

RIPCORD REPORT

Number 46 November 1998

For Friends and Survivors of Fire Support Base Ripcord, Republic of Vietnam

March 12-July 23, 1970

Ripcord story on the World Wide Web

www.tir.com/~max101/grunt/page5.html

Thanks to veteran Ripcord Association member Ted McCormick, the FSB Ripcord story is now on the Web. Ted was a member of Bravo Co., 1st Bn., 327th Infantry, and he and members of his platoon are shown below.

Thanks also to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and *VFW Magazine*, which originally published the story in the June-July issue in 1996.



L to R: 1st platoon members, Tom Baker, Ted McCormick, Travis Shattle, Ed White, Hugh Bussey and (kneeling) Erick Miller, photo taken in Aug. 1970 while providing bunker security on FSB Vehgel.

"... Quick-footed, quick-minded and, as far as possible, light-hearted."—Sir A. P. Wavell: *The Training of the Army for War*, February 1933

(Wavell's attributes the ideal infantry rifleman.)



Reunion '98 ... blast and a half

Fred Spaulding vows, 'never again'

A score and more Ripcord veterans and their wives and friends attended Reunion '98 at the Holiday Inn Boardwalk in Atlantic City, N.J. Despite the strong showing, more members might have attended. Part of the problem may have been that it was scheduled during the week and not over a long weekend as in times past. "I would have gone," said Paul Burkey (C/2-506), "but this is my busy season and I couldn't break away during the week."

Unbowed and unbeaten, reunion organizer Fred Spaulding (3d Bde.) swore, "never again will we hold a reunion exclusively during the work week."

Mihalko makes it from Colo.

Recon 2/506 veteran John Mihalko kept up his unbroken string of reunion attendances, making 1998 number seven ... or was it eight? Has it been that many? Congrats, John, and a gold star for your reunion report card.

And some people, John reminds us, "haven't even been to one."

Savannah, Ga. reunion site for year 'niner-niner'

The 29th anniversary reunion for Fire Support Base Ripcord veterans, family and friends will be at Savannah Ga., October 7-11 (the long Columbus Day weekend).

They say the beer pours green in this southern coastal city on St. Patrick's Day. Let's just hope they have some left—any color will do—come October.

Mark your calendars now. Details will follow.

Continued on page 5



Awww ... ain't he cute? Who doesn't like puppies?

Everyone reads the *Ripcord Report*. Even Rover!

Boyl Wadda goof we made!

Just a few lines to say hello. I just received my August copy of the *Ripcord Report*. Enjoy reading it very much. I hope Keith Nolan's book on Ripcord is as good as his *Battle for Saigon*.

The reason I'm writing is that although you have my name, you list no unit. I was with the 287th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Detachment (EOD), Phu Bai Combat Base.

Also, you have my name on page 3 (Financial Supporters) as "Boy" Lynch. My wife likes the new name, but I still prefer Bob.

Regards,
Bob Lynch
Hanover, Md.

P.S., Will be away on business and will miss the reunion.

Ripcord Association founder writes

Thought it was time I got back in touch. After about a two-year hiatus from social work and human rights related employment, I recently took a job working with the disabled. It looks as if the position will see me as an executive director within the next year. I'm pleased and I hope I can finish the next few years and my 30 year overall employment with the state.

I returned from Kentucky last March, worked briefly in the mines until my knees gave out, and then construction-related jobs until this one came along.

I am in hopes that this new situation will permit me to play a more direct role with the association. So let me know how you all are doing, I'll be back in touch soon.

Sincerely,
Chip Collins
Clinchco, Va.

INCOMING, INCOMING

Mail Call

If you wore this patch



You are eligible to join the 101st Airborne Division Association

Received the *Ripcord Report* today. I always look forward to receiving the next issue.

I just returned from the 53d annual reunion in Omaha, and I met a few Ripcord veterans. They are just great veterans and I will send you their names soon. Most of them were at Camp Evans in the 2/506 and also other units.

One bit of news is that the next two 101st Airborne Division reunions will be as follows: the 54th annual reunion will be at Hampton, Va., from Aug. 11-15, 1999; the 2000 reunion will be at Ft. Campbell, Ky., in the Clarksville area.

I also attended the 506th Infantry Regiment Association reunion in Reno, Nv., from July 16-18. It was great! Dee and I were guests and we truly enjoyed the dinner with all of our friends from the 506th Currahees. The memorial service was an emotional time.

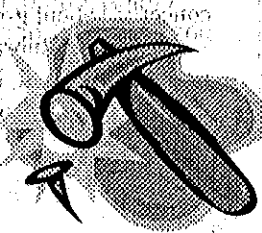
I will send some new forms for Ripcord Association members to use to join the 101st Airborne Division Association. The new life membership is \$101 and a \$10 annual *Screaming Eagle* subscription fee. Not bad for now. The regular annual membership is still \$20.

Enclosed is my contribution to the newsletter. I regret that I will not be able to attend the reunion in Atlantic City. However I plan to attend next year depending on where it is going to be held.

Sincerely,
Lloyd Rahlf (SGM, USA, ret.)
Sparks, Nv.

Ripcord tongue twister

Tough tac officers in the TOC tack tin tightly.



And more ... **INCOMING**

Geronimo CO writes

Can't make the reunion this year—but please correct my address and keep me on the mailing list. Enclosed is a small donation to help with the cost.

Best wishes,
Otis Livingston
Saluda, N.C.

Jestes sends article on Kiwi vets

Good to see the *Ripcord Report* again. Sorry I can't make the reunion.

Enclosed is an article on New Zealand's 1998 Welcome Home parade for Vietnam veterans. Let me know if you want to see the rest of the articles.

Best,
Gary Jestes
Manchester, Md.

See the article on page 4.

A small group of men

Heard about you from Keith Nolan. I think we may have met but I'm not sure.

I remember talking to a company CO sometime around the Ripcord battle and telling him about encountering an enemy patrol just a few days prior to B Co. being on the firebase for the last time. At that time I told this CO about a white soldier traveling with the North Vietnamese, he was tall and blond, it seems to me that this CO had also encountered this guy in a battle, he had been wounded and was yelling "help me," wasn't sure if he was calling to the Americans or the North Vietnamese.

In any event, I was with the 2/506 in B Co. and was on Ripcord until the end. I was a sergeant E5 and was left behind with a small group of men. Our helicopter group declined to stop to pick up us due to the heavy volume of ground fire. We were eventually picked up by three birds from Ghostriders. They monitored conversations between me and the lead bird that was supposed to get us, they weren't concerned about ground fire, came in and got us out.

Tom Rubsam sent me some copies of the report that he had, he was one of our platoon sergeants, and he and I were pretty good friends at the time. Hadn't heard from him for about 20 years and then found him through Nolan. Brought back a

lot of memories, wasn't sure whether they were good or not for quite some time, but ... I'm okay with it now. Spent quite a lot of time on the phone with Rubsam, seems like a lot of it was just yesterday.

Are you doing a Web page? If so, where is it? If not, add me to the mailing list and let me know what the subscription rate is.

Guess that's about enough rambling for now.

Phil Tolson
Clarks Summit, Pa.

My cousin served with the 101st

Your name has been given to me by Mr. Merle Delagrange in the interest of finding out more about my first cousin Robert Paul (Butch) Radcliff who served with the 101st Airborne and died at Fire Base Ripcord on July 2, 1970. Mr. Delagrange has suggested that I want to contact you as you are the editor of the *Ripcord Report*, a publication I'm not familiar with. I assume this publication caters to veterans who served in Vietnam at or near Fire Base Ripcord in Thua Thien, Vietnam. I am particularly interested in meeting anyone who may have known and served with Butch. Any information you may suggest is greatly appreciated. Additionally, I'm interested in meeting any veteran who is interested in discussing their experiences during their tour(s).

Thank you for your service to our country.

Thank you for your time,
Scott Radcliff, SRadcliff@microage.com
Phoenix, Ariz.

Merle Delagrange wrote to Scott:

Hi. I was with the 101st during the battle of Fire Base Ripcord. I didn't know your cousin. Your cousin gave his all (hero). Here is a friend of mine who edits the Ripcord Report. He will know who can help you.

A Nam Friend

If anyone reading this remembers serving with Butch Radcliff on Ripcord, please get in touch with Scott via his e-mail address. Delta Co. 2/506 was on the hill at that date.—Chuck Hawkins



LZ Windy Hill

If life turns on a dime, what do you get for 50 cents?

NOKESVILLE, Va.—I've been pondering the imponderables lately. You know, those questions in life that there really ought to be an answer to, but aren't. Things like: If we hadn't spent a billion dollars to put a man on the moon, would we still have invented the felt tip pen? Or, if zero-fat Pringles can be made to taste good, why do field rations (which have lots of fat, by the way) still taste like minced cardboard? Anyway ...

My latest ponder has to do with whether or not to encourage FSB Ripcord Association members to merge with and become subordinate to the 101st Airborne Division Association, and to hold our annual reunion under the big tent of the 101st.

A letter came the end of September from the collective leadership of the 101st Airborne Division Association—Chairman of the Board Robert Jones, a 502 PIR vet from World War II, President Richard Schonbeger, a 2/327 vet from Vietnam, and Gerald Counts, the current command sergeant major of the division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. It was a nice letter, and it invited the FSB Ripcord Association to "come together in celebration of the heritage and traditions we all share," at next year's 101st reunion in Hampton, Virginia.

At the end of the letter was a list of folks the letter had been sent to. A couple of names were familiar—Ray Blackman of the Delta Raiders Association, Bob Acklen, Jr., of the 506th Regiment Association—and I realized that this was a call by the 101st Airborne Division Association to bring what it apparently sees as a number of disparate, 101st-related groups together as part of the division association as a whole. I reread the letter. Here are some excerpts:

—"... to strengthen the bonds of friendship which have distinguished the members of the division; to provide patriotic assembly of all members in local and national reunions, and to perpetuate the Screaming Eagle spirit as to heritage and tradition for future generations."

—"... for varying reasons, organizations have been formed outside the Division Association ... The result has been to sub-optimize the potential ... also to create conflicts for some of our Screaming Eagle veterans" who are "forced to make choices among competing schedules, activities and membership dues."

—"Joining the Division Association does not require giving up unit identity. ... unit members have the option of establishing their own unit-based chapter.

The Division Association has and does accommodate separate units organizations and functions. These can be conducted separately, but more commonly, in conjunction with Division Association functions."

—"We sincerely believe that we all can belong to a common association that meets our collective needs and expectations. We hope that you will receive this letter in the spirit in which it's being sent. Your members are welcome in the Division Association, we want you in the Division Association, and we want to identify and address those concerns that keep that from happening."

I pondered some more. "Nuts," I wanted to reply, but that would have been a gratuitous answer. The 101st Airborne Division Association leaders who wrote me are sincere folks, men who served their country, and who are justifiably proud of that service with the Screaming Eagles. They really do want others who wore the division patch to be members of the association, which was started in 1945 after World War II. And they want the Division Association to serve member's needs, whatever those might be.

Thing is, nobody contacted me or anyone else in the Ripcord membership to find out just what kind of organization we are. I'm not sure I know exactly, but here's the way it seems to me.

—The Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord Association (long name, long battle) is unusual, if not unique, because it is based on a particular event, not a particular unit. The association was founded by Chip Collins (a B/2-506 grunt), who sent the first newsletter to three other veterans back in 1983. Now there are close to 400 people on the mailing list.

—We come from many units within the 101st, and some units that weren't part of the division, or even part of the Army.

—There are no dues. *Ripcord Report* is free. Funding support is and has always been based solely on contributions.

—Anyone who has an interest in the battle can be a member—college professors, children of veterans, family, friends—and receive the newsletter free of charge. Anyone.

—The purpose of our association and the newsletter is to share information about the battle, to find others who fought there, and to promote healing, good fellowship, and—especially important—honor the memory of those who fell at Ripcord.

So, here's my opinion, for what it's worth. —If you are not already a member of the 101st Airborne Division Association, I encourage you to join right now, if you're so inclined.

—I will not, however, support the subordination of the FSB Ripcord Association to the 101st Airborne Division Association. That would be nuts.

Tell me your thoughts.—Chuck Hawkins

Reunion '98 continued from page 1

Romantic reunion

Bob (B/2-506) and Red Judd of Twin Lake, Michigan finally tied the knot two days before the reunion, but they had to skip town in order to do it. Red explained, "So many people at work kept telling me, 'when you get married, I want to be there'; and we couldn't have such a big crowd. So we eloped."

In more ways than one

Reunion '98 was the 28th wedding anniversary for Patty and Gary Radford (D/2-506). Gary, Patty and her sister Nancy drove in from Pittsburgh, Pa.

Asked about the long drive, Gary quipped, "I just sit in the back and let the ladies drive." What some husbands won't do to show their wives they love them.

The Ripcord coin

Nine Ripcord coins were presented at this year's reunion to first time attendees. The bronze coins, which show the division patch on one side and a rifleman superimposed on a map of Ripcord and Hills 1000, 902 and 805 on the other, were the idea of Ben Harrison (3d Bde. CO), who had them minted in time for last year's reunion.

Receiving the coin this year were: Lee Widjeskog (A/2-506) from New Jersey; J. W. Pojedinec, Jr., a Navy veteran and long standing member from Pennsylvania; Joe Moyer (101st Camp Eagle) from N.J.; Tom Austin (A/2-11), who came in from Georgia with his wife Betty; Dan Esposito (B/2-11), also from N.J.; Dan Thompson (HHC/2-506) from Massachusetts; Bob Morton a Navy veteran also from Mass.; Charlie Devlin (502 PIR, World War II) from N.J.; and Phil Tolson (B/2-506), who came with his wife Sherry from Pennsylvania.

Thanks to all

Frank Marshall (A/2-506, and who did not lose his hair this year) and Arlene joined us from Philadelphia. Frank helped organize the reunion and collected the registration fee so we could pay for beer and snacks. Thanks, Frank. Ben Peters (B/2-506) and his wife Lillian came up from Georgia. Alfred (A/2-F1) and Bonnie Martin journeyed from Pennsylvania. Terry Stanger (A/159 Avn.) came in from Indiana for the reunion, and Fred Behrens (B/101 Avn.) made it up from Virginia for a day.

Did you know ...

Little known facts about the American Revolution

George Washington was the best spymaster in American history.

He ran dozens of espionage rings in British-held New York and Philadelphia, and the man who supposedly could not tell a lie was a genius at disinformation. He constantly befuddled the British by leaking, through double agents, inflated reports on the strength of his army.

By 1779, as many as one in seven Americans in Washington's army was black.

At first Washington was hesitant about enlisting blacks. But when he heard they had fought well at Bunker Hill, he changed his mind. The all-black First Rhode Island Regiment—composed of 33 freedmen and 92 slaves who were promised freedom if they served until the end of the war—distinguished itself in the Battle of Newport. Later, they were all but wiped out in a British attack.

Benedict Arnold was the best general in the Continental Army.

"Without Benedict Arnold in the first three years of the war," says the historian George Neumann, "we would probably have lost the Revolution." In 1775, the future traitor came within a whisker of conquering Canada. In 1776, he built a fleet and fought a bigger British fleet to a standstill on Lake Champlain. At Saratoga in 1777, his brilliant battlefield leadership forced the British army to surrender. The victory persuaded the French to join the war on the American side. Ironically, Arnold switched sides in 1780 partly because he disapproved of the French alliance.

Thanks and a tip of the FSB Ripcord steel pot go to *Parade Magazine*, Nov. 23, 1997, and author and historian Thomas Fleming. The above excerpts were adapted from Fleming's book *Liberty!*, published by Viking Press

New Zealand perspectives on the Vietnam War

From the left ...

Vietnam veterans

(Letter to the editor, Sun., Oct. 18, 1998, *New Zealand News*)

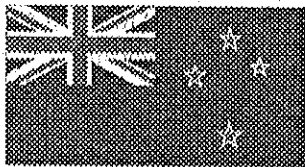
Sir--New Zealand's Vietnam veterans (editorial, June 3) deserve an official apology for being deceived and duped by Government propaganda into fighting an illegal, unjust, and barbarous war. It was not a war for freedom and democracy against communism, as the US claimed, but a US-led colonial war because the Vietnamese had defeated French colonists.

New Zealand foreign and defence policy has not changed significantly since, due to prevailing Government myths that bogeymen might invade unless we have big protectors. Consequently, New Zealanders are schooled to remain ready to make war for the US, in far away places like the Gulf, hoping for Uncle Sam's defence if needed. To avoid more Vietnam-type wars, or much worse, New Zealand should withdraw from dangerous, counterproductive military alliances, declare neutrality, and specialise in providing international peacemaking services to help resolve wars, as we have done so well in Bougainville.

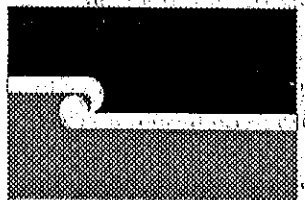
LARRY ROSS

NZ Nuclear-Free Peacemaking Assn

July 4, 1998



New Zealand national flag (official)



Maori "Tino Raukatirotanga" Flag (unofficial)

... and the right

Long-awaited salute to Vietnam veterans

(News article, Sat., May 30, 1998, *New Zealand News*)

Vietnam veterans say yesterday was their first chance in years to hold their heads high in public.

Yesterday's march through Wellington streets came 26 years after New Zealand pulled out of Vietnam.

"It means a bloody lot," said Te Anau vet Doug Rogers, of 161 Battery. Event organizer John Dow said the emotion had been overwhelming.

Several veterans and families who had held back had suddenly made last-minute decisions to come, and he expected registration to near 5000 by the end of the weekend.

Gael Keighley, who lost her husband in the war, and her sons Ali and Darrell Watt, who lost their father, were initially wary about attending Parade '98, but decided it was something they had to do.

The New Plymouth family met for the first time the three men who were with Sergeant Gordon Watt when he died.

Ali, who was only 3 1/2 when his dad died, was one of the 37 flagbearers who led the parade, representing soldiers who died.

Sergeant Watt had only two more weeks to serve on his tour of duty when he went to a small Catholic church in Tam Quan, 330 miles north of Saigon in early 1970.

Following the local custom he knelt down to pray at the shrine outside the door. It was the last thing he did.

The shrine was booby-trapped and the 29-year-old New Zealand medic died soon after in a helicopter.

Guests included Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, Australian Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer and U.S. Ambassador Joshua Beaman.

RUTH BERRY

Many thanks to Gary Jestes, Manchester, Md.

Pacific Command's strategy ...

The Asia-Pacific region, with economies, people, and sea lanes, is a vital national interest. It contains over half of the world's surface, and 60 percent of its population, largely along its littorals. The confluence of security, economic and diplomatic interests in the Asia-Pacific requires us to work security issues concurrently. Security provides the foundation for stability, which in turn, yields opportunities for nations to pursue economic prosperity.

The Pacific Command strategy has six elements for ensuring regional security:

U.S. Military forces—credible, combat capable; trained and ready to fight and win; balanced and joint.

Forward stationing of critical capabilities—today the capability represented by about 100,000 U.S. troops—which provide the standard of U.S. commitment.

Positive security relationships with all nations in the region—including our formal alliances with Japan, Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines; our emerging relationship with China, and nascent relationships such as with Vietnam. We believe multilateral relationships hold promise for future stability in the region.

Long-term commitment and long-haul solutions—the U.S. is here to stay.

Teamwork with the State and Commerce Departments, and other U.S. government agencies—ensuring our views are reflected in the Interagency process.

Measured responses to regional events—promoting peaceful resolution, including preparation to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

—Admiral Joseph W. Prueher
Commander in Chief



Lt. Gen. Randolph W. House named new deputy commander in chief for PACOM

CAMP H. M. SMITH, Hawaii—Ripcord Association member Randy House took over the duties of deputy commander in chief, U.S. Pacific Command, in early October.

Randy was a member of the Phoenix assault helicopter company at Camp Evans. Phoenix birds were critical to the successful withdrawal from Fire Base Ripcord on July 23, 1970.

The last units pulled out of the Ripcord area were Alpha and Delta companies, 2/506, commanded by Chuck Hawkins and Gabe Rollison. Randy led the flight of 21 Phoenix helicopters that made the extraction from the valley southeast of Ripcord.

Randy led his men and their UH-D hueys up the low valley from the southeast, flying toward Ripcord to make the extraction. He was concerned that enemy fire from the surrounding ridges would make his mission a costly one, but strangely, the enemy gunners did not fire at the ships roaring across the jungle.

It then dawned on him what was happening. Enemy gunners had dug themselves in bunkers facing up and toward the fire base. They would have to get out of their holes in order to depress their weapons to shoot down into the valley at his helicopters.

Still, flying directly under the enemy guns was a nerve wracking experience. As the last few helicopters departed, enemy gunners began firing, but it was too little too late.



© Don Poss



© Don Poss



© Don Poss

Three Bronze Men

We are the three bronze men:

Forever silent, but always alert, we stand,
Guarding, watching, waiting.
Our eyes speak the words our bronze lips cannot utter:
You, our brothers, are not forgotten.

We watch ... as friends and family come to visit you,
To touch you gently with their hands and feel your presence in their hearts.
We have seen, as only our eyes can see, the healing of a nation once lost,
But now found again.

By our presence, by our vigil, others see and know
That you did not shirk your duty,
Did not turn your back on your country,
And did not lose your sacred honor.

We are neither weary nor old
But forever young and full of promise
Just as you, our fallen friends, were once so long ago.

And just as your names are made steadfast in granite for eternity,
So are we steady at our post, our station of love and duty and honor.
That is our promise to you now.

*You remember me, brothers.
I carried the M-60.
I watch now, as others pass
On their way to honor.
And cherish your memory.
You are loved beyond
measure ...*

*You know me too.
I humped ammo for
A thousand fire missions,
Loaded helicopters,
Manned the radios,
Kept medevacs flying.
I will never leave you.*

*I was your point man.
I still am ...
There will be no danger
To your memory, none,
As long as I am here.
Your other brothers miss you,
And I guide them to you.*

We are the three bronze men.

Photos are courtesy of Don Poss, a Vietnam veteran. They and others can be seen in his story *Autumn's Wall*, posted on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.war-stories.com/WallAutm.htm>

The statue, "The Three Servicemen," overlooks the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Sculptor Frederick Hart designed the statue. It was dedicated by President Ronald Reagan in 1984.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
101st Airborne Division Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 101, 7698 State Route 41
Bentonville, Ohio 45105
Tel: 937-549-4326
Fax: 937-549-2018

Home Tele () _____ Work () _____

Please Check Applicable Remark: () Renewal () New Member () Reinstatement () Change of Address

() Enclosed is \$20 for one year membership () Enclosed is \$200 for life membership

() Enclosed is \$50 for 1st of 4 installments toward life membership

Name _____

Street/RFD _____

City _____ ST _____ ZIP Code _____

101st Unit: Co. _____ Bn. _____ Major Unit _____ WWII _____ VN _____ DS _____ FC _____

Other Units _____ Dates of 101st Service: From _____ To _____

Present Occupation _____

() Single () Married Spouse's Name _____

Please charge my () Mastercard () Visa the amount of \$ _____

Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

The foregoing membership application for the 101st Airborne Division Association is provided as a service to *Ripcord Report* readers.

In case you were wondering ...

Books by Keith William Nolan

Noted author of numerous Vietnam War battle histories Keith William Nolan is in the process of completing his work on the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord, which will be published by Presidio Press. Completion and publication dates are not yet firm, and readers will be notified when that information is available. In the meantime, you might want to check out some of Keith's previous work. His books on Vietnam include:

A Hundred Miles of Bad Road, with Dwight Birdwell, Presidio, 1997

Sappers in the Wire, Pocket Books, 1995

The Battle for Saigon, Pocket Books, 1996

Operation Buffalo: USMC Fight for the DMZ, Dell Books, 1991

The Magnificent Bastards, Presidio, 1994

Into Laos, Dell Books, 1986

Plus:

Battle for Hue: Tet 1968

Into Cambodia

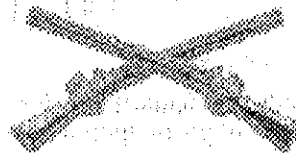
Death Valley

In this issue ...

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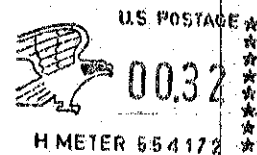
Ripcord Report is a publication of the Battle of FSB Ripcord Association, and is the authoritative voice of history of the battle.



It all depends on that article whether we do the business or not. Give me enough of it, and I am sure.—Wellington: On being asked by Thomas Creevey in Brussels whether he would beat Napoleon, May 1815. (At the moment of reply, a redecoated infantry private walked by.)

PHILA PA 03:33 11/19/98

Ripcord Report
c/o Hawkins



Fall 1998

Please send address changes or corrections to the address above.

