



# RIPCORD REPORT



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

Number 100

Winter 2014



## 100th Issue



In the summer of 1985 Chip Collins gathered together a few veterans of the Fire Support Base Ripcord battle and with their contributions, the first newsletter about the battle was produced. The first people to sign up were Rick Blyth (HHC 2/506), Frank Gonzales (Recon 2/506), Mal Moore (B2/320 FA), Tom Chase (163 AVN), Bill Heath (A 2/506), Lloyd Fulmer (Mortar E 2/506), Larry Smith (C 3/187), Bruce Updyke (158 AVN), Bill Aeschilman (2/320 FA), Alan Riddle (B 2/506), Larry Button (B 2/506), Ray Blackman (D 2/501), Arthur Hickman (75<sup>th</sup> Rangers), and Chip Collins (B 2/506).



*Chip Collins*

From this start, the seed for a reunion was planted. By the fall of 1986 the first reunion was held in Whippany, NJ through the efforts of John Mihalko and Chuck Hawkins. The attendees included Chip Collins, John Mihalko, Chuck Hawkins, John Sherba, Frank Marshall, Jim Fairhall, Dick Cable, Fred Behrens, Bill Heath, Tom Sheppard, Ray Blackman, Rick Blyth, and George Westervelt.

This was followed by a Washington, DC reunion in 1987. There was a break of seven years as things got better organized and more people got

involved. This has resulted in an annual reunion since 1995 to the present time.

The newsletter has gone through a lot of changes over its life. It started out with Chip Collins as the editor, then it was Chip and Ray Blackman working as editors. In 1989 Chuck Hawkins took the reins and eventually turned it over to Frank Marshall who has handled the duties since 2003.

The letter has gone from type written, to dot matrix printers, to the ink jet printers used today. The size of the newsletter has been all across the board. It has had from 8 pages to as many as 28 pages and been put out sometimes only once and other times as many as 6 times a year. Presently we try to get the publication out four times a year and have at least 8 pages.

Why the difference in number of pages? In the early years a lot more people contributed to the writing and less were aware of what Ripcord had been. Now a lot of our basic questions have been answered but we are all still looking for details about individual events. Thus we do not get long essays from members as often as short notes and questions. Today the long essays are put on the web page where they can be viewed at you leisure. As long as that continues, we will have a newsletter!

It has been 29 years since the number one issue was printed, let's hope there will be some of us around to publish Number 200 in 2039!



*Whippany NJ 1986*

# FROM THE EDITOR

Here it is already, the 100th issue of the Ripcord Report. When Chip Collins contacted me in 1985, he and John Milhako were on their 2nd issue. Who ever thought that we would now have the 100th issue published.



My special thanks go out to now deceased Chip Collins, who started the Ripcord Report and also to John Milhako, Bill Heath, Ray Blackman, Chuck Hawkins and all the others that were involved in creating such a wonderful and meaningful group as The Ripcord Association.

I started doing the newsletter in 2003 and hoped to carry on the great works of those before me. I remember the day in 1985 when I first met with Chip Collins and Chuck Hawkins in John Mihalko's home in Whippany NJ.

A group of us planned the first Ripcord reunion to be held in 1986. There were only 12 Ripcord veterans at that reunion and not many more were on the roster. Compare that to the 566 Ripcord veterans we now have on our roster, I would say we came a long way.

There will be a lot of good things in the future for our Association. More reunions, more get togethers, and many more Ripcord veterans finding other Ripcord veterans. It is amazing how many children of Ripcord veterans are getting on a computer and Google "Ripcord" and find out about our Association and get their father the information. The next thing you know, they are at a reunion.

Since the Association started now into it's 29th year, we have had books written, documentaries made, stories told on TV, and hopes that a movie would be made. It is in many opinions that the Ripcord battle was one of the worst of the Vietnam war and a battle that should be in all the History books. The sorry thing about this is that this Ripcord battle is still not recognized as such and many people never heard of it.

The Ripcord Association has only succeeded due to all the work done by the Ripcord veterans, their friends and their families that volunteer a lot of time, work, and effort in keeping the Association and the reunions together. A big thank you go to all the spouses that help at the reunions and all year long. There are too many people to name that have made the Ripcord Association what it is today and sorry if I can not name them all but to name just a few to thank are: John Mihalko, Chuck

Hawkins, Fred Spaulding, Jim Campbell, Ben Harrison, Lee Widjeskog, Bill Heath, Dennis Bloomingdale, Patty Radford, Bob and Red Judd, Anthony Critchlow for maintaining our facebook page and many many more. Some day, I would like to publish a list of all the names but I would still miss a lot of them. So to everyone, the Ripcord Association thanks you.

Looking ahead, the 50th Anniversary will be here before you know it. The plans for the 2020 reunion will be in Indianapolis, IN and this is one that you do not want to miss. Great things will be planned. So stick around a few more years and make sure you attend.

I hope to see you all in Springfield MO. in 2015 reunion.

## **2015 Ripcord Reunion Oct 7 thru 10, 2015 Springfield, MO**

**Registration forms will be in future issue of  
the Ripcord Report or on our website**

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.

## **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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## **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.

- Sam Rawlinson
- Bill Williams (B 2/506)
- Langhorne Rod and Gun Club
- Mark Minch (B 2/319 FA)
- Ken Hamilton (C 2/506)
- Charles Van Cleve B 2/319 FA)
- John Mason
- Steve Smith (158 AVN)
- Mark Skinner (D2/506)
- Albert Burckard (A 2/506)
- Stan Poloski (2/319 FA)
- Jim Harris (HHC 2/506)
- Nancy Thompson in memory of John Sherba (E 2/506 Recon)
- Russell & Chris Carter in memory of John Sherba
- John Boyle in memory of John Sherba
- Cape Regional Medical Center in memory of John Sherba
- Darcy Greenfell in memory of John Sherba
- Chris and Maurice Hart in memory of John Sherba

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

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

## **Dale Falconer and John Sherba**

Shortly after our 2014 reunion, two stalwart members of our association passed away. Those who attended heard that Dale Falconer was fading and it was not too long after that he died.

Many of us knew of Dale as the upbeat guy who gave Fred Spaulding all the competition he wanted on the golf course. He was president of the Seward Fastener Company, a generous supporter of the Ripcord Association and for many years was highly competitive in the world of trap, skeet and sporting clay shoots. Being with Bravo 2/506, he spent a lot of time on Fire support Base Ripcord. One night during a "Mad Minute", his grenade bounced back into his fighting position and went off before he could exit. Shrapnel slice open his intestines and he survived thanks to the quick help by Mike Chirelli who got him onto a helicopter and Dr. Harris who tended to him immediately. In spite of this serious injury, Dale recovered and went on to live a productive life. He will be missed!



A few weeks after returning from the reunion, I learned that one of our original reunion members, John (Doc Speed) Sherba (Recon) had died in Cape May, NJ.

John worked as a medic and a team leader for Recon for a year, rather than the normal 6 months for medics. Even back home he always felt more comfortable out of doors so the rear was not for him. Returning home he suffered from PTSD and hepatitis C. The stress issue was not recognized at that time by the VA so John handled it in his own way. His wife, Debbie, somehow put up with his issues and has stood by him all these years. Finally he got some counseling and things got better. All during that time, John kept a positive appearance, had three children and ran his own masonry business. In spite of John's mental and physical health problems, he was always up beat and outgoing at the reunions. Visiting with him two weeks before the reunion, he remarked that things were fine and would be great if the fish were biting a little better! Recon will not be the same with his passing.





## JERSEY RAMBLINGS

by Lee Widjeskog A/2-506



October is coming to a close as I write this article. Things have been very hectic for Kathy and me this past 30 days. We got all the gear ready to take to the reunion while receiving a last minute delivery of new hats.

On the way to Myrtle Beach we stopped in Smithfield, VA where we met with my first company commander, Albert Burckard. It turns out that he is an avid historian in the Isle of Wight County especially when it comes to the Civil War. He took time to take Kathy and I on a walking tour of the battle site in Smithfield and then to show us the 150 year old court house. It was a brief and very information packed time! It was great to see him again after 44 years and he was coming to the reunion for the first time!!

Once in Myrtle Beach we met with the Judds and soon had filled our rooms with snack and liquid refreshments for the hospitality room. This year's crowd was down a little from the previous year but we still end with about 200 people attending. The Ladies Raffle went well as did the food! On Saturday we held the usual business meeting. The high lights were we have just about complete the incorporation. We have set up and interim board of directors with Frank Marshall, Pete Meloro and Lee Widjeskog. We will draw up the by-laws and then get approval of the members before we go further. The primary reason for incorporation is to ensure the treasury stays with the Ripcord Association should something happen to the treasurer (me).

Monetarily, our account is sitting at about \$42,000 after the last of the bills are paid. This is just about where we were a year ago so things are going well on the finances.

For next year we are heading to Springfield, MO for the 2015 and the 2016 reunions. This is only 30 miles from Branson with all its shows and gaming sites. We will be set up at the University Plaza Hotel at 333 John Q. Hammons Parkway. The rate will be \$82 per night before taxes but, unlike Myrtle Beach, breakfast is not included.

After the reunion, Kathy and I often take off on a driving tour of different parts of the USA. This year was different. Our grandson turned 8 years old and since we had missed a few of his birthdays, we decided to be in Massachusetts to celebrate his birthday with his

family. We stopped at home for one day while Kathy repacked for the trip north. The following day we were off and driving once more. We spent a great week with our grandson, daughter, son-in-law and his family. Our son managed to get there as well so we had a great time!!

Then it was back to New Jersey so I could testify at a public hearing, present a slide show on bears and prepare for a hunting program for kids in New Jersey.

Meanwhile, my friend from Recon, John Sherba passed away and Kathy and I attended his funeral where I was able to say some words about John's time in Vietnam. John was a good man and will be missed by many.

Overall, we have been quite busy and now it is time to help Frank get out another newsletter!! Fall is here in Jersey!

### Ripcord on Facebook

by Anthony Chritchlow



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ripcordassociation/>

Burrrrrrrrrrrrr. Anyone cold out there? Winter hit here hard and fast this year.

Our member count is still growing. We are at 457 and growing.

The wife and I are making plans to attend next year's reunion. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone.

The holidays are getting close please be safe. Take your time traveling.

The last few months I have turned down a few member requests. I always look at the persons FB page if it looks empty or are from another country I ignore them. I also do not let anyone put ads on our page. If they want to make money they can do so on another web site. I give 1 warning not to do this again and then they are gone on the second event. Let me know if this is the way you want.

OK so everyone have a good Thanksgiving day. And a better Cristmas.

## INCOMING MAIL

Frank,

While I was in Colorado, I had a health issue. I got myself over to the local Veterans Administration hospital where my needs were addressed. As I was leaving the building, I saw a man with a 101st Airborne hat. Greeting him, I asked if he had served in Vietnam. With a "Yes" answer, I asked when he was there. He replied he was there from 1969 -70 and served with Delta 2/17 Cav.

This was my Troop and the same time! We soon traded stories and I could remember him even if he did not remember me. He is the first guy I have met who was in my troop since returning to the states. By the end of our talk he declared he would be coming to Springfield in October. I cannot wait to have 1 more from my outfit to join us in our reunion.

*Harold Day  
Delta 2/17 Cav.*

Frank,

Kathy and I would like to thank the members of the Ripcord Association for their gift to us at the last reunion. It is not necessary, but we appreciate it none the less. We enjoy trying to make the reunion a pleasant event for all that come!

See you all next year!

*Lee Widjeskog,  
A 2/506*

Dear Mr frank.

I just met one ripcord veteran name Bob Smoker (C Co 2/506 in my city Nhatrang VN. He was in contact with me on the email, and from Gary Radford my platoon leader D co. Gary sent me two of my pictures when I went on operation around FSB Ripcord and one mail I send him from Ripcord. We did not believed but true, if any ripcord veterans will come to VN or my city Nhatrang I am glad to meet them, Bob Smoker went home yesterday.

*Sincerely good healthy to you and your family.*

*Nguyenthuyet Nguyenthuyet  
nguyenthuyet1947@gmail.com*

Lee-

Just a quick query- and hope you and Kathy are doing well. My wife and I had a pleasant time at MB

last year for a variety of reasons and Linda and I are planning to hit Myrtle Beach come October again. This time, if I can dig out my "Sanford & Son" man-cave – I will also bring my photo albums for passing around and review by members. Being in aviation, I had the opportunity to get around a lot.

So there are varied places in I Corps and the Ripcord area from the air. The one shot I had taken of Ripcord is in face on the Associations website. The Pinnacle shot of Ripcord. I have taken that and had a poster size of it (36x24) made for Chip Collins years ago. If I recall right, he ended up donating it to a VFW in Piscataway, NJ to hang on their wall. I found my first Ripcord reunion beer mug Chip sent me and I plan to bring it to MB.

Now for my question! Where and when will the 2015 reunion be held?

Thanks!

Tom Chase  
163 AVN

### 2015 Reunion update

The 2015 Reunion will be held in Springfield, MO With dates of Wed. Oct 7 thru Sat Oct 10.

The event will be held at the University Plaza Hotel located at 333 John Q. Hammons Parkway.

The cost is \$82 per night before taxes.

Breakfast is NOT included.

### Update on the new Ripcord Book

*by Chris Brady*



Thanks to all who sat down for interviews at the Ripcord Reunion in October. It was a pleasure visiting and meeting so many people I've talked to over the last several months. The overall project is coming together nicely and I anticipate shopping it early next year. Anyone interested in taking part in an interview, please contact me at cbrady@windstream.net or contact Frank Marshall at the Ripcord Association.

This is your story and I'm honored to play a small role in telling it.

## Update info from Bn Cdr 2-506

*submitted by Bob Seitz*

Hail to the Currahee Nation from Task Force White Currahee here at Fort Campbell, KY! On behalf of CSM Noel Foster and myself, I wanted to give the team a brief update on 2-506 IN recent past, present, and future operations. Since redeploying from Afghanistan in January of this year, your battalion has been on the march through several key objectives.

As most are tracking, in April our formation transitioned from 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT) to the Rakkasans of the 3<sup>rd</sup> BCT. We have a shared history in blood and victory with this tremendous organization and many of our veterans still remember how 3-187 IN, 1-506 IN, and 2-506 IN comprised the nucleus of the Rakkasans during the fabled battles of Hamburger Hill and Fire Base Ripcord. Now we are rallied under the 3BCT Torii again, two storied formations coming together to cement a new legacy in our nation's history. Speaking of legacy, in July and August your White Currahees deployed in force to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA, a mere five months after returning from combat.

While there, our formation went from squad level proficiency to battalion level operations in 12 days, shattering a few Army paradigms and many OPFOR formations along the way. We continued to reinforce the sustains and improves from this rotation this past month in our most recent training operation, Eagle Flight/ Eagle Drive I, where our rifle squads and vehicle crews executed live fires and crew gunnery to set the conditions for future training.

On that note, the battalion will launch to the local ranges in OCT to refine our individual and small unit lethality through Operation Eagle Shoot II, focused on small arms and machine gun marksmanship. These events will prepare us for our culminating training operation for the calendar year scheduled for 17-25 November, codenamed Operation Eagle Smash. This operation is a combination of rifle platoon live fires supported by field artillery and mortars, platoon level air assaults with lift and attack aviation, and section level gunnery for our heavy weapons and support companies. You have every right to be very proud of your formation and its recent successes.

On the family front, we also have several key events lined up to support our formation. The first will be our Air Assault Trooper for a Day on 1 November where

our families will participate in a number of "patrols" to include an obstacle course, kid's obstacle course, battle drill patrol, and CASEVAC scenario. All coordination and planning is leading in the direction of a phenomenal event for our Troopers and their loved ones.

We would also like to highlight our battalion winter formal scheduled for 4 December at 6pm at the Bruce Convention Center in Hopkinsville, KY. We should have ticket prices out no later than 14 OCT. Please contact our adjutant, LT Joseph Valenzuela at (270) 798-6730, if you are interested in attending.

Finally, we will have our battalion change of command ceremony at 10am on 10 December where Kristie and I will say goodbye to the formation and welcome LTC Kurt Smith and his wife Amanda to the White Currahee Nation. It has been a distinct honor and privilege to serve with this amazing battalion in training and combat. Kristie and I will never forget the dedication, courage, and esprit de corps of Task Force White Currahee. Our Troopers and veterans will always hold a special place in our hearts. Thank you for your commitment to the cause of freedom.

Until the next SITREP, this is White Currahee 6, see you on the high ground!

**SCOTT W. KIRKPATRICK**

*LTC, IN CDR, 2-506IN, 3/101 ABN DIV (AASLT)*

### **Anna Britt Nolan Trust**

*by George and Mary Murphy*



It was great to see all of you again at the reunion in Myrtle Beach. We want to thank everyone for their generous donations to the Anna Britt Nolan Trust and for participating in the raffle.

Thanks to Jane Stortz for helping to sell the tickets.

Hope to see all of you next year in Springfield, MO!

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**



# The Ghosts of Ripcord Update *(DVD available soon)*

*from the filmmakers of The Ghosts of Ripcord*

Dear Ripcord Association,

On behalf of everyone involved in the production of *The Ghosts of Ripcord* we hope you are enjoying your fall and are doing well. Some of you might remember the email that was sent out last year where we discussed the state of the production, and how all of our resources had been exhausted after several years of extremely challenging work, and as a result the production was forced to go on a hiatus during most of 2014. Over the past few months however, members of our filmmaking team have worked closely together to put the “final touches” on the film that we were struggling to complete for the past year. And we are thrilled to announce, that the documentary is finally completed!

After an extraordinarily difficult process of trying to tell the story of Firebase Ripcord and its veterans we have reached a point where we are now able to distribute DVDS of our final product to people across the country. We have begun coordinating with Frank

Marshall and other members of the Ripcord Association to begin the process of distributing DVDS. There are several individuals who made generous donations at the start of our production and are owed a free DVD as a result, these donators will be contacted individually to establish a shipment process for their personal DVD.

For any others who wish to purchase a copy, we will be selling them for \$10 (with any shipping/handling costs that are required). More information will be available on the Ripcord Association website within the next week. For anyone who wishes to purchase a copy, and is without internet access, please contact the director at: 215-531-3230. Phone requests are strictly for those without internet access.

**Send an e-mail request to the director at [firebasefilm@gmail.com](mailto:firebasefilm@gmail.com)**

Thank you again for your continued patience and support of this production.

*Sincerely,*

*The Filmmakers*



*Atlantic City Reunion 1998*



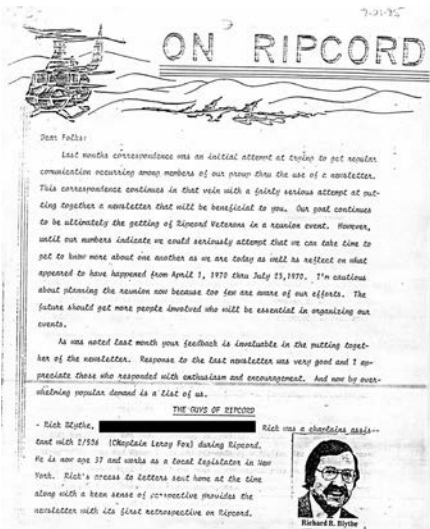
*Ewe Meyer had a gathering at his home during the 2004 Ripcord Reunion in Iowa*



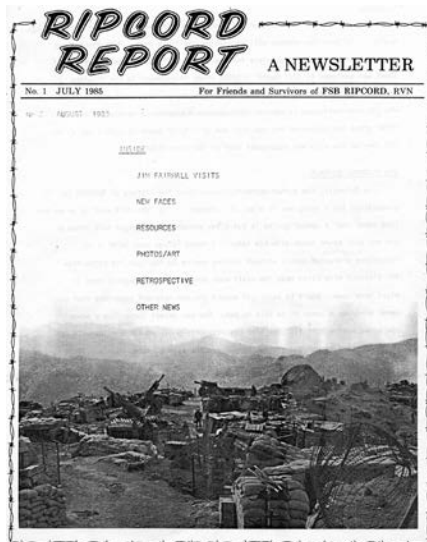
*2014 Reunion Myrtle Beach, SC*



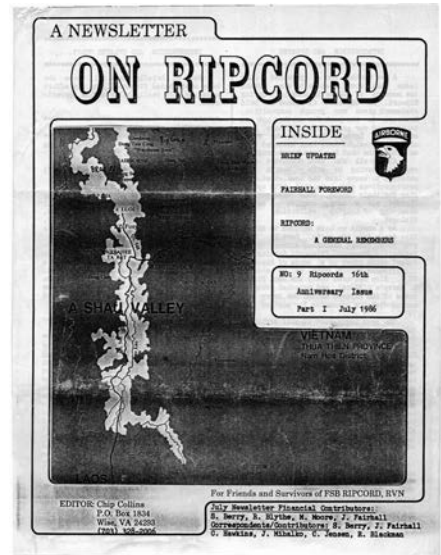
# Past Covers of The Ripcord Report



Cover of first newsletter July 21, 1985



Cover of Issue #1 July 1985



Cover of the Issue #9 August, 1986



Cover of Issue #41 November 1995



Cover of Issue #45 August 1998



Cover of Issue #53 March 2001



Cover of Issue #64 Fall 2004



Cover of Issue #73 Spring 2007



Cover of Issue #91 Fall 2012