

For friends and survivors of the
Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord,
RVN, March 12-July 23, 1970.

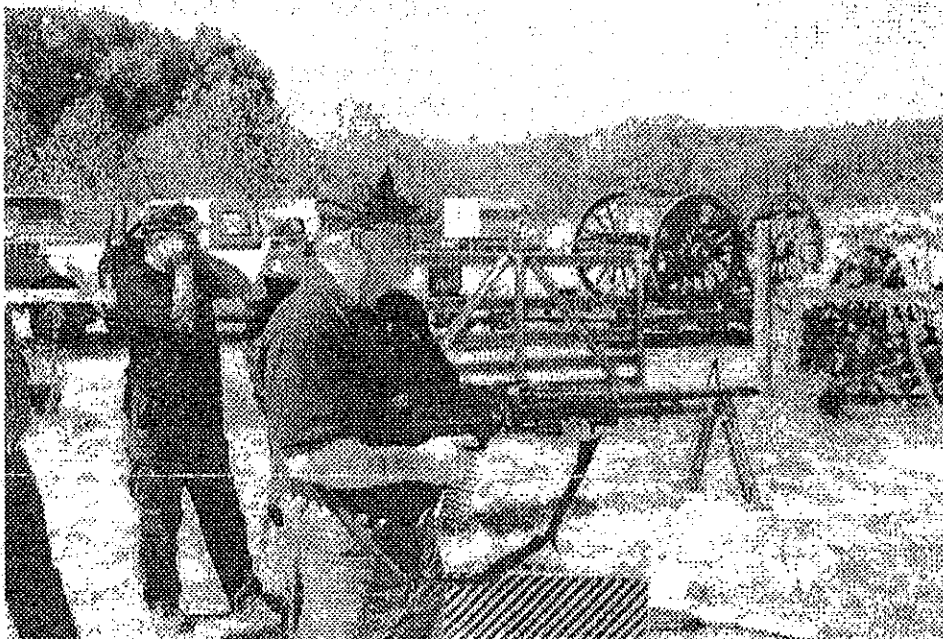
No. 56

February 2002

Old vets, old guns

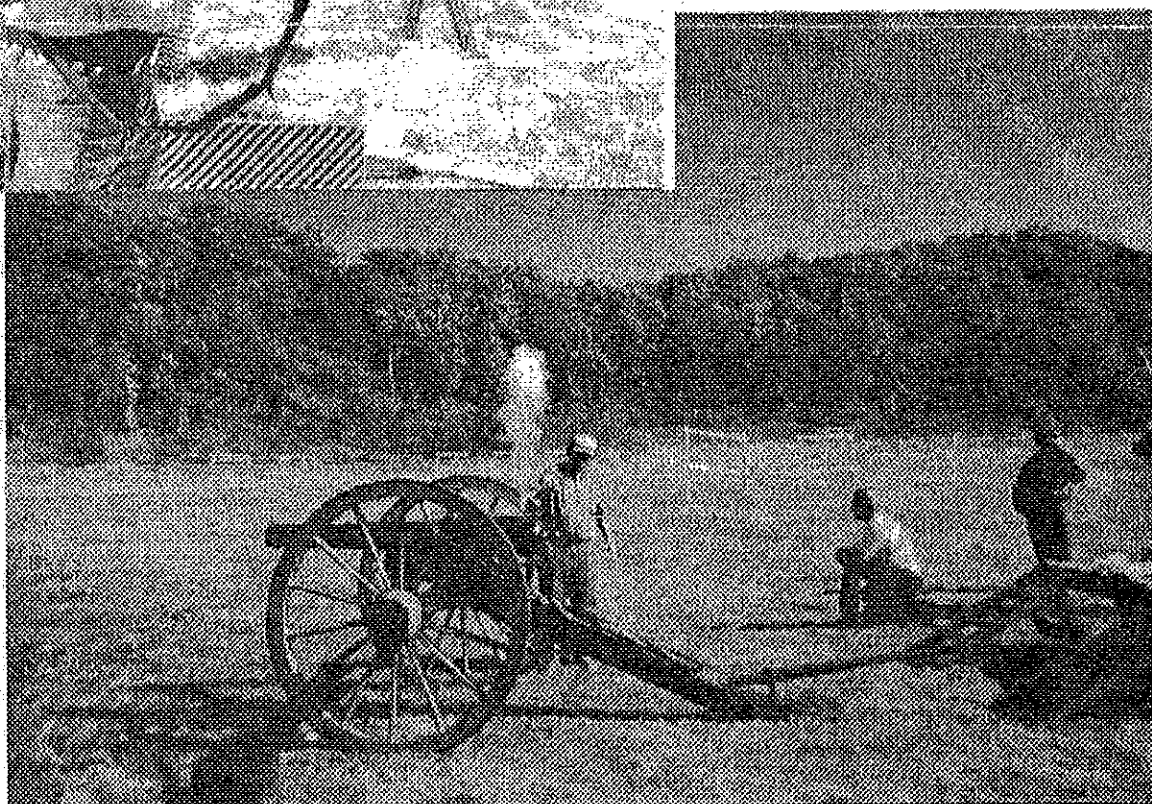
Scenes from Reunion '01

Mary Jean Terrell reports: The ones with the cannon and other guns were taken at Fort Shenandoah in Winchester, VA. Fred Behrens (B, 101st Avn Bn) and I took two carloads of reunion attendees out there for the day on Saturday to play with some of Fred's collection.



Above: J. W. "Poje" Pojedinec, Jr., a Navy veteran, gets ready to cut lose with a vintage M-60 machine gun.

Right: It looks like Charlie Tipton (C, 2/506) touching off a Civil War era cannon (or is that a Parrot Gun?), while Bob Judd (B, 2/506) and Dick Cable (? Recon, 2/506) look on.



Photos: Courtesy of Mary Jean Terrell and Fred Behrens.

Reunion 2002 will be in Coiorado Springs, Colo., October 17-20. Mark your calendars. More details inside.

LZ KENT ISLAND

DONATIONS!

STEVENSVILLE, Md.—The association wants to say "thanks" to recent contributors, and these include the following stalwarts: Dale and Jane Lane, Jim Campbell, Dan and Lydia Esposito, Floyd and Diane Alexander, Tony Cox, Sid Berry, Bill and Sheila Williams. Cheers and a tip of the Ripcord Steel Pot to you!

And, a special thanks goes to "Ripcordette" Patty Radford for all her help in copying and mailing the newsletter. Patty, whose husband Gary served as a platoon sergeant in D Co., 2/506th Infantry at Ripcord, assumed copying and mailing duties after the Carlisle reunion.

Who is this man?

Jim Campbell (C, 2/506) sent this photo several months ago, and asked if I knew whom this fellow is. I don't. The photo was taken on FSB Ripcord sometime in late April or early May 1970. If anyone has a clue, please let us know.

From the looks of the attire, my guess is that he's a staff officer, but at what level and whether artillery, infantry, engineer or other is difficult to say. — Chuck Hawkins

NOTES and REMINDERS

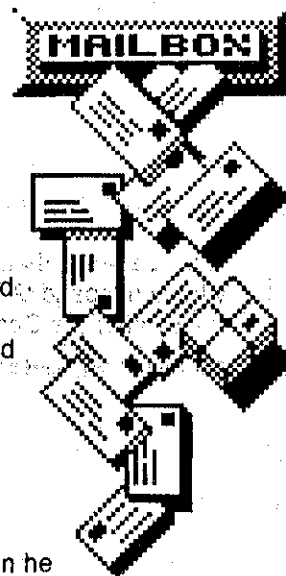
DONATIONS: When you make a **CONTRIBUTION**, please send it to

payable to **Ripcord Association**. If you send donations to Chuck Hawkins, he will just send them on to Fred.

NEWSLETTER ITEMS should still be sent to Chuck Hawkins, 4407 Love

MEMBERSHIP has now topped the 400 mark. Send **NAME** and **ADDRESS CHANGES** to Chuck.

INCOMING From across the country and around the world.



Bob Smoker, back in Vietnam

Just thought I'd let you know Bob called this morning around 7:00 a.m. our time and said they had gotten to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) around midnight last night. He was very tired—said they had 24 hours of nighttime flying—he didn't understand that, but that's what they had! It was 7:00 p.m. his time and they were getting ready to go to supper. I asked him if he had his oatmeal ready.

He was in good spirits, and said he would e-mail with details, so we didn't get to talk long. I imagine they all wanted to call home too.

It was so good to hear he was safe and sound. I told him the last time I was able to track his flight was when he was over the Bering Sea. So I was relieved to hear him! Just thought I'd update you and let you know what I know. Again, thanks for your prayers, and not just for his safety, but for prepared hearts to hear the gospel!

Love to you all,
Jeanne Smoker
Red Lion, Penna.

Looking for Peter Martin

I served with the 101st Airborne Division, 2/506th both A and B Companies at different times from August 3, 1969 to August 2, 1970.

I was at Fire Base Ripcord in June 1970. I was running the helicopter pad and the ammo dump. Being a short timer, I was transferred to Camp Evans to pull bunker guard in early July to serve out my remaining 30 days. I was very lucky. I was at the A Company barracks to help Top identify the dead when they arrived after the fight they were engaged in at the valley below Ripcord.

I know we lost some good men and there were many acts of heroism. In 1981, while volunteering for the Vietnam Veterans Outreach Center in Hartford, CT, I discovered a Fire Base Ripcord Survival Group had been formed. Is it still active today?

I am amazed at the published accounts and written material devoted to the fire base. I have finally found out exactly what happened that fateful day in July 1970.

Since the war I have been trying to find Peter Martin who was in A or B Company, 2/506.

Also, I would like to attend the next reunion. Will you please keep me informed? Thanks.

Sincerely,
H. John Waterhouse
Hartford, Conn.

Oldest grunt in the platoon

My name is Edwin Garvin. I was with A/2/-501 from October 1969 to October 1970. At the Ripcord action I was the oldest grunt in my platoon. I was a squad leader and led our point squad off of Hill 902 and also on the assault of Hill 1000. I never knew there was a Ripcord Association. Please put me on your mailing list. Also, how can I contact Keith Nolan? I could give him better information about our operations than he put in the book. I was on ReUp Hill, Granite, etc. I served under five CO and Capt. Goates was one of the best. I can be e-mailed at egg@dotplanet.com. Thank you for any assistance you can provide.

Edwin Garvin
(No snail mail address provided.)

Another Ripcord guy located

Rick (Doc) Kellogg and I tracked down another Ripcord guy. Kenneth Wargo, in Manhattan, Kansas.

Ken was a medic with B 2/506th. He was with us when we went up to Ripcord on April 1st. I tracked him down through "switchboard.com" and Rick called him a week ago. Like a lot of us, Ken was not aware of the Ripcord Association, the book *Ripcord*, or the reunions. He expressed an interest in the Colorado Springs reunion. We didn't clarify his e-mail address, but I will forward it when I get it. Will you please add Ken to the Ripcord mailing list?

Thanks, and have a great holiday season!
Craig Van Hout
Columbia, S.C.

Ripcord photos needed

Jim Campbell (C/2-506) reminds us that Behind the Lines TV documentary producer Ed Emanuel needs as many good still photos of the Ripcord area as he can get. Ed was at the reunion in Carlisle last year.

Ed's contact information:

E-mail: BTLTV@hotmail.com
Behind the Lines
11054 Ventura Blvd., #273
Studio City, CA 91604

Ripcord Reunion 2002, Colorado Springs, Colorado

(send in this form with your registration fee)

☐ Yes, I'll be there! ☐ I can't make it, but keep me on the list. Is this your first reunion? ☐ Yes ☐ No

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____ UNIT in RVN: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

Will a family member(s) or guest be sharing your accommodation? ☐ Yes ☐ No How many including you? ☐

If yes, what are the names? (For nametag purposes only.) _____

Arrival date/time: _____ Departure date/time: _____

If applicable: Arrival airline: _____ Flight # _____

Transportation is available to and from the airport. Please use the courtesy phone at the airport.

Registration fee of \$ _____ is enclosed. Fee is \$90 per adult, \$50 for children under 18, \$40 banquet only.

Registration fee is due NOT LATER THAN September 14, 2002. Make your check payable to Ripcord**Discounts for early registration:****Before March 12, \$75 per adult; Before July 23, \$80; Before September 1, \$85; After September 1, \$90.**

Your registration fee covers the following events, except as noted. Please check the boxes for headcount.

Wednesday, October 16: Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours.**Thursday, October 17:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours.**Friday, October 18:** There will be a tour of attractions in the Colorado Springs area plus a "chuck wagon" dinner.☐ Will attend, Number _____ attending. ☐ Will not attend.**Saturday, October 19:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours.Golf ☐ Yes ☐ No. Golf is **NOT** covered by the registration fee. Cart and green fees TBA.

1500 hours: Business meeting for Association business, in the hospitality suite.

Banquet: Will attend ☐, number attending? ☐ Will not attend ☐

1730-1830: Cash bar (open until 2000 hours).

1830: Opening remarks and invocation.

1830-1930: Buffet banquet

1930: Presentation of Ripcord Coins to newcomers by Ben Harrison (Maj. Gen., USA, ret.)

1950: Raffle of clock, and lamp.

2000: Closing remarks.

Sunday, October 20: Departure. See y'all next year!

(clip here)

Radisson Inn Colorado Springs North**8110 North Academy Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 80920; Phone: 719-598-5770**

Group: Ripcord Association, October 17-20, 2002

Confirmation Number: _____

Group Rate: \$69.00 plus tax, per night, single/double occupancy.

Name: _____

Number of People: _____

Arrival Date: _____

Departure Date: _____

Preference/Requests: _____

King Bed:

Double Bed:

Triple:

Quadruple:

Four Room Suite:

Handicap Access:

Smoking:

Non-smoking:

First Floor:

Method of Payment:

Check (If paying by check, one night room and tax is required for deposit):

Credit Card:

Type:

Number:

Expiration Date:

Name on Card:

(Save for your records.)

20 Deadliest U.S. Battles of the Vietnam War, 1965-1973

Battle	Battle Deaths	Dates	Battle	Battle Deaths	Dates
Ia Drang Valley*	300	Oct 23-Nov 26, '65	Vinh Huy	73	May 30-Jun 2, '67
Khe Sanh	205	Jan 20-Apr 14, '68	Ong Thang	70+	Oct. 17, '67
Dak To**	192	Nov 1-Dec 1, '67	Hamburger Hill (Ap Bia)	70	May 10-20, '69
Cu Nghi	121	Jan 28-31, '66	Dong Ha	68	Apr 29-May 4, '68
Hue	119	Feb 2-Mar 2, '68	Tam Quan	58	Dec 6-20, '67
Kim Son Valley	107	Feb 16-28, '66	LZ Bird	58	Dec 27, '66
Con Thien (ambush near)	84	Jul 2, '67	Dong Son	54	Sep 4, '67
"Nine Days in May"	79	May 18-28, '67	Con Thien	51	Jul 2-3, '67
Dak To	76	Jun 22, '67	Thom Tham Khe	48	Dec 27-28, '67
Firebase Ripcord***	75	Jul 1-23, '70	Tan Son Nhut Air Base (near)	48	Mar 2, '68

* LZ Albany alone claimed 155 KIA on Nov 17, making it the single deadliest U.S. action of the war.

LZ X-Ray resulted in another 79 KIA over two days, Nov 14-16.

** 158 of the KIA were sustained at Dak To over six days, Nov 17-23.

Note: Lengthy operations are excluded. Only actions that could be categorized as single or directly related engagements are tabulated.

Source: From *VFW Magazine*, November 2001; reprinted from: Sigler, David B. *Vietnam Battle Chronology: U.S. Army and Marine Corps Combat Operations, 1965-1973*.

Editor's Note: Battle deaths in Sigler's book for FSB Ripcord are listed as 61. Based on Keith Nolan's research a better figure is 75 KIA, including one ARVN interpreter attached to A Co., 2/506th Infantry. This makes the Battle of Fire Base Ripcord the 10th deadliest U.S. battle of the Vietnam War. —Chuck Hawkins, editor

Special thanks go to Rick Blythe (HHC, 2/506) for supplying this information to *Ripcord Report*.

HOT SKINNY ON REUNION 2002

Reunion registration form and hotel info on the Web: <http://www.herolibrary.org/p8.htm>

When: October 17-20, 2002

Where: Radisson Inn North, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Call 1-719-598-5770 x 305 (or toll free, 1-800-333-3333) for reservations. Make sure you say "Ripcord Association." Rooms are single or double at \$69 per night (normally \$135, but discounted for the reunion), smoking or non-smoking, triples are \$79 per night, and quadruples are \$89 per night. There are some really fantastic four-room suites available for \$195 (normally \$300, these are specially discounted for the reunion). Add 8 percent sales tax to all room rates. The Radisson Inn North is close to the airport and just off I-25 at the exit for the U.S. Air Force Academy. There is a National Car rental office at the hotel. Note: If you are paying by cash or check a one night room and tax deposit is required.

Reunion Registration Fee

Before March 12, 2002

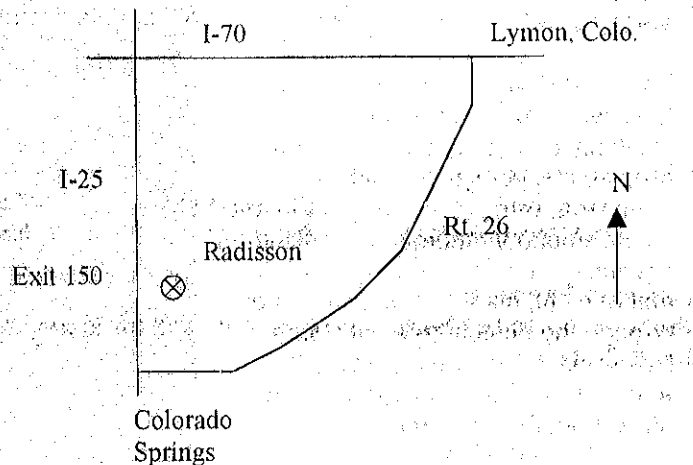
\$75 per adult, \$50 per child under 18, \$40 banquet only.

After March 12, but before July 23, \$80 per adult.

After July 23 but before September 1, \$85 per adult.

After September 1, \$90 per adult.

Make checks payable to Ripcord Association, and



Crossfire

Vietnam War Infantry Veteran vs. Veteran Author of Vietnam War

In the following exchange, Arthur Wiknik, a veteran infantry squad leader who served at Hamburger Hill with A Co., 2/506 Infantry, challenges a number of Keith William Nolan's findings as represented in his book, *Ripcord: Screaming Eagles Under Siege, Vietnam 1970*. And, as the reader will see, Nolan defends his position tenaciously.

A Critical Review of *Ripcord*

HIGGANUM, Conn.—I just finished reading the book *Ripcord* and I was somewhat disappointed, especially since the dust jacket pronounced Keith Nolan "as the foremost chronicler of the Vietnam War." I don't know who gave him such an accolade, but in my opinion it is hardly deserved.

My problem came early when Keith Nolan called the battle for Hamburger Hill a disaster that was clumsily fought. Having served with the 101st in Co. A/2-506th and found alongside brave men on Hamburger Hill, I did not appreciate his glib assessment. No doubt Keith Nolan was talking about the battle commanders but he trivialized our hard-fought victory just like Senator Edward Kennedy did in 1969.

Since Keith Nolan put me on the defensive, it was easy to spot a couple of things that were just plain dumb, such as a Huey resupply pilot requesting green smoke (page 115). Helicopter pilots in 1970 in Vietnam did not request a smoke color. That lesson was learned in the early years of the war. Also, he did not bother to correct a quote stating that The Lovin' Spoonful sang, "It's a Beautiful Morning," when the song was actually performed by The Young Rascals (page 388). Sure, these errors are minor, but they made me wonder where Keith Nolan got his other "facts."

The most disturbing aspect of the book was how Keith Nolan so wantonly perpetuated the myth that drug abuse, particularly with marijuana, was practically at epidemic levels among Vietnam G.I.s. Taking several quotes for granted, he wrote that at night, marijuana smoke drifted through the hootch areas of Camp Evans like a heavy fog (page 106). And that on Firebase Rakkasan, the bunker guards were zonked out on the stuff (page 106) and that on platoon NDPs the smell of marijuana

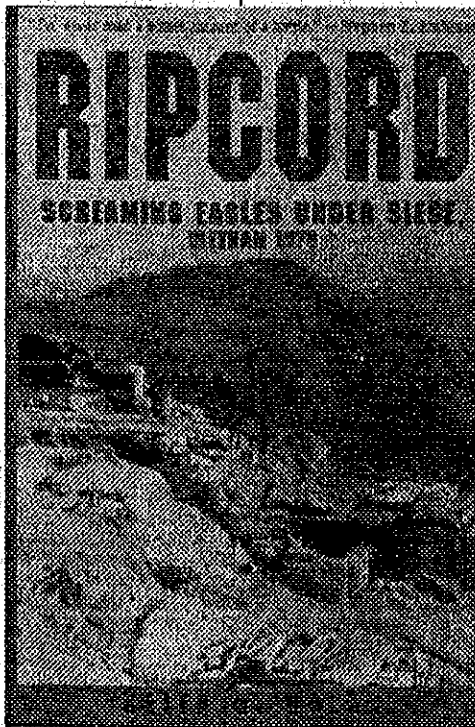
drifted from many a position (pages 156 and 219).

I was in the boonies and on firebases for 11 months and I don't ever remember pot being in the field. In fact, among the grunts I knew in the 101st, there was a great deal of pressure against pot smokers because they were considered dangerous, unreliable and lacking pride. I spent March 1970 in Camp Evans and I rarely smelled marijuana, let alone see the "heavy fog" from all the alleged smoke. I also found it amazing that of the nearly 150 veterans Keith Nolan interviewed that not one of them admitted to their own drug use. It was always somebody else. If pot smoking was so popular, Nolan should have been able to find at least a few "heads" (not dopers) willing to brag about it. Since no one came forth, I cannot help but think that there is some exaggeration in there. I'm ashamed to think that this is the legacy those interviewed want to leave behind.

Sure, there was drug abuse in Vietnam, but not on the grand scale that the American public has been conditioned to believe by Hollywood, the media, the

duds of the military and now Keith Nolan. His casual treatment of the drug issue makes all Vietnam veterans, especially those associated with *Ripcord*, look like a bunch of leaderless, stoned losers who were incapable of winning any war. As a result, he had reinforced the battle cry of the "look what the war did to me" ragtag veterans who cry at the Vietnam Memorial whenever television cameras are nearby.

Sadly, I believe that Keith Nolan simply wrote whatever drug drivel he was told or that he sprinkled the drug message into the book much like gratuitous sex is sprinkled into a movie. It is put there to shock, entertain or to reinforce an agenda. As a result, every G.I. who proudly served in Vietnam should not only feel insulted but betrayed as well. I know I do. —Arthur Wiknik, Jr.



Nolan responds

BLACKWELL, Mo.—*VFW Magazine* recently forwarded me an e-mail [Arthur Wiknik] had written regarding a profile they published about my books on Vietnam. Referring to my book *Ripcord*, the e-mail took me to task for "perpetuating the myth that drug abuse, particularly with marijuana, was practically at epidemic levels among Vietnam G.I.s. You added that I "sprinkled the drug message into the book much like gratuitous sex is sprinkled into a movie. It was put there to shock, entertain or reinforce an agenda."

Hard words, my man! Your e-mail to *VFW Magazine* made no reference to them forwarding your message to me, so I do not know if you want to start a dialogue on this subject. If you do, good. If not, so be it.

I will say quickly that I don't think I have an agenda. My goal was simply to set down on paper what happened during the *Ripcord* campaign, good, bad, or indifferent. When writing *Ripcord*, I heard a lot of stories about drug abuse from the 101st Airborne veterans I interviewed. No surprise there. The battle was fought in 1970, and drugs were much more prevalent in Vietnam in 1970 than back in 1965, 1966, or 1967.

From my conversations with veterans, it appears that marijuana first started becoming part of the scene in a big way in 1968-69, and was something that leaders at all levels had to contend with by 1970. I wrote what these *Ripcord* veterans told me—that pot was rarely smoked in the field, but that it was not uncommon on firebases and that the drug (and booze) situation was getting completely out of hand in rear areas like Camp Eagle and Camp Evans. (That heroin became such a problem in base camps across Vietnam in 1970-71 tends to confirm this view.)

As you know, approximately 15 percent of rear echelon personnel were hooked on heroin by 1971. As combat action waned throughout Vietnam, a lot of infantry troops also messed around with heroin in 1971-72. I remember interviewing a retired Navy corpsman who served two tours in Vietnam, the latter in 1st Corps, 1971-72; part of his duties during that second tour were to run urine tests on members of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, and he told me that he was stunned that something like 30 percent of the troops in the line companies showed evidence of heroin use.)

These realities do not support your contention that my discussion of pot smoking in *Ripcord* makes the Screaming Eagles who fought there "look like a bunch

of leaderless, stoned losers who were incapable of winning any war."

I'm still scratching my head over that one. Leaderless, stoned losers? Good troops and good leaders fill the pages of *Ripcord*, from Capt. Rollison to Capt. Straub to Lt. Campbell to Lt. Wallace to SSgt. Burkey, to name only a few. The book repeatedly emphasizes the professionalism of the troops in the 101st, citing Lt. Kwiecien, for example, as to the high quality of the men in his platoon and how their performance in the field flew in the face of the negative stereotype of troops who smoked dope, didn't care, etc.

I believe there are three references in the book to troops smoking pot in the field, one from Capt. Hawkins (A/2-506) who had a man killed when he got high on an observation post, one from Capt. Rollison (D/2-506) who told me that a lot of his troops were smoking dope when he first took over the company, and one from a D/2-501st trooper who said that a few guys passed the weed during the company's first night on Hill 805.

These three incidents are presented as freak incidents, not as the norm. In each case, I emphasized that the troops involved thought they were in safe areas, or at least that a lack of contact had led some troops to lower their guard. In each case, the pot smoking was confirmed by other sources. For example, Capt. Hawkins' story of pot smoking in the Rakkasan AO was confirmed to me by Lt. Widjeskog (who said that the situation was worse than Hawkins let on), just as Capt. Rollison's story was confirmed by one of his former platoon sergeants (who told me that the heads in his platoon would make sure to be assigned to LPs, Ops, guard, etc., together so they could smoke up without interference from those who frowned on pot). How in God's name could I ignore such testimony?

These three exceptions aside, the infantrymen of the 101st Airborne in *Ripcord* come across as excellent soldiers; the book is literally filled with tales of heroism under fire, from Hill 902 to Hill 805 to Hill 1000. You seemed to have focused so narrowly on the drug commentary to lose sight of the bigger picture. Like I said, I think you're the guy with the agenda!

Turning from pot smoking in the field to pot smoking on firebases,

I stand by what I wrote. When a career soldier like John Fox tells me that the smell of marijuana wafted over firebases when the sun went down, and a former artilleryman like Frank Parko confirms to me that, yes, a lot of guys smoked pot on firebases, well, there you have it. The testimony of Fox, Parko, and others was confirmed by numerous reporters who wrote about (and photographed and filmed) pot smoking at different firebases they visited in 1970-71 timeframe. You probably recall that CBS News filmed a pot party in which a shotgun was used as a pipe when one of their camera crews visited a 1st Air Cav. firebase in October 1970. The CBS reporter emphasized that there was little sign of the enemy in the area and that the troops were bored; thus, things like pot parties on firebases were almost inevitable, given the age of the troops and the generation from which they came.

You are wrong on another point. "Of the nearly 150 veterans Keith Nolan interviewed for the book," you wrote, "not one of them actually admitted to their own drug use; it was always somebody else." Actually, many guys "admitted" smoking pot to me, although "admitted" is a harsh word, implying that there is something immoral about marijuana, something worse than the beer and whiskey preferred by many other G.I.s. I did not go out of my way to identify those who "admitted" smoking pot. These guys are all in their 50s now, with children and grand children, and (in most cases) stable lives, and I saw no reason to attach their name to a subject that some people like yourself object to so strongly. (Over the years, some guys have told me point blank that they didn't want their children and co-workers to read about their drug use in Vietnam.)

Not sure what else to add. I thought the tone of your message a bit strident, a bit insulting, and the tone of this reply might have been a bit more acerbic if you had not noted having served with the 101st Airborne in Vietnam. Believe it or not, I have a lot of respect for Vietnam veterans (wouldn't be writing about the subject otherwise), and it wouldn't be right for a non-veteran like me to be barking at a veteran like you. But, really, I don't know how you could fixate so harshly on some fleeting (and I would argue, balanced) references to drug use, and miss the stories of courage under fire that make up the bulk of *Ripcord*.

Like I said, I don't know if you want to get into this or not. If you do, I look forward to your reply. —Keith William Nolan

Crossfire ... (cont.)

Wiknik writes

HIGGANUM, Conn.—I do not want to "get into it" with you, but since you took the time to write such a lengthy response, you deserve to know where I'm coming from. I sent an e-mail of my letter [to VFW Magazine] to Chuck Hawkins three-four months ago, but he never responded. So I send a copy to Vietnam and VFW Magazines. VFW contacted you, so I don't know what they plan to do. However, a staff member of Vietnam Magazine told me he agreed with my comments and my letter is in the June 2001 issue.

I served with the 101st Airborne in Co. A/2-506th from April 4, 1969 to March 28, 1970. I was an infantry squad leader who left the Army with the rank of staff sergeant.

I fought at Hamburger Hill, and I did not appreciate your assessment of that battle in *Ripcord*. As a side note, I was the first from Co. A to safely reach the top of the hill, but only after a series of bizarre incidents.

Now for the real issue. About 10 years ago, my 17-year-old niece was oblivious to my Vietnam service. When she discovered that I was a veteran, the first thing she asked me was, "How long did it take you to kick your drug habit?"

I was flabbergasted.

As a result of that perception, I started giving lectures about my experiences and the same question always came up, "How often were drugs used in Vietnam?" When I tell listeners what I saw (or did not see), they often came back with, "In the movie 'Platoon' drugs seemed like a standard activity."

Movies and Vietnam—the ultimate guide to misinformation.

I never used drugs in Vietnam, and I rarely saw drug use. I spent the last month of my tour in Camp Evans and I never saw the heavy fog you described on page 106. Also, I don't know where you got the term "dopers," we called them "heads."

Your e-mail said that drugs were more prevalent in 1970 than in the early years. I agree. But you poorly reinforced your argument by using a Navy corpsman that served in 1971-72 with the 196th Infantry. What's up with that? You're talking about 12-18 months after *Ripcord* and in a different unit.

Except for 1971-72, drug usage in Vietnam was lower than for American troops stationed anywhere else in the world, including the United States (The Vietnam War: The Illustrated History, by Crown Publishers).

Even when drug use started to rise in 1971-72, almost 90 percent of the men who served in Vietnam had already come and gone. Yet the public has this image of drug-crazed killers. Yes, I also remember the CBS shotgun pipe. The liberal media rarely looked at the positive or successful things we did in Vietnam because the public was growing tired of the war and it was trendy to focus on the negative.

You really committed a disservice when you wrote, "given the age of the troops and the generation from which they came." Yes, the country was in upheaval and drugs were in use

stateside, but you are painting an entire generation as part of your analogy. That's not only unfair, it is wrong.

You also called "admitted" a harsh word because it "implies that there is something immoral about marijuana." Are you suggesting there is not something immoral about marijuana?

You also said your goal was to record the good, bad or indifferent. That's fine, but the way some of the pot smoking was written, with few direct quotes, failed to give the reader authenticity. When the veterans you interviewed did not want to be associated with pot to protect their families from the truth, how can you be sure they were telling you the truth or not exaggerating?

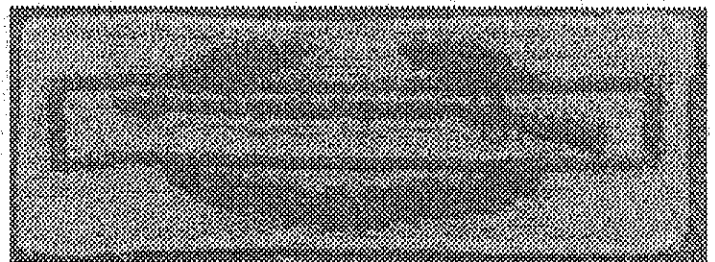
There will always be two sides to the issues surrounding the Vietnam War, be they drugs, atrocities, tactics, leadership, PTSD, etc. However, I take exception with those who wallow in, or exaggerate the issues, which I believe some of your sources did. In my travels, I sometimes meet those kinds of veterans, and they just make us all look bad. Here are a few examples.

On the History Channel there was a program titled, "The True Story of the 101st." During the segment on Hamburger Hill a veteran named Tom McCaul said, "After the battle, the grunts put up a sign that read, 'Welcome to Hamburger Hill'." He's flat wrong. The sign he's talking about was in the 1987 movie of the battle. The real sign, of which I have a photo, was poorly written like this, "HAMBURGER HILL." A note was later added to the bottom that asked the question, "Was it worth it?" The brass took the sign down and no other sign was put up.

A Vietnam veteran who lives a few miles from me joined me at a school lecture. I did not know him. Everyone felt sorry as he hobbled in with the support of a cane. Then he told a fantastic story of how he was wounded because he was forced to low crawl through a U.S. Army minefield in the dark when he was trying to get to the latrine. To top it off, a few days later I got a call from the teacher who said she saw him briskly walking his dog along the road. He was never invited back.

Only two weeks ago, a front-page story appeared in my local newspaper, The Middletown Press (Connecticut) about a Vietnam veteran who is so troubled by his war experiences that the only way he will eat in a restaurant is if he gets a corner table. That way, he claimed, "No one can sneak up on me."

Yes, I have an agenda: To clean up the misinformed image that too many people have of the average Vietnam veteran. And the public's perception will not change as long as this kind of nonsense goes unchallenged. Many of us served proudly and have nothing to be ashamed of. Too bad the guys you interviewed cannot say the same. —Arthur Wiknik, Jr.



Crossfire ... (cont.)

Nolan replies

BLACKWELL, Mo.—Thanks for your message, Mr. Wiknik. I don't agree with what you had to say, but I have to respect the experience that fuels your convictions—namely, serving as an infantry squad leader in the 101st in Vietnam—and since we aren't going to have any meeting of the minds, I'll try to keep this short.

I certainly may have been misled by some of the vets I interviewed, as you noted, but given the sheer number who recounted stories of widespread pot smoking at Camp Evans in the summer of 1970, I don't think so. Even the brigade commander at Ripcord, then-Colonel Ben Harrison, told me that when he took over the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in June 1970, his inspection of the perimeter defenses at Camp Evans revealed massive problems, to include the fact that most of the positions stank of marijuana smoke. I had heard as much from junior officers and NCOs in the brigade, so I felt it sufficient to quote only one of them in *Ripcord*, namely Blair Case to the effect that there was almost a fog of marijuana smoke around some hootches at night. I wouldn't have quoted Case if many others hadn't told me the same thing.

Incidentally, my reference to the Navy corpsman who spoke to me of heavy heroin use among 196th LIB troops in 1971 was not as disconnected as you imply. The heroin problem of the 1970-72 period did not explode from nowhere; it was a direct outgrowth of the marijuana problem.

Also incidentally, veterans who served with the 101st in 1971-72 have spoken of Camp Eagle being littered with empty heroin vials at the time. You do not seem to doubt that heroin was a major issue in 1970-72. You do seem, however, to be saying that marijuana was not a major issue in Vietnam until the time you rotated in March 1970. By 1971, the military itself admitted that approximately 10-15 percent of the enlisted troops in Vietnam were addicted to heroin, but you don't think there was a marijuana problem that led up to this tidal wave of drug abuse?!

Everything I've read on the subject, and almost everyone I've talked to, leads me to believe that there was a serious drug subculture in Vietnam by 1970. I have heard as much from brigade commanders, battalion commanders, platoon leaders, squad leaders, riflemen, etc., etc.

Subcultures can certainly go unnoticed. I remember talking to a fellow named Dennis Walker who earned the DSC with the 3rd Bde. (Separate), 9th Division, in 1970. He told me that he never saw any drug use in Vietnam and that he felt insulted by movies like *Platoon* that portrayed widespread drug use. I also interviewed

Walker's former company commander, a retired colonel; when I mentioned Walker's comments about never seeing drugs, the colonel said that, yes, Walker was an excellent soldier whose friends were also the better soldiers in the unit. But, continued the colonel, many men in the company did use drugs; they were just not stupid enough to light up in front of a tough, straight arrow, by-the-book soldier like Walker.

Another comment: You should not take my comments about Hamburger Hill in *Ripcord* as some type of personal insult. My comments had nothing to do with the courage of the troops on the ground. My comments did have everything to do with the mindset of the leaders in the 101st who would sacrifice the number of troops they did to take a remote, virtually meaningless objective in the middle of nowhere on the Laotian border at a time when the politicians were pulling the plug on the war and gearing up for the withdrawals, Vietnamization, etc.

If you think General Zias and the others who ginned up Hamburger Hill were some kind of military geniuses, I won't argue the point too strongly with you. I mean, hell, you were there, I wasn't! But, I will say that your view is a minority opinion. I would also say that commanders who threw their troops into prepared enemy positions, whether at Hamburger Hill or Dak To or Dai Do, or the Rockpile, were still fighting WWII and had no real concept how to fight the communists in Vietnam. I could go on and on about the poor leadership displayed by senior U.S. Army officers during the Vietnam War, but that is an argument for another day.

I will repeat what I've said before: Although senior military leadership during the war might have been miserable (Have you read *The Army and Vietnam*, by Maj. Andrew F. Krepinevich, USA?), I have nothing but respect for the courage of the troops who actually fought the war. I mean, c'mon, isn't that obvious from reading *Ripcord*?

It's odd. The more I consider your messages, the more I think we're on the same side. I'm not Oliver Stone, for cripes sake! But I'm also not a whitewashing revisionist like B. G. Burkett of *Stolen Valor* fame.

Anyway, I'll just close here by saying that I hate to be at odds with someone like yourself, but I have to write what people tell me, and sometimes what people tell me is ugly. Best wishes. —Keith Nolan



In this issue...

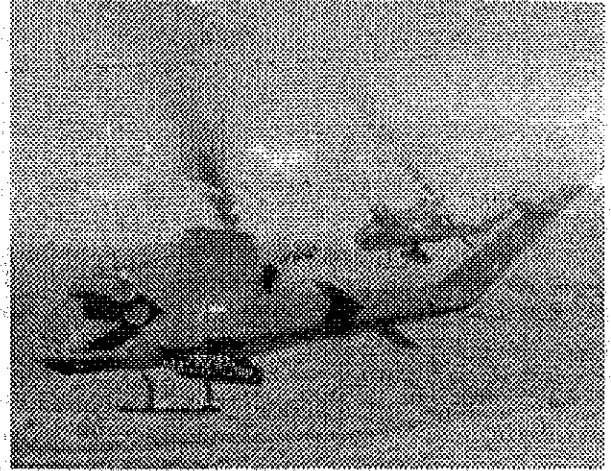
Old vets, old guns	Page 1
LZ Kent Island	Page 2
Who is this man?	Page 2
Incoming	Page 3
Reunion registration form	Page 4
Deadliest battles in Vietnam	Page 5
More reunion information	Page 5
Crossfire (don't miss this one)	Page 6-9

1970 - 2002

32 Years and Looking Ahead!

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

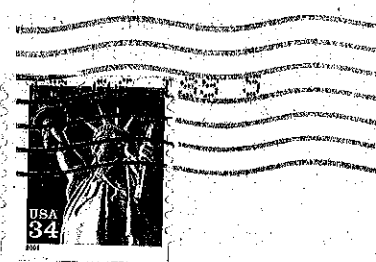
Photo: 4/77th ARA (Griffins) Web site.



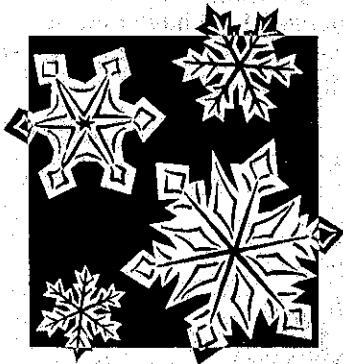
Ripcord Report

Chuck Hawkins, editor

THE HEART OF AMERICA BALL



Address correction requested.



Can spring be far away?

