memory of their loved one. These families and friends deserve our praise because they must always endure the pain of those memories.

For those of you who were not fortunate enough to have known any of our war dead, it is important to understand that they are more than just a name that is called out each year. These men were living, active members of this community, who may once have stood where you are standing now. And this year,

before you leave this ceremony, I want you to know what happened to each one of them.

From the Civil War we honor Wellington Barry, an infantry sergeant who earned

a battlefield commission to First Lieutenant. Wellington Barry was slightly wounded in the Battle of Peach Tree Creek near Atlanta. He returned to duty and was wounded again at Silver Run, North Carolina. He died two days later on March 17, 1865. Wellington Barry is buried in the Higganum Center Cemetery. He was 27 years old.

From World War I we honor Hezekiah Porter, who was killed by artillery on July 22, 1918. He is buried in France, but in his memory his name is engraved on the Porter family monument in the Higganum Center Cemetery. Hezekiah Porter was 22 years old.

William Woodruff was killed in France on October 16, 1918, when his squad attacked and captured an enemy machine gun position. The Woodruff-Parmelee American Legion Post of Haddam was co-named in his honor. William Woodruff is buried in the Higganum Center Cemetery. He was 28 years old.

World War II proved to be the darkest years for the town of Haddam. During that time we lost seven men to the war.

Erwin Parmelee was a career Navy diver and damage control repairman who is credited with saving the battle cruiser New Orleans from sinking after it was hit by an enemy torpedo on November 30, 1942. When the temporary repairs were nearly complete, Erwin Parmelee drowned and his body was

never recovered. For his sacrifice, Erwin Parmelee was awarded the Navy Cross. The Woodruff-Parmelee American Legion Post of Haddam was also co-named in his honor. Erwin Parmelee was 42 years old.

William Glass was a pilot who died on March 2, 1943, one month after his airplane crashed near Will Rogers Field in Oklahoma. He is buried in Fern Cliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York. William Glass was 27 years old.

Thomas Nosal was the youngest of five brothers. As a serviceman he was a bomber tailgunner who lost his life during a raid over Germany on February 6, 1944. He was later buried in Cambridge, England. Thomas Nosal was 20 years old.

Gino Pizzini enlisted in the Navy on his 17th birthday. While in Europe, he was wounded aboard ship and hospitalized in England. He returned to duty and was killed during the Normandy Invasion on August 19, 1944. He is buried in St. Sebastian's Cemetery in Middletown. Gino Pizzini was 19 years old.

Lewis Gladwin was an infantryman attached to an armor division. He was killed in Germany on November 17, 1944. He is buried in the Higganum Center Cemetery. Lewis Gladwin was 23 years old.

Joseph Cernan had been in Germany less than a week when he was wounded in combat. He died two days later on November 21, 1944, only four days after Lewis Gladwin was killed. Joseph Cernan is buried in the Burr District Cemetery. He was 26 years old.

Frank Sallak was an infantryman attached to a heavy weapons battalion. He was killed in combat in Belgium on January 31, 1945. He is buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery in Chester. Frank Sallak was 26 years old.

Lewis Gladwin, Joseph Cernan and Frank Sallak all joined the service on the same day, February 16, 1944, and lost their lives within three months of each other.

From the Korean War we honor Fred

(continued on next page)

**"You've never lived until you almost died; for those who fought for it, life has a flavor that the protected will never know."**



## Memorial Day Address ( con't)

Schuller who was the first Middlesex County resident to lose his life in the Korean War. He was killed in combat on September 25, 1950, and is buried in the Arlington National Cemetery. Fred Schuller was 20 years old.

Robert Blakely, best known as "Corky," was reported to have died in 1951 in a North Korean prisoner of war camp. His body was never returned. Robert Blakely was 19 years old.

Weston Thompson, Jr., best known as "Tommy" and a close friend of Corky Blakely, was killed in combat on January 30, 1952. In complete disregard for his personal safety, Tommy Thompson charged an enemy position and allowed himself to become a fighting target so that the men in his patrol could pull back to safer ground. For his sacrifice and bravery, Tommy Thompson was awarded the Silver Star. He is buried in Pine Grove Cemetery in Middletown. Weston Thompson was 19 years old.

From the Vietnam War we honor James Manning, who was wounded early in his tour of duty and was hospitalized for one month. He returned to duty and was again wounded seriously in combat on July 8, 1969. He continued to fight and was killed later that day. For his sacrifice and bravery James Manning was awarded the Silver Star. He was 20 years old.

Raymond Contino was a member of the U.S. troop incursion into Cambodia. With only 30 days left to serve in the military, he was killed in combat in Cambodia on May 16, 1970. Raymond Contino is buried in East Haddam. He was 23 years old.

Now that you know the ultimate price that is paid to keep this country's ideals alive, there is something that you can do to honor all American soldiers who gave their life for their country.

In their honor, fight to preserve the freedoms and rights that they died for as declared in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. In their honor, fight to make sure that our government will always be the servant, not the ruler of the people. In their honor, fight against those who would use the ills of society to justify a restriction of your freedoms and rights.

In their honor, fight to preserve these precious freedoms and rights for yourself, your children, and for all generations to come. Never become so accustomed to being free that you forget that keeping our freedoms and rights requires our constant vigilance.

Although published over two years late, Art's speech has a message that remains timeless. Many thanks.--Editor

## HISTORY NOTE

Brown Bess, The English formally introduced the flintlock into their infantry in 1682. The famous "Brown Bess" musket, an improved gun, soon followed and remained the standard infantry arm in Britain for 160 years. Its name came from the fact that its stock was walnut and its barrel artificially browned by rusting with acid. It was not rifled, but accuracy of fire was considered less important at the time than volume of fire. It was not a handy gun--it took 40 seconds for a well-trained soldier to load and fire a single shot--and it weighed 10 pounds. Its accuracy, and those of related guns on the continent, was appallingly bad at any but short ranges. At 40 yards it could hit a foot-square target almost every time, but at 300 yards only one bullet out of 20 would hit a target 18-foot square.--From Crossbow to H-Bomb, Bernard and Fawn M. Brodie, Indiana University Press, second printing, 1973.

## HISTORICAL FACTOIDS AND MILITARY TRIVIA

### A First for Women

Sixty years ago, on Aug. 18, 1934, Jeanette and Jean Piccard flew "Century of Progress" balloon from Dearborn, Mich., to an altitude of 57,579 feet. This was an unofficial altitude record for women and Jeanette became the first woman to enter Earth's stratosphere.

### The First "Smart Bombs"?

Fifty years ago, on Aug. 13, 1944, two GB-4 glide bombs, incorporating television and radio control, were launched against German E-boat (fast torpedo boat) pens at Le Havre, France. Four additional GB-4s were sent against targets in France and Germany between Aug. 17 and Sept. 13, 1944.

### Rocket Fighters

During August 1944, German Me-163B "Komet" rocket-powered fighters first attacked American bomber formations over Europe. The Komet had sweptback wings, Walther liquid-fuel rocket motor, speed of 590 mph, and powered flight time of 8-10 minutes.

Source: Aeronautics and Astronautics, 1915-1960, Eugene M. Emme, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Washington, D.C., 1961.





## Friendly Fire (con't)

rounds were not going to land close to where we were. That day I learned the sound of the round that is going to miss. Sometime later I learned the sound of an incoming round that is coming right at you. The troops in Desert Storm never got to learn the distinction between those sounds.

A round that is coming right at you sounds different, and the difference is the doppler effect that we learned in basic science class in high school. If one stands on a train platform when a train is passing by, the sound of the train changes as it approaches and rushes past. It is the same way with an incoming round. One that is coming directly at you sounds different, and when you hear that sound, you know it.

In the spring of 1971, during Operation Lam Son 719, the 1/506 was on a valley floor fire base defending the supply route for the ARVN into Laos. The fire base was a natural target for the NVA, and until counter-battery fire and an infantry assault cleared the offending hilltop, we were taking mortars and rocket fire on a regular basis. I learned first hand what the sound of a round coming right at you sounds like.

A few weeks later, C Co. was in a night defensive position on a hilltop overlooking the A Shau Valley. I was asleep on the floor of a bunker when I was suddenly awakened by the sound of an incoming freight train. The

ARVNs were firing 8-inch howitzer harassing and interdiction (H&I) fires and obviously did not know that we were out there. It took an hour and twenty minutes to get it shut off; fortunately, we took no casualties.

Shortly thereafter, I was with five or six troops when we got in a firefight; artillery and aerial rocket artillery (ARA) were called. When the ARA arrived on station, because of the terrain, they had to make their passes flying towards our hasty defensive position, and once again, I heard the sound of rockets coming straight on.

One other incident comes to mind. In August 1971, there were 10 or 12 of us in a night ambush position in the lowlands outside but close to the hills near Camp Evans. Another company in the mountains got into a firefight just after dusk. They were about halfway between our position and Fire Base Rakkasan on a direct line. Fire Base Rakkasan was providing artillery support for them and either a bad round or too much charge put a 105mm round into our position. And again, we heard that different sound that comes with a round aimed directly at you.

Fortunately, we were all on the ground and the round hit in a soft area and none of us were hit. If one were to consult an artillery firing table, statistically we all should have been dead. Certainly we were lucky, but perhaps our combat instincts went into play when we heard

that distinct sound.

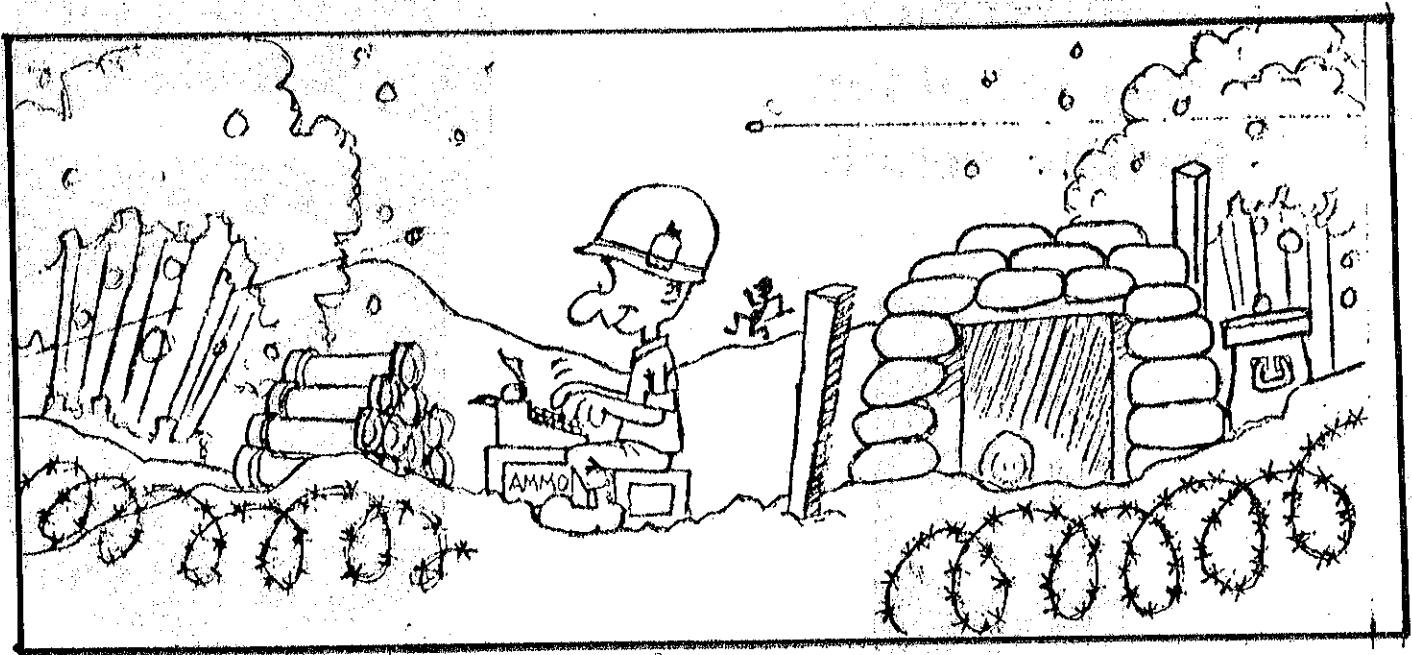
It is interesting to me that of the incidents that I have related here, three of them were from friendly fire, and we took no casualties.

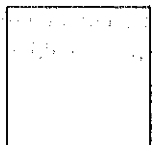
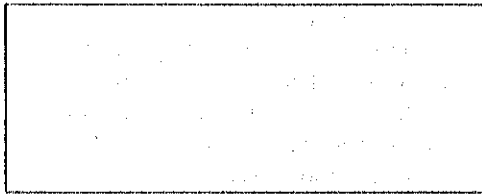
I think that what the news media often overlook in their reporting of friendly fire incidents is that combat is not a firing range with safety officers and NCOs. Mistakes are made, people get tired, too much or too little charge is put on an artillery round or mortar, someone is firing back at them, etc. Casualties from friendly fire will never be eliminated.

I recently had a conversation with a judge who was a Marine in Korea. He told me about a time when his company was well to the rear and they took casualties from friendly artillery fire. The shells were passing overhead and they exploded when they passed through cloud cover.

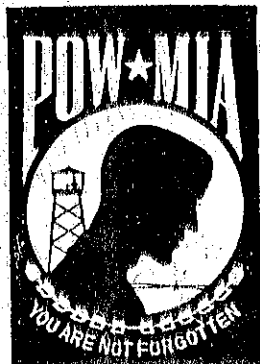
As long as there are firefights there are going to be friendly fire casualties, and as every infantryman knows, friendly fire isn't.

Bob Lorbeer served with the 1/506th in 1970. He wrote this article in response to an earlier piece on friendly fire that argued that supposedly high fratricide rates in Operation Desert Storm were similar to historical experience (i.e., Vietnam and World War II), and not an anomaly.--Editor





**RIPCORD REUNION '95**  
**Twenty-Five Year**  
**Anniversary!**  
**Stay tuned for**  
**further details.**



RIPCORD REPORT  
c/o Charles F. Hawkins  
11614 Helmont Drive  
Oakton, VA 22124  
Address Correction  
Requested