

RIPCORD REPORT

For friends and survivors of Fire Support Base Ripcord, Republic of Vietnam, 12 Mar.—23 July 1970

No. 43 Feb. 1997

SSgt. Radford returns to Ripcord, Hill 1000 on quest for MIAs

FSB RIPCORN, Vietnam, July 1996—It was hot, dry and windy, reminiscent of the weather 26 years ago when this isolated Vietnamese mountain top fortress was evacuated by 101st troopers under siege by a division of North Vietnamese regulars. For the first time since the war ended, a U.S. citizen walked across the scarred peak, stood and looked east toward Hill 805, south to Hill 902 and, finally, west to see Hill 1000.

There was none of the noise and confusion of fighting this time. Even the sound of the rotor blades of the Soviet-built Mi-17 helicopter was different from the popping sound of U.S. Huey lift ships common to 101st airmobility. For Gary Radford, a Pittsburgh truck driver, father of two and a former member of Delta Co., 2d Bn., 506th Inf., the memories of a fight long ago came flooding back.

"It was the same place I remembered," Radford said, "just older by 26 years and weathered." Debris from the siege littered the old mountain fire base. "Rusty artillery shells were everywhere," Radford noted, "and the landing gear from one of the Chinooks that had been shot down." The shells and landing gear were corroded by time. Shell fragments lay about. Here, an unexploded grenade, there, a foxhole, with leaves in it but still usable.

When Ripcord had been built, most of the top soil had been dozed or washed away. Little grows there now except for tufts of coarse grass which cover the hill. The jungled rain forest has not yet reclaimed its prize.

Hill 1000, on the other hand, "was thick with vegetation and covered with jungle," Radford said. It was this hill mass, as high as Ripcord, and the scene of vicious fighting during the siege, that Radford and a U.S. MIA recovery team had come to investigate.

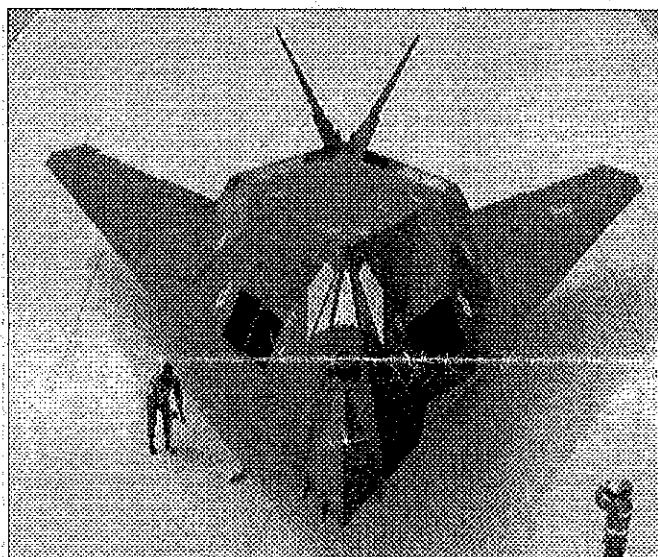
"We left two men, or their bodies, there on July 7, 1970," Radford explained. "About eight years ago I started thinking it was time to get them back."

Eight years is a long time, but that's how long it took for Radford to satisfy the U.S. Army that he was indeed serious, and could pinpoint the grid coordinates where the missing men were last seen. "It was frustrating, sometimes," Radford said. "They had the wrong coordinates; and I had the correct ones." Well, you know the Army.

Continued on page 2 ...

(Ripcord Report is mailed to 350 members across the country.)

SPOTLIGHT ON STEALTH



STEALTH, F-117A

(Photo: Jane's Information Group)

After a program of prototype development, manufacture of operational F-117A aircraft began in November 1978 under the Senior Trend program. The first of five pre-series aircraft (numbers 780-784) flew June 18, 1981; one crashed April 20, 1982. A planned production of 100 was reduced to 59 (numbers 785-843) of which No. 785 crashed on its first flight June 21, 1982; first hand-over to USAF (No. 787) was on August 23, 1982; first picture and designation was released six years later on November 10, 1988.

The first operational deployment of the F-117A was in Operation Just Cause over Panama on December 21, 1989, when two F-117As each dropped a 907 k.g. (2000 l.b.) laser-guided bomb on a barracks area at Rio Hato; all 56 in-service F-117As participated in 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, flying 1,270 missions.

Continued on page 2 ...

Stealth, F-117A (cont.)

External Dimensions:

Wing span.....13.20 m (43 ft 4 in)
Length overall.....20.08 m (65 ft 11 in)
Height overall.....3.78 m (12 ft 5 in)

Wing Area (estimated):

Wing area.....105.9 m² (1140 sq. ft.)

Weights:

Weight empty (estimated).....13608 kg (30000 lb)
Max T-O weight.....23814 kg (52500 lb)

Performance: (* = not confirmed by USAF):

Max level speed.....Mach 1+*
Normal max operating speed.....Mach 0.9
T-O speed at normal combat weight.....165 knots (306 km/h; 190 mph)*
Landing speed.....150 knots (227 km/h; 172 mph)*
g limit.....+6

(Source: Janes)

That Was Alpha Battery, and Those Were 155s



VFW Magazine, June-July

1996—Alert readers of my article in this issue, "Rendezvous At Ripcord," picked up on the error in the accompanying picture. The caption mentioned that the howitzers in the picture were 105mm, and belonged to B Btry., 2d Bn., 319th Artillery. Not so. Those howitzers were 155mm, and belonged to Alpha Battery, 2d Battalion, 11th Artillery, a general support battalion of the 101st Airborne Division.

I won't take the blame for the error. Picture selection and captions were the responsibility of VFW Magazine.

Ripcord had a total of 12 howitzers, six 105s and six 155s. The 105s were from B/2-319th, and they did yeoman work throughout the battle. Initially, however, there were only four 155s from an ARVN unit. Later, A/2-11th got on the mountain with their big guns. When the fighting got tough, it was Alpha Battery, 2/11th, that was there sharing in the trials of the 23-day siege.—Editor

*"Gold is for the mistress—silver for the maid—
Copper for the craftsman, cunning at his trade."
"Good!" said the Baron, sitting in his hall,
"But Iron—Cold Iron—is master of them all."*

(Rudyard Kipling: Cold Iron, 1909; in *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations* by Robert Debs Heipl, Jr.)

Radford (cont.)

At first they didn't know what to do with Radford's offer of assistance. Then, they had him jump through a series of bureaucratic hoops, including getting notarized permission of the surviving family members for him to lead the search. Finally, they told him that he had to be in top physical shape in order to make the journey.

Radford, a former Army ranger and still lean as a rail, did not disappoint. Finally, in July 1996, his patience and persistence paid off, and he was placed on official orders to join a MIA recovery team in Hue to help search for the remains of the missing Americans.

When Radford arrived in Hue, he was welcomed by Capt. Frank Mausolf, team leader of Det. 2, Joint Task Force-Full Accounting. Finally, here were soldiers, airmen, marines and sailors Radford could understand. "They're total professionals," Radford said, "and were eager to learn what I could tell them."

In a few days arrangements with the Vietnamese had been made and Radford found himself and the other team members churning through the air over the rugged Nam Hoa mountains. The green canopy looked just as it had in 1970, lush and verdant, but, somehow, not quite so deadly. Ripcord, or what was left of it, came into view.

The Vietnamese pilot eased back on the throttle and increased the pitch on the rotors of the Mi-17. Carefully, slowly, the chopper settled onto the top of the scarred mountain top.

After Vietnamese Army escorts made sure the area was safe, the team debarked. For Radford, it was a weird sensation.

"Here I was, finally, at the place of so much fighting and dying that took place 26 years ago," He paused and looked around. "It was like I'd never left," he said, "yet also like I was here for the first time." Quickly, the team got to work.

As Radford and the team labored up the eastern slope of Hill 1000, they began to find signs of the battle. There on the leafy jungle floor lay an unexploded 105mm round, over by a tree was a bent rucksack frame. Then, just a few meters farther on, the rusty remains of a M-60 machine gun were discovered.

One of the MIAs had been an assistant machine gunner.

At the spot Radford remembered, the team found a rotted jungle boot, size 10, the same size as one of the missing troopers. Just beyond lay a GI helmet. The MIA recovery team took careful notes and recorded the grid coordinates. "They felt pretty positive about the search," Radford said. Then the team probed the ground for signs of a long-ago burial. They found nothing. Still, Radford felt that the team would file a report recommending further investigations in the area.

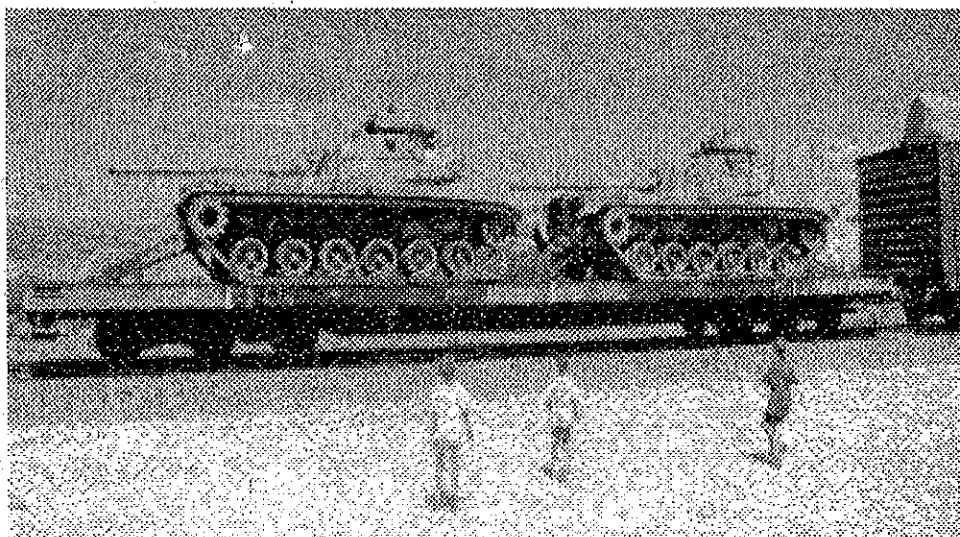
As the team members went about their work, Radford knelt by the broad roots of a massive hardwood and began digging a small hole. When it was deep enough he stopped. Quietly, he slipped two worn copper MIA bracelets from his pocket and placed them in the hole, and covered them up.

Staff Sergeant Gary Radford continued to kneel, tears streaming down his cheeks, as he offered a prayer for the two men lost so long ago. Then he stood up. Around him were the members of the MIA recovery team. They, too, stood silently, honoring the memory of brothers they never knew.

The MIAs: Sp/4 Lewis Howard, Jr., of Macon, Ga., had been Radford's radioman for several months. On that fateful day, Howard had volunteered to walk point. PFC Charles E. Beals, of Frenchlick, Ind., was an assistant machine gunner. May their honored souls rest in peace. Curraheel

'Gee, guys! Look' it the cool Army tanks.'

U.S. M-60 tanks, rail-loaded and bound for ... where? Rail transport does the job here in the states, but the Army used heavy equipment transports (HETs) in Operation Desert Storm to move armored task forces to their jumping off point in the Saudi Arabian desert.



Say, is this what you'd call 'rail-mobility,' or what?

(Photo by Randy Houk)

LZ Dumfries

DUMFRIES, Va.—Happy New Year to all friends, family and fellow veterans of TSB Ripcord. Let's make 1997 the best yet!

By the way, the picture above wasn't taken in my back yard, but it comes close. Dumfries is next to the Marine Corps base at Quantico, and the firing ranges are just beyond the trees and a little creek. When there's small arms fire, it sounds just like the rifle range it is, and I don't mind. But when the artillery and mortars do their thing, I still flinch a bit, and look around. Then I realize they're too distant to worry about, and I pick up my ruck ... ahhh, I mean, get back to the computer and go to work.

It's been a busy couple of months, with lots of "gummint" work to keep me gainfully employed, and plenty of contact with new members and old. Had the pleasure of a visit with Gabe Rollison (D/2-506 commander) and his wife Marty at their farm in Prairie Home, Mo., back in November. Also spent some time with the Ripcord Association founder, Chip Collins (B/2-506), out in Kentucky, and Fred Spaulding (S-3 Air, 3d Brigade) in Indianapolis.

Got a surprise call from John Clyde "Pops" Hedrick (E/2-506 Mortars) of Galena, Mo. He's the county extension agent there. By his own account, Pops was one of the oldest grunts in the battalion, and did his fair share of mortar firing off Ripcord. "After I found out that Michelin continued to trade with the North Vietnamese during the war," he told me, "I stopped buying their tires."

Also heard from Bruce McCorkle (D/2-506) of Hudson, Ohio. Bruce was one of Rollison's radio operators, and is now a regional sales manager for Chilton Professional Automotive Information Systems. (Nice plug, 'eh Bruce?) He was kind enough to fax me some pictures, one of Rollison "doing his laundry," and another of himself, Rollison, Lt. Jack Flaherty, Ron Sperring and Rick Rearick.

Al Martin (A/2-11th Artillery) has been busy rounding up new members from his old outfit. Keep up the good work, Al. Mike Webber (426th S&S Bn.) called from Miami, Fla., to get on the mailing list. Mike had been a cook, but transferred to POL, and was with the 3d Forward Element at Ripcord. Tony Cox (D/1-506) called from Indianapolis to sign up some new members from his company.

Karin Loke of Kailua, Hawaii, called to see what information we had on her brother (and my West Point classmate), Don Workman, who commanded D/1-506 and was killed at Ripcord. Welcome to the Ripcord family Karin.

There's been a lot of support from members recently, and many submissions of material for publication. Too much and too many, in fact, to do justice to everyone and everything in one issue. But, as they say, keep the cards and letters coming. It's good to hear from you, and important to pass on to other members as much as we can.

Ripcord Report delivered via e-mail

It had to happen sooner or later. Now it has. The November 1996 issue of *Ripcord Report* was sent over the Internet e-mail system to two new members, Bruce McCorkle and Robert Nelson. As it turns out, Nelson, who lives in Mountlake Terrace, Wash., was a member of B Btry., 2/319th Artillery, commanded by Capt. Dave Rich. Rich won the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism during the siege, and his "redlegs" provided round-the-clock fire support from Ripcord during the entire period. Nelson worked in the counter-mortar radar section on Ripcord, and was called ... you guessed it ... "Radar" by Capt. Rich.

If you want *Ripcord Report* sent to you via e-mail, please contact me at: hawkins@bellatlantic.net; or you can always write and let me know in the more traditional "snail mail" way.

Is a Ripcord book in the works?

You bet it is! Noted author of eight (count 'em, eight) history books on Vietnam, Keith William Nolan, is "very excited" about writing the story of Ripcord. After a recent visit with Keith, he sent a proposal to Presidio Press in California, and their response was "Do it!" The research and writing should take 18 months to two years.

Keith will want to contact as many Ripcord Association members as possible to do the background research for the book, and I've agreed to let him access the considerable files and documentation on hand in the association archives. Keith will be contacting members in the near future. Give him a hand. It's our chance to get the story of Ripcord told.

Keith has long been interested in writing the history of Ripcord, and has been an association member for a number of years. His previous books include *Into Laos*, an account of Operation Lam Son 719 in early 1971, and his most recent, *The Battle for Saigon*, about fighting in South Vietnam's capital city during Tet 1968. *The Battle for Saigon* is a terrific book, with lots of action and human interest, including the 2/506th. Get a copy for yourself and enjoy.—Chuck Hawkins, Editor

INCOMING

For 26 years ...

I'm looking forward to getting the newsletter. For 26 years I have had no contact with any of the men I served with in Vietnam and was excited to hear that you saw Rollison recently. If you would be kind enough to fax me his address, I would like to send him a card and some pictures.

Bruce McCorkle
Hudson, Ohio
D/2-506th Infantry

Just the FAX

To: FSB Ripcord Assn., Ripcord Report

With this fax I hope that I am reaching Chuck Hawkins, who I found on the Internet, and I hope that you are doing well.

I am interested in getting into contact with others formerly on Ripcord to:

1. Say hello and
2. Compare notes on medical problems. I have a peripheral neuropathy.

I am also in need of help on proof of stressors for a PTSD claim with the VA, one stressor being the events on Ripcord. Can you help?

Best wishes,

Robert G. (Bob) Nelson (aka "Radar")

B/2-319th Artillery

Friendly and eager ...

I read the November *Ripcord Report* and was sorry I could not make the reunion. However, my wife was in the hospital for almost two weeks late September and I had a lot to catch up with: working, taking care of things at home; I was doing double duty.

I met a guy who said he was in 2/502d Inf. as a CP medic at Camp Evans around 1970. He heard of a lot of different fire bases, but I do not know if his unit was around Ripcord. He said his name was C. J. Kwaitkowski of Hobart, Indiana. I told him about the association. He said he was interested. We will see if he makes contact.

When I went to Vietnam in 1995 with the group, Vets With a Mission, we stayed in Hue and I think the Vietnamese are willing to open their doors. We possibly could see Ripcord again if we approached it right. If you want to possibly go back, we could get Chaplain Fox and some men together and go back and approach it like a healing trip. When we get on Ripcord's mountain we could say a prayer led by Rev. Fox and we could all be affected in a good healing way. It is approximately a 17 hour trip back by jet and costs a group rate of approximately \$2,000. We could stay in Hue. There are some good international hotels there. You saw some of my tape at the 1995 reunion in Colorado. The people there are friendly and eager for American contact.

Sincerely,

Martin J. Glennon

Valparaiso, Ind.

HHC, 2/506th Inf. (2d Plt., A Co., medic)

P.S. I just did my 60th wedding as a lay non-demoninational minister. Ripcord changed my life. I'm sure I probably wouldn't be a minister if it wasn't for my Ripcord experience.

Rest assured ...

Just a short note with some funds enclosed. The \$25 is all I can afford at this time. I don't make much here in prison. But I know you can use all you can get. My address is the same.

The last report I received was in January 1996, so if there have been others since, I've not received them. I would appreciate it if you could get me up to date.

I am not able to make the reunion, as the State of California desires my attention right now. But rest assured that the first reunion I can make, I'll be there.

Keep up the good work, and give the best to family and friends.

Dau tranh,

James "Sneaky" White

Vacaville, Calif.

C/4-77th ARA "Griffins"

From the sergeant major ...

It was a great surprise to see Chris Garrett a few weeks ago, and he attended the Ripcord reunion and I attended the 101st Airborne Division reunion in St. Louis, Mo. I have a lot of tasks both with the division association and the chapter now. First as chairman of the membership committee, and now about to be president of the largest chapter in the association.

One of my duties is to make sure that all of us Screaming Eagles have an opportunity to join the national association. I have enclosed some coin for the Ripcord Association, and I hope you keep up the good work. Also, I hope to make one of the Ripcord reunions one of these days. Could you run the enclosed ad for me in the newsletter? Also, the 101st Airborne Division Association invites all of the Ripcord Association members to join us at the national association.

The national association sponsored a return to Vietnam recently, and I'll get all the details shortly. I have heard from all of the S-3s and brigade commanders during the period 1969-70, and I am about to put all my Screaming Eagle photos that I had made from slides into two books. Now I can have my daughter's wishes complete.

Best wishes to all, sincerely,

Lloyd Rahlf

Membership Committee

101st Airborne Division Association

HHC, 3d Brigade

Bear of a tail ...

A Panda walks into a honkey tonk and orders a bowl of chilli from the bartender. The Panda eats the chilli, then gets up, hauls out his six-shooter and plugs the piano player. Then the Panda heads for the door.

The bartender cries, "Wait, you can't do that. You can't just come in here and shoot my piano player and then leave with out paying for your food!"

"Of course I can," says the Panda, "I'm in the dictionary. Look it up." And the Panda walks out the door.

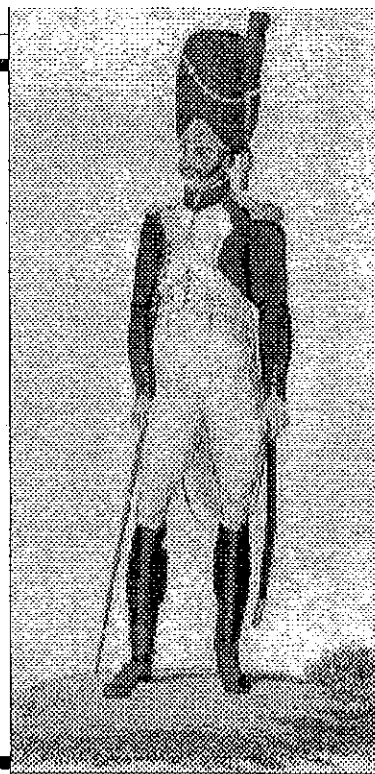
The bartender gets his dictionary and, sure enough, it says: "Panda. Asian marsupial. Eats shoots and leaves."

Honor Roll of the 101st Airborne Division

The 101st Airborne Division Association is establishing a Roll of Honor of all veterans who served in the 101st Airborne Division from 1941 to present date. If you served in World War II, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Iraq or Fort Campbell, Kentucky, you are eligible to have your name included.

For further information, contact: SGM Lloyd J. Rahlf (ret.), HHC, 3d Brigade (Vietnam) 1969070. Send postcard or letter to:

SGM Lloyd J. Rahlf (ret.)
738 O'Callahan Drive
Sparks, Nevada 89434



INCOMING (Cont ...)

The wise still seek Him ...

Peace on Earth and Good Will to All

Gary Jestes
Hampstead, Md.
HHC, 3d Bde.

Merry Christmas

Dick really enjoyed the Ripcord reunion. I was sorry I couldn't make it. Sounds like you all had a great time: The boys are 16 and 13 and keep us busy with basketball, running and Boy Scouts. Excavating and teaching are going well.

All our best.
Happy holidays,
Debbie Cable
Frewsburg, N.Y.
(Debbie's husband Dick Cable served with Recon, 2/506th)

Received the Ripcord newsletter. Thanks for the write up. Take care and keep the memories of both the living and the deceased alive.

May your holidays be happy ones.
Tom's pop,
Joe Shepherd, Sr.
P.S., Enclosed find a check to help expenses for your paper. God bless.

Special thanks from a sister of a fallen friend ...

I'm Karin Jean Workman Loke, Capt. Donald R. Workman's sister. I'm sorry I wasn't able to visit during our brief stay in Washington, D.C. My father was not feeling well and up for visiting.

Seeing "The Wall" for the first time was hard on all of us, especially my father and myself. So many names. So long to heal, if ever. Maya Lin did a great job with her design. My father and I do feel better now that we have seen The Wall personally. I placed a silk lei from Hawaii at the base of the panel where Don's name is.

We also went to West Point and visited Don's gravesite. I also placed a lei there. It was Aug. 17, 1970, that my father and I were there—the day of Don's funeral. This was the first time for my husband to visit West Point. Now he feels what U.S.M.A. represents and what a hero Don was and is!

Going back after 26 years makes me realize that "The Long Grey Line" continues. It made me realize again what Don, you and the present cadets are taught—Duty, Honor, Country. I know Don did his utmost in Vietnam and I will always be proud of him and I do miss him dearly.

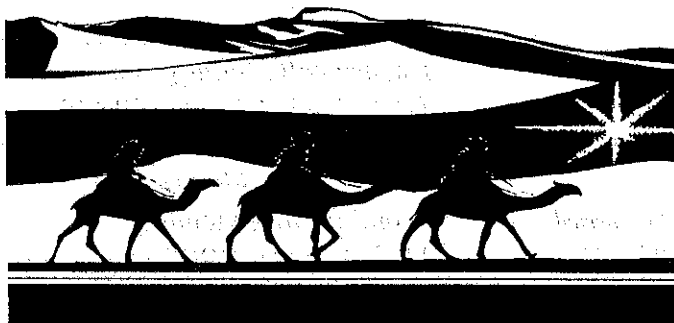
I appreciated getting the Nov. 1996 issue of *Ripcord Report*. Thank you for putting me on the mailing list. I had no idea you had Ripcord reunions. I think reading the letters has been healing for me. I see Don was mentioned in Richard Drury's letter. I would love to hear from anyone in Don's company or anyone else who knew him.

I appreciate what all of you did in Vietnam!

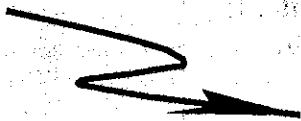
Sincerely,
Karin J. Loke



*When the going gets tough the tough make
sure their machine gun ammunition is clean.*



*I wish I was
going to be in
Mobile, Alabama
this October.*



MOBILE, ALABAMA

Mobile is a city in southwestern Alabama at the head of Mobile bay on the Gulf of Mexico. It is a river port and the state's only seaport.

History

The Mobile area was explored by Spaniards under Alonso Alvarez de Pineda (1519), Panfilo de Narvaez (1528, with Nunez Cabeza de Vaca), Francisco Maldonado (1540), Guido de las Bazaras (1558) and Tristan de Luna (1559). French colonists under Jean Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, established Mobile at its present site in 1711, the first permanent European settlement in Alabama; and Mobile was the capital of French Louisiana (1711-20). Its name is a French adaptation of the name of an Indian tribe in the area.

*It's where folks want to
be! Don't miss this one!*

French rule was followed in 1763 by British rule. During the American Revolution, Spanish forces under Bernardo de Galvez captured Mobile. The United States occupied the city in 1813 and clarified its title by the Florida purchase (1819). In antebellum times Mobile became one of the leading ports in the export of cotton, and the Mobile and Ohio



railroad was of major commercial importance in supplementing the river system.

RIPCORD REUNION '97

During the American Civil War, trade with the West Indies and Europe was kept up despite a Federal blockade begun in 1861. In 1864 Adm. David G. Farragut entered the channel, captured the Confederate ironclad ram Tennessee, destroyed one gunboat and drove another aground; in the engagement he lost the Federal monitor Tecumseh. Ft. Gaines, on Dauphin Island, surrendered on Aug. 7, 1864; Ft. Morgan, on Mobile point, on Aug. 23. In the spring of 1865 Gen. E. R. S. Canby laid siege to Ft. Blakely and Spanish Fort, on the east side of the bay. After 25 days the forts, and then the city, were evacuated, and the Federal forces entered the city on April 12, 1865.

**October 16-19
(Thurs.-Sun.)**

The post-war reconstruction period was a difficult time for Mobile. The municipality went bankrupt in 1879

and was again rechartered as a city in 1887.

Banana importing commenced in 1893, supplementing the old export trade in lumber and cotton. Foreign and coastal trade was especially stimulated by the opening of the Panama canal. The opening of the system of locks and dams on the Warrior-Tombigbee rivers in 1915 proved to be a major event in the history of Mobile, as did development of the Gulf Intracoastal waterway and the Federal barge lines and the construction of the Alabama state docks, commenced in 1923. Cochrane bridge across Mobile bay (extending 10 1/2 mi.) was completed in 1927 and Bankhead tunnel under the Mobile river in 1941. Bridge and tunnel together added materially to the trade area of Mobile by improving access to Baldwin county, which has the largest area of all Alabama counties.

*Come early ... stay late
... bring your family ...
bring your friends!*

Controlling depth of the ship channel has been a vital factor in the commerce and history of the city. Originally the minimum depth was only 5 1/2 ft. In 1839 the channel had a minimum depth of 10 ft. but by 1867 the controlling depth was only 7 ft. A 13-ft. channel was opened in 1876. By 1888 the depth was 17 ft. and by World War I the channel was 27 ft. After World War II the channel's minimum depth was 36 ft. and width 400 ft.

(Source: Encyclopedia Britannica)

**Rooms: call Holiday Inn
Historic District, 1-800-692-
6662, or 1-334-694-0100 ...
\$58/night reunion rate ...
Monday thru Monday.
Reunion fee: \$90 per person.
More details to follow.**

Editor's History Corner

HQ, 2d BN (Ambl) 506th INF
APO San Francisco 96383
Unit History, March 1971

The 'official' history of the 2/506th for 1970.

Continued from No. 41

At higher headquarters radios and phone lines were alive with traffic. Command and control helicopters constantly overflew the Ripcord area. On the evening of July the 21st, Brig. Gen. Sidney Berry made a difficult decision. Ripcord would be evacuated.

Lt. Col. Lucas was notified and plans for the evacuation were drawn up and the battalion prepared to execute the evacuation on the 23d. Charlie and Delta companies were already at Camp Evans after aiding Delta 1/506th. This left only the personnel on Ripcord from (Bravo Company plus others) and Alpha Company to bring in.

Brig. Gen. Sidney Berry made a difficult decision. Ripcord would be evacuated.

At 0900 hours on the 22d Capt. Hawkins received a coded message from Lucas ordering Alpha Company to return to a LZ location just east of Ripcord. At 1245 the lead element moved out of the perimeter and to the north. They had moved about 100 meters when the point man engaged three enemy at 20 meters. As the enemy died, the platoon moved forward to exploit their success.

In the next 30 seconds, success for Alpha Company came to a screaming, bloody halt.

The lead platoon had assaulted into the flank security of an NVA battalion. At the same time the main assault force made a human wave attack with supporting mortar fire against the remainder of Alpha Company. Outnumbered six to one, Alpha Company battled against these odds for the entire afternoon. Often without communications and frequently surrounded, the men of Alpha Company fought as their brothers had fought on Hill 1000, Hill 902 and on Ripcord itself.

Continuous air strikes consisting of 250-lb. bombs and napalm plus constant gunship cover eventually broke the brunt of the enemy attack. Alpha Company slowly pulled back together in a defensive position.

In the next 30 seconds, success for Alpha Company came to a screaming, bloody halt.

As darkness fell, an attempt to insert Delta Company was aborted due to burning napalm on the landing zone. Capt. Rollison and his men would try again at first light to move in to assist Alpha Company.

On the 23d, Delta Company was successful in landing and reached Alpha Company in short order. A LZ was cut and Rollison and Hawkins prepared their men for extraction.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of Ripcord was going smoothly. Artillerymen and their guns were removed first followed by the remainder of other personnel. A constant stream of helicopters hovered into Ripcord and back out carrying their precious cargo to safety even under the nearly continuous fire of enemy gunners.

Miraculously, very few men were injured during the extraction and only three killed. The enemy, however, had dealt one final blow to the "Best of the Currahees." Lt. Col. Lucas landed on Ripcord after the extraction had started in order to help supervise. As he stood discussing the operation with his S-3, Maj. Tanner, a 120mm mortar round landed killing Tanner instantly and mortally wounding Lucas. The battle of Ripcord was over.

The cost had been high. Twelve of Alpha's finest men lay dead and an additional 56 had been wounded. The enemy too had paid heavily in the contact. Sixty-five NVA soldiers had gone to meet their fate and a large amount of NVA equipment lay scattered over the battlefield. Alpha Company would be combat effective in a week with new replacements. The NVA battalion would wait months for replacements to filter down the Ho Chi Minh trail before they would be ready to fight again.

While the evacuation of Ripcord was in progress, Brig. Gen. Berry was constantly in the air over the fire base in his C&C helicopter. At one point when things seemed

"No sweat, sir, we'll get out of this shit!"

to go a bit rough for the men on the hill, Berry radioed the tactical operations center on Ripcord and asked if there was any particular assistance they needed. The TOC radio operator, with a casualness that is typical of brave men in a tight situation, answered back, "No sweat, sir, we'll get out of this shit!" And they did.

For an entire week after the evacuation, heavy concentrations of artillery and countless air strikes shook the ground around Ripcord. Ripcord was over, and as the enemy scuttled for cover and areas away from the incessant bombardment, the men of the 2/506th uttered one word common to all, "CURRAHEE."

To be continued ...

Military Terms and Definitions

paravane—A naval defense device. It is a type of water kite that is towed from the forefoot of a vessel, riding out to one side at the end of a wire rope usually 56 yards long, to deflect mines that may be moored in the path of the vessel and cut the mooring lines so that the mine rises safely to the surface.

Paris Gun—The designation of any of three long-range 210mm German guns used to bombard Paris from March 23 to August 7, 1918. Most of the several emplacements were in the St. Gobain Wood near Laon, 70 miles from Paris. The Paris Gun, Pariskanonen in German, designed by a team of Krupp engineers, had a barrel almost 120 feet long and could fire a 275-pound projectile to a range of approximately 80 miles. When the guns' first shells landed on Paris it was thought that they had been dropped from German bombers. In all, Paris Guns fired 203 shells against the city but did not produce the panic and population exodus the Germans hoped to achieve. The advance of the Allied armies in August 1918 ended the shelling.

(Source: Dictionary of Military Terms)

How I learned about the Ripcord battle ...

By Mike Womack

FORSYTH, Mo.—Thanks for sending the copy of the *Ripcord Report*. I have enjoyed reading it. Sorry I was unable to make the reunion this year. I am already making plans to attend the one in '97.

In reading the *Ripcord Report*, I started thinking about my time there and tried to remember dates and names. After 26 years it's pretty hard to do. I thought you might find this story interesting and a little funny.

A sergeant was struck in the head by the main rotor of an OH-6. He survived!

On or around the 13th of June 1970, C Co., 2/506th conducted an air assault in the area around FSB Ripcord (I'm not exactly sure of the location). As C/2-506 went in, I believe the 2/501st went out (call sign Iceman). One of the company machine gun teams, 1st Plt. maybe, fired up two trail watchers. The only casualty suffered by C/2-506 was a sergeant who was struck in the forehead by the main rotor of an OH-6. He survived.

We cleared the LZ and set up a night defensive position (NDP). The next morning a sergeant, myself and possibly one or two other individuals were left behind when the company moved out. Our job was to set up a couple of mechanical ambushes in case anyone was following the company. I remember asking the sergeant about having to come back and get them. He told me that we wouldn't, but that artillery would be called in a couple of days and they would be blown in place that way.

During that week we had a mission to recover the body of a soldier who's remains had fallen to earth from a helicopter when the sling-loaded body bag broke open. Guess who was "lucky" enough to find the remains!

The other thing that really sticks in my mind was that we found a cable about one to two inches in diameter winding its way through the jungle along the side of a trail we were working. It was attached to the trees with glass insulators like you used to see on telephone poles back in the World. I wanted to cut it but was told not to since "Chuck" might send a whole bunch of people out to see what was wrong with the cable.

On the 20th of June, C/2-506 was picked up and made a combat assault into the same

LZ we had the week before. Now our mission was to retrieve the mechanical ambushes we had left the week before. On the morning of the 21st, we moved out as a four-man point team. We humped for about an hour and were still short of the site of the ambushes. Sgt. Bomersbach (sp?) called a halt to let the rest of the company catch up. I think 2d Plt. was operating independently on the ridge line to our right.

A tremendous explosion picked me up and threw me backward down the trail.

I took my helmet off, holding it under my left arm, my M-16 was leaning against my right leg and I had the radio handset in my right hand. I no sooner pushed the transmit button and said, "6 Papa, 6 November, over," when a tremendous explosion picked me up and threw me backward down the trail. I remember lying on top of the PRC-25 (radio) and still calling into the handset, only this time for a "Band Aid" (medic).

Sgt. B, the drag man and myself were wounded in the explosion. PFC Johnson, the point man, escaped unharmed. I remember him apologizing because he thought he had set the thing off.

It turned out that the mine was indeed one of ours, but it had been moved and was command-detonated from a spider hole off the left side of the trail. Sgt. B took a single ball bearing through his left kneecap, the drag man was peppered by backblast and I took four ball bearings and a chunk of the fuse well in the legs. I don't think any of us were in the kill zone or we were standing close but off to the side.

A poncho litter was constructed and I was loaded into it for the trip to the LZ. The last time I saw Sgt. B he had his arm over PFC Johnson's shoulder and he was hopping along on the trail.

We didn't go very far down the trail before the litter came apart and dropped me to the ground. The litter was put back together, I was reloaded and off we went again. Then, one of the guys carrying the litter bumped a nest of red ants which fell all over me (it wasn't his fault).

Those little suckers began biting and stinging! They set the litter down and broke out the GI insect repellent and gave me a good dousing. The next thing I knew, I was one fire! I had wounds in the back of both thighs that no one was aware of and the repellent was burning like hell. Good ol' Doc gave me a quick shot of morphine and off we went again.

We had one last obstacle to clear before getting to the LZ. A fallen tree lay across the trail and it had cluster bomblets hanging in

it. We cleared the tree fine, but the litter gave way for the second time depositing me on the ground. Finally we made it to the LZ. Thank God!

I recall lying in the hot sun, on the LZ, listening to my radio. I heard the dustoff saying he was inbound and then heard "Black Spade" (Lt. Col. Lucas, the Bn. CO) tell the dustoff not to land until the area was secure. I think the dustoff came in anyway.

I also remember being loaded into the dustoff with the two NVA that had been fired up the week earlier, but I have no knowledge of what happened to Sgt. B and the drag man. I also remember the crew chief sticking a business card in my pocket that said, "Congratulations. You have been successfully dusted off by Capt. (name of the pilot).

They flew me to the 326th Med. at Camp Evans. I was off-loaded and taken into a building. I recall lying on a table with uniform and boots still on. There was a big tan-colored tag hanging from the laces of my left boot. Where or when that was put there I'll never know.

A doctor came into the room and looked at the tag. I remember asking him, "Does it say 'don't open 'till Christmas'?" He just looked at me and turned and walked away.

That's when I learned that the battle cost C Co. 8 KIA, 18 WIA and one missing man.

Soon I was loaded onto another medevac and flown to the *U.S.S. Sanctuary*. There they proceeded to cut off my clothes and boots and I lost the card from the dustoff pilot. From the *Sanctuary* I went to Camp Zama, Japan. While at Zama, guys from C/2-506 started showing up. That's when I learned about the battle that cost C Co. 8 KIA and 18 WIA and one missing man. I also heard some disturbing stories about short timers who refused to go to the aid of their friends in the field.

I really hope that last part isn't true.

Well, I'll shut up in a minute. Here are some names I remember: Sgt. Bomersbach (sp?), N. or S. Dak.; Sgt. Gillespie, Buffalo, Mo.; Sgt. "Foxtrot" Fowler, Doc, New York?; "Shakey"; Beech, Tenn.; Boo Zollar (KIA), Ohio; PFC Taylor; PFC Johnson; Capt. Vasquez; and Kit Carson scout Lon, N. Vietnam. Lon always hid when F-4s were flying overhead. Best regards, Mike Womack

Mike Womack is currently the police chief for the City of Forsyth.

USO ... Thanks for the memories.

CAMP EAGLE, Republic of Vietnam, Aug. 22, 1970—Troopers of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) attended the USO show "The Sound of Young," taking time off from grueling combat action in the rugged jungle. The featured performers were (surprise, surprise) all lovely young ladies, including Pamela Anne Eldred, Miss America 1970.

This short article for *Ripcord Report* readers, many of whom remember the show, gives brief bios of each performer. We might well wonder, "Where are they now?"



Miss America 1970, Pamela Anne Eldred. Poised and lovely, Miss America 1970, is a 22 year old green-eyed honey-blond from the Detroit, Michigan, suburb of Birmingham, who competed in the Miss America Pageant as Miss Michigan.

At the time of her selection as Miss America, Pam was to start her senior year at Mercy College in Detroit, majoring in speech and drama. Following her year of reign, Pam plans to return to school, finish her undergraduate work and obtain a master's degree. Hopefully, she plans to have a career in the Broadway theater. Pam has been a lead dancer for the Detroit City Ballet since the age of 13, and has played feature roles in many college theater productions.

Pamela has enjoyed her year as Miss America. She eventually will have traveled at least 20,000 miles around the country and she is looking forward to her USO tour of Vietnam. Truly, she is a natural beauty with a radiant smile and an inner warmth which one cannot miss.

Miss Alabama 1969, Ann Harriet Fowler. A lovely brunette from Birmingham, Alabama, was chosen Miss

Alabama in 1969, sponsored by the *Birmingham News*.

Miss Alabama graduated this year from Birmingham Southern College as a music major. Ann has special training in voice, drama and dancing. Her ambition is to complete an advanced degree in music, followed by a career in TV advertising, public relations or musical theater.

Miss California 1969, Susan Ellen Anton. Blonde, brown-eyed and beautiful, Miss Anton lives in Yucaipa, California.

A sophomore at San Bernardino Valley College, majoring in pre-education, Susan has also had six months of vocal training. In 1965 Miss California traveled through the United States and Canada with the "Touring Teens."

Her hobbies are tennis, golf, horseback riding, sewing, cooking and sketching. Susan was chosen Miss California in 1969, sponsored by the Redlands Jaycees and the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce.

Miss North Carolina 1969, Patricia Elaine Johnson. This beautiful brunette was born and raised in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Patricia is a junior at Meredith College majoring in music (voice). She hopes to receive her bachelor of arts, master of music and bachelor or master of divinity. Miss North Carolina has sung since she was two years old and sings duets with her father in church. Patricia's ambition is to have a voice career and also to work with missions in large cities.

Miss Colorado 1969, Adria Elaine Easton. A statuesque beauty, brown-eyed brunette, Miss Easton was born and raised in Boulder, Colorado.

A senior at the University of Colorado, she is majoring in journalism and advertising. Adria was the first female member of the University of Colorado Men's Marching Band and in 1969 was the featured twirler with the International Tour Band throughout Europe. She was also twirler of the year, an award given in 1969 by the Rockne Club of America in Kansas City, Missouri.

Miss Oregon 1969, Margaret Elaine Huhta. A blue-eyed, brown-haired beauty, Miss Huhta was born and raised in Astoria, Oregon.

A junior at Portland State University, majoring in speech education and speech pathology, Miss Oregon and her family lived in Europe for 2 1/2 years. Her hobbies are sketching, painting, writing and singing. Her

ambition is to graduate from college with a B.S. degree in secondary speech education and certification in speech pathology. Her goal is to become a high school speech teacher and speech pathologist.

Miss Tennessee 1969, Mary Susan Cox. Beautiful, green-eyed, blonde, Mary Susan Cox was born in Springfield, Ohio, and now resides in Johnson City, Tennessee.

She is now a senior at East Tennessee State University, majoring in speech and drama and has studied voice, piano and dramatics. Mary sang with the Hollywood, Florida Philharmonic Orchestra; for the March of Dimes telethon; and has made many appearances as a special entertainer for civic, social and fraternal events.

Her ambition is to have a singing career and eventually teach voice and drama.

Mrs. Irene Bryant, manager and chaperone for "The Miss America USO Show," was born in Kansas City and now resides in Overland, Kansas. She is the mother of Debbie Bryant, Miss American 1966. A permanent Miss America chaperone, she is pretty enough to be a beauty queen herself. Mrs. Bryant accompanied the Miss America USO Show to Japan and Korea in 1968, and to Vietnam in 1969.

Mrs. Bryant graduated from the University of Missouri at Kansas City with a bachelor's degree in elementary education.



This show, like others playing the USO overseas circuit, is made possible by the generous contributions to the USO by the American public through their Community Chests, United Funds, Combined Federal Campaigns, and other voluntary donations.

Many thanks, and a tip of the Currahee Steel Pot to John "Pop" Hedrick, formerly of E Co. (Mortars), 2d Bn., 506th Infantry. Pop fired a lot of missions off of Ripcord in the old days. Today he's an agriculturalist and extension agent in Galena, Missouri.

RIPCORDEREPORT

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Winter Issue ... Go for it!

