

RIPCORD REPORT

A NEWSLETTER

No. 1 JULY 1985

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

No. 2 AUGUST 1985

INSIDE

JIM FAIRHALL VISITS

NEW FACES

RESOURCES

PHOTOS/ART

RETROSPECTIVE

OTHER NEWS



RE:LAYOUT

As you will note this newsletter layout is significantly different than last months. I'm sure the changes will be seen as positive ones. Much thanks goes to two of our contacts responsible for the change. The new letterhead and face sheet was designed by Bill Heath A 2/506 whose involvement in the printing industry was helpful and appreciated to say the least. Rod Soubers of D 2/501 who has been mentioned in earlier correspondence prepares a newsletter for another group and suggested the new type and utility of space in such a way as to cut down on the size and subsequent cost of the newsletter.

JIM FAIRHALL CONTACT

Jim Fairhall, the author currently researching the history of RIPCORN in preparation for a book, was in Wise, Va. August 11-13. Wouldn't want to go on too long about what a decent guy he is but a few personal notes might help those of you who will be in touch with him later. I found he was easy to talk to. Interviews proceeded easily without feeling you're on the spot. His attractive and pleasant wife Ellen made the visit much more socially enjoyable than it might have been. Don't be surprised should she ask relevant questions that you never expected a woman to be able to ask. You can expect those from a woman who knows what a REMF is. She also has obviously provided Jim considerable support in regard to RIPCORN and the extensive undertaking it represents. Jim's research appears to be proceeding fairly smoothly. Conversation indicates he knows where to look and what issues might have likely been involved with what was going on. One issue he is grappling with that surfaced early on was whether or not 101st activities around RIPCORN were a grand diversion to lure the NVA out of its sanctuaries, eg. The Ashau Valley, so they could be bombed to Hades. Or was it as some have suggested to Jim that the 101st's intention all along was to go back into the Ashau as we had done in '69 and instead the NVA brought

the war out to us. Wrapped up in this whole ball of wax was command's fears that without doing something around RIPCORN and the Ashau an avenue would remain open giving free access to Hue much as was the case in Tet of '68. Apart from interviewing some this summer on his current trip he plans a second trip next year for more interviews that will take him to parts of the Southwest. Any information or assistance you can give him is always appreciated.

NEW FACES

New contacts occurring since last months newsletter are:

- Paul Mueller D 1/506 [REDACTED] Paul was a sergeant when his unit was "OP-Conned" to the 2/506 during RIPCORN. Delta was doing enemy body counts 3 clicks from RIPCORN. He would appreciate the address of SP/4 Mike Hennessy who served with him or those of other members of his unit.
- Walter L. Smith E 2/501 [REDACTED] Walter was on RIPCORN some ten days until 7-18-70 when the Chinook was shot down on top of the hill. He would be interested in a reunion if one could be arranged. We think it can.
- George Toole, B 2/506 [REDACTED] George was with this writer and other B 2/506 people on RIPCORN until the end. He was an excellent special forces trained medic and later we were in E 2/506 (Recon) together.
- Steve Hawk A 2/501 [REDACTED] Steve was a staff sergeant. His unit went to the RIPCORN AO on July 1, '70 and he was WIA on the same day, which was his 21st birthday. He returned to the field on 7-6-70 and stayed until the end.
- John Mihalko E 2/506 (Recon) [REDACTED] John along with John S. Sherba (Doc Speed) and Robert Granberry were Recon people who were Jim Fairhall's first personal interviews in regard to RIPCORN. Received a nice phone call from John the other evening noting his interest in the goings-on of this group and supplying some general information about himself. John along with other Recon people were all around RIPCORN both before and up until the end in late July. He was to take 3 rounds in the chest during RIPCORN but was saved by his bandoleers (which he still has). John noted as did Jim Fairhall earlier that Recon 2/506 has been having reunions and has promised to pass along more information. Have not yet heard back from John's pals Granberry and Doc Speed but their addresses are listed below. I did find out from him that coincidentally he was the team leader of Bravo Team Recon just before I became Team Leader in late October or early November.
- John S. (Doc Speed) Sherba [REDACTED] 08219 E 2/506 (Recon)

RESOURCES

From time to time we will note certain resources or organizations that we have been made aware of that could be of benefit to the group.

- Veterans of the Vietnam War Inc. Mike Milne National Director, Bear Creek Township, [REDACTED] FOCUS: Agent-Orange, unemployment, education, post-traumatic stress disorders.
- Vietnam Veterans, Agent Orange Victims, National Headquarters, 589 Washington Blvd.- Rice School, Stamford Ct. 06902
- Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, Box 35699, Phoenix Az. 85069
- Vietnam War Newsletter, P.O. Box 122, Collinsville Ct. Subscription \$17.00. Books, MO. Newsletter.
- 101st ABN Div. Association, P.O. Box 101 AB Parchment MI. 49004
- K&S Books, [REDACTED] \$1.50 for catalog, Have 1968 101 Pictorial History. Maps of some military regions. Original Sout Vietnam Medals, Campaign Ribbons.
- Veterans Business Resource Council, [REDACTED] 46140. Ronald D. Stamps, Chairman, [REDACTED] Business.
- Herb Shriver, [REDACTED] Collecting copies of Vet photos for photohistory called THE SOLDIERS EYE. Will explain conditions of exchange.

DELTA DEATH DEALERS

HAVE



SIXTEEN

WILL

TRAVEL

D 2/506 INF

101ST ABN

WE KILL GOOKS FOR NOTHINGS
DANGER INC

GOT VC/NVA PROBLEMS?

DANGER INC.



WIRE: "D" CO 2/506th - SAN FRANCISCO

This months recollections are provided by Ray "Blackie" Blackman who served with D 2/501. Like myself Blackie has a tendency to remember the funny, outrageous or insane more than other more ominous things. As Rick Blythe did in July Blackie provides memories that are very acute and which give insight to what we call the Vietnam experience:

"LOG DAY"

When being re-supplied without a landing zone things were bound to go wrong.

On one log day our Company was located on a rather steep hill side with tall trees all around. There was a small opening in the trees just big enough so that we could see the chopper. This is where they would drop our stuff down to us. It was calm where we were but must have been windy above the trees because the bird kept swaying back and forth out of sight. Cases of C Rations seemed to be raining through the tree branches and down on us. We dodged them.

It kind of reminded me of a game we played in gym class on a rainy day. Half of the class got on one end of the room and half on the other. We were given three small rubber balls to throw at each other. If you were hit by a ball you were out of the game.

No one was hit so it was time for them to drop the Mail Bag. It didn't make it through the branches. There it hung, a large red bag, stuck in a tree. Everyone just kind of stared at it. Now what? The most important thing to a person in Vietnam were letters from home so how can we get them down. The tree would have been impossible to climb so what do we do? Shoot it down, of course. It was simple. All we need to do is cut the branch with a bullet and the bag will fall.

Several M-16 rounds later and the bag still hung there, with holes in it. It was time for more fire power.. M-79, front and center. This was starting to get silly but it had to be done.

Poomp- - - - - "BOOM" Poomp- - - - - "BOOM"

It hung there. It was starting to become a contest. "Come on man, let me try!" "You gotta hit the branch!" Poomp- - - - - "BOOM!" It started to fall but stopped. "Try again!" Most of the branches were blown away by now but it finally fell to the ground. "All right, now we can read our mail!"

An M-79 is not an accurate weapon when trying to hit a branch way up in the air. The Mail Bag was wounded - the tree was dead.

We moved out right away because of all the noise we had made. It had sounded like a full firefight. I was fairly new in Country and the whole thing seemed so bizarre. I still laugh out loud every time I think about the mail bag.

ent, the cheerleaders. "Come on man, you can do it!"

reaching our NDP the mail was handed out. Some men were lucky and got letters with only a few holes. Some had whole sentences missing. Others just got a handfull of shredded paper.

Every once in awhile we would be sent a hot meal in the field on log day. I had mixed emotions about this. Of course, it was a nice change from C Rations but it usually meant trouble for us later on. You could just about tell what kind of area you were going to be sent to by how good the meal was.

Once we were sent a very good hot meal with pop, and SP pack, clean clothes, and a few packages from home. They almost never sent packages to the field. They even sent us some watermelions.

The next day we were on hill 805!

It didn't take me long to find out that the NVA were not alone in the jungle. They were not the only enemy we had to contend with in Vietnam.

On the day that I joined my Company in the field, the Platoon Sgt. introduced me to some of the men. I noticed right away that they all had straps or shoe laces around their legs just below the knees. I didn't want to sound stupid so didn't bother to ask why. Besides, I figured it was to keep their pant legs from rubbing together, making unwanted noise. Well, I was right, it did that but had another very important function also. A good set of leg straps were our last line of defense against an invasion by the SVL.

During the night we were attacked by the SVL. When I got up the next morning I needed a doctor. There was blood all over my arm and I couldn't tell where it had come from..."MEDIC!"...

After a quick examination, Doc started to laugh. I didn't think it was funny at all. After all, I was bleeding. When Doc finally got tired of laughing, he told me that I'd live. It had only been an SVL (South Vietnam Leech) that had over eaten and exploded on my arm. "What the hell is a Leech?" I didn't know. I'm from Iowa and all they grow is Corn. Doc explained that their whole lifes ambition was to suck blood until they blew up. I couldn't imagine myself eating C Rations till I exploded. I didn't even know what a leech looked like yet.

You're supposed to eat Eggs for breakfast, so I did. That crap never made it to my ruck sack again. Someone could have told me how rotten that stuff tasted but I guess that old timers wanted me to learn on my own. Besides, if they told you everything, they wouldn't be able to laugh at how dumb the Cherry Is. So I learned, the hard way.

Later on, while on a little hike, I got hooked on something that seemed to reach out and grab me. Now what? I must have walked into some sort of booby

trap set by the NVA. I tried to pull myself free. It got worse. I reached around with my other arm to un-tangle myself. Now both arms are caught. I was really stuck. I was wrapped up like a mummy. Every time I moved the thing seemed to tighten its grip. Everyone had to stop while my squad worked to free me. It was as if a hundred fish hooks had grabbed my uniform.

Now I know what a "Wait-A-Minute Vine" is.

At this point I have come to the conclusion that the NVA aren't the only things to watch out for in Vietnam.

"MEDIC!"

Doc cleaned up all my scratches. The next time I would wait a minute and let the man behind me carefully remove the vine.

We worked our way down the Mountain. When we reached the bottom the Company turned up stream. We were on a river bank and my Platoon was on point. There were two loud cracks from an AK-47. All hell broke loose for a few seconds then it was quiet. Quieter than I had ever dreamed possible. It had been my first look at the real enemy.

Today I saw a leech. We were cutting through some thick vegetation and the going was slow. The SVL seemed to be everywhere. Every time we stopped they were drawn toward our body heat as if they had radar. The leeches were on the leaves and looked like pointed, bent fingers. They would wait until you got close enough for them to get on. A leech looks like a large black maggot. There was no way to avoid them so you just learned to put up with it.

It always seemed strange to me that we would spend a whole day climbing a mountain only to turn around and come back down. That seemed to be what we did most of the time. One time we fooled them. We found a quick way down. It was raining, as it always seemed to do when below 100 degrees, and we were working

our way around a Mountain. We were moving slow because of how slippery the ground had become. All of a sudden, just like magic, the point element was gone. Disappeared. When we reached the area they had been, we saw it. The ground had given away and there was a new trail heading down. We could see the point man way down at the bottom looking up. They tried to get back up but couldn't. Now what do we do?

One by one we headed down to where the point had slid. We tried to stay on our feet by holding onto branches. It didn't work. It was useless to even try to walk. The best way was to simply sit down and go. Small trees and branches were plowed under. After we all reached the bottom I looked up. It looked as if we had been sent there to build a highway out of mud. Maybe we created a new river in Vietnam. If so, it should be named after us. "The Delta Raider River."

At one point in time I developed ringworm. "MEDIC!" The Medics in the field had to treat many ailments besides bullet wounds. They were the unsung heroes of the war (conflict) in Vietnam. Doc gave me a pill and went away. Later, after counting his supplies, he returned. "Have you taken the pill yet?" "Yes" "You won't be pulling any guard duty tonight." It seems that I have taken a muscle relaxer by mistake. "Just lie down and enjoy it." I made my bed. After awhile I couldn't feel anything. I was wide awake and staring up at the tree tops. I couldn't move from the brain down. It was a good thing we weren't attacked that night. What a strange feeling.

That was the best nights sleep I got while in the jungles of Vietnam.

"Blackie"

Raymond H. Blackman August 1, 1985

Served with D/2/501 Infantry in Vietnam, 1970-71

" I REMEMBER!"

CLOSING COMMENTS

Over the past several months I have heard from any number of you. Each contact lets us know a little more about you. Some of you I know more about what you are into now. Others I only know the Vietnam past. One thing I would like to accomplish with the newsletter is for the group to gain some sense of both. Ways in which you might help would be to provide more information on what your doing now, information on what you did then, information on your family, photos (which will be returned later if you wish) past and present. Anything that you feel comfortable providing.

The newsletter could use more short pieces about RIPCORDER or Vietnam in general. Ray's article arrived just in time for this months edition so be aware that there is not alot of competition at this point for the RETROSPECTIVE section. Selections as I have noted earlier can be anything under the sun as long as it applies to the experience. Short story, poetry, comedy, etc.

Also being considered is a book review section in the newsletter (an idea provided by Rod Soubers publication) If there is anyone out there who would feel comfortable working on that part of the newsletter and who reads regularly the note worthy new publications on Vietnam I'd be willing to collaborate with them. The section might also consider reviewing current movie and T.V. offerings on the subject as well. Let me know.

Mal Moore B 2/320 Arty on RIPCORDER has suggested that for an initial meeting of our group why not attend the 101st ABN DIV Association Annual Reunion at Fort Campbell in June of '86. This writer has no problems with that. Correspondence indicates that at least a few of our group already belong to the association. I would like to have feedback on this suggestion so we can begin to form up more concrete plans. Below I have copied a card the association uses for new membership applications. Until next time....LUCK.

Chip Collins
August 1985