



RIPCORDER REPORT



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

Issue # 127

Aug 2021

COVID Delta variant plays havoc with the Ripcord Reunion

After last year we had hoped that we could go back to holding our Ripcord Reunions. As of May 2021 it was looking good as more and more people were getting the vaccine and the COVID cases were down all across the nation. By June things hinted at a potential problem and the cases started to rise. OK! Most of us are vaccinated and surly we will be fine.

As August rolled around we found the center of the new Delta variant of COVID is pounding our reunion site in Springfield, Missouri. Uh oh!? Well, we think it will be over by the time October rolls around so maybe we will be alright.

Then we start hearing that as you near 8 months after your vaccination, you become vulnerable. While you probably will only get a mild case, you can spread it and if you have underlying conditions it can be a problem. Suddenly we are looking at meeting in an area where the highly contagious Delta variant of COVID is rampant when many of our vaccines will be on the low ebb of their viability and not being able to get the booster until October of later.

Knowing our crowd which is generally over 72 years old and many have underlying ailments added to their longing to see their friends once more, it does not seem to be smart to bring us all together in closed spaces for four days. Thus the Board of Directors voted to once more cancel the reunion.

All members who have paid for their Ripcord Registrations for 2020 or 2021 will be credited with a paid-up registration for 2022. However, if you would prefer a refund please contact me at:

ltwidjeskog@aol.com

Lee Widjeskog

493 Stillman Ave.

Bridgeton, NJ 08302

Or call at 856-451-1108.

The Association is solvent and returning the money will not be an issue.

Next year we will send out registration forms to all who are paid in advance for the 2022 Reunion

We have previously contracted with the University Plaza Hotel to hold a reunion in October 2022. We have booked the time period of 5 to 8 October 2022. The hospitality room will open on Wednesday 5 October, Golf on 6 October, and the banquet on 8 October with Sunday 9 October the "Get away day".

Ripcord Reunion 2022

We have booked the time period of 5 to 8 October 2022
with the University Plaza Hotel, Springfield, MO.

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.

- Rick Hahn E 2/506
- Ken Lilley A & HHC 2/506
- Audrey Wrightsell : To the memory of David Johnson and Randy Burdette A 2/11
- Ben Harrison 3rd BDE
- Robert Wright A 2/506
- Vincent Priola B 2/506
- Leland Tremblay D 2/506
- Linda Parson: In memory of Michael Griffin HHC 2/506

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

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



Opinions expressed in submitted material are not necessarily those of the editorial staff. We reserve the right to reject any material deemed to be inappropriate. We also reserve the right to edit all submissions, but we will make every effort to maintain the writer's concept and meaning. Please be brief and concise.



Join us on Facebook group
Ripcord Association

**Visit our website at
www.ripcordassociation.com**

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

ltwidjeskog@aol.com

or

postal mail to:

[Lee Widjeskog](#)
493 Stillman Ave
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

Everyone would love to hear from you.

RIPCORD REPORT

Ripcord Report is a publication of the **Ripcord Association**, and is the authoritative voice of history for the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord.

Ripcord Report

www.ripcordassociation.com

Editor: Lee Widjeskog

Phone: 856-451-1108

E-mail: ltwidjeskog@aol.com

Design & Layout

Frank Marshall

E-mail: mail@ripcordassociation.com



**Visit our website at
www.ripcordassociation.com**

Read the **Ripcord Report** on line
Daily updates ● History
and much more

The Judds Retire

Bob and Red Judd have been the face of the Ripcord Association at the reunions in some form since 2001. As Fred Spaulding tried to fill a need for someone to handle the transportation and storage of the unit flags and store merchandise, he soon found his answer in the Judds. By 2003 they were hauling flags, coolers and merchandise from each reunion then back to Michigan. Each year they loaded their pickup and headed for the reunion, stored the items in their room and made sure the flags and guide-ons were properly displayed. Several times a day they sold items to the Ripcord members and helped with the annual raffle. Once the reunion was over, it was all repacked and hauled back to Michigan. It was stored and sometimes items were sold to members when possible. They have continued to do this each year through 2019. Then, because we were going to be in Springfield, Missouri for a few years, the Association rented a storage locker to cut down on the transportation.

By 2006 the Judds were working hand in hand with the Widjeskogs who handled the registrations and coordinated with the hotels. Fred Spaulding continued to locate hotels and schmooze with the hotel sales people.

After 20 dedicated years of service, Bob and Red have decided to call it quits. Their health has not improved as with the rest of us and they want to be certain the equipment can be delivered and set up at future events so others have offered to take over.

Bob and Red will still come to the reunions when health permits, but they will be on the side lines.



JERSEY RAMBLINGS

by Lee Widjeskog



Presently here in New Jersey on the 8th of August the weather is OK. This will soon be back into the 90's and the humidity up in the 60 to 70 percent. Ahh!! Summer! Kathy and I have been wondering about the country trying to get things set up for the October reunion in Missouri. Travel is not as casual as it once was. We have received our COVID shots but are still concerned. We hope and recommend that all attendees to the reunion get their shots before attending. We have to do what we can to protect those who may not be able to receive a shot due to medical problems.

The hotel in Missouri has essentially a brand new staff so we are working to get along with them and their regulations. They are trying but there are things that are out of their control such as hiring workers. The people in Springfield seem to be doing fine and there are plenty of people in the stores. Most were without masks. This latest outbreak involves the "Delta" variant that is much more contagious. Recent information indicates that as you get into the later months after getting your COVID vaccine, it wears down making you more susceptible to the virus. The good news is most are not heavily impacted if they have a vaccination. The bad news is they can spread the virus for a period of time after infection. Good news is a booster shot will be available 8 months after your second shot. CDC recommends wearing masks whenever you are in crowded areas with people of unknown exposure. This describes our reunions.

Rather than take a chance with our membership, the Board of Directors voted to cancel this year's reunion. The decision, like most things about COVID was not unanimous.

So once more, I have to announce that we will wait till next year! Location is the same and the dates are 5 October thru 8 October 2022. This is like the movie "Groundhog Day" where we keep doing it over till we get it right!

Lee Widjeskog

A 2/506 1970



Diorama Donation

Joe Moyer 2/320 Field Artillery in 1970 and Lee Widjeskog A 2/506 1970, teamed up to provide the South Carolina State Museum a 105mm artillery shell for their display.

Lee, being in Infantry, of course, had the projectile for which he had often called and received but usually on the NVA. While looking through an old chicken hatchery Lee discovered an old 105mm artillery projectile. What he found had been milled but never armed or painted. How the owner of the hatchery had acquired it is not known but it was apparently used as a heavy door stop in the garage. The new owner had no need for it and was glad to see it leave.

A year or two later, Lee, while attending Frank Marshall's wedding to Dee in South Carolina, met Frank's cousin Joe. In conversation, he discovered that Joe served with the 2/320 Field Artillery during the same time Frank and Lee were in Alpha Company 2/506. Joe mentioned that he had a 105 shell casing he got from someone in his volunteer fire company in New Jersey. This also makes sense because after the projectile is fired for the infantry, the artillery is left with the empty shells. Lee offered Joe his projectile but they while they discussed it, they never were able to get together.

Time rolls on and as the diorama of Fire Support Base Ripcord neared completion in the State Museum of South Carolina, the museum historical director put out a call for a 105mm round that might be nice for the public to view as well. Joe and Lee joined up to produce what you see here. It now sits in the South Carolina State Museum in Columbia being prepared for the official opening on March 26, 2022. The diorama is open to the public at this time and can be readily seen from all directions including overhead.



Nominations for the Board

Anyone who wishes to run for the board of Directors of the FSB Ripcord Association should contact Lee Widjeskog at 856-451-1108, ltwidjeskog@aol.com or by mail at 493 Stillman Ave. Bridgeton, NJ 08302. You must be a regular member and not an associate to sit on the board.

Thus far we have three nominations in the form of Frank Marshall (A2/506), Peter Meloro (C 2/506) and Lee Widjeskog (A 2/506). Nominations must be received prior to the election at the annual business meeting on 9 October, 2021.

Since the reunion has been cancelled, anyone wishing to be nominated should contact Lee and if needed an election by mail will be conducted. Nominations must be received by Lee before 9 October 2021.



Frank Marshall
A2/506



Peter Meloro
C 2/506



Lee Widjeskog
A 2/506



Ripcord on Facebook

by Anthony Chritchlow



I hope your summer was good. It looks like we are going not done with this covid 19.

Our face book page has been growing at a steady rate. I don't get too many Ripcord vets joining. As of 8/23/2021 we now have **1010 members** on our page. Thanks to everyone that have posted articles messages and pictures on our page. A special thanks to Freddie Harris for his pictures.

I hope to see everyone next year at our reunion. I was looking forward to this year's reunion but it just can not be. So! Everyone take care be safe get your covid shots if you haven't already.

Be safe

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

(The Day I Thought I Might Die)

For seventeen straight days Firebase Ripcord had been under attack by mortar fire, rocket propelled grenades, .51-caliber heavy machine gun fire and small arms fire, yet the soldiers on the hilltop remained steadfast in their defense of the perimeter. Concurrently, the line companies working the AO around the firebase had been engaging in brutal firefights and had bravely kept the enemy at bay. But the enemy was continuing to build in strength and they were emboldened to step up their attacks on Ripcord as American troops were being extracted from the surrounding areas. This was the scenario that led up to the events that took place on the afternoon of the July 18, 1970.

The day had begun with a barrage of mortar fire that was just a preamble to events that would take place several hours later. That afternoon, as a CH-47 Chinook helicopter carrying a full sling of 105MM artillery rounds attempted to lower its load alongside the 105 battery's ammo bunker, it became an easy target for the enemy's .51-caliber machine gun. Despite all the skirmishes that had taken place outside the perimeter, the machine gun, notoriously referred to as a copter killer, was still very much active in the jungle below. As the hovering craft lowered the ammo toward the ground it was riddled with bullets. The metal-piercing projectiles slammed into the fuselage and rotor mechanism with hollow thuds and metallic clangs. The Chinook strained to release its payload and vacate the area but its blades no longer supplied lift and the Chinook tumbled to the ground. Within moments it was engulfed in flames and one of its crew members perished after being pinned under the craft while trying to escape. Making a bad situation worse was the fact that a fuel bunker in close

proximity to the drop-off point was also set ablaze. Flaming fuel flooded the area and spilled over the edge of the hill.

A devastating inferno was thus set in motion.

Everyone on the firebase was quickly aware that something was drastically amiss. We had become accustomed to the sound of explosions and puffs of smoke but this was like nothing we had seen or heard before. Black billowing clouds from the top of the hill rose a hundred and fifty feet into the sky and were rapidly carried to the north by a strong wind. The air was permeated with the scent of burning JP-4 aviation fuel and expended ordinance. The intensity of the heat quickly caused the artillery rounds to cook off, releasing their contents of shrapnel, white phosphorous, and tear gas throughout the surrounding area. Beehive rounds, carrying thousands of one inch long darts called flechettes, exploded and sent their contents skyward. Once aloft, these pointed little objects righted themselves and fell back to earth where they randomly became embedded into the dirt, the ammo boxes and sandbags throughout the firebase. We had endured so much on the firebase and we had withstood everything up to that point, but this was way outside our comprehension and it gave us a sinking feeling that the entire firebase would soon be lost. From where I was positioned on the downward slope from Impact Rock, I stole a glance from my bunker and witnessed the total annihilation of the entire upper level of the hill. My heart sank.

Shortly afterwards, our five-man mortar squad received a call on the landline informing my squad leader that he had to send someone to the top of the hill to help put out fires. The anguish on his face was evident as he relayed the message to us. He didn't want to make that decision. I looked around and saw the dazed looks of my fellow squad members. It was an unbearable moment. Each man in that dank bunker was fearful of being the one selected. To go up the hill was almost certain death.

"I'll do it," I said.

I couldn't believe those words came out of my mouth. I didn't want to go but the looks on their faces impacted me so deeply that I couldn't bear to see any of them having to do it. There's an adage in the Army that you never volunteer for anything because it seldom turns out well. I was about to prove that true. I'd spent my whole tour up to that point trying to avoid volunteering or establishing emotional attachments and had actually gone to great lengths to keep people at a distance. I had



even tried to build my own private bunker at the first firebase I was on because I didn't want to be close to anyone. Even in basic training I'd been called out for not using the "buddy system." My drill sergeant had ordered me into his office one evening after chow to explain the system to me. "You need to learn to depend on other people," he said. And I argued that I had been doing everything that was required of me up to that point. But the troubled look on his face and his hesitance to carry the conversation further indicated that he wasn't buying it and that we were going to be sitting there a long while until I acquiesced. "I'll try," I said. "Get out of here," he replied.



So there it was. After eight months in country I finally realized that I cared about the men in my squad very deeply and I couldn't allow them to be in harm's way if I could help it. I grabbed my steel pot, put on my flak vest, attached my gasmask to my ammo belt, and reached for my entrenching tool before heading out the bunker door. Once outside, the enormity of the situation became instantly evident. I'm an idiot, I thought. I had quite possibly sealed my fate. I stood there fully exposed and vulnerable. There was no time to think. I had to move as quickly as I could and it was imperative to find as much cover as possible along the way. Normally I would've gone up to the 105 battery by climbing a cleared path straight up the hill behind my bunker to Impact Rock, where I would then traverse the 155 battery, go past the sunken mess hall and climb the rise up to the VIP helicopter pad before ascending the last plateau that contained the 105 howitzers. But that was too circuitous and open. Instead, I followed a straight line past mortar pit number one, squeezed through the barbed wire gate, ducked behind a hillside latrine, and quickly climbed a makeshift stairway up to the far end of the 155 battery just below the upper levels of the firebase. The whole time I was doing that I cussed myself for voluntarily putting myself in that situation.

I had little clue as to what I would do when I got to the top. I was hopeful that I could find cover behind a barrier and sling dirt overhead in an effort to smother the flames. I wouldn't know for certain until I got there. From the corner of my eye I could see a few other unlucky soldiers moving towards me as if I was the one to follow. Pity them. I crouched behind some dirt-filled ammo boxes at the base of the rise that led to the VIP pad. It would be the last bit of protection I was certain of before ascending the final level to the 105 artillery battery. Up to that point I was still on familiar territory as I had trod this ground many times before, but from that point forward it would be uncharted. I took a deep breath as I stepped out and began to race up the incline. Others began to follow.

"What are you doing?," a voice bellowed.

I looked to my right and came face to face with Lt. Col. Lucas. He stood there defiantly with his hands on his hips. He wore a flak vest and the helmet that we had all come to recognize with the black spade emblazoned on its side. He had spotted us from his bunker as we moved across the hill and was waiting to confront us. The look on his face was one of surprise considering the circumstances. "We were told to come up here to put out fires, sir." I wasn't comfortable standing in the open although the colonel seemed unfazed. I could see the quizzical look on his face as he deciphered this information. It was obviously news to him. "You men get back to your positions. It's too dangerous to be here." Who was I to argue. For a brief instant I thought about someone being in line to get reamed for giving the order but the more pressing matter was to get the hell out of there. "Yes sir!" I replied.

Now the challenge was to get safely back to my bunker as quickly as possible. The hill was reverberating with the continuous explosions as the fires crackled and hissed with a fury. I knew that I would not be going back the way I had come. My footing had been relatively secure on my climb up the steep slope but the downward trek would be a slow and unsteady one as I navigated the rudimentary steps and tried to avoid stumbling into the barbed wire. I thought the safest route would be the one that I had avoided to get to the spot where I now stood. I had to move at a full sprint across the 155 battery and drop down to my bunker just beyond as fast as I was capable of moving. Halfway across the battery, my helmet bobbing up and down on my head, mortar rounds began tossing up dirt in front of me. I needed to take cover. Immediately to my right was a dirt ramp that

led down to a half buried bunker and I dove head first toward its darkened doorway. My helmet went flying and my entrenching tool, which I still grasped in my left hand, dug deep into my thigh as I tumbled to a halt amidst the artillerymen huddled within.

“You alright?” someone asked.

“Yeah.”

They didn’t seem surprised at all by my graceless unexpected entrance. It was like an everyday occurrence to them. I gathered myself and moved back toward the door as I listened for an end to the barrage. I could still hear explosions but they were further away, most likely coming from the conflagration from which I was spared. Again I was off and running as fast as I could muster. In the background I could hear a faint voice telling me to be careful. My leg hurt from where the E-tool had dug into my flesh but I ignored it as I got to the end of the battery and rounded the corner to where I began my descent. I was half running and half freefalling as I focused on my bunker now just ahead of me. I leaped over the sandbag sidewall of the mortar pit and turned quickly around to barge through the makeshift door that fronted our shelter. I could see the relief on my friends’ faces as I fought to catch my breath. I had cheated death and the Good Lord and Colonel Lucas had looked after me. I was overcome with emotion and my body trembled uncontrollably but I was safe. I was still alive and I had made it .

Thirty minutes later, after I had gathered myself, I carefully stepped outside the bunker, aimed my point-and-shoot 35MM camera up the hill and took a photograph of the carnage that was still in progress. It’s an image that’s stayed with me for over fifty years and it’s a constant reminder of how precious life is and how grateful I am to have lived to tell the tale.



INCOMING MAIL



Comments on Dave Rich’s Passing

Gentlemen,

During Dave’s years at U of Maine, Farmington, I was the IT director. One of the Geology faculty, Dr (LtCol, AF) Tom Eastler, introduced me to the recently-arrived Dave. It was clear to Tom that Dave had just parachuted into a very un-military environment and might appreciate occasional interaction with someone who was not hostile to the military world.

My first hours with this new “Soldier Dave” was a beer at his apartment with a couple of geology student acquaintances. We talked a little about our pasts. Dave didn’t say a lot, but something was oddly familiar about some of his history. I finally noted that I’d once read an account in a magazine of a significant VietNam battle where the story line focused on the actions of a particular artillery officer. “Dave, what is your last name?”

That was the start of several years of most “Outstanding!” encounters.

The RIPCORD website profile of Dave was spot on.

One chilly morning in Harpswell, Maine, rime ice from fog had formed on the granite doorstep of the seaside cottage. Dave took a header and broke some ribs. After a way-too-long time on his back, pneumonia set in. Dave’s friends had been kept out of the picture by family. If the Colonel and this medic had known what had been going on, we might have been able to alter the outcome. Getting Dave painfully up and walking might not have sufficed (heavy smoking had indeed taken a toll), but even substantial pain on the path to a good outcome would not likely have backed down Dave. (There is a family back story that played into the outcome, but the hour has passed.)

Dave never got to return to Russia. He had planned a Rock Hound’s Trans-Siberian Rail trip (the whole way, of course). He also had an invitation from a Spetsnaz Unit he had encountered on a previous trip to jump out of MI-24s when he returned for his year-plus sojourn.

In this life, many have been dealt better hands. Few have done more with their cards, however.

Sincerely,

Mal Carey

Newcastle, Maine

• • • • •

INCOMING MAIL



Lee,
I hope that you and your family are in good health and that all is going well with you.
Enclosed is a check for eighty dollars to cover the reunion registration fee for my guest.
Will there be photographs of the Ripcord model at the reunion?
Raymond Hudzinski: in the Ripcord Report wondered what had happened to Maj Law after being wounded on April 1, 1970. Maj Laurence James Law was medically retired on August 10, 1970. He died on 22 May 1996 at age 61.
All the best,
Robin Graham

.....

Dear Lee,
Please accept this donation to the Ripcord Association in memory of Michael Griffin HHC 2/506 who served bravely in Vietnam as a Medic. He was very proud of the Ripcord Association.
Thank you
Linda Parsons

.....

IMPORTANT

If you receive the newsletter Postal mail Membership Mail Checking

There will be a **Post Card included** in your newsletter already stamped to be returned to us Postal Mail.

Please put this card in the mail

This will let us know you are getting your newsletter by Postal Mail.

Just drop this **pre-paid already stamped** postcard in your mailbox to return to us.
It is that simple.

It has your name and membership number to let us know who you are and that you want to continue receiving the Ripcord Report newsletter by Postal Mail.

Larry Rosen (1946-2021)



On 21 July 1970, Larry Rosen and his brave flight crew made flight after flight onto the area east of FSB Ripcord to pull over twenty wounded men of Delta 1/506 from the Hill 605 vicinity. They braved NVA fire four times and saved many who might have died without timely medical aid. On their last flight in, their medic, Brent Law was killed by a ricochet bullet that wounded the co-pilot, Doug Rupert.
After his service, Larry went to medical school, married, raised three sons and worked for years as anesthesiologist.
His passing will be mourned by those he saved and his family that loved him after we knew him.

Ripcord Association Membership

699 members in our Ripcord Association
583 are Ripcord Veterans
116 are Associate Members
147 receive newsletter via Postal Mail
552 receive the newsletter via e-mail
1010 on Facebook "Ripcord Association Group"

If your contact information has changed, please go to our website and update your membership to keep getting important information about our Ripcord Association

Membership is FREE!

Everyone is welcome to join.

www.ripcordassociation.com/membership-form/

To All members.

Please continue to send your letters and comments to: mail@ripcordassociation.com
Everyone would love to hear from you.