

RIPCORD REPORT

A Newsletter

No. 22, January 1989

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

Thanks For The Memories



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- * James Kilgore
- * Jim Fairhall
- * Frank Gonzales
- * Vince Kenyon
- * Tom Shepherd
- * Martin Glennon



= FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS =
(To Treasurer)

- * Ripcord Association
o/o John Mihalko

= EDITOR =

- * Ray Blackman

NEWSLETTER INTENTIONS

The intention of this Newsletter is to bring those of us together that are interested in FSB Ripcord, RVN. The events, the people, the humor, the memories of that time are being written by those that served there. We want this to be a healthy experience for the Veteran, his or her family or friends. We encourage you to write, call and talk, or send a taped message to us with your feelings about our Newsletter or Ripcord in general. We wish to improve as we grow and your initial input is necessary.

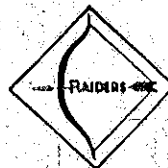
However, there may be those Veterans who are still troubled by their Vietnam experience. We regret this situation, but can not share responsibility for their reactions regarding the Newsletter contents. Ideally, this Newsletter will help all of us through our past and into a rewarding future.

CONTACTS/NEW FACES

David Gilson
(Assoc.)

Clinton A. Ramey
(D, 2/501)

Paul J. Grelle
(D, 2/501)



SIT/REP

Chip Collins, our founding father, has gone on R&R from his duties as Editor of the Ripcord Report.

Those of you who were with us from the beginning know what I mean by "founding father". Without Chip the Ripcord Association and this newsletter most likely would never have been born. He had a burning desire to get the survivors of the battle for Ripcord together so that we could help each other understand what the hell happened out there some 18 years ago.

Well, it's all coming together now and Chip has earned his R&R. I know I speak for everyone in saying God bless you Chip Collins and thank you very much. I'll do the best I can at filling in for you but feel free to come back when you're ready.

Robert Austin sent us a copy of a story that appeared in the Winter 1988 edition of Vietnam Magazine, in the Bases & Installations section. I wrote to the Publisher, Gregg R. Oehler, at Empire Press and was granted permission to re-print the story Fire Base Ripcord in this issue of Ripcord Report. Many thanks to Mr. Oehler and Empire Press for letting us print their story.

Those of you that may be interested in getting a subscription to Vietnam Magazine can do so by writing to: Empire Press, 105 Loudoun Street, S.W., Leesburg, VA 22075.

John M. Del Vecchio, author of The 13th Valley, has sent us a copy of the speech he read at the dedication of the memorial to the 450 men of the 2/502 that were killed in Vietnam.

I think you will all agree

that it is a very special speech written from the heart and join me in thanking John for sharing it with us.

Also in this issue you will find a very good retrospective by Chuck Hawkins and excerpts from the January 4, 1971 issue of The Screaming Eagle.

One final note. We need material for future issues of Ripcord Report. This issue took three months to put together because of the lack of material so I am asking all of you to please help us out.

You are the Ripcord Report. All I do is tape the stuff together and Send it to John Mihalko. Dig through your treasure chest and make photo copies of the items you think will be of interest. Write a retrospective about a mission that sticks in your mind. Make copies of some photo's, or send the originals and I'll get them back to you after copying. But, most of all, send something to us.

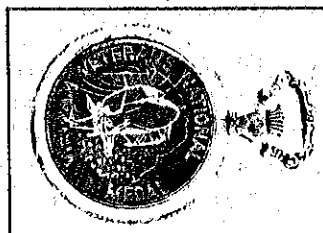
Blackie

★ ★ ★ VIETNAM VETERAN ★ ★ ★

With special tooling the cover of our finest quality quartz pocket watch has been exclusively designed to hold the Vietnam Veterans National Medal. All moving parts are Swiss made.

This spectacular medal is not a reproduction but the authentic medal as issued by the U.S. MINT. Appearing on the reverse side is the phrase, "In honor of those men and women who gave of themselves in an effort to insure democracy and peace throughout the world this medal is struck by act of congress 1984."

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SIT/REP FROM FIREBASE WHIPPANY

As we enter another new year, I would like to thank all of our members who have shown their support of the Ripcord Association by their generous donations. Our membership keeps growing (178 and climbing) but the members who make it financially possible to publish and mail the Newsletter, are few compared to our membership.

As you are all aware, we are very unique in that we charge no dues or membership fees. The Ripcord Association has survived over the years in much the same way that we survived in Vietnam; that is, with much luck and a lot of support from the ranks. Speaking for the staff, we'd like to keep it that way. Firebase Ripcord may be history, but the Ripcord Association will do its best to insure that it will never be forgotten.

Contributions can come in more than one form. As Blackie mentioned, retrospectives are sorely needed if we are to continue to publish the newsletter. With the size of our membership, we should have a wealth of material to draw from, but it's usually the same few who contribute retros, pictures, new contacts, etc. I know that you all have good intentions, but with work, raising families, outside interests, etc., it's difficult to find the time. I know. I happen to be in the same situation, but we can only publish if we have things to publish.

We also need to know of any address changes. Don't leave it up to the Postal Service to forward your newsletter. If a newsletter comes back to me stamped moved, address unknown, you are lost to us forever, unless you contact us with a new address. Many thanks to those of you who have moved and notified me beforehand.

One of initial goals in the Association was to save enough money to purchase a copier. Needless to say, we never even came close to make that dream a reality, but I am pleased to announce that we do now possess a copier of our own. Mr. Ralph N. Meerwarth, President of Consolidated Bearings Co., 10 Wing Drive, Cedar Knolls, N.J., has graciously donated to us one of his office copiers. My sincerest thanks go to Mr. Meerwarth for his generosity.

I can only echo Blackie's comments on Chip Collins, the driving and guiding force that made the Ripcord Association happen almost four years ago. Chip holds a special place in the hearts of the Mihalko family. It was Chip who cajoled me into writing a retrospective back in our infancy, and I've been involved ever since. Thanks, Chip. You unleashed a dormant force that needed to be untethered. Blackie, Chuck, and myself will man the Firebase until you're ready to return from a well deserved R & R.

Last, but not least, I would also like to thank my many contacts here in Firebase Whippany for their much valued and continued support. At the top of the list is American Legion Post #155 and V.F.W. Post #5351. Their respective Commanders, officers, and members give me much valued assistance. I am very proud to be a member and Officer in each post.

I guess that's about it from Firebase Whippany. Speaking for Blackie Blackman, Chuck Hawkins, Chip Collins, and myself, we wish you all a healthy and prosperous New Year. CURRAHEE!

John Mihalko

DELTA COMPANY REUNION

D. 2/501, 101st Airborne Division

(Taken on July 16, 1988 at Carrollton KY)



On the weekend of July 15, 1988 thirty-six Delta vets and their families attended the fourth Reunion of Delta Company, in Carrollton, Kentucky. All three platoons were heavily represented with third platoon leading the pack.

Vets started arriving early Thursday evening, and by Friday the pool area, and banquet room at the Holiday Inn were jam packed.

The first day was spent renewing old acquaintances and looking at album upon album of photo's. Friday evening was also spent veiwing Ray Blackmans excellent VCR taped photo album set to music & Mike Allens third platoon eternal slide show.

I know from past experience that it was a very emotional high, especially for those who attended a reunion for the first time This was the largest turnout ever for a Delta

Reunion, and hopefully our twenty year reunion in 1990 will be even better.

Saturday morning started the official opening of the reunion with a Memorial service for all the vets who were no longer with us.

Chef Bill Gibson roasted a pig which was shared by all and the remainder of the day was devoted to swimming, card playing, heavy war stories, scholarship fund drawing, and even a few naps by those who occupied the banquet room Friday night until the wee hours of the morning. No names will be mentioned.

Sunday was spent saying goodbye and once again returning back home, hoping that all renewed acquaintances would survive until we meet again.

Paul Grelle



Mail Stopped

CAMP EVANS - Screaming Eagles of Co. B, 3rd Bn. (Ambl.), 187th Inf., have broken the sacred tradition of mail carriers. Neither rain, sleet, snow nor the dark of night shall stay the postman from his appointed rounds, but on a rainy morning recently, a "Rakkasan" reconnaissance team stopped a NVA postman from making his rounds.

While the team, led by SSG Joe Kerr, Dallas, Tex., was in its night defensive position, about 25 miles west of Hue, one of three NVA soldiers tripped a Claymore mine.

A sweep of the area revealed one dead enemy soldier whose case contained a bundle of mail to enemy soldiers in northern MR I.

Ammo Cache

CAMP EVANS - Screaming Eagles of the 3rd Bn. (Ambl.), 187th Inf. recently discovered an enemy munitions cache and bunker while on a reconnaissance patrol about 17 miles west of Hue.

The cache consisted of 21 60mm mortar rounds and 200 AK-47 rounds. The bunker, showed no signs of recent enemy activity.

The cache was extracted.

Trucks Blown

CAMP EAGLE - Four enemy trucks were found 30 miles southwest of Hue recently by elements of the 2nd Sqdn.

(Ambl.), 17th Cav. and were subsequently destroyed.

"These vehicles were used to haul cargo and troops to combat bases in the mountain jungle canopy," said CPT John Black, Denver, Col., S-2 officer for the cavalry. "We definitely hurt their logistical capability," he added.

Squadron Commander, LTC Robert P. Molinelli, Pocatello, Idaho, discovered the trucks. Spotting what he thought was something out of the ordinary, he took his UH-1 Huey lower to get a better view and spread the thick 18-foot-tall elephant grass with his rotor wash.

Below were four NVA vehicles which had been hidden in the grass.

The next day, the 2nd Aero-Rifle Plat., D Twp., 2/17th, was inserted into the area. After the area surrounding the vehicles was secured, explosives were placed between the engine and cab of each truck. The blasts rendered the trucks inoperable.

Card Carried By MEDEVAC

CAMP EVANS - "YOU HAVE JUST BEEN SUCCESSFULLY MEDEVACED BY LT ALLEN SCHWARTZ, FAIRFIELD, CALIFORNIA. EAGLE DUSTOFF."

With these words, neatly transmitted to medevac patients on 1LT Schwartz's calling card, so ends a lifesaving operation conducted by the 101st "Dustoff" mission.

"Of course I would never give it to someone hurt seriously," said the lieutenant, explaining the card, "but soldiers with minor wounds or injuries always get a kick out of it and flash me the thumbs up sign."

"It takes some of the tension out of the medical evacuation and puts the soldier, being evacuated at ease," 1LT Schwartz commented.

"I also have another reason for giving the cards. I'd like to hear from some of these guys after we get back to the states," Schwartz concluded.

Bunker Cache

FIRE SUPPORT OPERATIONS BASE BRICK - The 3rd Bn. (Ambl.), 506th Inf. had a busy week recently when they found several enemy food and weapons caches and bunker complexes.

Patrolling an area about 15 miles south-southeast of Hue, Co. C found three food caches yielding about 1,500 pounds of rice in the heavily booby-trapped bunkers, a munitions cache and a bunker complex.

Co. D, working in the same area, discovered 50 enemy fighting positions, a bunker complex and cave containing small amounts of rice, land mines and other booby traps.

As one "Currahee" trooper summed it up, "We really hit a jackpot this week. It seemed as though every time we took a step we found something."

The finds were made when troopers spotted two NVA soldiers and searched the area.

Rounds Found

FIRE SUPPORT OPERATIONS BASE BASTOGNI - The sky grew darker. Visibility shrank as dusk approached. The small group of men pushed onward through the thick foliage, searching the greenery for a place to stay the night.

Instead of finding a night defensive position, the 4th Sqdn., Recon. Plat., Co. E, 1st Bn. (Ambl.), 501st Inf., discovered an enemy cache containing 120 23mm antiaircraft rounds. The squad also found 30 wooden crates used for storage and shipping.

The cache site was discovered approximately 18 miles southwest of Hue.

After reporting their find, the "Geronimo" troopers destroyed the cache site and most of the antiaircraft rounds.

Eagle Action

Fire Support Base Ripcord was an outpost that soon drew the NVA's most serious attention.

By Shelby L. Stanton

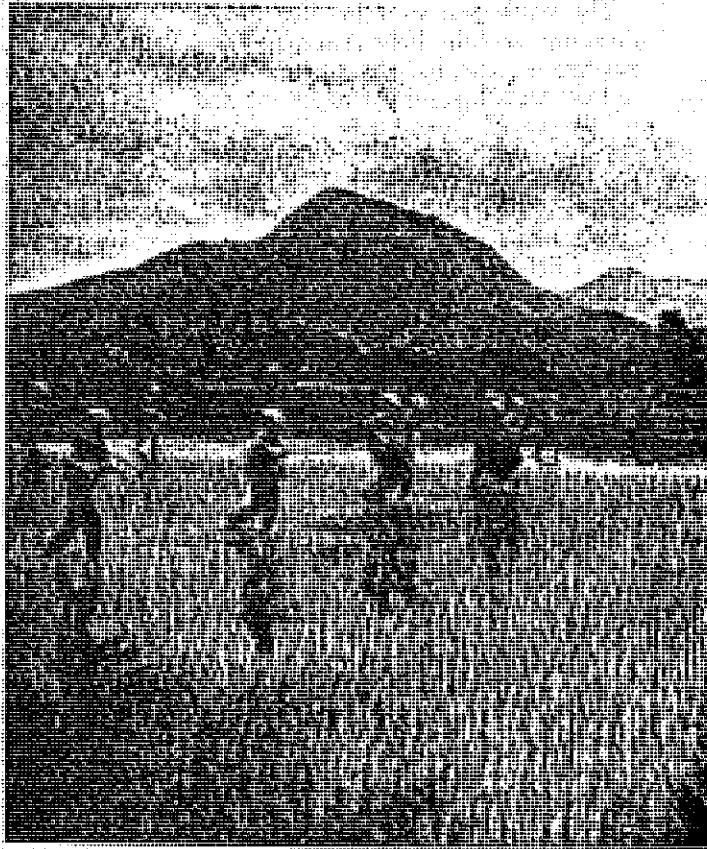
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Empire Press, 105 Loudoun St. S.W., Leesburg, VA 22075

During the Allied summer offensive of 1970, in Operation Texas Star, the 101st Airborne Division established Fire Support Base Ripcord on top of a mountain deep in the remote jungle wilderness of northern Thua Thien Province, a combat outpost overlooking the trackless inner valleys and mountain ranges congregating near the western frontier of South Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) used the same rugged area as one of its primary infiltration bases for raids against important coastal towns and rice lands. Thus, Ripcord offered both the South Vietnamese ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and American forces an excellent forward vantage point, from which infantry patrols and artillery fire could be directed against the hidden web of enemy trails and way-stations.

Operation Texas Star was initiated by the 101st Airborne Division in close coordination with the ARVN 1st Division (which most observers considered the best division in the South Vietnamese Army). The operation had four primary objectives. One was to provide the aggressive defense mission underlying "Vietnamization" that would guarantee the pacification of Thua Thien Province. Another was to deploy the 101st in such a manner as to facilitate future operations in an expanded area. A third was to cover U.S. redeployments as congressionally mandated American troop withdrawals increased. And finally the Allies hoped to take advantage of the good weather of the southwest monsoons to counter attempted enemy movements out of the A Shau Valley toward the populated coastal region.

The Division planned to conduct air-mobile attacks, combined with South



Operations in the valleys depended on artillery fire bases in the mountains. However, the U.S. Army developed at Fire Base Ripcord was unable to hold on.

Vietnamese infantry assaults, to seek out and destroy NVA units in their base camps and cache sites throughout the summer. Allied forces operating in the mountains northeast of the A Shau Valley would locate and destroy the logistical facilities and lines of communication of the 29th and 803d NVA Regiments. The 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade was assigned to open up Fire Support Base Ripcord, but rainy weather and low overcast delayed its offensive.

The 2nd Battalion (Airmobile), 506th Infantry, and the 4th Battalion, 1st ARVN Regiment, planned originally to make their airmobile assault and carve out a Landing Zone (LZ) on Hill 902, a steep mountain peak covered with dense jungle vegetation. The attack was to take place on March 13, but just prior to the insertion the Division determined that

the LZ was unsatisfactory.

As a result, Company A of the 506th Infantry's 2nd Battalion was diverted to the alternate landing zone, code-named Ripcord. Upon landing, this company was immediately challenged by a hail of enemy gunfire and blazing rockets. The valiant American troopers withstood an intense barrage of mortar and recoilless rifle, as well as heavy machine-gun fire which raked their lines. Senior commanders decided to pull them off the hill and bombard the objective first.

The American troops returned with captured enemy documents that showed the 6th NVA Regiment was in the area.

For the next several days, the 101st used air strikes and heavy artillery fire to blast the entire Ripcord area. The mountain slopes were reduced to a shamble of splintered trees. Satisfied that this dose of heavy bombardment had sufficiently reduced enemy capability to resist, Company B of the

same battalion air assaulted onto Ripcord on April 1, 1970. But again, the airmobile infantrymen were subjected to a withering storm of mortar and recoilless rifle fire. The company was forced to withdraw from the hill after 7 men were killed and 21 wounded.

The rest of the battalion, along with the 2nd and 4th Battalions of the crack ARVN 1st Regiment, relentlessly combed the jagged hills in the Ripcord vicinity during April 2-10. Many mortar and recoilless-rifle pits were found and destroyed, but it appeared that the enemy had abandoned the area and melted back into the jungle. Finally, on April 11, Company C of the airmobile battalion conducted a ground assault up the hill and secured Ripcord at 8 o'clock in the morning.

A series of rainstorms, accompanied by

fog, low clouds and unfavorable weather, then developed. This prevented the airlift of artillery pieces to the mountain-top until April 16. On the following day, cannoners and howitzers of Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 319th Artillery, were brought in by helicopter and joined the infantrymen. A battery of the 11th ARVN Artillery was also placed on Ripcord. Fire Support Base Ripcord was now fully operational. The artillerymen began firing their howitzers into suspected enemy trails weaving through the misty mountains. The 2nd Battalion of the 506th Infantry guarded the hill by conducting local patrols and maintaining perimeter security. The battalion was initially located all around and on top of Ripcord.

At 7:08 in the morning of July 1, the command post of Company D was shelled by 82mm mortars. More 82mm mortar shells began falling on Ripcord, and at 1:45 p.m., this barrage was joined by 75mm recoilless-rifle fire. The enemy siege of Ripcord had started, and the close-fire weapons being used meant that Ripcord was surrounded. No one knew, however, how many enemy troops might be in the area. This type of harassing fire could happen anywhere, even if only a few enemy troops managed to get close, since it was impossible for the defenders to cover all approaches in deep jungle. On the other hand, the troops knew that Ripcord might be surrounded by large enemy forces.

The soldiers on Ripcord fired back at the lush green curtain of jungle covering the nearby valleys and mountains. Braving the incessant enemy shelling, the cannoners manned their pieces and fired at suspected enemy locations throughout the day. Scores were wounded at their posts. In reaction to these attacks, the aero-rifle platoon of Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry, was inserted west of Ripcord to find out how many enemy troops were in the area. This small force was ambushed immediately upon landing and engulfed in enemy fire. The situation was serious, and the rest of the troop was brought in to help. With unhesitating valor, their comrades leaped from helicopter skids into the thick of battle. This gallant reinforcement allowed the air cavalymen to disengage, and they were extracted the next day.

In the early morning hours of July 2, the 506th Infantry 2nd Battalion's positions on Hill 902 (held by Company C) were stormed by NVA infantry armed with rocket-propelled grenades, satchel charges and rifles. The enemy sappers screamed as they lunged through the darkness into the American fire. Many were cut down by the combination of claymore mines and M16 rifles and fell down the muddy slopes. Others con-

tinued forward, firing their assault rifles from the hip and heaving grenades at the American defenders. One section of the perimeter was overrun and several U.S. bunkers were taken by enemy troops. The fierce battle continued as the North Vietnamese sappers pitched fragmentation grenades and explosives at the Americans fighting to regain their lost positions. The Company C commander was killed leading his men. The company aidman heroically organized the defense of the command post until the artillery forward observer took charge.

The battle was over by 4:20 in the morning, and the 101st Airborne Division put another battalion into the area to safeguard Ripcord. At 10:20, the 2nd Battalion of the 501st Infantry air assaulted into hot landing zones south and southwest of Ripcord. With this reinforcement, the Division had two battalions on Ripcord, but the NVA began to mass still larger forces against them. The Ripcord defenders were subjected to daily attacks by 60mm and 82mm mortars. On July 17, Ripcord was hit by large 120mm recoilless-rifle shells. As the enemy continued to encircle the position and upgrade his armament, the resupply helicopters came under 12.7mm antiaircraft machine-gun fire.

Although Ripcord was not subjected to enemy ground attack during this time, the hill positions around it were constantly fought over. These included Hill 1000 to the west, Hill 902 to the south, and Hill 805 to the east.

The North Vietnamese became more brazen in their attacks, but always chose to tackle the easier targets—those where they could mass the largest number of men against a few. The outposts around Ripcord were constantly assaulted in this manner. American patrol activity became increasingly hazardous, and the men encountered very dangerous enemy booby traps.

In the early afternoon of July 18, a CH47 Chinook helicopter from the 159th Aviation Battalion was carrying a sling load of 105mm howitzer ammunition to Ripcord. It was hit by enemy 12.7mm machine-gun fire while on its approach to the fire support base. The stricken aircraft went out of control and crashed into the main ammunition storage area, which erupted into a large fire and series of explosions. The spectacular firestorm wrecked most of the U.S. artillery battery's equipment, including the counter-mortar radar and radios, as well as the tactical operations center and bunkers on the southern perimeter. All six of the battery's howitzers were damaged beyond repair.

The massive damage sustained by Ripcord, combined with the massing of more NVA troops in the area, caused

senior American commanders to question how long the fire-support base could be held. While the Air Force gave the area a good pounding with its tactical fighter-bombers, ground sweeps were difficult and costly, and no one knew when the enemy would try to mount a massed charge up the hill at Ripcord. Further, no one knew if Ripcord could withstand such an attack.

Elements of the 6th NVA Regiment were positioned generally to the north and west of Ripcord, while the 29th and 803rd NVA Regiments were to the south and southeast. The fire-support base was encircled by a reinforced division.

By the third week in July, it became apparent that the position could only be held at great cost—at a time when there was tremendous political pressure in the United States to hold down American casualties. Continued defense of Ripcord would be politically unacceptable, and the position was declared untenable. Earlier in the war, American commanders might have decided to defend such a key location and would have welcomed the chance to engage. Now, the American government wanted to speed up its military disengagement from Vietnam and was willing to abandon such strategic ground to the enemy.

During the night of July 22 to 23, massive artillery and air strikes were employed all around Ripcord. Early the next morning, the 3rd Brigade headquarters directed the extraction of the remaining troops of the 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry, from Ripcord. This mission started at 5:45 in the morning and faced heavy enemy fire as helicopters darted through the smoke and machine-gun tracers to out-load the American defenders. More than 2,200 artillery rounds were fired in their support, and 22 aircraft sorties were used. At 7:40 a.m., a CH47 Chinook was shot down above the fire base, hit by a mortar round. It exploded, eliminating all hope of getting the six remaining howitzers and two 106mm recoilless rifles off the mountain.

The extraction of all friendly troops from Fire Support Base Ripcord left the enemy avenues of approach from the A Shau Valley partially open. The NVA moved next against nearby Fire Support Base O'Reilly, which was also lost. In the final analysis, the campaign for Ripcord was a complete North Vietnamese victory. It must be remembered, however, that the valiant soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division were not forced off their mountain bastion by direct enemy attack. They manned their posts bravely and defied the NVA to push them off the mountain. The NVA never attempted the feat because, with the Americans pulling out for political reasons, they didn't have to. □

STRIKE FORCE SPEECH -- delivered 3 June 88 at Ft. Campbell, KY., @
dedication of memorial to the 450+ men of the 2/502 Infantry/101st Abn Div
Killed in Viet Nam.

By John M. Del Vecchio

To Our Brothers of the STRIKE FORCE

We have come a long way from Viet Nam, from the mountains and jungles and rice fields. We've come a long way in time from '65, or '68 or '71. Many of us have come a longer way emotionally than we've travelled in either time or distance. NOW we return, emotionally, to remember the time, to remember the men whose names are inscribed on this monument, and to recall ourselves when we stood with them and with each other.

How can we honor these men, these our brothers? Is it enough to erect a monument? To gather before it? To remember them, their smiles and fears, their friendship and laughter, their misery and death?

Or must we do more? Must we understand WHY they went, WHY their country sent them to a war half way around the world? WHY they fought? WHAT they did there? WAS that sacrifice in vain? What must we do to keep faith with their spirit?

I would like to read to you a short story of life under, and escape from, the Communist regime in the words of a wrinkled old man. For the sake of time I've condensed it. The old man described his village as a happy sea coast settlement where the flat land was divided into an infinite number of paddies, "often brilliant green with the rice crop."

"[Then peace came," he said, "and] our enemies became our rulers. They gave us a new set of laws, a new history, a new way of life... the Communist way of life. Yet the Communists say it is... nationalism. This was a dull uncertain peace...

"...anything at all that had been concerned (with the previous regime) became tainted. In the eyes of our new historians, everything (they) had done was evil. Even the good they had done was evil...

... "Our new way of life was supposed to be Utopia. But it did not take long to see that the underlying idea was that the present generation must always be pitilessly sacrificed to the happiness of the one that is to come.

"The new land reforms produced only famine, which now claws at the belly of all our people. Their 'materialism' became an ogre which sucked our land dry. At first the attainment of... nationalism seemed to conform to authentic justice. Then it show[ed] itself in true form--a lie. The new sociology has led to family denunciations, self-criticism and distrust. The people of our village have been ruthlessly sacrificed to the idea of economic utility. Never before has there been cruelty of this organized order."

This old man went on to tell of nearly his entire village escaping, and of a boy named Mai Van Thinh, who provided a diversion for

those fleeing.

"There could be no open talk of escape; nothing could be done straightforwardly...

"We made plans but could not hold meetings. According to the new laws, there could be no gatherings of more than four people. We passed the word while we bent our backs in the rice fields, or while our fishermen unloaded their catch...

..."There was no moon, [the night we escaped]... the seas were calm.... we slipped down to our boats singly or in twos. ...Mai Van Trinh...was creating a disturbance at one end of the village. This drew the police, the Commissar and many soldiers...

"These [sampans] were built to handle about twenty-five people... That night they each carried more than a hundred...

"...we escaped... we were not especially jubilant... our thoughts were on Mai.

"Mai's father and mother had been killed in the war and his only brother, Cham, had been burned alive, apparently because he was the head of a Christian youth movement. On the afternoon of January 16... he was tied to a tree and brutally beaten with short bamboo sticks. Then his blood-soaked body was splashed with gasoline, ignited, and he was burned to death...

"...by morning [on the day we escaped] we could not see land... we had the sea to struggle with now... our trip lasted five days and five long nights. We could not have fires, for our wood was too wet... We had little drinking water or none. The decks of our small junks were splashed by every wave..."

I tell you this boat person's story, not because it is so unusual but because I want you to know the dates. The particular village, Cua Lo, about 300 kilometers south of Haiphong, was captured by the Viet Minh in 1951. Mai's brother, Cham, was burned to death in January 1953. The escape took place at the end of 1954. The story was written in 1955 and published as part of Dr. Tom Dooley's book Deliver Us From Evil in 1956.

It is bizzare to me that American's did not, and generally do not, know or understand the factors which brought about the war and our involvement. The words of the Geneva Accords of 1954 say; "Any civilians residing in a district controlled by one party who wishes to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district." (Underline is mine)

The people of the village of Cau Lo, and nearly a more million were not assisted to leave North Viet Nam but were brutally restricted. Almost a million escaped. Perhaps as many as another two million attempted to escape but were stopped, turned back, arrested, physically beaten or killed. When one compares the post April '75 period with the 1954-'55 period, one is shocked by the similarities, and yet, one who understands why we made the sacrifice, is not surprised.

So many in this country, over the past two decades, have questioned why were were in Viet Nam, why did our brothers, our sons, our fathers die... But so few have sought to answer the question. These men died for a cause, for a principle, for the altruistic ideal that All Men

Are Created Equal, that all men have the inalienable right to life, to liberty. We identified ourselves with life in a free nation, with self-determination and self-government, with dignity for the individual and for truth unaltered by the party. For these values we were willing to risk our lives.

If we don't understand that, then we will have broken faith with our brothers. But if we recognize what they accomplished, why they were needed, we will always see them as heroes, as martyrs to the best values of the human spirit.

I would like to say one thing to you, to those of you with your names on this monument... You were the best. What you did, no army has attempted to do. And you succeeded, even if your success was later forfeited.

It was right for America to assist South Viet Nam and to oppose the Viet Minh. I am not saying that every American policy, that every allied act, was right. But I am saying that, because we had (and have) the ability to oppose that evil, we also had the responsibility to oppose it. As John Kennedy said in 1961, "...few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger... the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it..." That is the bottom line for those who stand here. For that there is no apology. For those whose names are listed here, there is only honor.

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IMAGES

Charles F. Hawkins
CO, A/2-506th, May 30, - Nov. 17, 1970

Rain. Wet, but not real wet. Steady more-than-a-drizzle. The sheen of tree trunks, marbled by rivelets. The patter-plop of drops-on-leaves. A thousand jungle timphany beating in time to no-time.

A platoon on patrol. Ponchos glistening. Helmet covers soaked to the steel. Moving carefully from hill-top to valley, and back again. Just a walk in the rain.

"Just a 'walking in the rain."

Who was it? Danny Kaye? Yeah. That's the dude.

Leaches. Ten hundred million slimy, wet, blood sucking, muther-fuckers.

Squirt a little bug-juice on 'em, and watch 'em squirm.

Mud. Two steps forward, one step back. Progress. Muttered curses. Pity the man walking drag.

Where to now, LT?

"Goin' home in a body-bag. Doodah. Doodah."

Play it, Sam.

Rest halt. Wet cigs. Pull out ten spongy fags to find one half dry, then light it with dishwater hands squirking the rasp on a Zippo lighter. Good shee-it.

John Wayne ought'a see me now.

Shred the cigs too wet to light in the arcane belief that the Gooks really care what you smoke.

C-ration ham'n eggs. They always taste better when they're wet. Fuckin' gourmet meal.

Where's the hot sauce?

A beer and a hot fire would go good right about now. You don't think about it long. Rest halt's over. C'mon feet. Do your thing.

The squish of water in-and-out of your jungle boots. Dry socks in your rucksack. Maybe. Yeah. Hope Doc remembered the foot powder.

Then, just when you think you're about to get used to the wet, someone steps on a land-mine.

Its not the point team. They're too lucky for that to happen. It ain't the LT, he's never where he's supposed to be. It ain't the LT's RTO. RTOs are protected by the All Mighty. It ain't none of the above.

Its your buddy, the Thump Gunner.

And, you rush to help him. Oh, sweet ever-lovin' Jesus.

One foot is gone. Gone. No boot, no nothin'. Just white leg-bone stickin' out. And, he's moaning, tryin' hard not to scream and give away your location. Though, God knows, the explosion must have been heard as far away as Ripcord.

The free-flowing blood mingles with the rain, and pools on the leafy jungle floor.

He's got fragments up his legs and in his crotch. Never mind that you picked up a piece or two in your arm.

You fumble for his first-aid pack and fish out the field dressing -- all in slow motion. This can't be happening. You try to scream; for him and for yourself. But words won't come.

He's dying. Somebody, please! Help Thump Gunner.

You try to scream again; and wake up.

Its raining. The plop-patter of drops-hitting-leaves brings you back home. The screened-in porch provides shelter, but you can feel the hard damp. The Sunday paper lies scattered next to your lounge chair. Half an Irish whiskey sits on a small table. The supper dishes are still in the sink in the kitchen. The Sonora chimes strike mid-night.

Slowly, you move to the porch door and look out at the dark. Tears stream down your cheeks.

So long ago. So many years.

Gotta' go to bed. Tomorrow's another day.

Best wife is in bed. Asleep. Has been for hours. Beautiful; all naked shadows and blond hair. She stirs.

"Mfff. You okay, honey?"

"Yeah, babe. I'm okay."

"You've been crying, darling. What is it? Another bad dream?"

"Yeah, just a bad dream."

"Come to bed, honey. Its okay now."

"Sure, babe. Lemme hit the can first."

But, its not okay -- and never will be.

You straddle the komode and try to relax. The warm stream finally comes. Bad aim. You feel the plop-splash of pee hitting your leg.

Piss on it. Piss on all of it.



The new CURRAHEES on the DMZ in Korea also have a new commander. He is Lieutenant Colonel Micheal M. Zais who took command from Lieutenant Colonel Micheal Hess on the 25th of August 1987. LTC Hess reactivated the CURRAHEES in Korea in April and thus began another page in the distinguished history of the CURRAHEES.

All the unit property has been safely transferred from Fort Campbell to the unit's new home in Korea. The Sink rifle, Holy Grail, and several other artifacts are now in the hands of the 2nd Infantry Division museum.

I want to thank all the former CURRAHEES who have written and supplied me with historical information.

It is business as usual for the new CURRAHEES in Korea. Korea has been called the last place of pure soldiering. This is because almost no dependents are authorized therefore the commander in Korea has his soldiers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is a busy place with a real world mission of being the first troops that will confront a North Korean attack. Because of the mission and because the average soldier is only in Korea for one year very little time can be spent on nonessential matters. The new soldier and the new leader must jump in and function as a trained member of the team right from the start.

The 1/506th is the only American battalion North of the Imjin River. Getting to Camp Greaves the home of the 1/506th Infantry requires the crossing of a single lane wooden bridge called Freedom's Bridge. From the camp you can look into North Korea. A visitor to this northern bastion is immediately struck by the lack of trees and the incessant background music provided by North Korean propaganda loudspeakers. Camp Greaves is built on a hill. To get anywhere in this part of Korea you have to go up or down (to this observer it usually seemed up) a hill.

The living conditions for the CURRAHEES are spartan by United States Army standards. But the enlisted soldiers do have new barracks with semi-private rooms. The junior officers still live in quonset huts. The isolation tends to foster a close knit unit. For the year the soldier is in the 1/506th the unit is his family. There are alot of stray dogs running around Camp Greaves, pseudo pets of CURRAHEE soldiers. From all indications the dogs are well feed and very pro-American. The camp has a PX, snack bar, library, gym, movie house, and club. The soldier must have a pass to get off-post and see the rest of Korea.

The area around Camp Greaves is farmland. Very green and beautiful in the summer and very brown and barren during the rest of the year. I am told that you have not lived through a winter until you experienced a Korea winter. The Imjin River is a shallow winding river. It is not as significant a military barrier as say the Rhine River is in Germany but it will definitely slow an attacker. This is not much good to the CURRAHEES who have the river at their backs but it does give the visitor the distinct impression that in the event of war there will be no retreat for the 506th. They will stand with their backs to the Imjin and fight.

Many of you have written me and asked why the 506th was deactivated at Fort Campbell and removed from the 101st Airborne Division only to be reactivated in Korea?

The answer to that question is simple; THAT'S THE ARMY!

Actually under the new Combat Arms Regimental System first implemented in 1983 there were not enough units at Fort Campbell to insure each of the distinguished regiments in the 101st Airborne Division would be represented, so the CURRAHEES were bumped. Fortunately the powers in charge saw fit to save the CURRAHEES on the active Army rolls by redesignating a unit in Korea. It is fitting that the WE STAND ALONE regiment should stand alone north of the IMJIN defending freedom's front door.

Robert L. Boyko

MAJOR BOB BOYKO
Regimental Adjutant
506th Infantry

The CURRAHEES now have an Honorary Colonel of The Regiment. He is Lieutenant General David E. Grange, Jr. General Grange took the 2/506th Infantry to Vietnam, as their commander in December, 1967 and commanded them during their baptism under fire. He was selected from a list distinguished former commanders by the new CURRAHEES. A biographical sketch of General Grange follows;



LIEUTENANT GENERAL DAVID E. GRANGE, JR.

David E. Grange, Jr. was born in Richmond Hill, New York, on 9 April 1925. He attended high school in Sayville, Long Island, New York. He joined the Army in June 1943 and served as a Parachute Infantryman in Europe taking part in the Rome-Arno, Southern France, Rhineland, Ardennes, and Central Europe campaigns. After the war, he served in the 82nd Airborne Division, and in 1949, left Fort Bragg to attend the Army's Officer Candidate School at Fort Riley, Kansas. He was commissioned a second lieutenant of Infantry on 19 May 1950. In Korea, 1950-51, he served as a rifle platoon leader in the 187th Airborne Regiment. Later, on a second Korean war tour, 1952-53, he commanded a rifle company in the 17th Infantry Regiment. Upon return from Korea in 1953, he was a Ranger instructor at the Army's Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1955, he attended the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, and upon completion in 1956, volunteered for Special Forces duty. General Grange served with Special Forces at Fort Bragg until 1957 when he was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group in Germany. After three years in Europe with the 10th Special Forces Group, he returned to the United States to attend the 1960-61 Regular Course at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Following graduation in June 1961, he was assigned to the Pentagon for duty on the Army General Staff. In 1963, General Grange was assigned on his first tour to Vietnam as a member of the Department of Defense's Research and Development Field Unit as an Airborne/Ranger/Infantry advisor. He returned in 1964 to an assignment with the US Army Combat Development Command as the Army Liaison Officer with the US Air Force's Special Air Warfare Center and Tactical Air Warfare Center at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. In 1966, he was moved to Fort Bragg to become the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, of the 82nd Airborne Division. When the 101st Airborne Division was alerted for movement to Vietnam in 1967, General Grange was selected to command the 2nd Battalion, Airborne, 506th Infantry. He took command in August 1967, and on 2 December 1967, took his battalion to Vietnam. General Grange returned to the United States and a Fort Knox assignment in December 1968 where he served as Director of a special course for Vietnamese and Laotian Company Grade Officers in the Allied Training Department of the Armor School. He next attended the Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, graduating in June 1970. General Grange returned to Vietnam for his third tour in June 1970 where he again served with the 101st Airborne Division, consecutively commanding the Division Support Command and the 3rd Brigade. Upon his return from Vietnam, he was assigned as the Director, Ranger Department, US Army Infantry School, and served in that position from July 1971 until September 1973. In October 1973, he assumed the position of Assistant Division Commander (Support) of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Carson, Colorado, and

subsequently Assistant Division Commander (Maneuver) in September, 1974. General Grange was next assigned as Chief of Staff, I Corps (ROK/US) Group, Camp Red Cloud, on his third tour in Korea, on 15 August 1975. He served in that position until June 1976. General Grange assumed the position as Commanding General, US Army Readiness and Mobilization Region VIII, with headquarters in Denver, Colorado, in June 1976. He left this command on 7 January 1978 to return for his fourth tour to Korea, where on 18 January 1978, General Grange assumed the position as Commanding General, 2nd Infantry Division. On 15 June 1979, General Grange assumed command of the US Army Infantry Center, Fort Benning, Georgia. In August 1981, General Grange became Commanding General, Sixth US Army, Presidio of San Francisco, California. On 16 February 1984, he left the Sixth US Army for Washington, D.C., to become Chairman, Coordinating Activity for Historical Observances, serving as principal assistant to the Secretary of the Army for coordinating and executing support for observances of World War II historical events. He retired on 30 June 1981 at Fort Benning, Georgia and currently resides in The Plains, Virginia. General Grange has completed the Advanced Infantry Officer Course; the Regular Command and General Staff College; the Army War College; Airborne School; Ranger Course; Special Forces Officer Course; the Strategic Intelligence School; and the Russian Language Course. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Nebraska, and the Advanced Management Course, University of Pittsburgh. General Grange has been awarded the following decorations: Defense Distinguished Service Medal; Army Distinguished Service Medal; Silver Star with two Oak Leaf Clusters; Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster; Distinguished Flying Cross; Soldier's Medal; 28 awards of the Air Medal with V; Bronze Star Medal with V and four Oak Leaf Clusters; Joint Service Commendation Medal with V; United States Army Commendation Medal with V and four Oak Leaf Clusters; United States Air Force Commendation Medal; and the Purple Heart. France has awarded him the Legion of Honor in the degree of Officer. Korea has awarded General Grange the Wharang Medal with Gold Star, the Kuksun Medal and the Cheonsu Medal. Vietnam awarded him the Gallantry Cross with two palms and Silver Star, and the Military Honor Medal, First Class. General Grange is a master parachutist with combat jumps in World War II (Europe), Korea, and Vietnam. He holds the Combat Infantry Badge with second and third awards. General Grange is a veteran of twenty campaigns in three wars as an Infantryman. General Grange is married to the former Lois M. Okvist and has three children: David Lawrence, Suzanne Elizabeth, and Henrietta Marie. His primary hobbies are fishing, hunting, and horseback riding.

Christmas Brings Hope To Eagle



A CLUB WITH SWORD TO SHARPEN HIS GAME--MG Hennessey presents Bob Hope with a gift on behalf of COMUSMACV and in return gets a laugh--one of many during the show. (U.S. Army Photo)

CAMP EAGLE -- While Christmas is known as the season for hope throughout the world, Screaming Eagles of the 101st got their own Christmas "Hope" on December 22.

More than 19,000 Screaming Eagles and military personnel representing commands throughout the Republic of Vietnam's northernmost reaches jammed into Eagle Entertainment Bowl at Camp Eagle. They had come by foot, vehicle and helicopter, from basecamps and firebases, some waiting for hours, to see Bob Hope, the military's greatest "Santa Claus" and his 1970 Christmas Show.

In the early after, as the sun broke through clouds which had covered the area and deluged the land with monsoon rains in recent weeks, the Christmas troupe presented the men of northern MR 1 with a two-hour and 15 minute gift of laughter, song, beautiful women and, of course, Bob Hope.

MG John J. Hennessey opened the show by welcoming Hope and his cast in behalf of GEN Creighton W. Abrams, Commanding General of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV). Later in the program MG Hennessey presented a plaque of appreciation to Hope from the officers and men of the 101st.

The 20th Annual Christmas Show, and seventh consecutive in Vietnam, featured Hope, singer-dancer Lola Palana, country-western singer Hobbi Martin, Cincinnati Red's catcher Johnny Bench, the Goldiggers, Miss World-Jennifer Josephine Hosten, Gloria Loring, the Ding-A-Longs and Les Brown and his "Band of Renown."

Making an unexpected visit to the show was Republic of Vietnam Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky. Also in attendance were LTG James W. Sutherland, Jr., commanding general of XXIV Corps, LTG Hoang Xuan Lam, I Corps commanding general and BG Pham Van Phu, commanding general of the 1st Inf. Div. (ARVN).

The finale featured the entire cast and audience joining to sing "Silent Night." It was followed by a standing ovation for the troupe which show officials said "was the longest in years."

Patients at the 85th Evacuation Hospital in Phu Bai were not forgotten. Those who were unable to attend the show had their own private performance as Hope and members of his troupe entertained at the hospital after the show at Camp Eagle.

The 15-day tour was co-sponsored by the Department of Defense and the USO.

The Screaming Eagle



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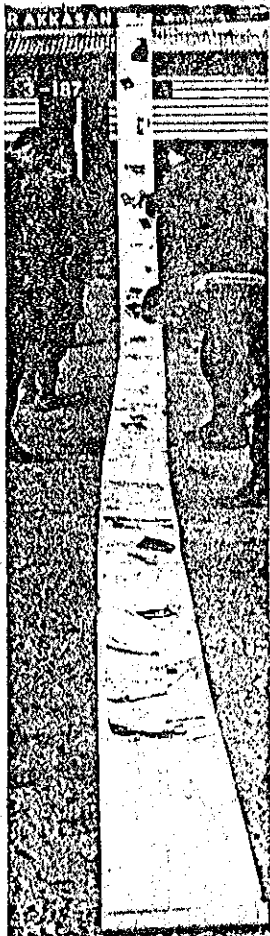
101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)

January 4, 1971

Letter From S.S.U.

Gift Pac

To Me-From Me



CAMP EAGLE -- A recent mail call at Co. B, 3rd Bn. (Ambl.), 187th Inf., brought a great big Christmas greeting to the Screaming Eagles.

A Christmas letter, 51-feet-long, was sent to the men of the 101st in care of SP4 Edward Hanson, Baldwin, Wis.

The letter, penned on a roll of wrapping paper, contained foot after foot of best holiday wishes from Hanson's sister Lorna and the girls on the 3rd floor of Keith Hall at Stout State

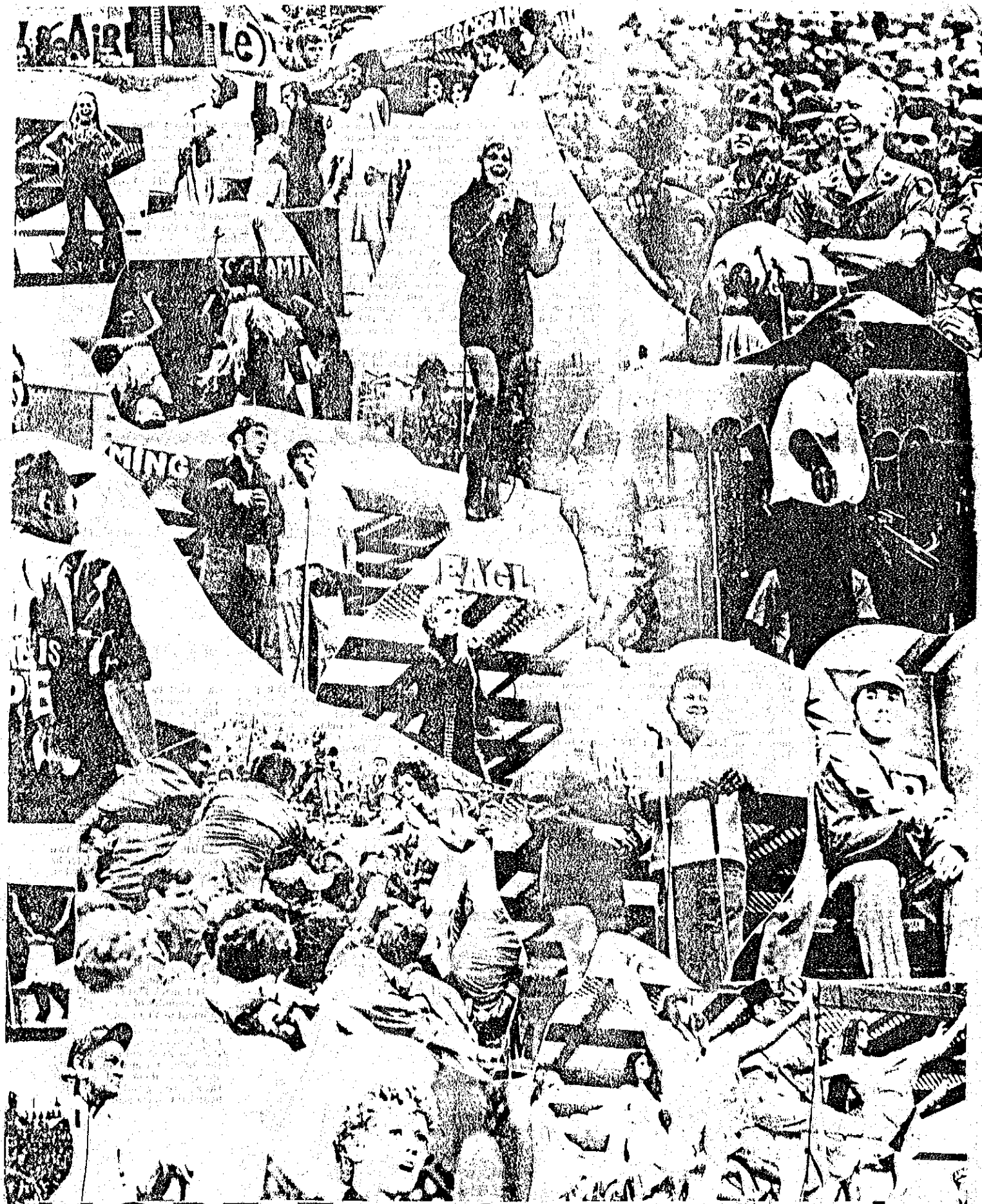
University in Menomonie, Wis.

"We'd like to send our warmest wishes for a happy holiday to the greatest guys of the 101st in Vietnam. We'd like to say we're thinking about you over there," the girls said in concluding the Christmas message.

The letter, on display at the Rakkasan battalion headquarters, has drawn many smiles from the weary troopers coming in from the field.



SOME CHRISTMAS PRESENTS THAT DIDN'T GET UNWRAPPED -- The very beautiful Mary Grover seems to be wondering why so many gifts are left lying under the tree. Not opening your Christmas presents is the same as not taking full advantage of your veteran's benefits. Check with your career counselor or local Veterans Administration representative when you return to the "World." (Photo Courtesy of American Broadcasting Company)



HOPE For Camp Eagle