

RIPCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

A Newsletter

No. 27, August 1990



TWENTY YEARS ... CURRAHEE

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(Send Newsletter Items to,)

Editor: Chuck Hawkins

(Send Donations to,)

Treasurer: John Mihalko

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 about by those who served there, or who sent loved ones. 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 other appropriate material regarding the Newsletter or about Ripcord in general. We wish to improve as we grow and your input is needed.

However, there may be those Veterans (or others) who are still troubled by their experiences. We regret this situation, but can not share responsibility for reactions regarding the Newsletter contents. Ideally, this Newsletter will help all of us to better cope with a difficult past and move us toward a rewarding future.

CONTACTS/NEW FACES

Mr. Al Lopez

Mr. Jack Wilhite

Mr. Keith Nolan

LZ OAKTON

The 20th anniversary of Ripcord and there doesn't seem to be much going on except work, work, work. I keep promising dear wife Glenda that we're going to take a vacation soon (its been over a year). Oh well, I know I'm not alone. John Mihalko is putting in long hours on the job and, as some of you know, has been involved with making presentations to local (Whippany, NJ) area high school classes.

I did have lunch with Bob Seitz (Recon 2-506) on 23 July, and got a call from Frank Marshall (A/2-506) the evening prior. Frank is staying real busy in Philadelphia working at the roofer's trade. With the recent events in the Mideast, you can bet that Colonel Seitz is busy -- the Pentagon guys are working 12 hour shifts during the crisis.

I spoke with Bob Smoker (C/2-506) of Red Lion, PA. Bob asked about any reunion plans, and said he'd be real interested to get together with guys who had been at Ripcord. I recently spoke with Jack Wilhite who lives in Springfield, MO. Jack had been in 2d Platoon, C/2-506 when I took it over from West Point classmate Charlie Lieb in March 1970. He reminded me of several guys we knew: Tom "TC" Manbeck, SSG Jerry Moyer, and others. I mentioned that Tom "Doc" Shepard was on the mailing list and lives in Elizabeth, NJ.

From the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, Triple Threat Gazette, 30 September 1970..

Monsoon News

With the approach of the monsoon season and the lightning which accompanies it, all unit commanders must ensure that fougasse, husch flares, Z-8 launchers and claymore mines located on base camps and fire base perimeters are shunted at all times except during firing. This will preclude accidental firing of these munitions by an electrical charge produced by lightning.

Army Changes Studied

A five-day training/work week for recruits in basic and AIT is being studied by the All-Volunteer Army Task Group. Some other proposals being considered by the group include: elimination of reveille; abolition of liberty passes for EM; elimination of reception centers; ending "make work tasks"; and ending all hazing and harassment in individual training. Some ideas are being considered for early implementation. (Army Digest Magazine)

* Courtesy of Gary Jestes.

INCOMING

Dear Sir,

Dear Chuck,

Enclosed is some information that might be of interest to the Ripcord Report. I found this copy of the Triple Threat Gazette while cleaning out some boxes in the basement.

Also is a copy of the Carroll County Vietnam Memorial program. We dedicated our county memorial on May 28, 1990. My county had seventeen KIAs, one MIA, and one POW. We had their faces engraved on the monument. God! How young they all looked!

Of special note, two of the KIAs were from the 101st Airborne Division: SGT Franklin Underwood, who was killed in 1969 while trying to save the lives of his men; and Russell Millberry, a medic, who was killed in the Tet Offensive of '68. The POW black flag is flown day and night by the memorial.

I would enjoy showing the memorial to you one weekend.

Take care,

Gary Jestes
Hampstead, MD

Sorry it took me so long to write back. Thank you for the Christmas card. I think of you guys often and hope to see you all again someday. By the way, I reviewed the newsletter and saw that you are the temporary editor. Keep up the great job.

Tell me how Pinky is doing? Is he still in politics? Another thing I have wondered about: What is with this Agent Orange shit? When my daughter was born (she's now 11 years old) she developed blisters all over her body. The doctor said it was Stevens-Johnsons Disease. Well, I looked it up in a medical book, and it said that it was common among Mexican field workers. So, as you know, I was all over Vietnam -- me and Pinky since we served with the 1st and the 101st. Please write soon, and say "hi" to everybody, and God bless you and yours.

Bye for now, your loyal trooper.

Alfria S. Booty
California

Editors Note:

On the facing page are two copies of Viet Cong/North Vietnamese "Chieu Hoi" leaflets -- Communist propaganda which they used against us. I sent these home to my Aunt, Mary Hackman of Baltimore, in March or April 1970.

On the page following is a copy of a 1:25,000 map of the Ripcord AO which was originally sent to me by John Palm of Lutz, FL. John's son Terry was with D/2-501 and died on Hill 805 in July 1970.

**THE SOUTH VIETNAM NATIONAL FRONT FOR LIBERATION
GIVES LENIENT AND HUMANE TREATMENT TO RALLIED
ARMYMEN AND PRISONERS-OF-WAR**

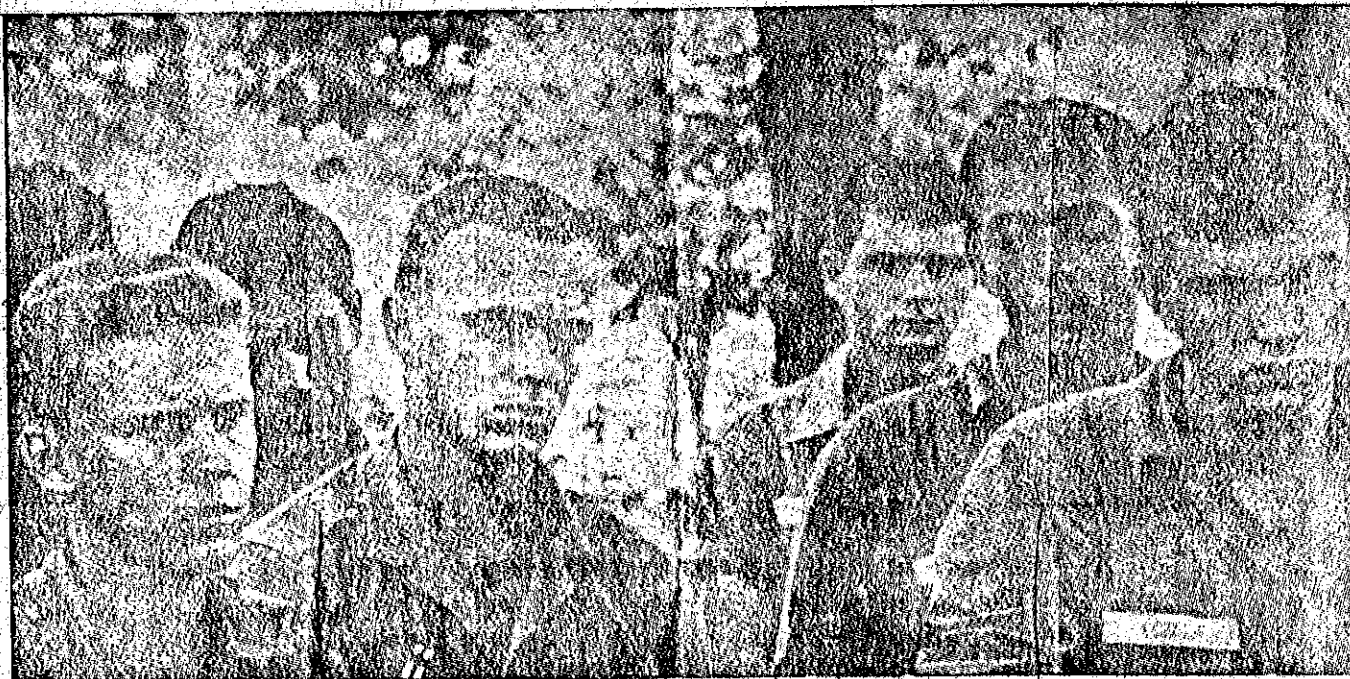
« To welcome puppet officers and soldiers and puppet officials back to the just cause ; show leniency and give humane treatment to rallied army men and prisoners-of-war,

☆ Captured officers and soldiers of the puppet army will enjoy humane treatment and leniency,

☆ Men in the US army and its satellite armies who cross over to the people's side will be given kind treatment and helped to return to their families when conditions permit.

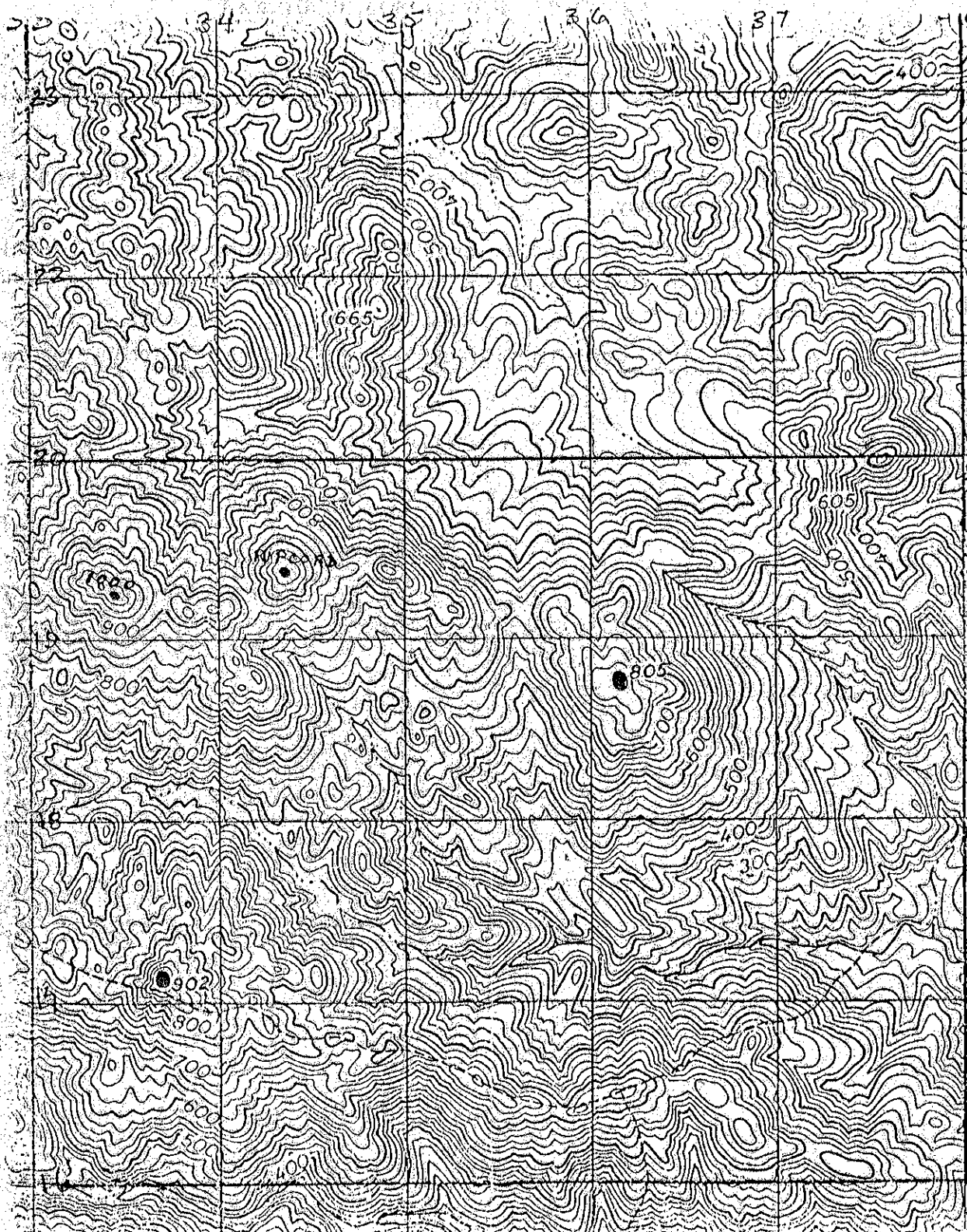
☆ Captured U.S. and satellite troops will receive the same treatment as captured puppet troops... »

(Article 12 of the SVNFL'S Political programme)



*Young American soldiers in Vietnam
Their enemy is in Washington*

You're not the only one who's sick of this war !



SITREP: RECON, 2-506TH

by: Bob Seitz

Several Recon 2-506th troops and their families met in Washington, DC 19-22 June 1990 for family vacations and a platoon mini-reunion. The group had a similar reunion in 1980.

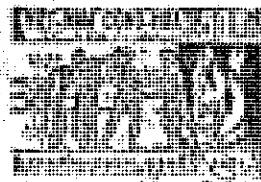
Former Platoon Sergeant Lenny "Ranger" Long organized the event. He and his family (Cindy, Noah (14) and Amanda (13)) linked-up with Ron "Doc" Will's family (Blenda, Jennifer (14) and Amy (10)) at Ron's patrol base in the Shennandoah Valley, Virginia. A further link-up was made with Mike, Carol and Elizabeth (3) Bodnar and then the three families conducted a tactical roadmarch to Washington, DC where they were met on the LZ by Bob (LT) Seitz.

The group visited the 101st Airborne Division Monument at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetary, and then toured the grounds. That evening at their hotel another link-up was accomplished, this one adding Dick, Debbie, Dan (10) and Trevor (7) Cable.

During the next two days, the families visited all the monuments and museums, and returned each evening to relax in their pool-side rooms. The kids loved the pool and the weather was great.

On the last evening, all gathered for an excellent dinner at the hotel and were joined by Chuck (A/2-506) and Glenda Hawkins.

For all these Currahee soldiers, it was a most enjoyable time. All look forward to future and more frequent gatherings.

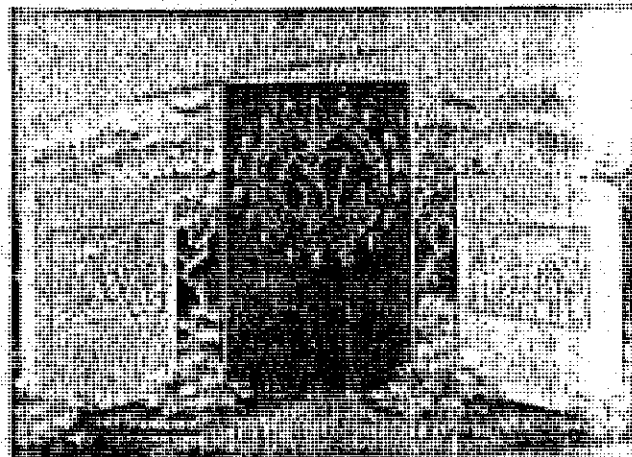


CARROLL COUNTY VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

DEDICATION

May 28, 1990

2:00 P.M.



DEDICATION PROGRAM

INVOCATION Rev. Dr. Robert E. Zimmerli

FLAG RAISING

NATIONAL ANTHEM

WELCOME Richard F. Will, Sr.

MUSICAL SELECTION "From A Distance"
Ms. Karen Goldberg

INTRODUCTION OF HONORED GUESTS

SPEAKER Bryan Hall, Esquire,
President Maryland Vietnam Veterans of America

SPEAKER Steve Mason,
Poet Laureate Vietnam Veterans of America

SPEAKER Julla Gouge,
Carroll County Commissioner

SPEAKER Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr.,
United States Navy, Retired

SPEAKER Jeff Griffith,
Carroll County Commissioner

Presentation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
to the Vietnam Veterans and the
Citizens of Carroll County Richard F. Will, Sr.

SPEAKER John Little, Director of Parks and Recreation,
accepts the Memorial for the Vietnam Veterans
and the Citizens of Carroll County

BENEDICTION Rev. Dr. Robert E. Zimmerli

CLOSING REMARKS Richard F. Will, Sr.

HISTORY OF THE MEMORIAL

The Carroll County Vietnam Veterans Memorial was conceived as a result of involvement of local Vietnam Veterans in fundraising for the Maryland Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in the Spring of 1987.

At a luncheon, held in April 1988, for the families of KIA/MIA's, from Carroll County, it was formally announced that a Vietnam Veterans Memorial, would be constructed in Carroll County.

Following the dedication of the Maryland State Vietnam Veterans Memorial, on May 28, 1989, the Carroll County Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee was reformed, and began the planning for the local Memorial.

Following the selection of the design, and the donation of the site by the County Commissioners, construction of the Memorial, physically began in March of 1990.

The Memorial consists of three granite panels. A grey panel on the left, depicting a combat scene. A grey panel on the right, depicting a humanitarian scene. And a center black panel, honoring the seventeen KIA's, one MIA, and one prior POW.

The Memorial was made a reality, due to the generosity of the businesses and citizens of Carroll County, and thru the efforts of the Vietnam Veterans of Carroll County.

To the men and women who served in Vietnam, The Citizens of Carroll County are Proud of You.....Welcome Home.

Courtesy: Gary Jestes

SIT/REP FROM F/B WHIPPANY

"Currahee," once again from Firebase Whippany. The calendar tells me that summer is slipping away and I'm still trying to figure out what happened to Spring? It's been a busy and hectic year for the Mihalko clan.

First of all, many thanks to Gen. Berry, Jim Fairhall, Frank Marshall, and of course, Vince Kenyon, for their generous donations to the Association. It is donations such as theirs that keep us in business.

It's hard to believe that the Ripcord Association is five years old and counting. It's even harder to believe that it's been 20 years since Ripcord and its aftermath. Like all of you, I wonder where the time has gone.



John Mihalko - May, 1970



John & James Mihalko - May, 1990

It has really been a hot, humid and surprisingly wet summer here in Whippany. Even the "old timers" can't remember a summer like this. When the people at work complain about the rain, I just smile and say: "You aint seen nothin'."

I'm really looking forward to Autumn and my return to the local High Schools. Those students make everything I've done in Viet Nam worthwhile. I guess that they are the reasons why we did what we did 20 years ago at Ripcord.

The future generation is coming of age and the torch is being passed to them. They are eager to accept it, and like us before them, they'll make us proud.

I guess that's about it for this month. In conversation with Chuck, we decided to run some "blasts from the past." Till next time, take care and enjoy.

RIPCORD: A CHARLIE OSCAR'S VIEW

By: Charles F. Hawkins
Commander, A/2-506
30 May - 17 November, 1970

A prayer, dear Chaplin,
Is all we need
To go out and fight,
And die and bleed.
And when the war
Is won - or lost;
What prayer then,
Is heavenward tossed
By we poor souls
In our man-made hell?
I think we'd best
Say that prayer well.

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in Alaska where I learned to use a gun, read a map and roam the forests in search of game. I knew how to fish, set snares and bait traps. Reading sign and following trails were second nature to me. I should have been a point man but they made me a company commander instead.

I ended up in Nam by way of West Point, a quick tour in Germany and a succession of aircraft that seemed to get progressively older and uglier at every stop. So did the stewardesses.

Cam Rahn Bay, Phu Bai, Camp Evans and the inevitable SERTS training, the 2-506th, Currahee Pad and (finally) into the bush as a platoon leader with Charlie Company. It was early March and the monsoons were just starting to let up a bit.

I busted jungle with Charlie Company as a platoon leader for three months. I busted my cherry in the first 48 hours. That was the way it was in our battalion, you didn't stay cherry long; the NVA saw to that.

On 30 May the Battalion Commander, LTC Lucas decided I'd been a lieutenant and a platoon leader long enough. Six days before I expected it, captain bars were pinned on my collar and I was sent to command Alpha Company.

Since everyone went by nicknames in Nam, Alpha Company chose one for me - Charlie Oscar for Commanding Officer. It stuck.

PROLOGUE

It didn't have a name until we gave it one. Later, when the name Ripcord encompassed more than the fire base itself, we simply called it

The Hill. Now Ripcord has passed into the history books as one of the most costly battles of the Vietnam War. It was also one of the most significant.

Ripcord rose 970 meters out of the thick, mountain rain forests just a few kilometers east of the A Shau Valley. It was a jumble of rocks, dirt and leftovers from its occupation the year prior when it supported operations in the northern end of the A Shau Valley. Two dominant rocks dotted the loops of its figure-eight shape. As a hill it wasn't bad.

What was bad was the surrounding hills. There were three that were high enough and big enough to provide good observation and fields of fire against Ripcord: Hill 805, 2000 meters east; Hill 902, 2200 meters south; and hill mass 1000, just a kilometer west. These key terrain features provided the enemy with a significant tactical advantage. We tried to control each one but we were never successful for very long.

The battalion's interest in Ripcord actually began in mid-March when Alpha combat assaulted onto Ripcord, took casualties, and was pulled off.

On April 1st we tried again by putting Bravo on the hill. That wasn't much good either. Bravo took some serious casualties before they were extracted.

On the 11th Charlie Company conducted a ground assault from the south and secured Ripcord. Except for the artillery prep, not a shot was fired.

The original plan of operation called for Ripcord to perform the same stepping-stone-into-the-A Shau role that it had played the year prior. FSB Bradley, in the northern end of the Valley, was the next planned fire base for the battalion to occupy.

The plan changed, however, after the Battalion Commander made a visual recon of Bradley from his C&C huey. He, his S-3 and Fire Support Officer observed NVA artillery rounds impacting on top of the hill. The NVA, from across the Laotian border, were registering their guns in preparation for our anticipated move into the A Shau. The plan to seize Bradley was scrubbed; we would now concentrate on interdicting the enemy around Ripcord.

The 2-506th picked up responsibility for FSB O'Reilly, nine or ten clicks north of Ripcord, late in June. This really spread the Battalion thin; only two companies plus Recon to cover the thick jungle between and around Ripcord and O'Reilly, and a company on each fire base.

On 1 July Ripcord received sporadic mortar fire. On 2 July it got worse. The fire base received over 300 incoming mortar, rocket and other weapons fire; and it continued the next day and the next ... for 21 more days. The battle for Ripcord had begun.

ALPHA'S STORY

Waiting for Our Turn

When the battle starts we're on FSB O'Reilly. We're there when Charlie Company gets waxed on Hill 902. We're still there listening on the command net when Delta is out-muscled on Hill 1000; and the next day when what's left of Charlie and Delta try again. We know our turn is coming. It's just a question of when.

10 June. A hot, dry wind is blowing - 45 knot gusts. Bravo Company's on Ripcord catching living hell and has been for four days. Delta and Charlie are back at Camp Evans waiting for replacements and preparing for reaction type missions. And Alpha is beginning its air assault into a small LZ just east of Ripcord.

The lift birds bounce around the windy sky like popcorn in a skillet. We pitch and yaw so bad I worry more about falling out than what's happening on the ground. We're told that it's a hot LZ but the AK fire isn't even close - two, three hundred meters away, maybe. Except for Bravo, we're alone in the AO. Our mission? Simple; take Hill 805.

The waiting is over.

Hill 805

12 June. D/2-501 gets OPCONed to the battalion and together we assault and secure 805. 3d Platoon leads the way and makes contact with an NVA machine gun team. The enemy flees but LT Jim Noll gets hit in the leg. I lose my most experienced lieutenant.

D/2-501, under CPT Straub, gets the higher part of 805 and the mission to defend it. We secure a lower hill 200 meters west that has a small LZ on it. Our mission is to leave in the morning and head down into the valley southeast of Ripcord. We're to look for enemy graves.

At 2245 the attack comes; sappers first, NVA riflemen second. RPGs and 60mm mortar rounds slam into the hill. They hit Delta from three sides but they don't know we're on the other hill. Surprise. Alpha's 2d and 3d Platoons' supporting fire rips into the attacking enemy. The 1st Platoon fights off a penetration attempt on our backside.

We take no casualties. D/2-501 has 16 wounded. The NVA pay dearly. It is one of the few times I've ever seen them attack without conducting adequate reconnaissance.

Delta would stay on Hill 805 four more nights. Each night the NVA would launch a fresh assault and each time they would be beaten back. And CPT Straub would watch his company die a little with each of the ensuing attacks.

The Penetration

13 June. Alpha begins penetrating the valley. The days and nights run together. There are bunkers, caches, and fresh sign everywhere as we continue working our way deeper and deeper. We don't find any graveyards, though.

Our good luck holds. We move out of an NDP before dawn; an hour later the NVA are hitting it with mortars. 2d Platoon gets caught in a friendly 155mm howitzer barrage. No casualties. Neither myself or the FO has called for it, the bastards just fired. And we go deeper.

We are alone again on the 17th when D/2-501 is evacuated. On the 18th a Chinook gets shot down on Ripcord and causes the ammo dump to blow. It takes out CPT Dave Rich's D/2-319 Arty; no more 105 howitzer support.

On the 19th we have more contact. I kill two NVA who walk up on our CP. One's a recon sergeant. D/1-506 becomes OPCONed to the battalion. LTC Lucas tells me to move to a link-up with them about two kilometers east of Hill 805. But they never make it off the LZ. Delta and Charlie have to go get them out. The D/1-506 commander, CPT Don Workman, a classmate of mine, is killed. Alone again. No one tells me about Workman.

On the 20th we make our deepest penetration into the valley, about a click south of Hill 805 and two clicks east of Hill 902. Things start to get real interesting.

The Wire Tap

1st Platoon's up front when they discover a high speed trail with WD-1 telephone wire running parallel to it. LT Bill Pahissa taps into it with the ear plug from a Sony radio and has his Kit Carson scout listening and writing by the time I get there. We make a second tap with the handset from a PRC/25 and our interpreter begins eavesdropping.

Pahissa gets some ambushes out along the trail for security and I tell 3d Platoon to secure the high ground to our rear. 2d Platoon sets up in a far ambush overlooking a small stream. Then I go back to the wire tappers.

For over five hours ARVN SFC Long, the interpreter, and the Kit Carson listen, take notes, and relay the hottest, first-hand intelligence of the battle directly to Division. For the first time during the Ripcord operation we learn who and what we are up against. We don't believe it at first, but it's true. I've managed to get me and my men between an NVA Division Headquarters and one of its four Regiments.

And, as we're learning the names of the division, the commander, the political officer, and the locations of each regiment, several

battalions, and some of the companies, all bloody hell breaks loose. 2d Platoon springs their ambush on a water party.

Still, we listen. They're bitching about Hill 805 and are excited about the ammo dump explosion. They wonder who we are, who's messing around in their valley. (GIs aren't supposed to get too far from hill tops and ridge lines.)

And the information keeps coming and we keep passing it on. Sometimes we talk directly to BG Sid Berry, the acting Division Commander. Then 2d Platoon springs their ambush a second time and SP/4 Miller kills one of the enemy.

By late afternoon the enemy wises up. We hear them order a squad to investigate why they've lost impedance on the line. Pahlisa holds his position and SSG Ross' ambush fires up the NVA linemen. We use captured AKs to add to the confusion. A second party comes through the brush an hour later and 1st Platoon rips out as much phone line as they can and break contact.

We set up in our old NDP and are real quiet that night. Looking for those gravesites isn't important anymore.

'The Maw of the Beast'

I'm caught between a rock and a hard place. I don't know Workman and D/I-506 have been nailed on their LZ. I think about linking up with them. But finding the NVA division changes things. My training tells me to attack the enemy headquarters, defeat them. But they'll be well defended; we'll need a fresh brigade to do it. I don't think the 101st has a fresh brigade. And my grunt-tactical common sense tells me to get the Hell-out-of-Dodge. But where?

The only guidance I receive from battalion is that division wants a prisoner to confirm our wire tap findings. Shit!

We talk it over that night and I decide to try for a link-up with Workman and D/I-506. That means going back through the wire tap area. It might work. The NVA might not expect it. But, I think, if we have any contact at all, we'll head west toward Hill 902 and an LZ I know. If there are any prisoners hanging around, well, we'll keep them.

We work slowly and carefully the next day and, sure enough, we make contact. 1st Platoon blows away a couple of NVA and, honest-to-god, one of them is still breathing. But Doc Draper says he isn't going to make it, so that's that. Bang!

Then I get the word from battalion to prepare to get to an LZ. Good idea; at least I'd been planning ahead.

Later that day as the company comes back together, SP/4 Journell, out on OP, kills a

courier for the NVA Division Commander. Bingo! There's a detailed map outlining the NVA plan of attack for Ripcord. We don't need a prisoner anymore.

That evening LTC Lucas tells me that Ripcord is to be evacuated, thanks to our intelligence information. We stay quiet throughout the night but our mood is one of confidence and relief. We aren't out of the bush yet, but it looks like we might make it. I wish to God it had been that simple.

0700 Hours, Wednesday, 22 July, 1970. We're up all night in anticipation of our coming extraction. I send 1st Platoon on a patrol to the west to find and secure a crossing site on the stream we have to traverse to get to the LZ I've picked. Everyone else is packed and ready.

0900 Hours. LTC Lucas calls me on the secure set and tells me to go to the LZ just east of Ripcord for extraction. Huh? I've always picked my own LZs. I don't want to back-track all the way to Ripcord. He says no. We argue. And the damned secure set goes out. By the time I get a message shackled-up and sent to the TOC, Lucas is gone - out on the fire base or up in the air. I say the hell with it and, figuring that maybe he needs me at his LZ as part of a plan, I call 1st Platoon back and give 2d Platoon the mission to lead the company back toward Ripcord.

1245 Hours. 2d Platoon under LT Lee Widjeskog moves out. I'll be with 3d in the middle and 1st Platoon will follow last. We uncoil from the perimeter. 2d disappears into the brush - 50 meters, 100, 150. Men in 3d Platoon start to get up with their rucks. Some of the guys in 1st are leaning up against trees. Pahlisa and his platoon sergeant are hanging around the CP getting ready to watch us leave. Helmets on. The 2d Platoon point team hits the 200 meter mark. Can't see fifty feet. Eeasssy.

The silence shatters. I hear the pop-snap of M-16s. Contact! Everyone crouches down. Damn it! What's happening?

For the first few seconds it seems like another successful engagement by the 2d Platoon. The point team drops two NVA in their tracks, an M-60 crew runs forward to provide a base of fire and a couple of guys start maneuvering. But then the AK fire comes crackling back. It's a fuckin' fire fight and getting worse. The high pitched rip-chatter of the M-60 merges with the wump of satchel charges and the thrumming beat of RPD machine guns. The FO begins to call for fire. I'm trying to get the situation clear from Widjeskog.

Damn! Damn! Damn! My mind screams - I've really got us in the shit now. Why did I decide to back-track? Why?

Then there's the ringing tung! tung! tung! of 60mm mortars firing close to our east flank. There's movement in the brush. We see them. NVA. It's a massed attack. Firing erupts

everywhere and men on both sides fall. Widjeskog tells me he has a platoon to his front, maybe a company. Then his radio goes dead. Something hits me in the leg. Pahlissa heads for his men and begins directing fire toward the enemy. Mortar rounds are landing everywhere - bursting in trees and spewing fountains of earth out of the ground. Men drop rucks and roll behind them or find trees for cover. 3d Platoon begins dropping back. The CP is exposed and, for the moment, the only thing that stands between us and the enemy is an enormous hardwood.

Fuck it! I'll get us out of this shit.

I see a small knoll some 60 meters west, grab my RTOs, Wit and Vic, and head for it. My only thought now is to secure the radios and get help: cobras, fast-movers, mortars, anything. A mortar round bursts overhead and sends shrapnel into my back. The three of us make it, but I can't locate the rest of the CP.

My stomach is churning bile. The sounds of battle rage around us and I force myself to be calm and talk on the radio. Gunships first; they are closest out of Camp Evans and Phu Bai. They can be on station in eight minutes. Then fast-movers, F4s with 250 pounders and napalm. The FO usually handles the artillery and mortars but I tell the TOC I needed it anyway. I don't realize until later that the FO is dead. We don't get mortars and artillery right away.

Either the NVA see us or our long pole antennas. Whatever. RPGs and mortar rounds begin ripping through our little knoll. We slide down the backside of the hill as far as we can and still maintain radio communications. The fire gets too intense and we scramble over to where we think 3d Platoon is. There we find Jody Smith from 3d and SSG Ross from 1st. I still don't have commo with 2d Platoon. I try 1st and 3d; nothing. Myself, and what is left of the CP, have the only two functional radios in the whole company.

In three minutes the cobras get to us. They're already airborne for another mission when they hear our call and divert. Their rockets and mini-guns are desperately needed. The problem is that I don't know how the company is deployed. I can't talk to, or see, any of the platoons. 2d Platoon is the only one I have a good idea about and from the sounds of their fire fight it seems as if they are holding, for the moment. I try shouting. It works. Some guys from 1st Platoon holler back.

Twenty minutes into the battle the situation starts sorting itself out. 1st and 3d Platoons are mixed together a hundred meters or so down the southwest side of our NDP hill. 2d Platoon is two hundred meters northwest on level ground and I'm in the center down on the west side. The NVA have us surrounded on three sides: east, north and south. We figure its about a battalion, but who's counting. Then our TOC on Ripcord tells me there's another NVA battalion on the way. Thanks, they can wait in line.

The first F4 Phantoms arrive carrying 1000 pound bombs - too big. Air Force MAJ Skip Little is up in the FAC bird and I tell him to find the nearest clearing to our position and drop the bombs. He finds the one I mean a click away and unloads, with secondary explosions as a result. I sort of hope it might be the NVA Division HQ.

Enemy fire against our position intensifies and we move back to our little knoll. By this time I've got about six other guys from 1st and 3d. We form a tight, little perimeter as I work the gunships.

I finally get the artillery and mortars to come down on the company net and they start shooting. Skip Little gets F4s out with the right ordinance. We are getting good support. The gunships are superb. I'm able to bring their fire in as close as 25 meters. It comes in too close one time and myself and some others catch a few pieces of rocket fragments. But it forces the NVA to keep their heads down.

Several times Jody Smith catches my attention and says, "Charlie Oscar, we got to do something!" I know he's right.

We make a quick plan and start crawling forward. We don't get twenty feet before the world opens up on us. I take shrapnel in the face and several guys get knocked over by the concussion. We try again and don't get half as far. An RPD fires us up and nearly gets Ross. One NVA aims an RPG at us - my M-16 is just a bit faster. Still, we're pinned down.

I'm not sure when I realize that we're going to win. (winning means surviving with what is left of the company), but I know we won't unless we get the NDP hill back in our control and rejoin the platoons. 2d Platoon is effectively surrounded. That leaves the CP group and what can be put together from 1st and 3d. I figure that, if the guys in 1st and 3d can move back up their side of the hill, we can provide supporting fire. I've still got to direct the cobras and fast-movers. It might work. The problem is that there's no leadership left in 1st and 3d.

As we shout back and forth I learn that Pahlissa and his platoon sergeant, the FO, and a lot of others are KIA; and even more men are badly wounded. I end up shouting to a fellow from Alabama named Webster. I had found a leader.

Webster has maybe a dozen men who can move up the hill. I've got nine. So, a score of men have to take the hill back from the NVA battalion. We'd need some help.

We get it from the U.S. Air Force.

Skip Little controls fast-movers for me all afternoon. I send him the adjustments and he tries to show the F4s where to put the 250 pound high-draws and napalm. We work Phantoms up and down the length of the enemy lines. Trouble is that Skip isn't authorized to drop the ordinance any closer than 500 meters to friendly troops. I know this; and he knows.

we're in deep trouble. So he fudges the danger close margin down to 300 meters or so. Still not good enough. Most of the NVA are 50 to 150 meters away and sometimes closer. (2d Platoon had enemy throw satchel charges completely over their perimeter.)

I need the high-drags to drop even closer. A 60mm mortar is still throwing rounds at us. Just on the far side of our old NDP hill, maybe 100 meters away. Its also well defended. I recognize that, if this position can be destroyed, Webster and his men might have a chance to take the hill. I begin telling Skip to bring the air strikes closer; "Drop five-zero.", I radio.

Skip won't go for it at first - too close. I tell him about the mortar position and our need to regain the hill. The bombs fall a little closer. I keep giving 'drop five-zeros'. The bombs inch closer. Skip! We're dying down here! Webster and his men begin to move. We're shooting. I don't want the bombs on top of us, just next to us. Is that such a hard thing to do? Drop five-zero, drop five-zero. And then it happens.

The dive of the Phantom is different from previous dives. It's closer, louder, lower - filled with deadly intent. Looking back on it one can almost imagine hearing the bomb's release mechanism go 'pop'. And two hundred fifty pounds of high explosive fall out of the sky. And it goes whoooooomp-boom!, right where I want it, right on top of the NVA mortar.

Later, Skip would say the bomb had malfunctioned - that it was just a fluke - a lucky accident of fate. I guess he had to say that and I guess I believed it then. But hindsight is sometimes more revealing. Today, I honestly believe Skip and that unknown F4 pilot planned and executed that life saving 'malfunction'. Guys, wherever you are today, thanks and God bless.

The blast picks us up and throws us around. Some of the guys get hit. But it destroys the enemy position and a lot more. Webster and his men move up the hill.

Its still a hell of a fire fight. But this is our chance. Men from 1st and 3d assault the hill. The men around me are firing.

"Charlie Oscar. We've got it back!" Its Webster.

The NVA begin breaking contact. We shoot some in the back as they run through the jungle. They leave their dead scattered over the torn earth, along with a lot of equipment.

As I join Webster one of the last rounds of the day is fired at us - an RPG which, luck again, hits a tree limb instead of us. The blast and shrapnel bowl us over and we all take fragments somewhere. I get hit in the neck and end up on my ass. Vic gets it in the leg. But we're okay.

2d Platoon begins fighting their way back and

the NVA break contact with them too. Sometime during the battle they get a radio working. The gunships are still on station, circling the air like sharks looking for prey. They provide cover throughout the night, taking turns as their fuel runs low.

About dusk CPT Rollison and Delta Company try to come into a nearby LZ but napalm is still burning on it. They'll try again at first light. We're alone.

My first worry is security - a perimeter. But I've only got twenty guys who can move and fight. I then make what I think is the toughest decision in my life. I put the wounded outside the perimeter. Somehow my OP medic is alive. Doc is everywhere at once doing his best to put pieces together. We place the wounded men in small groups of twos and threes, between tree roots and anywhere else they'll have some cover, and a chance of surviving another attack. The dead we try to collect at a central point.

The men impress me with their hard-core attitude. Those who aren't in shock or agony are grim and determined. "Let 'em come back, Charlie Oscar," one guy says, "we'll whip the shit out of 'em again." And I hear other tough, positive comments from each man I speak with.

Overhead, flares fall through the night sky and artillery strikes seek targets on the sides of Hill 805 and elsewhere. Alpha watches and waits.

The two MIAs come in around 2100 hours. Alexander (Big Al), the FO's RTO, had taken care of my secure radio set operator who had been blinded in the first minutes of the battle.

Sometime during the wee hours of the morning I succumb to shock and exhaustion. Wit sees me become incoherent and tells me to lay down and get some rest. I pass out and sleep the remaining hours until first light. When I open my eyes I'm staring into the dead face of an NVA soldier.

Rollison is back into the LZ before sunrise and fights his way to us by 0900. We're not alone any more.

A lift of 21 choppers is due at 1230. That leaves three and a half hours to make a hole in the jungle. At 1225 we hear the birds in the distance and, as the lead ship comes into view, the last tree goes down. Our postage-stamp-sized LZ with its raised platform is just barely large enough.

The dead and wounded go first. We keep waiting for the NVA to open up on us. As we rise into the clear, mid-day sky the last few birds begin taking 51 cal fire from the surrounding ridges. Its too little and too late. We head for Camp Evans and away from the 'maw of the beast'.

Postscript

Ripcord marked the beginning of the end of the Vietnam War. Neither side could be said to have won the Battle for Ripcord but because we didn't, it signaled our lack of resolve to the NVA.

The battalion suffered terribly - 60 KIA and 360 wounded. LTC Lucas and his S-3, MAJ Tanner, were killed on 23 July, the final day of the battle. The Charlie Company Commander, CPT Hewitt, was killed on Hill 902. The list is a long one - too long, and too painful, to remember clearly.

There were heroics also. 2d Platoon's Miller had an M-16 and then a thump gun shot out of his hands. He picked up an AK and proceeded to kill seven NVA. Doc Draper died trying to save the life of a wounded comrade. A guy in 1st Platoon stepped in front of an RPD machine gun burst to save the life of his buddy. And others: Alexander, Galindo, Pahlissa, Webster ... and the names blurr with the passing of time. And, God help me, sometimes I wish I could remember, and sometimes I'm too afraid.

Alpha went back to the field a week after Ripcord, as did the rest of the battalion. There were thirty-nine of us: myself, nine veterans of Ripcord, and twenty-nine cherries. The platoons were barely squad sized. I had Smith and Baldy now carrying radios in the CP and Booty carried the secure set. The FO and his RTO were new, and I had a new medic. It would be a month before we got back to anywhere near full strength.

There was one man who got killed that everyone overlooked because he wasn't American. SFC Long, the ARVN interpreter who provided the valuable translation service during the wire tap, was Alpha's thirteenth KIA. Out of 75 men who started that long Wednesday afternoon on 22 July there would be 13 KIA, 56 MIA and only six unscathed.

LET IT BE

By: J. Mihalko

There was a time when I was young
So many songs had yet to be sung
I was so happy, carefree and content
Along came a war, to Viet Nam I was sent.

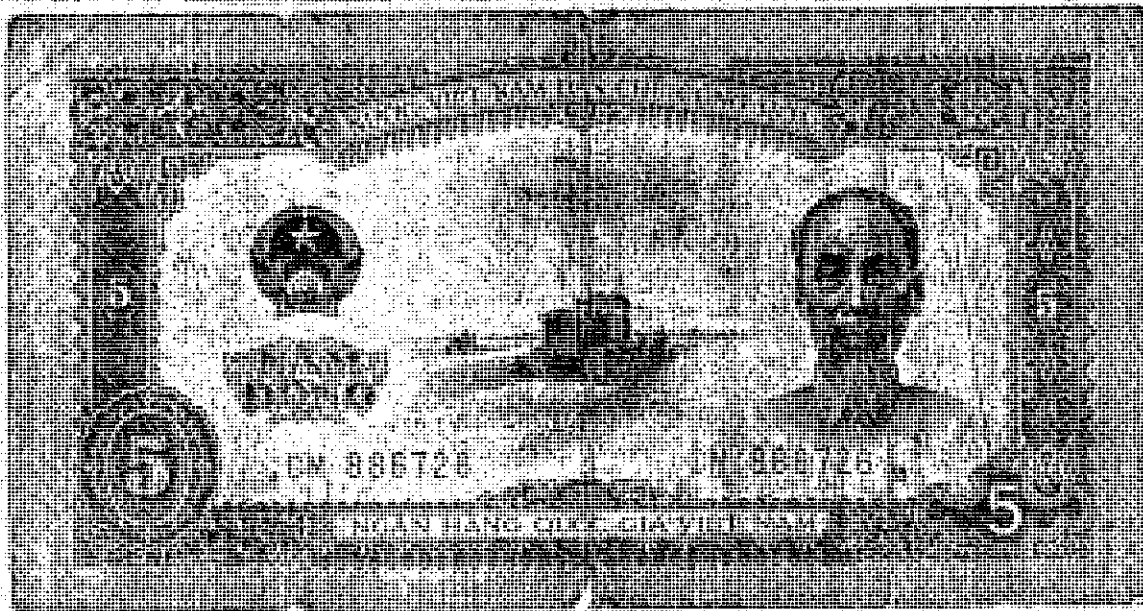
They taught me to maim, they taught me to kill
Just one more mountain, just one more hill
Darkness brings peace, so you think while you rest
Then the incoming rounds shake you out of your nest.

The morning comes quickly, you awake with a yawn
Like men on a chessboard, too bad you're the pawn
Another day, another mile
You'll only survive by your cunning and guile.

A well deserved break, the heat is intense
You think to yourself, does this war make any sense
The months go by slowly, you count every day
You hope you are lucky, and you break down and pray.

At last it's over, as you sigh in relief
You board that freedom bird, very much in disbelief
Your mind is now speeding, your thoughts race ahead
It's great to be alive, but you remember the dead.

You finally arrive home as you stand there and stare
You gaze at the faces, and wonder did they care
Oh, the outside you're happy, but inside you plea,
A song comes to mind, Let It Be, Let It Be.



HEADQUARTERS
101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96383

AVDG-CS

23 July 1970

SUBJECT: Firebase Ripcord

TO: Commanding General
XXIV Corps
APO 96 349

1. BACKGROUND. Fire Support/Operational Base RIPCORN was to be opened on or about 1 April 1970 as a key forward fire support/operational base in the division's summer offensive plans against the 803d and 29th NVA Regiments in the A SHAU VALLEY area. Mutually supporting firebases would be opened at FSB BRADLEY (105mm how) and AIRBORNE (105mm how). AIRBORNE, in turn, was within mutually supporting range of FSB KATHRYN (155mm how).
2. OCCUPATION. Assaults into the FSB RIPCORN area by elements of the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and 1st Regiment, 1st Infantry Division (ARVN) on 5 March 1970 were delayed due to inclement weather in the AO. On 13 March, A/2-506 Infantry was to combat assault into an LZ on Hill 902, 2 kilometers south of FSB RIPCORN. Just prior to insertion, this LZ was determined unsatisfactory and insertion was made into the alternate LZ. The alternate LZ was FSB RIPCORN. A/2-506 began to receive intense mortar, recoilless rifle and small arms fire on the LZ. This fire continued until the company was ordered off the hill to the east. On 14 March, elements of the 1st Regiment (ARVN) captured documents indicating the location of units of the 6th NVA Regiment in the RIPCORN area. ARVN and US units were extracted on 15 March. Extensive air and artillery strikes were conducted until 1 April, when US and ARVN units again assaulted into the RIPCORN area. This assault had been delayed since 17 March due to unsatisfactory weather conditions. B/2-506 Infantry assaulted onto the firebase on 1 April, and again the enemy employed intense mortar, recoilless rifle and small arms fire. At approximately 1830 hours, the company moved about 700 meters to the east and joined A/2-506 Infantry which had combat assaulted into an LZ 700 meters east of RIPCORN.
3. OPERATIONS IN THE FSB RIPCORN AREA. During the period 2-10 April, 2/506 Infantry and 2 battalions of the 1st ARVN Regiment conducted ground combat operations around FSB RIPCORN to locate and destroy enemy mortar and recoilless rifle positions. These operations were conducted within 3000 meters of and all around the firebase. On 11 April, C/2-506 Infantry assaulted RIPCORN and secured the firebase by 0800 hours. The battalion light CP and engineer support elements were lifted into the firebase on 11 April. Inclement weather precluded insertions of artillery into the firebase until 16 April. During the period 16 April to 1 July, the battalion continued construction and conducted security operations around the firebase.

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without significant stand-off (indirect fire) attack on the firebase. During the period 1-22 July, FSB RIPCORDER was subjected to daily attacks by mortar, recoilless rifle, RPG, and sporadic machinegun and small arms fire from enemy locations all around the firebase. On 18 July, a CH47 aircraft was shot down on the firebase. The aircraft crashed in a 105mm ammunition storage area and burst into flames. The resulting fire and exploding artillery ammunition destroyed 5 105mm howitzers, 2 106mm recoilless rifles, one mechanical mule, and several other items of equipment. The remaining 105mm howitzer on the firebase was damaged.

4. EXTRACTION FROM FSB RIPCORDER. At 230545 July 70, the 3d Brigade began operations for the extraction of the 2-506 Infantry from FSB RIPCORDER and field locations south of the firebase. During the night of 22-23 July, massive artillery and air fires were employed throughout the area against known and suspected enemy locations. More than 2232 mixed caliber artillery rounds were fired in support of the extraction. The US Air Force, Marines, and Navy flew 35 preplanned and immediate air strikes, for a total of 74 sorties. Fourteen CH47 aircraft were employed commencing at 0545 hours to extract 22 sorties, which included 1 155mm howitzer battery (6 tubes), 2 M-405 dozers, communications equipment, 1 M55 multiple machinegun (Quad-50), and 1 damaged 105mm howitzer. The CH47 extraction operations proceeded smoothly until 0740 hours when 1 CH47 was shot down on the firebase by enemy 12.7mm machinegun fire. The aircraft was forced to land amidst the 105mm howitzers which had been destroyed on 18 July and thus prevented the landing of additional aircraft to extract the remaining artillery pieces and two 106mm recoilless rifles. The CH47 received a direct hit by an unknown type enemy mortar round, causing the aircraft to burn and explode. The aircraft was destroyed. Eight additional CH47 aircraft received hits during the extractions; 4 are nonflyable. B/2-506 Infantry began extracting at 0745 hours by UH1H aircraft but was delayed until 0935 hours by heavy enemy 60mm and 82mm mortar fires. The extractions was conducted by infiltrating one UH1H aircraft at a time into the firebase. The extraction from FSB RIPCORDER was complete at 1214 hours. Companies A and D/2-506 Infantry extracted from a pickup zone 1 1/2 kilometers south of FSB RIPCORDER commencing at 1301 hours. Sporadic small arms fire was received during the extraction. There were no casualties or damage. The extraction of 2-506 Infantry units from the RIPCORDER area was complete at 1407 hours. During the extraction, FSB RIPCORDER was under constant fire from numerous enemy mortars of 60mm and 82mm caliber. Several hundred rounds impacted throughout the firebase during the operation. Heavy 12.7mm anti-aircraft fire was directed against the aircraft flying into the firebase. Air, artillery, and ARA destroyed several enemy mortars and 12.7mm machineguns. In addition, numerous enemy driven into the open by CS were killed by air, artillery, and ARA.

5. RATIONALE FOR CLOSING FSB RIPCORDER. In early July, it became obvious that NVA forces were massing in an attempt to control the RIPCORDER area. The enemy buildup of forces and the tempo of mortar, RPG, and anti-aircraft fire steadily increased during the first half of the month. By the third week of July, it was apparent that the cost and effort required for the self-defense of RIPCORDER placed the accomplishment of the primary mission, i.e. operations in the BRADLEY-AIRBORNE area, in grave jeopardy. The closing of

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SUBJECT: Firebase Ripcord

RIPCORDER would make troops available for offensive use against the enemy supply caches and logistic installations to the rear of the NVA forces massed around RIPCORDER. The cache sites in the AIRBORNE-BRADLEY area are believed to be part of the base areas of the 803d and 29th NVA Regiments. The concentration of NVA forces around RIPCORDER would further facilitate operations in areas to the south and southeast. Therefore, the decision to extract from RIPCORDER was made, and operations into the AIRBORNE-BRADLEY areas will be undertaken as a part of operations CHICAGO PEAK. Additional factors of critical importance in the decision to close FSB RIPCORDER were the domestic and foreign political implications of another US firebase undergoing a KHE SANH or DIEN BIEN PHU siege. RIPCORDER, in given an inordinate amount of adverse publicity, might well have jeopardized the program of Vietnamization. RIPCORDER operations caused heavy NVA casualties and drew the enemy from his cache sites, causing him to mass and thus to present numerous targets vulnerable to heavy air attack and artillery fire.

6. ENEMY LOSSES. From 13 March through 23 July, the enemy suffered 422 NVA KIA, 6 NVA PW, and 93 individual and 24 crew-served weapons captured.

7. FRIENDLY LOSSES.

a. During the same period, US losses were 68 KIA and 443 WIA. Casualties during the extraction on 23 July were 3 KIA and 20 WIA.

b. Aircraft losses on or near the firebase include:

(1) UH1H	
Minor damage	13
Major damage	10
Destroyed	3

(2) OH6A	
Minor damage	1
Major damage	4
Destroyed	1

(3) OH47	
Minor damage	5
Major damage	3
Destroyed	2

(4) In addition, 60 aircraft received combat damage which required limited repair.

8. PLANNED OPERATIONS. Planned offensive operations will be initiated on or about 25 July with the combat assault of one infantry battalion to open a fire support/operational base which will provide support for the insertion of 2 ARVN infantry battalions on or about 28-30 July 1970. A detailed plan will follow.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

HUGH A. MACDONALD
Colonel, GS

IN HONOR OF THOSE WHO DIED IN THE DEFENSE
OF THEIR NATION

101st Abn Div, 2/506 Inf

1970

Posting of the Colors	CPT Vasquez-Rodriguez
Invocation	Ch. Howard Johnson
Calling of the Roll	
Commanding Officer	LTC John C. Bard
Reading of the Old Testament	
Reading of the New Testament	Ch. LeRoy Fox
Address by the Chaplain	
Prayer	
Solo - The Lord's Prayer	SP/4 Bill Woody
Silent Tribute to the Deceased	
Benediction	
Salute	
Taps	
Retiring of the Colors	



Photo Bill Heath



WE GATHER IN MEMORY OF

STAFF

LTC Andre Lucas	23 July 1970
MAJ Kenneth Tanner	23 July 1970

HEADQUARTERS COMPANY

PFC Richard Conrady	2 July 1970
PFC Rickey Scott	8 July 1970
SP4 Martin Draper	22 July 1970
PFC Danny Fries	22 July 1970

A COMPANY

PFC John Babich	22 July 1970
PFC Virgil Bixby	22 July 1970
PFC Robert Brown	22 July 1970
SP4 Robert Jawinell	22 July 1970
SP4 Donald Severson	22 July 1970
SGT John Kreckel	22 July 1970
SFC Pham Uam Long	22 July 1970
1LT Steve Olson	22 July 1970
1LT William Pihassa	22 July 1970
SP4 Thomas Schultz	22 July 1970
PFC Gerald Singleton	22 July 1970
PFC Gus Allen	23 July 1970

B COMPANY

PFC Robert Utecht	3 July 1970
SP4 Victor DeFoor	10 July 1970
SP4 Roberto Flores	21 July 1970
PFC Francis Maune	21 July 1970

C COMPANY

SGT Thomas Herndon	2 July 1970
CPT Thomas Hewitt	2 July 1970
SGT Lee Lenz	2 July 1970
SP4 Robert Radcliff	2 July 1970
SP4 Roger Sumrall	2 July 1970
SP4 Robert Zoller	2 July 1970
SP4 Gerald Risinger	7 July 1970
SP4 James Hupp	8 July 1970

D COMPANY

PFC Charles Beals	7 July 1970
PFC Michael Grimm	7 July 1970
SP4 Lewis Howard	7 July 1970
SGT Paul Guimond	14 July 1970
SSG James Hembree	14 July 1970
SP4 John Keister	14 July 1970
1LT Terrence Palm	14 July 1970
SGT Gary Schneider	14 July 1970
PFC Keith Utter	14 July 1970
SGT Stanley Diehl	22 July 1970

E COMPANY

SP4 Ray Johnson	10 July 1970
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Who died serving their country in the
Republic of Vietnam.

TWENTY YEARS

Twenty years an' countin',
Lord, it seems like yesterday.
Jungled mountains, valleys,
So close, yet far away.

Twenty years of thinkin'
Of the mud, the rain, the heat,
An' how we ever lost the war
To an enemy we'd beat.

An' twenty years of drinkin'
To try to ease the pain
Of coming home to neighbors
Who thought we were to blame.

Twenty years of dreamin',
An' then wakin' with a yell.
The combat's never over,
An' that's why war is hell.

An' twenty years of cryin'
An' prayin' for my soul.
An' twenty years of guilt trip
Because I came back whole.

Twenty years of laughin'
At the death I shoulda' had.
It wasn't funny at the time.
But now I'm kinda' glad.

Twenty years, that's just how long
It's been since we were young an' trim
An' fought a war we may not win.

C. Hawkins, July 1990

