

RIPCORD REPORT

A NEWSLETTER

No. 1 JULY 1985

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

No. 12, JULY 1987

= INSIDE =

- * Contacts
- * Incoming
- * Retrospectives
- * Fairhall Book Recon
- * Art/Photos
- * Parting Shots

= Financial Contributors =

- * R. Hageman
- * J. Griffin
- * V. Kenyon
- * J. McKinley

= Co-Editors =

- * Chip Collins

- * Ray Blackman

= Financial Contributions =
To Treasurer:

- * John Mihalko



= CONTACTS/NEW FACES =

Maj. Jerry D. Rodgers
(326 Med. Bn., Eagle Dustoff)

Rande Hall
(326 Med. Bn. Eagle Dustoff)

James L. McKinley
(C CO. 159th Avn. Bn.)

LTC. Fredrick Spaulding
(S-3 Air, 3rd Bde.)

Ray Sellers
(A 2/327)

Robert L. Bridges
(Aslt. Helo's)

SSG Thomas W. Stoddert
(D Trp. 2/17 Cav.)

John A. Bowman
(Scout Dog Handler)

Steven Wandland
()

LTC. Wayne C. Kabat
(426 S&S Bn.)

Ronald L. Hudson
(A Btry. 1/39th Arty)

Harry Whitfield
()

Ronald L. Gaines
()

James A. Williamson
(CSM, 101st Abn. Div.)

AK1 G.R. Hatley
(B 2/506)

Fred J. Hacker
()

Hector "PEEWEE" Reyes
(E 1/501)

William I. Ayres
(265th Rad. Rsch. Co.)

Vincent P. Kenyon
()

Michael J. Leiviska
(B 101 AHB)

Cathryn Ball

Robert V. Hageman
(2/502 RECON, Div. G-2)

Dan Esposito
(B Btry. 2/11 Arty)

John Campbell

Jim Griffin
(2/501)

LTC Ronald Reichsmeier
()

Karen Daby

= ADDRESS CHANGES =

John T. Schuelke (D 2/501),

Mike Miller (C 1/506),

Bill Aeschliman (2/320 Arty),

= INCOMING =

= INCOMING CON'T =

16 March 1987:

It was interesting to note your notice in the Army Times Locator File. I was then a First Lieutenant serving as Medical Evacuation Pilot in the Air Ambulance Platoon, 326th Medical Battalion, known more commonly as Eagle Dustoff. Our Unit was stationed at Camp Eagle, with a 2-ship standby at Camp Evans. This standby was manned on a rotational basis by platoon members attached for a week to 10 days at a time to C Company of the 326th which operated the field medical station at Camp Evans.

I arrived in Vietnam in May, 1970. After a few days of orientation, training and checkrides, I began participating in the actions on and around Firebase Ripcord. In fact, my first mission was extracting the bodies of an entire crew of one of our Dustoff ships shot down by an RPG while performing a hoist rescue in the Ripcord vicinity. We lost several more ships in the following months in that area. I was in the last lift of ships during the evacuation on the final day. As I recall, my crew went in and picked up the Radio Telephone Operator of a Battalion Commander and his S-3 who were killed by an enemy mortar round while awaiting their C & C ship to come in and pick them up. If my memory serves me, the Call Sign of the Bn Cdr, was "Black Spade", but I may be wrong about that after all these years. I also recall a LOH being the final US on Ripcord that day, his Call Sign being "Thunder 77", again if my memory serves me right. I recall a B-52 strike afterwards.

I have a few pictures of the Firebase and surrounding terrain. Would be happy to share any more of my experiences that might lead to a more definitive history of the operation. Would also like to read anything already compiled.

Best wishes in your endeavors.
Major Jerry D. Rodgers
Burke, VA

17 March 1987:

I read the notice in the Army Times, and was somewhat amazed that an association had been formed. This is the first time that I knew about it. Will there be any reunions, or gathering's of the ones that are still alive? If so, I could probably help locate a bunch for you.

I was the S-3 Air, for the 3rd Bde, and remember quite well most of the events that took place during the battle for RIPCORD. I still have (somewhere), pictures and slides that was taken during the battle. As an additional duty, I was also the Bde briefing officer, and had to brief every evening on the events of the day. The logs/journals that were kept daily, are at Fort Campbell, KY, still in boxes. I've asked for them several times and have been told (every time), that they are still packed and probably won't be gotten at until 1988 or 1989.

Let me know if I can help in any way.

Fredrick L. Spaulding
LTC, IN
Executive Officer
Headquarters 4th Brigade (INF), 70th
Division (TNG)
USAR Center, Bldg 724 Camp Atterbury
Edinburgh, IN 46124

23 March 1987:

I served with the 101st Airborne Division from May, 70 - May, 71. I was originally stationed at Camp Eagle then Camp Evans and then Camp Eagle again. The exact dates escape me. I was at Camp Evans when FSB Ripcord was under siege and finally evacuated. I was the only platoon leader from the 426 S&S Bn at Camp Evans and as such provided Class I, II, III, IV and V to the 3rd Bde and supported many FSB to include Ripcord.

I now command the 260th Quartermasters Bn at Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia.

Wayne C. Cabat
Savannah, GA

March 1987:

As a member of a 106mm Recoilless Rifle team I was positioned on Firebase Ripcord on or about the 10th of April, 1970 till the 19th of April, the day before my twentieth birthday. During this time frame D-Troop 2/17th Cav., 101st Abn. was sending 106 teams as support for the rebuilding of the FSB. I still have many photos and memories of the bloody place. I only got bits and pieces of all that went on particularly what ever happened to the mortar platoon located at the base of the firebase. Any information you can send would be greatly regarded and let me know how I may be of any assistance.

Yours truly,
Thom Stoddert
SSG U.S. Army
Ft. Sam Houston

March 26, 1987:

I was in and out of Ripcord in the time period you mention.

On my Birthday April 30th I remember we were mortared. One round landed near us and was a dud. I'll never forget turning 26. I was a Spec 5 at the time.

Good luck,
Fred Hacker
Venice, FL

27 March 1987:

I read about your organization in the latest issue of the VIETNAM WAR NEWSLETTER and would like to receive your newsletter. My relationship to FSB Ripcord is somewhat indirect. I was originally a squad leader in Recon 2/502 from February through May 1970. Late in May I was wounded on Hill #882. At that time I started working for the Division G2 staff. Among my duties was the writing of the 101st Daily Intelligence Summary (Intsum). This was the report used as the official historical record of all elements of the 101st Airborne. It was also used to brief the commanding officers. All official records of enemy

contacts from the middle of June until the middle of December were written by me. That would include all records of Ripcord.

I am enclosing a picture of the Firebase after it was abandoned. It was taken on a flyover soon after we abandoned. I did not take the picture but was on the flight and received a copy of it. This small print is a copy of my copy. Among my other duties was looking for bodies that we left behind. We were doing that when the picture was taken.

I was also acquainted with Major Tanner who was killed as the evacuation was being completed. He was previously assigned to the G3 staff and often worked at the same time that I did. He was a fine person.

Bob Hageman
El Paso, IL

March 1987:

I want to thank you very much for getting me in contact with Bill Heath. He sent me all the newsletters you told me to ask for. They brought back alot of memories and tears.

I couldn't believe the article, when Wondell Prew was hit with the RPG round in the leg. I remember him. He was in my company (C, 1/327th). I was later transferred to HHC, 1/327th to work on the generators at Camp Eagle.

Please keep in touch,
Anthony Pawlik
Elmhurst, New York

March 1987:

I saw your Ad in VVA Oct. 86 issue. My name is Rande Brian Hall.

I was a crewmember (MEDIC) on a Dustoff helicopter from Eagle Dustoff. We were at Camp Evans pulling duty (Medivac) when we got shot down just outside of Ripcord. I got hit. I think it was July 4. I'm not sure. Our ship Call Name was Tripple Niner, pilot M. Smith. B. Pascoe

= INCOMING CON'T =

co-pilot. Casey Patzenick crew chief. Smitty got hit also.

I want to know if Gary Runge died in that battle. He was a Medic from my unit. I heard through wounded that he did. I would like to know.

Eagle Dustoff was under the direct command of Col. Diamond, 101st Abn. Division Surgeon.

This ad gives me goose bumps every time I see it. I would like to join your ASSN.

Rande Hall
Nickname, "RAISIN"
Martin City, MT

April 8, 1987

Please include me on the monthly newsletter. As a scout dog handler with the 101st Airborne operating out of Camp Eagle in 1970, I walked point for the 1/501, 1/327, 2/327 and the 2/17 Cav.

Very truly yours,
John A. Bowman
Davenport, IA

April 13, 1987

I recently saw your ad in the Army Times. I don't know that this would be of any interest to you:
During the period you mentioned my unit A btry 1st/39th ARTY XXIV Corp Artillery went by road to FSB Rakkasan which was close to Ripcord.

I was an FDC sp/4 and calculated the artillery firing data in support of units in contact with NVA units around the base of Ripcord. My battery was the large 8" self propelled guns. It was very questionable that we would even make it from Camp Evans to the firebase given the amount of enemy activity.

I could listen on the radios in FDC to the various units requesting artillery support, many were in heavy contact.

We also coordinated a large T.O.T.

= INCOMING CON'T =

mission with many artillery units firing when the last troops were withdrawn from Ripcord.

If I can provide more information or photos please contact me.

Ronald L. Hudson
Colonial Hts., VA

April 13, 1987:

Until now I was unaware of the Association. I hope you have brought together many of those great guys.

James A. Williamson
Winnsboro, S.C.

P.S. If you don't remember I was the CSM.

April 1987

I like the idea for a Ripcord Association and the newsletter. Vietnam shares a part of the past in our lives, and can not or should not be forgotten. I look forward to Jim Fairhall's book on Ripcord. As a suggestion, maybe he could begin the book by explaining what firebases were and what their purpose was. Explaining the rotation of each company guarding the firebase with the other companies working the A.O. and using the fire support from the firebase when needed. It is very interesting to study the Vietnam situation, with firebases scattered across the area and all companies working their A.O.'s, this way we could keep the NVA in control. But when we would abandon a firebase, giving the NVA a chance to build up in the A.O., then it would be very difficult to move back in. It is my understanding that this is what happened at Ripcord. I was in the 501 and we heard that part of the 508 were in Cambodia and this was why they sent us to Ripcord.

Keep up the good work. I look forward to the next issue.

Jim Griffin
Rossville, GA

= INCOMING CON'T =

April 21, 1987:

I was checking out the VETERAN MAGAZINE and saw your ad in the locator section.

I never knew there was a Ripcord Assoc.

I was not a grunt at Ripcord, but I was a door-gunner during the extraction on 23 July.

That was a bad scene. I had to check my pants after that one.

For what its worth I was with B Co., 101st Aslt. Hel. (Kingsmen).

I believe we were doing a log mission that day when we were called in. We hauled out some grunts below the fire-base that were surrounded. We didn't take any hits. I heard there were less fortunate air-crews.

Any way good luck in your search for survivors. If I can help any, just give me a call or write a note.

Sincerely,
Mike Leiviska
Blaine, MN

April 23, 1987:

I am writing in regard to your ad in the VVA newspaper concerning Firebase Ripcord.

I was a corporal with the 101 Abn. Div., B Battery, 2/11 Artillery and was assigned with Alpha Battery with the 155 artillery to replace a gun that was blown up, and was there when the chopper was blown up on top of the Battery of 10 Deuces. We stayed out there until July 23 and were pulled back to Firebase Bastogne.

I would like to hear from:

Robert Weber, PFC
John Stubbs, Sgt.
Ronald Dixon, (DIXIE)

Staff Sgt. Dan Esposito
Lynn, MA

= INCOMING CON'T =

12 May 1987:

I saw the announcement about the Association in locator section of April '87 issue of VETERAN.

I was a Chinook helicopter pilot with 101st, (C.Co., 159th Bn - Playtex 17). I would like very much to join the Association or communicate with others who served in that AO, especially during 1969 - 1970 time frame.

Please write back before end of May as I work overseas and am only U.S.A. on vacation until then.

Best regards,
Jim McKinley
Langhorne, PA

13 May 1987:

As a member of an Assault Helicopter Company I visited Ripcord several times and my gunships helped some in 70.

I would appreciate any literature you may be able to send me concerning this operation.

Saw your notice in Army Times which I have taken since retiring from U.S.A.

Robert Bridges
McComb, MS

June 1987:

I would like to talk to anyone who knew Sgt. Stephen J. Harber. He was listed as MIA on July 2, 1970 at Firebase Ripcord. He was with C, 1/506th or C, 2/506th most likely. I am wearing a POW/MIA bracelet with his name on it.

Karen Daby
7601 62nd Ave. No. #3
New Hope, MN 55428
612-533-1650

June 17, 1987:

I was with the 101st Abn. Div., 2/506 INF., Co. B, 1st platoon. On or about April 1st 1970 we were on Ripcord all day and moved out at night, and re-grouped with A Company. I would like to know as to how I could be a member. I'm a life member of the 1st Cav. Assn. since I spent some time with them in 1972 with 1/7, C.Co.

I got out of the Army in 1977 and joined the Navy. I read your article in the Army Times a month or so ago and decided, why not. So I'm writing you now!

AKI G.R. Hatley
N.A.S. Kingsville, TX

June 1987:

I would like to receive the monthly newsletter, THE RIPCORD REPORT. I served with the 265th Radio Research Company, 101st Abn. Div. from May 1968 to July 1971. On my third tour in Nam I arrived back in Country on July 1, 1970 and was sent out to Ripcord July 4, 1970. This was because some of our guys were wounded & since I had experience I lucked out. I stayed till about July 19 or 20th.

Our job was to monitor VC/NVA voice radio transmissions and triangulate to pinpoint their location.

William I. Ayres
Kulpmont, PA

(6)

Vietnam medic struggling to tell his story

For several years now, Martin J. Glennon has had the need to tell his story.

It's been beating around in his brain, trying to get out. He has tried to satisfy the need twice already but it's still there. He's not sure why it's there. It just is.

Glennon grew up in the Brunswick area of Gary and graduated from Bishop Noll Institute. He started liberal arts training at Calumet College but ran into an English teacher who was not very liberal with the grades, insisting the subject not sound like a foreign language.

He would have flunked the course, he said, but dropped it instead. Dropping English put him high on the pop charts in the Pentagon "pick of the hits" where every listing came "with a bullet."

It was 1969 and the only legal lottery was the one that qualified someone 26 and under for an expense-paid trip to the Saigon Sheraton. It was a mere month before Glennon received "Greetings" from Uncle Sam.

"When I got the letter, I didn't care. I figured I would just go over (to Vietnam) and see what's going on. It wasn't until the first bullet

whizzed by my head that I knew it was not a game. They were playing for keeps."

There's nothing like a few ounces of lead close to the head to improve a person's educational aptitude. He trained as an army platoon medic and spent 6½ months in the jungles of Vietnam putting Band-Aids on bullet holes and passing out a rich assortment of malaria pills.

"They taught us how to deliver babies (a constant problem during combat) and take out appendixes (remember not to get the appendix confused with delivering a baby) but I mostly just tried to stop the bleeding and put in IVs of blood filler."

Glennon had only been in Nam three weeks when he made his first "house call." A scout leading the platoon picked up a body full of scrap metal from a boobytrap. The scout died on the way to the hospital.

Near the end of his jungle duty Glennon and his platoon of 75 men were caught in an ambush in the A Shau valley. The whole valley was the Viet Cong equivalent of an ant farm, an underground city connected by a maze of tunnels.

On July 22, 1970, near the army's



Phillip Wieland
Times staff writer

Commentary

Firebase Ripcord on the perimeter of the valley, Glennon's platoon spent the day pinned down by gunfire from an unseen enemy. Twelve men died and 51 were wounded. Two other medics were killed that day.

The average lifespan of a platoon medic in Nam was shorter than the sex life of a mayfly, but Glennon escaped the ambush with a minor shrapnel wound to the side of the head and a psychological need to know why he was spared.

He finished his Vietnam service with five months' duty in a base hospital and was back in the states by Christmas. He served out the final

seven months of his enlistment at Fort Knox, Ky.

Glennon said he was not a very religious person before going to Nam. He went to church on Sunday where he felt guilty about enjoying beer bouts with the boys during the week.

He discovered, possibly while trying to patch up a man with half his face blown away by a bullet, why there are allegedly no atheists in foxholes. He read the Bible five times while in Vietnam.

After mustering out he re-enrolled at Calumet College but eventually ended up at Florida's Liberty Bible College. He brought his minister's license to Black Oak, starting his own non-denominational ministry in a storefront church.

The comfort he found in the Lord, however, did not relieve the need to tell his story.

He started with a pamphlet in 1979, which he distributed to veterans groups around the country. One of the people who read the pamphlet was William R. Kimball, of California, who was putting together a book of first-hand accounts by

Vietnam veterans titled "Vietnam: The Other Side of Glory."

Kimball rewrote Glennon's experience as Chapter 11 of the book. Most of the material was taken from the additional details in Glennon's expanded 54-page book of his experiences.

The pamphlet and the book have not made the need go away. It has grown to a desire to include more details.

He no longer has his storefront church. With a wife and five children to feed, he found his father's insurance business in Black Oak a more secure source of financial support. He still does occasional weddings.

In his office, drawings of soldiers and the visions of war are evidence of his lingering turmoil almost 16 years later. He has copies of his book handy to sell and talks of the work begun on a new version.

"I have a strong drive to get the message out. I think people are interested. A lot of young people are interested."

It's a story Martin Glennon can't get out of his mind.



"THE TRAIL"

by: Charles F. Hawkins
CO, A/2-508, 30 May - 17 Nov. 1970

The trail wandered lazily, as if it had all the time in the world to wind its way through the rolling hills and shallow valleys. In some places it wasn't even a trail at all, but rather a hint at where a small animal might find the going easier. In other places it became wider, confusing itself with the thick matting of leaves on the floor of the dense tropical rain forest. On occasion, the trail would offer its scant width to a spider, webbing suspended in the stillness, waiting for the chance insect to fly into its trap. A kid, fresh from the streets of the Bronx, would miss it, and someone from the woodlands of Tennessee might. To the seasoned point team in 2d Platoon, Alpha Company, the trail stood out like a four lane interstate.

Its beginnings lay in a jumble of moss-covered rocks and ground water springs at the base of a hill they called Ripcord. From there, it wound for three kilometers down the hilly floor of the valley running southeast of Ripcord, and ended at another trail, more used and obvious. During the day, what sunlight that the jungle permitted, turned everything a mottled green and brown. At night, in the pitch-darkness, the trail whispered its existence through the phosphor of fungi on the leafy humus.

It was there - and it wasn't. A sigh you thought you heard. A wink you thought you saw.

"Do we take it, or not?" Unspoken words between two men who know each other well.

"Has it been used lately?" A shake of head; a flash of hand and fingers.

"No." Eyes flicker across the jungle-scape. "Spider web's still intact. See?" Kneeling. Pointing.

A nod. "We go."

The point man moves onto the wisp of a

trail. A pause. The slack man follows. In a few, silent seconds, they disappear. The rest of 2d Platoon, one soldier at a time, steps forward. This real estate is now theirs; the point team is their broker.

Some distance west, perhaps a kilometer, two men are moving easterly down a small finger of a major ridge that extends south of Ripcord. Like the men in the 2d Platoon, they move silently through the tangled brush and thick jungle. Unlike the Americans, they are wearing the khaki uniforms of the North Vietnamese Army. Over their shoulders and across their backs are slung AK-50s, the folding stock version of the AK-47. The thirty round magazines are full. The man in front is smaller, his features more sharp, than the full-bodied, rounder faced man who follows. Their black hair is uniformly cropped short. The smaller man wears sandals made of rubber tire tread; the larger man has the luxury of boots. To the casual observer they are both NVA. In fact, only the smaller man owes his allegiance to the government in Hanoi. The larger of the two is Chinese; an advisor; a guest who has come to see the war against the Americans.

There is no love lost between these two; no comradeship. For over two thousand years the Vietnamese and the Chinese have been enemies; have fought wars against one another; have conquered and been conquered in return. A thousand years before the Vikings discovered what would become the United States, the forefathers of these men spat on each other's graves and hurled curses against opposing gods.

The Vietnamese soldier from the north resents the presence of his Chinese companion. He is polite to the point of sarcasm. His subtle inuendoes drive home the point that is the Vietnamese, not the Chinese, that are fighting this war of liberation against the Americans. The Chinese soldier is aloof; condescending. The superiority of the Chinese Army goes unquestioned. They are the power in this part of the world - period.

Now, both men think their private thoughts as they move eastward. Their shared destination is a regimental supply depot several kilometers away, at the base of a hill the Americans call

Hill 805. The North Vietnamese is a sergeant in a reconnaissance unit, but a slowly healing wound from an American helicopter rocket has put him on light duty. His mission this day is to deliver a supply request from his commander. They have not had meat in several weeks, and their supply of medicines is critically low. They cross a small stream and continue eastward; on a course which will shortly intersect that of the 2d Platoon, Alpha Company.

The company CO has picked this day to be with the 2d Platoon, and has put his Command Post after their 2d Squad in order of movement. The seven man CP consists of: the CO, a company RTO (radio/telephone operator), a battalion RTO, a soldier to carry the secure radio set, an Artillery FO (forward observer), his RTO, and (unique to this company) an interpreter. Except for the FO and his RTO, who are new, the members of the CP average over six months combat experience. They are the nerve-center for Alpha Company; and they are good at what they do.

Function and competence are more important than rank in combat. This Company Commander is rarely called 'sir' or 'captain' in the field. Often, the men refer to him as 'the Old Man'. But, the name that is most frequently used is the name they gave him when he assumed command of the company - 'Charlie Oscar' - the phonetic letters for Commanding Officer. The men respect and trust him. He, in turn, is totally dedicated to them.

Charlie Oscar is a young man. His six foot plus height is stooped under the load of his rucksack and M-16. When he arrived in Vietnam, nearly five months ago, he weighed in at almost two-hundred pounds. He is now down to one-sixty. In two weeks he will turn twenty-four years old; the average age of his men is nineteen.

The war has taken its toll on this man in other ways as well. His wife has already suggested they get a divorce. The lack of national and military commitment to winning the war bothers him. He has seen men die, both as a platoon leader in Charlie Company and, more recently, as the Alpha Company Commander. Though this both angers and saddens him, he feels the weight of

responsibility even more. His wandering thoughts always come to focus on what he could have done better, or differently, to prevent this loss of life. All this, he internalized. They are private thoughts and feelings. Outwardly, he is another person; the professional soldier, the commander.

He is also a third person. His men see this person more than others see him. He is the man who will get them home alive. He is the man who talks to them; who listens to what they report; who hears their problems. He is the man who can out-shoot most of them with their own weapons. He is the man who knows where the enemy is; and how to defeat him. He is the man who keeps them safe on hill tops; who takes them 'hunting' in the valleys. He is the man who will 'walk point'; who sets ambushes for the enemy. He is the man who talks on the radios; who gets help; adjusts fire; brings in the close air support; calls medevacs... He is one of them, but not one of them. He is their Charlie Oscar.

The company RTO leads the CP, Charlie Oscar next, followed by the battalion RTO and the remaining members. They step, one-by-one, onto the trail. They separate; mindful of what this collection of radio antennas would indicate to an enemy observer. They move in silence; the whisper of cloth and the crush-crush of decayed leaves the only sound of their passing.

For months now, since the monsoon season sputtered to an end in April, the weather has been hot and dry. Recently, wind storms with gusts up to 45 knots, have buffeted the countryside. Helicopters have had a tough go of it. And, the men defending the fire base on Ripcord have felt the biting sting of wind blown grit and sand. Down in the valley, however, Alpha Company is only aware of the wind. They do not feel its effects, for the wind merely howls at the jungle, it does not penetrate it.

"Rest halt." A silent command from the point team. They have crested a small hill. There is another small hill two-hundred meters behind. Two hills. The terrain offers security.

"Rest halt." Silently, the word is signed back along the file.

Men, alternating, move left and right off of the trail; weapons outward. No one moves. It is hot; but not bad-hot. A few cigarettes are lit. The scratch-snap of zippo lighters die in the thick jungle. There is no other movement; no other noise.

The North Vietnamese and the Chinese are not halted. Silently, they labor up the side of a small draw; keeping to the low ground between two small hills. They do not sense, or hear, the presence of the 2d Platoon a scant two-hundred meters to their front.

Charlie Oscar sits; back against his rucksack, on the side of the trail, and rests. He is tired; as the gods are tired. But he is not a god; just a man. His t-shirt, sweat stained, with sleeves cut off; his helmet back on his head; legs splayed across the trail. The company RTO sits just ahead; the battalion RTO is a discreet distance behind; but within a second's grab of the radio handset. They do not split the trail, but are on the same side; security giving way to command prerogatives.

They are in a draw between two small hills; more on the backside, from where they've come. They are facing west. Rifles cradled in their arms; facing to the right. Awkward. But ready. Ahead of them are two men from the 2d Platoon; weary; watching. Behind them is the last squad of the platoon; among it, six new men. The jungle is thick. The winds have abated. The air is still.

The NVA soldier is thinking of his family. He carries pictures of his wife and small child in his wallet. There, also, are stamps for his next letter home. His wallet further contains the supply request from his commander; written on a scrap of note paper. He feels this weight of love and responsibility as his feet seek footholds on the hillside. He also has, in his possession, nude pictures of women from an American 'girlie magazine'. He grins. Later, this afternoon, while the others are resting, he will slip away and fuck the American bitches. His thoughts take him away from his festering shrapnel wound.

The Chinese thinks of his belt and the knife strapped to it. What a cheap knife it is. He would very much like to have a k-bar such as the Americans carry. But, he is stuck with this cheap knife. No identification. No wallet. No pictures from home. He must never exist. To the Americans, if he is captured or killed, he is just an unknown oriental. They will not know the difference. AK-50, knife, belt, uniform and boots; that is all. He is too large to be Vietnamese. Intuitively, he knows this, and slouches as he plods up the draw.

"Go now?" The slack man cocks his eyebrow.

The point man shifts; ass tired; bone weary. "Soon, man."

Charlie Oscar looks at his M-16. Clean. A good weapon; better than the AK. He looks at his company RTO. The RTO has taken his glasses off; relaxed; weary. Time to move out. The CO knows the word will trickle down the file in a moment or two. He shifts his rucksack a bit. The company RTO sits up; glasses still in his hand.

It's funny, Charlie Oscar thinks. All this time; I've never killed a man - knowingly; never even seen the enemy face to face. Two dozen fire fights; maybe more. These last seven days; lots of action. We must have killed some. Know we have. Seen blood trails. Hill 805. What a bitch. Had to have gotten some there. I want it - I don't want it. Jesus! Its time to go. What's with the point team?

California. The company RTO is lost in thought. Maybe Hawaii. The beaches. I could be there. God! Wouldn't it be great? Ice cream; sand; no jungle; no gooks. Just me and the world. Charlie Oscar needs me, though. Gotta take care of the Old Man. Damn glasses. Always getting dirty. Fuckin' ice-cold beer'd be great right about now.

Crunch-rustle. Rustle-crunch.

Before the ears hear; before the eyes see; every muscle and nerve ending come alive.

"Charlie Oscar!" No words. No look. Just a sense.

"I hear it." A sense back.

"They're coming, Charlie Oscar. I don't have my glasses on. They're coming. God! Tell me where they are." A scream in silence.

"Easy. Easy, man." Mind reassures mind. The CO's rifle shifts. "I got ya covered. No sweat. Whatever it is, I got it."

From the night of day they come. Two khaki clad enemy, armed with AK-50 death. Two of 'em. Right up on the Alpha CP.

Crunch-rustle. Step. Rustle-crunch. Step.

Into view they come; two enemy with close cropped hair. One after the other. Two. Could be a point team. No. Weapons slung. Not ready. Maybe a point team.

Charlie Oscar's M-16 is on semi-automatic.

Why doesn't anyone fire?

Crunch-rustle.

Doesn't anyone see? Doesn't anyone hear? Shoot them!

Time slows to a crawl. Every body movement takes an hour to complete. The enemy are fifteen feet away from the CO. They are not coming head-on, but at an angle. He can see the detail of their uniforms, the shape of their ears, the black stubble of hair at the nape of their necks. They are four paces from a tree which will mask them from view. Then, they will be upon the two men from 2d Platoon. One step - an hour.

I must fire. I have men down there.

A lead weight has descended on Charlie Oscar. He can not move. He can not draw a breath. Two steps - another hour.

Shoot them, goddamit! They will see your soldiers!

The mind is racing around the body; trying to get the arms to move; trying to get the hands to lift; trying to get the lungs to breathe. C'mon boy. Don't

freeze on me now. You can do it. React!

Three steps - time moves by in great, slow-motion chunks. Charlie Oscar's heart is pounding; slamming blood into the brain. The enemy are almost behind the big tree.

The adrenalin pump kicks in.

The lead weight goes away. The M-16 lifts from Charlie Oscar's lap. He doesn't aim; just points. He does not hold the butt-stock to his shoulder, but simply tucks it under his arm.

Eight years earlier, a sixteen year-old kid goes on his first moose hunt in Alaska. It has been his home since he could remember. Twenty miles back toward the Caribou Hills he finds his moose. It is his first; large, with spread antlers. He aims. He has buck fever. The safety on his rifle is still on. Off. He aims again. The 'shakes' get to him. The three-hundred magnum rattles in his hands. It will be impossible to fire, he thinks. I must do this, he knows he must. He is the man of the house. The moose will feed the family of three for a year. Steady. Fire. Fire again. Ka-pow! Ka-pow! The moose drops.

I am the commander. I am their leader. I must do this. I will kill - now!

Taanng! Taanng! Taanng!

High velocity, .223 caliber rounds zip across fifteen feet of jungle. They impact flesh and bone. The Vietnamese is down.

Shift slightly; point; fire. Taanng! Taanng! Taanng!

The Chinese senses the danger; but can not move. His Vietnamese guide begins to crumble. The Chinese takes a step; but no more. He feels a tremendous pressure deep in his chest. His heart bursts from the hydrostatic shock of the first M-16 round. His lungs rupture with the second. The third round shatters his spine. He is dead as he sags on the leafy ground.

It is over - but it is not over.

In Dubious Battle
by: Jim Fairhall

The epigraph to Keith William Nolan's "INTO LAOS" (Presidio Press, 408pp, 18.95), which describes the last major campaign involving U.S. troops in Vietnam, is a quote from Nietzsche to the effect that men will suffer willingly if they can find meaning in doing so. Meaning, of course, was in short supply for American soldiers at this stage of the war. The high morale and sense of purpose of 1965 had undergone a sea-change by 1970. Nolan's account of the Allied strike into Laos is also the story of this change.

The North Vietnamese Army wouldn't have survived long against U.S. firepower without sanctuaries. In May and June of 1970, American and South Vietnamese units swept through the border area of Cambodia, meeting little resistance and destroying huge caches of war materials. Stung, the NVA reacted with a build-up in Laos and in the A Shau Valley in the northern part of South Vietnam, next to the Laotian frontier. The American command decided to use its best remaining full combat division, the 101st, to clean up the A Shau that summer.

Americans had entered the A Shau Valley before. The Special Forces had maintained two camps there until they were driven out. The Marines had kicked tail there briefly and departed. And the 101st had been there, too, notably during Operation Apache Snow which involved the battle for Hamburger Hill. With Vietnamization well underway, the hot season of 1970 offered the last opportunity for U.S. grunts to chase the enemy from the man-high elephant grass and tripple-canopy jungle of that long, mist-shrouded, frightening valley.

Something happened to the 101st on the way to the A Shau. The NVA attacked first, putting a key forward firebase called Ripcord under virtual siege for three weeks and putting pressure on nearby firebases. On July 23, after over 400 American casualties, Ripcord was abandoned under fire. The A Shau

remained NVA territory.

The Ripcord operation may have disrupted a Communist drive on Hue and the surrounding lowlands. But the Allies still wanted a shot at the NVA's long-untouched sanctuary in Laos before Vietnamization was completed. The result was a two-phase campaign at the beginning of 1971: Operation Dewey Canyon II, which was American and limited to Vietnam; and Operation Lam Son 719, which sent Vietnamese ground forces with American air support into Laos.

The long-standing reluctance of the U.S. to cross the South Vietnamese border had been politically motivated, needless to say. Vietnamization was politically motivated. So, too, was the backing off from a showdown at Ripcord; and so were the Cambodian and Laotian incursions. This book reminds us forcefully that war, as Clausewitz observed, is an extension of diplomacy, and that the Vietnam War was especially political. Nolan does a good job of describing the political factors which hampered the Laotian campaign from the start. These included the conflicting objectives of General Abrams and President Thieu, the barring of American advisers from accompanying their Vietnamese units across the border, and the need for a propaganda coup by taking and occupying the Laotian town of Tchepone--a largely symbolic rather than strategically important objective.

Nolan gives us a sense not only of the politics, but of the logistics behind the move into Laos. Two engineer battalions revamped the northernmost stretch of Route 9--a narrow dirt trail untraveled by U.S. troops since 1968--with bulldozers, bridges and culvert crossways. The Marine base at Khe Sanh was reopened. Truck convoys, involving units from as far away as Cam Ranh Bay, rumbled night and day, creating huge traffic tie-ups.

We learn little about the Vietnamese--South or North--who bloodied each other in Laos during February and March of 1971. But we do learn much about the American soldiers who manned the

bases at Khe Sanh and Vandergrift or patrolled the boonies near the border or flew their choppers into the lead-strewn skies over Laos. On the whole, they did their jobs well and bravely. They belonged, however, to an army that was "perhaps the least motivated in U.S. history." Nolan tells the story--a familiar one by now, yet still unsettling--of drugs, fraggings, and racial conflicts among bored, angry soldiers in the rear areas. He cites causes such as the inadequacy of small-unit leadership and the lulling effect of long periods of no combat. In the end, though, the underlying cause was lack of meaning. We hadn't won, yet we were pulling out. What had we been fighting for? Why were we still there? What did it all mean? Few American soldiers could come up with satisfactory answers to these questions.

On February 7 a huge ARVN force entered Laos in a spirit of easy victory. They didn't realize that they would be facing 40,000 to 60,000 enemy troops and 200 tanks. By setting up a string of firebases, they allowed the NVA to surround and pin down isolated units. The ARVN commander had never led such a large force before, and the inevitable problems in coordination were exacerbated by rivalries among his fellow generals and the absence of U.S. advisers. Though American air support was reliable--often outstanding--there were breakdowns, the worst being when the ARVN 3d Airborne Battalion was "abandoned" in favor of a rescue operation for two downed American pilots. The South Vietnamese and the Americans differed as to the scope and aim of the campaign. The Vietnamese wanted a quick in-and-out strike. The Americans wanted a longer stay followed by a fighting withdrawal through the A Shau Valley. Unbeknownst to Abrams or Nixon, Thieu had a secret plan to end the operation if 3,000 ARVNs were killed. As Nolan understates, "Relations between the U.S. and ARVN were not superb."

Nolan depicts well the air war over Laos. This involved 90,000 helicopter sorties into "the worst concentration of fire U.S. aircrews experienced in the

Vietnam War, frail Hueys going through WWII-style flak barrages." No altitude was safe. General Sidney Berry, commander of air operations, was nearly blown out of the sky by the 76mm main gun of a PT76 tank. Choppers flew into 37mm and 57mm flak at 8,500 feet over Tchepone. The "semi-controlled chaos" of hot LZs was no better. One Huey pilot explained to a reporter why he seldom wrote home: "What am I supposed to say? That I took fire eight times today, and that if I had stayed on those LZs five seconds longer each time, I'd have been dead?"

Still, the chopper pilots and jet pilots did their jobs. So did the truckers pulling convoy duty through the red dust on Route 9, and so did the artillerymen at Khe Sanh and Vandegrift, and so did the grunts humping the hills or accompanying the armored columns. The mutiny of Bravo Troop, which drew press coverage in the States, was an exception. The men who ghosted in the rear on phony profiles were exceptions also. But most American soldiers called on to serve in the Laotian campaign--though some may have smoked grass or smack during off-duty hours and cursed the pointlessness of it all--were there when it counted.

As Nolan emphasizes, the South Vietnamese did their duty, too, for the most part. They took Tchepone on March 5. They fought hard, often holding positions against numerically superior forces. The infamous scenes of ARVN soldiers clinging to the skids of retreating choppers stemmed at least in part from the difficulties of an orderly withdrawal--one of the trickiest of all military maneuvers. They had attacked the enemy in his stronghold and were fiercely counterattacked. At one point during what Nolan calls the "Great Withdrawal," it took American planes to stop a North Vietnamese tank column from pursuing an ARVN unit to the border.

Statistically, it could be argued that Lam Son 719 was a victory. Though the South Vietnamese suffered many times over the official (and understated) U.S. figure of 219 KIA, they accounted for a majority of the estimated 20,000 NVA dead. On the other hand, their

withdrawal did at times look very much like a rout. And, if the campaign bought time for South Vietnam, it didn't buy very much time--about four years.

Nolan rightly criticizes the press for the negative tone of much of its coverage. And he rejects the "theory that ARVN failed so miserably in Laos that the final Communist invasion of 1975 was a foregone conclusion." But we still look at Lam Son 719 in the retrospective light of that final debacle. If a victory, it was a dubious victory--one achieved in an atmosphere of growing meaninglessness which affected not only the journalists, but also the soldiers who fought in it.

Nolan, who has published a book on the battle for Hue, must have found "INTO LAOS" a challenge to write. He had to make sense of a controversy-ridden, two-month campaign involving tens of thousands of troops and dozens of units in different areas. On the whole, he does this well. In the process he tells many stories of individual soldiers. These are fascinating, even though I wished more than once for one sustained account focusing on a smaller cast of characters. Nolan's complex material didn't allow him such simplicity, but he could have made things simpler for his readers by supplying more than a single, incomplete map. A list of units (especially American units) correlated with their AOs during the operation would have helped also. The book has no photographs; this isn't necessarily a drawback, though, especially if no first-class photos were available. In the final analysis, Nolan has written a very readable history of a crucial campaign during the last, demoralized, yet often heroic stage of American participation in the Vietnam War.

WARNING ORDER!

For Friends and Survivors of Ripcord

Mark your calendars, round up the kids, tell your bosses, and get a new pair of blue jeans.

OCTOBER 23, 24, 25, 1987
(Fri. Sat. Sun.)

WASHINGTON, DC

We'll have rates at one of the local hotels and shuttle bus service from and to airports. Planned/unplanned tours, fun things to do for all, and a good time.

Many, many more details to follow.

Call (collect) at 703/620-3534 or write Chuck Hawkins, 11603 Belmont Drive, Oakton, VA, 22124 if you plan to attend. Tell me how many will be in your party and if you want to arrive early or stay late.



"It's no picnic, but where else could a kid like me meet Bob Hope, Billy Graham, Cardinal Spellman and John Steinbeck?"

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST



"REFLECTIONS IN THE SNOW"

April, 1987

When I left Vietnam I swore that I'd never dig another foxhole. That promise was broken last winter after a blizzard brought 8 inches of snow with 40 to 50 mile an hour winds.

On Monday morning I found that a 5 foot drift had closed my driveway. After digging a trench to the mail box I sat down and started watching my two sons play in the snow. Danny was digging a hole on one side of the "path" I had dug while Eric was doing the same thing on the other side. They were each building a fort for protection during the up-coming snowball fight.

Eric had selected the very top of the driveway drift for his position which gave him the advantage. Because of this, Danny started digging trenches and holes all around the base of the hill. Eric knew this was bad news for him so he asked me for a little help.

I must have gotten a little carried away because, after a couple hours of building the best damn mini-firebase you ever saw, the two boys decided they didn't want to fight after all. The battle was over before it got started and not one snowball had been thrown!

Danny and Eric found another drift to play in, leaving me alone with my thoughts about war,

In the last couple years I've learned a lot about the Ripcord operation from Rod Soubers, the Ripcord newsletter and at the reunion in Whippany. During July of 1970 there was only one small circle of earth that I was aware of or interested in and that was the top of a little hill called 805. I had no idea what was going on outside of that circle, not even that Chuck Hawkins' Alpha Company was near enough to give us some much needed help on that first night of Hell.

I stood in the CP bunker at the center of my re-enforced snow drift and let my mind take me back to July of 1970 and the Ripcord operation.

It was then that I decided to use the log records from Hill 805 and my memory to write this Retrospective about that battle.

"HILL 805"

July 12, 1970

7:55am:

Delta company CA'd to a small LZ some distance from hill 805. It was quiet. Too damn quiet! You could feel the gooks. I walked rear security for the company and never felt so alone in my life. We could hear them prepping 805 in the distance and the explosions were getting louder as we got closer.

After reaching the base of 805 we were told to form a line and move up. Just like in the movies, we assaulted the hill in waves. Thank God for the heavy prep. We got to the top without contact and started checking things out. There were a few blown up bunkers and a couple NVA bodies. In a way there seemed to be a feeling of relief. We had CA'd into this bad fucking AO and John Wayne'd it up one nasty hill without contact. All right, there's nothing here, lets go back to the bush.

That, however, wasn't our mission....We started digging in.

Hill 805 had been blown all to hell. There were a few large boulders at the very top and ragged tree stumps everywhere. Blown up trees and branches covered the sides of the hill providing a million places for the gooks to hide. At the bottom of the hill there was a wall of green jungle. We were, to say the least, extremely vulnerable.

10:22pm:

The first attack came from an unknown size enemy force 250 meters Northwest of Hill 805. As far as I remember everyone was still awake. We were on a self imposed full alert. Another man and myself were sitting near the top of the hill just below one of the big rocks. After such a long day and not much sleep the night before it was nice to kick back a little. It was real quiet and peaceful.

The silence was suddenly broken when the first of 30 or 40 RPG's came slamming into the hill. As we ran toward the foxhole below an RPG went off behind us and the guy with me got some shrapnel in his back. The battle was in full force before we ever reached our position with loud explosions and small arms fire hitting all over the hill. Delta Company had opened up with everything we had. It was an impressive display of the firepower that a line Company with full supporting fire is capable of producing. I guess the thing that struck me the most was how damn loud it all was. Mortars from Ripcord, Cobras, Air strikes and a flareship were called in. Captain Straub was doing his job well. The belching sound and steady stream of melting tracers from the mini-guns that ripped into the jungle wall below almost made us cheer. The flares had made the trees and stubble below do a shadowy death dance that I'll never forget. I have no idea how long the firefight lasted but it seemed like hours. It was quiet now. So damn quiet that it made my ears swell until I thought they would burst....The battle was over!

There had been 16 men wounded during the contact. Three were evacuated to the Camp Evans Med station during, or shortly after, the firefight.

July 13th.

At first light the evacuation of our remaining wounded began and patrols were sent out. There were 4 RPG's with boosters found lying in the open with indications of enemy activity in the area. Wire, ammo, M-60 barrels and replacements came in....We were staying!

The Company was shifted slightly around the hill and we began building our bunkers. Busted up tree branches were placed in front and on top of our new position. Wire was strung and claymores put out. The rucks of the wounded were stripped of ammo, food and water. Everyone worked on their fighting positions with silent determinationThen we waited.

The 1st platoon sector faced a saddle leading to a small LZ with Ripcord beyond, 2nd platoon faced the ridge line

leading up to hill 805, and 3rd platoon completed the perimeter along a steep dropoff.

It was just about dark when we got the word to keep our heads down. Straub was walking our DT's in as close as possible. He wanted to show the NVA that we were ready and to show us that we weren't alone. Shrapnel from the friendly fire whistled over our heads. It made me feel better.

July 14th.

2:03am:

We received an unknown number of RPG's, satchel charges, and small arms fire from an unknown size enemy force 20 meters to the Northwest of 805. The hill exploded! This time they were close.....Very close. I started rolling grenades down the hill and filling magazines for the other guys in our bunker because my FUCKING gun had jammed.....I was pissed!! The M-60 to our left was sending a steady stream of tracers down the hill. It's barrel was bright red and I could see the piston pumping. Airstrikes, flareship, ARA, Quad 50's, Artillery and Mortars, from Ripcord and another firebase, pounded in around us.

Cobras were circling us like vultures. Such fire power, yet they kept coming. What drives these men that we call gooks?

Suddenly there was silence. Those fucking shadows were the only things that moved....Then our platoon Sergeant appeared, "First platoon was hit hard. There are men lying all over the side of the hill. I need one man from each position to come with me. We have to re-enforce that side!" We looked at each other without saying a word. I was the closest one to the door so climbed out of the bunker.

We went up the hill and around the big rock at the top. As we started down into the 1st platoon area I stumbled, stopped, then looked down. There were three men lying in a row. I thought they were asleep. After looking at them for a couple seconds I realized that they were dead. Then I turned and followed my platoon sergeant to an empty foxhole. "You stay here and keep your eyes open!"

I was suddenly alone. I looked around and saw one man in the position to my left. There was an empty foxhole to my right. I hope my damn gun don't jam again....I should have brought more frags!

Someone stopped and talked to the guy on my left, then came up to me and said "Rat's down there and he's still alive. I want you to help me carry him up." "Where?" "He's right down there, can't you see him? He's still alive damn it and when I come back we're gonna bring him up!"....I was alone again.

A flare went up and I saw someone heading down the hill. He turned, looked at me and said "Get some BALLS about you man and help me, he's still alive!" I went down the hill and the two of us carried Rat to my new position. He had been shot in the head but was still alive. Doc came and put a field dressing on his right temple. I held the bandage until the Medivac came. "Damn it Rat, don't die man!"

3:53am:

A Medivac was above us. Doc and a couple other guys came and took Rat from me. We put out suppressive fire and a basket was lowered for Rat and another man. It seemed like the chopper swayed back and forth above our heads forever.

Rat died just before reaching the rear.

4:26am:

Another Medivac was completed for 1 man.

At first light I started the long walk back to my platoon. There were guys moving around but nobody talked. I tried to rub the blood off my shirt... "FUCK!" There had been 9 men wounded and 6 killed. I wanted to sit down and cry when I reached my squad but couldn't. A Medivac came for 1 man at 7:53am, and for 6 men at 9:45am. The KIA's were carried to the little LZ and taken out after the wounded.

Patrols were sent out and the wire was repaired. There were 4 RPG's, an RPG launcher, 1 AK-47, a bag containing ten 1/2 pound satchel charges and 5 NVA bodies found in the area.

2:38pm and 3:25pm:

There were two Airstrikes called in on suspected NVA positions around Hill 805. Ammo, M-60 barrels, more wire, C's and water came in. A sign was nailed to a tree above the 2nd platoon sector that read, "Welcome to Ft. Courage - F Troop."

Still no Sleep!!

10:53pm:

We received an unknown number of RPG's, satchel charges, and small arms fire from an unknown size enemy force 20 meters to the South and Southeast of 805. The hill exploded again. One man from 2nd platoon was killed and another wounded. I started rolling grenades again. Mortars, artillery and the Quad 50's on Ripcord created a wall of protection for us until the ARA and flareships were on station to help. The support we got was fast and fantastic. The NVA withdrew in an unknown direction and the shadows replaced them with their silent dance of death.

July 15th.

1:59am:

We received thirty-seven 82mm enemy mortar rounds that impacted all around the hill. Mortars and artillery were called in on the suspected NVA tubes.

3:57am:

Three trip flares went off 15 meters to the West of 805. We opened up with small arms fire and Artillery was called in. A first light check revealed indications of numerous NVA bodies that had been dragged through the area, a wallet containing misc. documents and photos, misc. clothing with no indication of enemy unit, two first aid packs, five 1/2 pound satchel charges, two RPG rounds, two AK-47's, one pair of bloody sandals and a blood trail leading Southwest. The blood trail was followed until it ran out. When the patrol returned a Medivac was called in for another man that had been wounded the previous night, believed to have a collapsed lung.

By now I had become numb with fatigue and time had lost all meaning. Fear and hatred had come and gone. All I wanted to do was leave this hill with no more pain to my family....My Delta Family!

3:25pm:

Our log bird had a power failure and went down on the little LZ across from 1st platoon. First platoon sent security to the LZ.

3:45pm:

A Chinook came to pull the bird out and received a heavy volume of enemy fire...the strap broke. The extraction had failed. The pilots were swept away on a rope ladder dangling below another slick. I guess they didn't want to spend the night with us. The door gunners stayed until morning.

6:45pm:

Three 82mm enemy mortar rounds impacted 40 meters to the West of 805. Nobody was hurt.

July 16th.

2:46am:

A trip flare went off to the East and a mechanical ambush detonated to the West. We opened up and immediately received 30 RPG's, satchel charges and small arms fire from the West, Southeast and Southwest. The main direction of the attack was from the West and Southeast. Artillery, mortars, AFA, Stinger and Skyspots were called in. Flareships and basketball lit up the area for us until the contact ended at 3:04am.

3:17am:

An unknown size enemy force was observed 250 meters North of Hill 805 moving toward our location. We engaged them with small arms fire and AFA. The enemy withdrew in an unknown direction without returning fire.

4:13am:

A mechanical ambush detonated to the North of Hill 805. The area was engaged with organic weapons fire. The NVA did not return fire.

A first light check of the area was made revealing 2 NVA killed by mortars, 2 AK-47's, 5 full AK-47 magazines, 2 pouches containing five 1/2 pound satchel charges each, 50 AK-47 rounds in a leather pouch, 1 knife, 5 Chicom grenades, and 4 bottles of an unknown type liquid.

7:10am:

First platoon secured the downed logbird from a distance because it looked like it had been tampered with. A rope used to secure the rotar blade had been removed and a small compartment in the bird had been opened.

7:15am:

A Pink Team was on station for us.

8:31pm:

We engaged suspected enemy movement 100 meters Southeast of Hill 805 with small arms fire and ARA was employed.

8:55pm:

Col. Lucas indicated that they had intercepted an NVA radio transmission. A Kit Carson scout translated saying the NVA were massing for an attack on Hill 805.

11:58pm:

One of our mechanical ambushes detonated 150 meters to the West of Hill 805. Artillery and 81mm mortars were employed.

July 17th.

12:06am:

There was suspected enemy movement to the West and North of Hill 805. ARA, Artillery, and 81mm mortars were employed.

2:30am:

A mechanical ambush detonated and a trip flare went off to the West of 805. We engaged the area with organic weapons fire. The enemy returned fire with satchel charges and small arms then withdrew in an unknown direction. ARA and Artillery were employed.

2:36am:

We received an unknown type of C/S round.

A first light check of the area was negative.

5:00pm:

A chopper took fire while a sensor team was being lowered by a ladder to the little LZ across from First platoon. The sensor and equipment were dropped in, but one man fell from the ladder breaking his foot. Permission was requested to abort the mission due to the time required for

movement to the NDP site. A Medivac was called in for the injured man. The pilot did not have commo with us and didn't ask for smoke.

The decision was finally made to get us the FUCK off that Hill!!

We didn't waste any time filling in our bunkers. First platoon took the point and headed toward the little LZ with Third platoon right behind them. Second platoon was to stay and blow up the gear we couldn't carry. I remember walking slowly through the First platoon sector where we had been hit so hard on the second night. I thought about Rat but still couldn't cry. We moved down the hill past a couple NVA bodies that had been blown to shit. We would stop on the other side of the LZ and wait for Second platoon to re-join us. We were off the hill but not out of the woods yet.

7:00pm:

First platoon put security out along a trail Northwest of the LZ. We were walking past them when our Kit Carson Scout decided to kill himself with a grenade. One man from First platoon, the scout, and a man from Third were killed. There were 7 men, including Captain Straub, that were wounded.

Second platoon re-joined us and Medivacs were called in. I was sent to help secure the LZ and had to face Hill 805. It seemed strange to point my M-16 toward the hill where the First platoon had been fighting so hard the last few nights. A few NVA sniper rounds were fired at the Medivac.

It was getting dark so we moved out and set up for the night. I remember it was a very small NDP. We were to be extracted in the morning.

I'm not sure if the NVA didn't know where we were or just decided to leave us alone but we weren't attacked that night.

July 18th.

At first light we humped to a long narrow LZ for the extraction. Everything went fine until my bird came in. As I ran past the door gunner the chopper took sniper rounds in its tail. The

pilot took off with me dangling out the door. Two guys grabbed my arms and yanked me in. Just as I turned to sit down the chopper reached tree-top level, banked, and dove into a valley to pick up speed. I slid out the fucking door. I remember reaching back with both arms finding nothing to grab but air. There was nothing under my ass when I felt a solid jerk on my ruck. Someone had saw me going out and had grabbed the top rail of my rucksack frame. In July of 1986 I found out who that man was.... "Thanks Bull!"

The last bird of the extraction took heavy enemy fire and had to circle. One squad of men stood at the edge of the LZ watching the NVA run up the hill toward them as that brave pilot came back in.

The last of Delta Company was safely taken out of the Ripcord area.

July 18-20.

Delta Company went to Camp Evans, then to Eagle Beach for standown.

July 20-23.

Delta Company went to Phu Bai for refresher training.

July 24th.

Delta Company moved by air to Camp Evans where we stayed overnight.

July 25th.

Delta Company CA'd from Camp Evans back into the mountains.

From Shakespear's "Henry V"...

But we...shall be remembered;
we few, we happy few,
we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
shall be my brother;...

"BLACKIE"
D 2/501

"CATCH 22"

For those of you that got your last newsletter with 17 cents postage due, I apologize.

When we took them in to be mailed an official representative of our local postal service weighed one and told us they would go for 22 cents each. We licked and stuck 128 individual stamps to the letters and off they went.

Now I know, like the military, the post office never makes mistakes so obviously the 22 cent stamp weighed just enough to put the letter over the 1 oz. limit. In other words it cost 17 cents to put a 22 cent stamp on a 1 oz. letter.

"BLACKIE"

As you can see we have been able to deliver on our promise for a quick follow-up to the last newsletter. You will see Blackie's subsequent investment in a new printer for his word processor has been worth it's weight in gold.

A fat list of new contacts is featured. New/old faces are always welcome and represent a strong indicator of the interest that continues to exist for Ripcord and those who were there.

This months retrospectives by Hawkins and Blackman are top-rate. Two of the best stories ever I've seen on the Ripcord A.O.

John Mihalko (2/506 Recon) and I had a lengthy conversation the other night. We were bemoaning equally painful job situations of late. That caused us to reflect on the simplicity of our experience in Vietnam in terms of our simple but uniquely solid relationships with those around us.

We discussed how much like the "LT" in the letter to the "Sporting Crew" (last issue) we related to those around us even now. We do tend to measure people now by people we knew then. And yes, "Fuck them if they don't measure up".

We talked about why the newsletter was important.. to us.. and to you. We came to the conclusion that each issue takes us back to those simpler times. When relationships meant something. In fact they had been the only thing that made Vietnam bearable at times.

Thru this newsletter we go back each issue. Sometimes we deal with the bad, sometimes the good. But like Vietnam we walk thru it together.

A final word on Association business. This is the last newsletter that we have access to Blackie's copying source. And although since last issue we have had some good response from some of you we're still looking for a solution to our copier dilemma.

Come hell or high water we'll continue to find a way to get the Ripcord Report to you. And in the same vein I know we can continue to depend on this group for support. As two of my best friends (Bartyles & James) always put it, "And we thank you for your support"

See you next issue,

C. Collins
July, 1987

= NOTES =

The Vietnam Veterans of Illinois are planning a reunion for anyone that served under Major Mark "ZIPPO" Smith with 1/506 during 1969/70. For information about this reunion contact Mike Miller (C 1/506), 135 Stahl, Washington, IL 61571

