

Ripcord Report

No. 47

January 1999

For friends and survivors of FSB Ripcord, March 12-July 23, 1970, Republic of Vietnam

Ya gotta luv it ...

How to tell if you're an 'old soldier'

1. You know what GDP means and still remember where yours was and how long it took to occupy.
2. You remember when we had tactical nukes and really planned to use them.
3. You remember spending hours in MOPP4 and doing M256 kits.
4. You remember when the M8 Claymore and M72 LAW were part of QTT.
5. You remember when ARTEPs were 36 hours and you had fun.
6. You remember when Carl Vouno was CG and Max Thurman was head of recruiting command.
7. You know what a Gamma Goat and Goer were and could fix an M151A2 to run off one prop shaft.
8. You remember when the Israelis were bad asses and we all wanted to be like them.
9. You remember when Saddam Husseln was our loyal ally.
10. You remember when Airland Battle was a new concept, and everyone religiously read 100-5.
11. You know what the 'Cap Wineberger' Doctrine was.
12. You remember when the M16 was a plastic carbine, and you hoped for an M14.
13. You can remember going to the Club at Graf, drinking, and watching Margaret.
14. You personally know Margaret.
15. You know what is a "smokey" at Hohenfels.
16. You know the difference between the VRC46, VRC47, PRC77 and VRC160 and the requisite installation kits.
17. You know what a CEOI is and you can encrypt grids.
18. You remember when NTC was a new and cool concept.

Continued on page 2 ...

Caption Contest!

A Ripcord Report first!

Name the two banditos pictured below and win 100 bonus kilometers on the Ripcord frequent boonie humper program. For an extra 10 kilometers, guess what the next words outta their mouths will be.

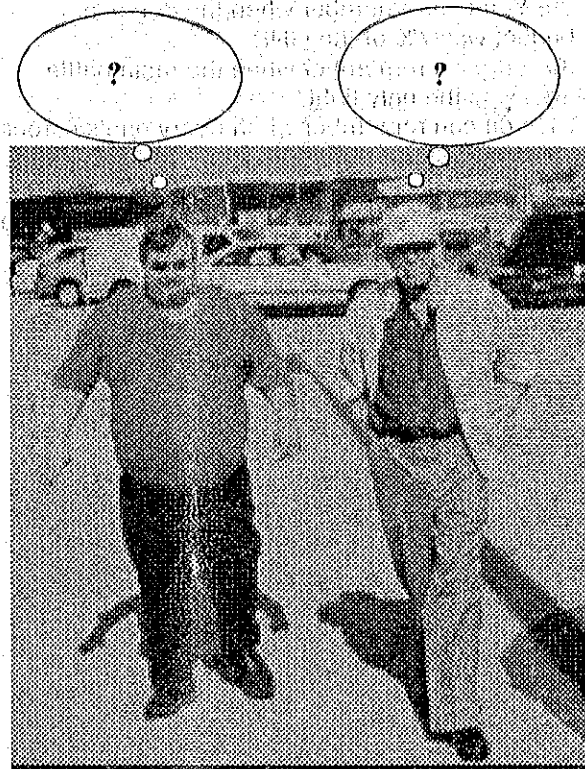


Photo by Red

Answers on page 2.

Continued from page 1 ...

How to tell if you're an 'old soldier'

19. You remember when it was real cool to go to SAMs or be an OC at NTC.
20. You remember when as a new LT/CPT you could go out and train your soldiers and not have an OC tell you how screwed up you were.
21. You remember BN Cdrs and 1SG's who were Vietnam Vets.
22. You remember Bn Cdrs who drank, swore and mentored.
23. You remember Bn Cdrs who were ruthless about tactics, but didn't give a crap about admin BS.
24. You remember when 2LTs and CPLs demanded respect from PFCs and got it.
25. You can navigate at night without a GPS.
26. You can remember OPDs about Clausewitz (aka dead Karl) which usually ended with beer drinking at the O' club.
27. You can remember when lanes training was a neat concept.
28. You can remember when 25-101 was a new concept.
29. You can remember when the defense budget was 7% of the GNP.
30. You can remember when the main battle area was the only fight.
31. You can remember when every one's career track was 10 years in Germany with 1st Armored Division at Ansbach.
32. You remember when the Soviet Union was a major super power instead (albeit the Russian Republic) of being a basket case for the IMF.
33. You remember when CEOI was called SOI.
34. You had more time in grade as an O-3 than you did as a civilian.
35. You remember when the term "operational art" was first used.
36. You learned assault fire as a young'un, and
37. Learned the North Vietnamese didn't give a shit if you pulled the trigger each time your left boot hit the ground, and
38. You learned about "assault crawling."
39. You remember scaling ridge lines one contour interval at a time.
40. You remember when the phrase "when Christ was a corporal" meant your career was still ahead of you.
41. You remember what REMF stood for, but not quite how far back you could find them, except for your wimp brother-in-law who had a 1-F deferment.
42. You remember the difference between "roger" and "wilco," but mixed them up on

purpose anyway.

43. You remember when you really believed that the last battalion to emerge after a nuclear strike would win the "big one."

44. You actually had a living relative who had served in The Great War.

45. You remember when the three most important infantry jobs were: pointman, machine gunner, and radio operator; 2d looles were trainee captains.

46. A LRRP was something you did and ate.

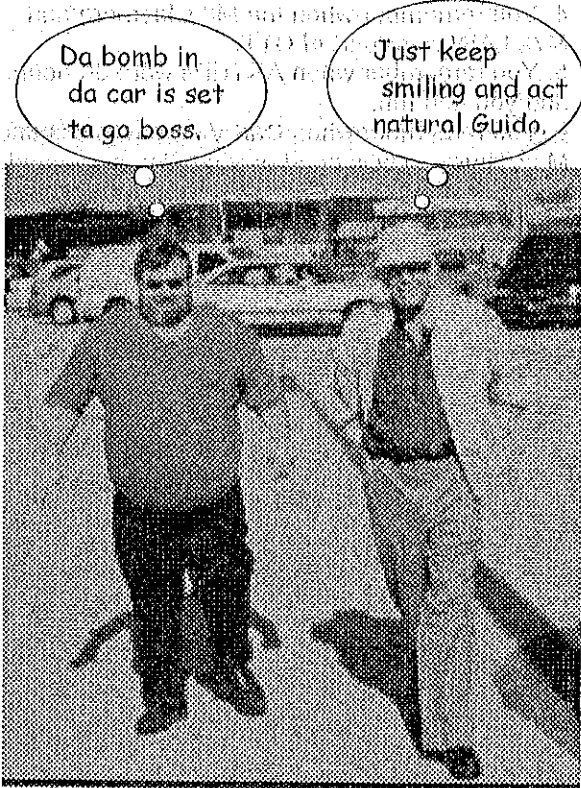
47. You remember when air mobility was a test concept.

48. You remember an NCO in your unit who actually served in the wehrmacht.

49. You remember standing in line for pay call and then paying your bills before going on a three-day binge; you could still afford a three-day binge.

50. You remember Israeli officers in Ranger School in 1967 who didn't leave to go home to fight because "the war will be over before we get there."

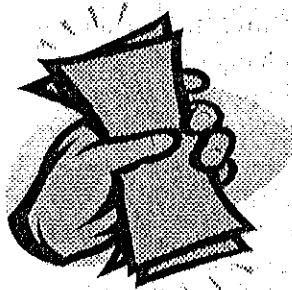
Crazy Caption Contest



Bob Judd (B/2-506) and Ben Harrison (3d Bde.) at Mobile, Ala., Reunion '97

Financial Contributors

Ted McCormick (B/1-327)
Richard Blythe (HHC/2-506)
Jerry Wise (D/1-506)
Fred Edwards (Div. Engr.)
Karin Loke (sister of Don Workman,
D/1-506)
Gary Watrous (Recon/2-506)
Rosemary Adams (friend)
Ken Hamilton (C/2-506)
Bill Whitaker (D/1-501)
Martin Glennon (HHC/2-506)
Bob Morton (Friend)



*Thanks, and a tip
of the Ripcord steel
pot to our
supporters.*

Reunion '99

Just a reminder for everyone ... Ripcord Reunion '99 will be held at Savannah, Georgia, from October 7-11 (the long Columbus Day weekend). Details will follow. But mark your calendars now and get ready for the big event ... the last one of the 20th century!

Quote noted ...

The easiest and quickest path into the esteem of traditional military authorities is by the appeal to the eye rather than to the mind. The "polish and pipeclay" school is not yet extinct, and it is easier for the mediocre intelligence to become an authority on buttons than on tactics. (March 1925)—Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart, *Thoughts on War*, 1944

Ripcord in the news

HOLLYWOOD, Fla.—Paul Greaux (1/506) sent an article from the Broward County edition of *The Miami Herald* that reported on the experiences of Daniel Biggs, a member of Bravo Co., 2/506, who was on FSB Ripcord.

Biggs, self-described as "young, cocky, 20 years of age and very much drafted," was a machine gunner on the fire base.

During the final days Ripcord was "receiving 100 mortar rounds a day," Biggs said. The last night Capt. Peters said "we would be airlifted at 0800 hours the next day."

When the first helicopters appeared they "came toward my position," Biggs recalled, "and received sniper fire." When the helicopter flew low to draw fire away from the grunts on Ripcord, Biggs opened up on the sniper with his M-60.

Caught in the open, the North Vietnamese soldier didn't have a chance. One round from the machine gun shattered his AK-47 rifle stock, tearing it from his hands. "He foolishly reached for it," Biggs said, "and I could now see every fifth tracer round from my M-60 go through his body as he was held up by the bullets I poured into his body as if he were walking backward."

It was a grotesque dance of death, but it meant that Biggs and the remaining 11 soldiers of Bravo Company could now get on the lift ships and make their way to Camp Evans, the battalion rear base.

Biggs' M-60 was blazing hot. He had been firing at other enemy soldiers trying to overrun the base, but were stopped in the defensive wire. He didn't know if he'd make it out alive, but just then a fighter bomber screamed overhead and began engaging the North Vietnamese outside the wire. Biggs then knew that they'd make it out.

Once back at Camp Evans, Biggs was asked by a reporter what he thought about the helicopter pilots. "They came straight in and did not stop for nothing," Biggs replied. That quote appeared in a *Stars and Stripes* article about the battle.

Twenty years later Biggs met the pilot who saved his life, Tom Marshall, who wrote a book called *The Price of Exit*, and again used the quote by Biggs.

INCOMING

Mail call from across the country and around the globe.

A sister of Ripcord vet writes ...

I recently spoke to a member of the Ripcord Association (online through America Online) and was told about the group. I would be very interested to learn more about Fire Base Ripcord and the survivors of the battle that occurred there.

My brother was a member of the 101st Airborne, 2nd Battalion, 506th, 3rd Brigade. He was stationed at Camp Evans and was killed May 18, 1970 when the helicopter he was a passenger on was shot down. He was delivering radio equipment to other areas, and had been at, or was going to, Fire Base Ripcord the day he was killed. He was an E-5 (promoted the day he was killed), and his name was Harry James Stone.

I have recently begun a search to find the survivor of the helicopter crash, and possibly anyone else who might remember my



brother. I have learned so many things during my search that I was not aware of prior to starting the search. Currently, I am reading the book *The Price of Exit* by Tom Marshall, which has

given me a much bigger picture of what life in Vietnam was like for the men who fought there. It portrays a much different picture from what my brother wrote me home in his letters ... that he was in a "safe place." Although I have always had deep respect for anyone who served in Vietnam, the search and this book has brought me to new heights!

The information I received about your organization was that it is free to join, and that there is a newsletter and reunions. I would very much like to be a part of this, if I may. If the information is correct, please add me to your supporters.

Sincerely,
Kathy Allen
Orange, Calif.

A reply to Kathy ...

Thanks for your letter of December 8. I am delighted to hear from you and know that other members are sharing information, regardless of the medium. Consider yourself "a member," and I hope you enjoy the enclosed newsletter.

In retrospect, I want you to know that I'm very sorry for the loss of your brother. I remember May 18, 1970, very well. And I remember the terrible event that claimed your brother's life deep in the Nam Hoa mountains. May 18 is when Buddha's birthday is celebrated. There was supposed to be a ceasefire in remembrance of it, but these PR events were pretty much one-sided. The weather was warm and rainy, an on again, off again kind of wet, with plenty of cloud cover over the higher mountain peaks. I was a platoon leader in Charlie Co., and less than two weeks from my promotion to captain, when I would take over Alpha Co. We were patrolling an area south of Fire Base Ripcord and working our way toward it.

That evening we learned that one of our supply helicopters was missing. Search teams from the 2nd Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry, were out searching the cloud covered peaks and valleys, but they hadn't come up with anything. We continued our patrolling the next few days, hacking through bamboo thickets and dense brush with machetes and keeping a wary eye for elusive enemy.

A few days later, maybe the 20th or 21st, we received word that the helicopter had been found along with a lone survivor. The helicopter had been hit by enemy ground fire and began losing altitude. The pilot tried to control the descent to make it to a small landing zone, but his efforts were in vain. The ship crashed a few hundred meters short. But the crew chief had jumped just before impact, and although he was badly injured in the fall, he managed to crawl away from the crash site (a favorite thing for the enemy to investigate) and secure himself in a thicket. The cavalry soldiers had secured the site and had loaded the remains of those killed into body bags, which would then be sling loaded under a helicopter and carried back to Camp Evans.

Continued on next page ...

(I know this sounds unglamorous, but that's the way bodies had to be handled for sanitary reasons.)

Our patrolling continued.

About mid-day we heard the sound of a lone helicopter beating the air overhead. I looked up. Sure enough, it was the one carrying the bodies back to Camp Evans. I could see the sling beneath it. Then a terrible thing happened. One of the bodies slipped loose from the body bag and the sling and fell into the triple canopy rain forest. The helicopter continued toward Camp Evans. I radioed my company commander to tell him what we'd observed and, since my platoon was in proximity to where the body had landed (about 500 meters away), I said we would go to find and secure it for extraction. It was not a mission I wanted, nor would I have volunteered for it but for the fact that there simply was no choice. We have a reverence for our dead that borders on the mystical, and we will go to almost any effort to ensure they are recovered.

I don't know who it was that we found that day. We made sure, however, that what we found was enough to identify through forensic examination. Another helicopter came and hovered over the tree tops, dropped a body bag and then a litter on a cable, and hoisted the remains and flew them to Camp Evans.

Well, that's my little part of the story. I hope it's helpful in some way. I don't mean it to upset you, but I reckon after all these years that you've come to some terms with your brother's death and would like to know more detail.

Your brother worked as the communications sergeant for our battalion, so he did have a relatively safe job as he told you in his letters. His boss was 1st Lieutenant John Darling, our communications officer, and a classmate of mine from West Point. John Darling was also on the helicopter that day.

Welcome to the association. Our members total close to 400 now, although there are many more who were involved in the Ripcord battle. We welcome your participation in any and all our reunions, and I will be delighted to print your letter in the next issue of *Ripcord Report*. Thanks for caring and sharing.—Chuck Hawkins, editor

Finding the old squad ...



My name is Danny Smith. I served with C/2-506 in '69 and '70. I was on Ripcord in the spring of 1970, in fact, I DEROSed from there June 11, 1970. I was a squad leader in the 1st Platoon under Lt. Wallace. A buddy told me about the Ripcord Association.

Recently I have made a great effort to find my old squad. I have had great success and am planning some type of reunion. I understand the you have a gathering every year. I would like some info if possible and would like to join the group. My e-mail address is buckmans@raex.com. Thank you very much. Curraheel
SSgt Danny C. Smith

Mission accomplished ...

Just a quick note to let you know that the purpose of the association and the newsletter, as stated in the latest issue, has been accomplished with me. I have done a lot of healing since my letter was printed two years ago. Thanks for that.

I have heard from so many. I hope this [donation] will help.
Sincerely,
Karin J. Loke
Kailua, Hawaii

Flying Old Glory

Happy Veteran's Day ... had to work today, but I flew my flags and would like to share with *Ripcord Report* this article in *The Miami Herald* today ... I don't know Daniel. God bless.
Paul Greaux
Hollywood, Fla.

As usual ...

As usual I enjoyed the latest *Ripcord Report*. Enclosed is a small donation to help with the cost.
Fred Edwards
Jacksonville, Fla.

MORE INCOMING

Fire for effect ...

Thanks for *Ripcord Report*. I read it cover to cover. It is something I anticipate and relish reading.

Sorry to be out of touch but I was married a year ago and a lot has happened. We have moved twice and each of us took another position within our organization. It has been rather hectic.

We now live in Branson, MO, and work close by. The settling process is still ongoing but I guess it never really gets settled. Life is wonderful for us now and I am very happy. You know my wife must be super nice to put up with me!

In regard to thoughts about our Ripcord Association, you were right on! No way should we be subordinate to another association. Curraheel I hope to make the reunion in Savannah next year. That is a very beautiful city.

A 'Nam buddy,
Jerry (and Sharon) Wise
Hollister, Mo.

Hold a reunion here!

Just got the latest copy of the *Ripcord Report*. I think it is one of the best yet. I wish I could have attended this year's reunion. Maybe one of these days. "Pops" Hedrick and I even talked about coming together but it never materialized due to our schedules.

I know that next year's reunion is already set for Savannah but I would like to know if the association would consider Branson, Missouri, for the year 2000? The area here has a lot to offer with plenty of motel rooms, music shows, the lakes, golf, Silver Dollar City and Bass Pro Shop in Springfield. "Pops" and I have discussed this in the past and would be willing to grab the bull by the horns and work with Fred to make this an enjoyable time. Also, there are three or four more Ripcord survivors in the area that we might be able to talk into helping.

I believe that I read in on of the newsletters that it had been decided to hold all reunions on the east coast. (*Not true. Reunions*

can and will be held in different locations across the country.—Editor) I wish that decision would be reconsidered. If it is set in stone then I'll accept it although I may not agree.

I don't know if you are aware or not but every year there is a week-long veteran's celebration in Branson. This year it ran from November 5 through November 11. There is a large Veteran's Day parade on the 11th. Most of the shows discount veterans and their families. Branson has held Veteran's Day activities for the last 64 years but only in the past five has it turned into the massive thing that it is today. This year the remaining crew from the Enola Gay was present. For the last three years they have had the Moving Wall at the Lawrence Welk Theater and they read the names from the wall the whole time the celebration goes on. Last year the Tuskegee Airmen were here.

October in the Ozarks is a very pretty time of the year with all the trees turning color, but this year wasn't that great due to the very dry weather. October is a good fishing time and still warm enough for a house boat ride on one of the lakes, either Table Rock or Bull shoals.

Enough about that, but THINK ABOUT IT!!!!

I fully agree with your assessment of the 101st Division request. Every time I pick up a veterans magazine, VFW (past All State Commander), DAV, Legion, Order of the Purple Heart (I have too many memberships) I see Battle of the Bulge, Corrigedor/Baatan or other battles having reunions even though they all belonged to military units. Why should we lose our identity? I plan on joining the 101st Association one of these days (I just paid my 506th dues). While I am proud of my service with the 101st, 506th, in Vietnam, and 503rd at Fort Campbell, I am proudest of my service in Vietnam with the 506th. They were highly motivated and professional, not like the young troops I dealt with at Campbell in 1/503rd from '75 to '77. We took care of our own and we should not dilute that by becoming part of a larger organization. If they want us that bad now then they should have committed the whole division to Ripcord and kept it. A lot of fine men lost their lives on a couple of hills in the middle of nowhere.

Mike Womack, C/2-506
Forsyth, Mo.

AND MORE INCOMING

P.S. from Mike ...

Been in contact with Scott Radcliff. I think I knew his cousin Robert "Butch" Radcliff. Robert was RTO for Lt. Jim Campbell. I might even have some pictures of him taken at Camp Evans during stand down in early June 1970.

Have been debating on sending this letter since I don't want to stick my nose in other people's business.—Mike

Thanks, Mike. We're glad you sent the letter.

More new members ...

I have enclosed the new membership form that is being used by the 101st Association. I also have listed below the other Ripcord veterans I met at the Omaha reunion in August.

Rick Schroth (B/101 Avn., Kingsmen)
Bemidji, Minn.
Uwe Meyers (B/2-506)
Montezuma, Iowa
Phil Kallas
Stevens Point, Wis.
Larry Frazier
Greeley, Colo.

I have enclosed a picture of FSB Ripcord I took on my way back from one of my journeys to Camp Carroll, FSB Rakassan and others, I don't remember them all. It is yours to keep, taken on April 24, 1970.

I'll be looking forward to receiving the next *Ripcord Report*. I received a letter from Phil Tolson, says the reunion was just great. Keep in touch.

Sincerely airborne/air assault,
Lloyd Rahlf
Sparks, Nev.

And more ...

After I mailed my Nov. 20 letter the latest *Ripcord Report* arrived, and what an informative newsletter! I also had a long conversation with Col. Otis Livingston yesterday, and hopefully a large contingent of 3rd Brigade will attend the Ripcord Reunion in 1999. Thanks for putting

my letter in the last newsletter. I am also chairman of the 101st Association National Membership Committee, and in that capacity I am responsible for recruiting and retaining our Screaming Eagles in the national association.

A few of us from B/2-506 and HHC 3rd Bde. are still looking for William J. Willis, captain, CO of B Co. on Ripcord. He was severely wounded in July and flown to Japan. The last word I received was that he was recovering, and that's the last we have heard. We are still searching but as of now no information.

I read with interest the LZ Windy Hill article. I was aware of the letter [from the 101st Association] prior to the October reunion. As chairman of the membership committee I have always advocated that all Screaming Eagles regardless of the time they served with the 101st Airborne Division are always welcome to join the association, and that this was an individual choice. Your opinion in the last two paragraphs of the article is greatly appreciated and respected.

The listing of the books by Keith William Nolan is also appreciated, and I'm looking forward to the FSB Ripcord book. Since the *Ripcord Report* is about the heroes of Ripcord, friends and supporters, having nothing to do with my official job with the membership committee, I would agree with the opinion to encourage membership in the national association, and keep the Ripcord Association as it is. You will always have my support.

Sincerely airborne/air assault,
Lloyd Rahlf
Sparks, Nev.

Thank\$

Please accept this donation for the *Ripcord Report*. Excellent job in getting the story out on OP Texas Star and the Battle of FSB Ripcord. I look forward to every issue of the newsletter. Keep up the good work.
Ted McCormick
Flint, Mich.



LZ Windy Hill

A saga of the eastern Louisiana rice fields and the teal duck that got even.

NOKESVILLE, Va.—Life moves in strange circles, some larger than others to be sure, but circles nonetheless. Some folks think in terms of spirals, up or down. Like my tour in 'Nam.

Air assault operations in the rugged mountains of western Thua Thien province were full of circles and spirals. We'd circle over the thick rain forest (sometimes *forever*) and then spiral down to a scratched-out LZ on some forgotten hill top. Grunts in baggy pants and 100-pound rucks would disgorge from the choppers and then they would spiral back up into the air.

I even came "full circle" in the field.

In March I started out as a green first looie in Charlie Co., commanded by that tough-as-leather veteran of several wars, Capt. Vasquez. This was on the fabled Rocket Ridge, viewable from Camp Evans and at a greater range. My first taste of combat came quickly.

Sappers from the K-12 battalion began hitting us in our night defensive positions. A test of us perhaps, or training for them. Vasquez pulled out all the stops and after one disastrous night for the enemy, the nighttime attacks ceased. Rocket Ridge was ours, sorta, mostly.

About 220 days later, now commanding Alpha Company and after Ripcord had become a dull ache, I found that I had come "full circle" back to Rocket Ridge. It was October, and the monsoon rains had begun with the fury of a full blown typhoon.

We went 14 days without resupply, often in fog so thick you literally couldn't see your hand in front of your face. And it was cold—40 degrees or so at night. We took to digging up our old trash sumps to find unopened cans of peanut butter to eat; one LRRP ration made soupy with extra water would feed a fire team.

Now, finally, I knew what the enemy was faced with in terms of just having enough chow to eat. Full circle, or a spiral? Interesting twist of fate in any event.

So what's this got to do with teal ducks, you ask? Good question.

There I was, minding my own business, when Jim Campbell (C/2-506) called and asked how I'd like to go duck hunting with him in Louisiana. "Sure," I said, and we made a date for early December.

We went to a camp somewhere south of Monroe in the middle of the eastern rice fields—a vast area bigger than some countries that's flooded each fall after the rice harvest. Waterfowl love it. I liked it just fine.

We put on camouflaged clothing (ducks can spot you better'n a sapper in moonlight) and went to our ambush site—a blind in the middle of a large wet spot. We sat, and waited for it to get light—BMNT, or beginning morning nautical twilight, came at 6:19 a.m.

Ducks, zillions of them, arrived right on schedule. My first shot brought down a pintail, and I shoulda stopped while I was ahead. But the bodycount for ducks was six and I was determined to win this one.

Becoming increasingly wary, the ducks began taking evasive action. Shotgun shells began piling up in the bottom of the blind with no visible result to show for it. Teal ducks were particularly elusive.

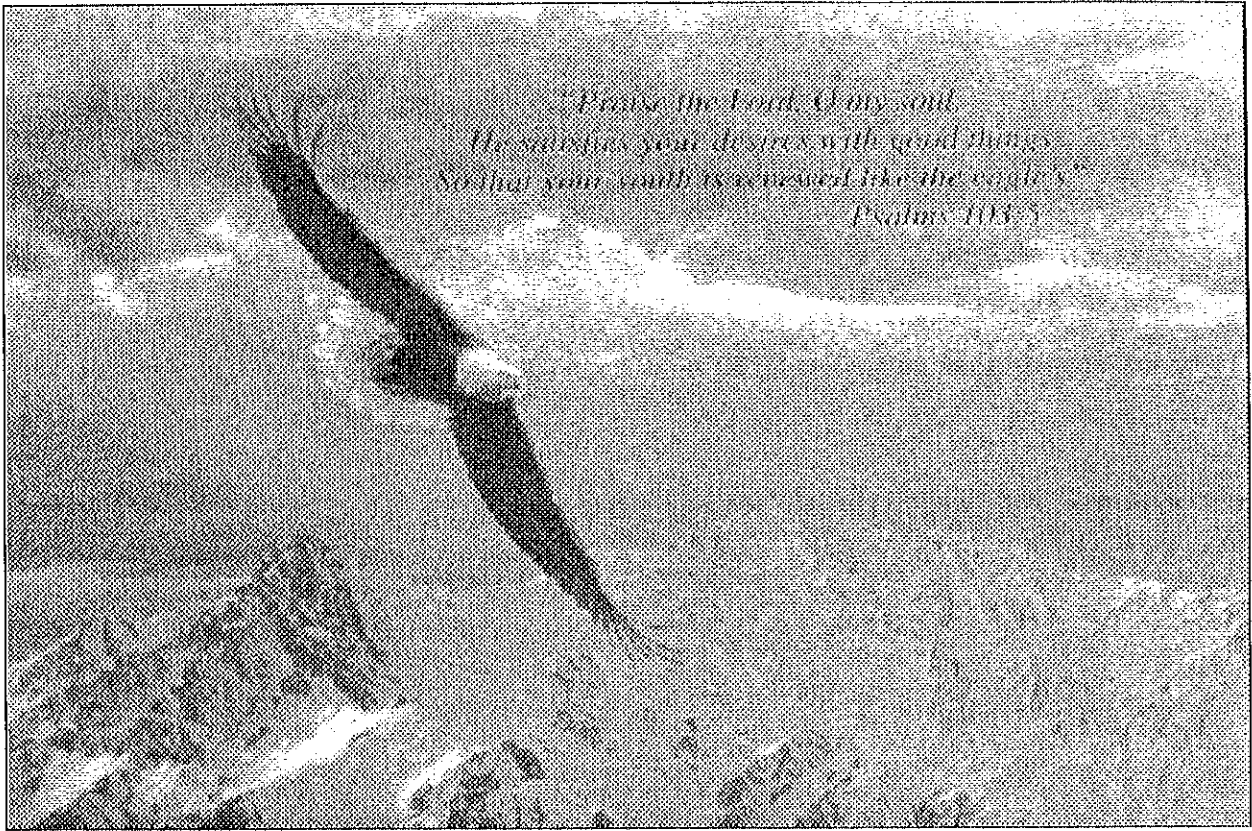
Then, one of the little critters pulled up short right in front of me and stuck out his tongue, grinned and said (in duck-talk) "Nah, nah, nah." That did it.

I let him have a full three-round burst of semi-automatic 12-gauge fire. Bam, bam, bam! Nothing. The teal must have been wearing a flak jacket.

Then he fluttered just out of range, did a little duck dance in the air, turned around and buzzed me while I was reloading. Zoom! And he was gone. But he did leave a little white-speckled reminder on my hunting shirt. Dang! Score another one for the ducks.

Sitting there, Jim and I got to thinking how similar ambushing ducks from a blind was to ambushing our enemy in Vietnam from concealed positions three decades ago. Strikingly similar.

We shot more than we hit the target. We had to be camouflaged and stay still. Sometimes there were ducks, sometimes there weren't. You could hear shooting off in the distance, but didn't worry about it. And the one teal even shot back, in its own way of course. Full circle? Hmmm, I wonder.—Chuck Hawkins, editor



*Praise the Lord, O my soul,
He satisfies your desires with good things,
So that your youth is rewarded like the eagle's.
Psalm 103:5*

© Daniel Smith—Mill Pond Press

It seemed, somehow, appropriate to close this holiday issue with a Christmas greeting from Martin Glennon. Marty was a medic in A Co., 2-506th Infantry, and lives in Indiana where he is a minister. Thanks, Marty, for the eagle and the quote from the Bible.

*Praise the Lord, O my soul,
He satisfies your desires with good things
So that your youth is rewarded like the eagle's.
Psalms 103:5*

Marty writes:

I saw this card and thought of sending the greeting to the Ripcord Association. It reminds me of the Denver reunion also.

May you have a peaceful Christmas and New Year.

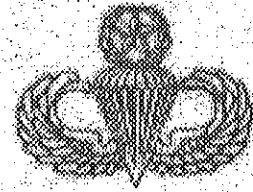
Martin Glennon
Surviving medic, 2/506, A Co., 2nd Platoon

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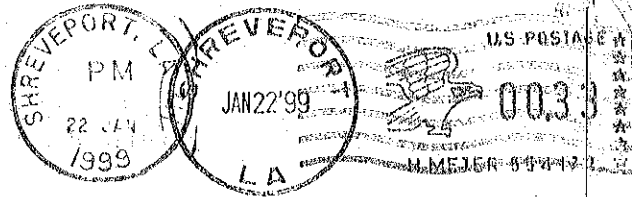
Plus more ...

Ripcord Report is a publication of the Battle of FSB Ripcord Association, and is the authoritative voice of history of the battle.



Today's light infantryman must learn 493 individual tasks in order to be MOS qualified. Of these, 129 are considered 'battlefield critical' tasks.—Enhanced Brigade Training Strategy, Enhanced Infantry Brigade, Fort Benning, Georgia, July 1995

Ripcord Report
c/o Hawkins



Holiday Issue, Winter 1998-99

Please send address changes or corrections to the address above.