



RIPCORN REPORT



For Friends and Survivors of the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord
Republic of Vietnam 12 March - 23 July, 1970

Issue # 133

May 2023

Ripcord Association Update *by Pete Meloro*



Greetings from New Jersey! It is hard to believe that six months have passed since we held our reunion during October in Springfield, Missouri. Your Board of Directors are actively working to ensure that our upcoming reunion will be as successful. In our last newsletter, I spoke about the flash drive I gave Kathy Widjeskog which contained the video of our tribute to Lee and Kathy. Chris and I have spoken with Kathy several times over the last six months and she let us know that she did view the video with her family. She wanted to thank the Ripcord Family for their kind thoughts and remembrances of Lee. I continue to be hopeful that Kathy will again join us at a future reunion.

Thus far, we have 46 people who have registered for our October 2023 reunion. If you plan to attend, it is important to send in your registration sooner rather than later. This will facilitate our ability to plan for the event. Please remember that when you register with the University Plaza Hotel, you mention our Group Code, RIPCORN23. We were notified by several attendees from our last reunion, that their final invoice did not apply the discounted rate. It is imperative that you register with our Group Code and, just as important, upon checking out of the Hotel, please verify that the discounted rate was applied.

Since our last newsletter, Jim McCoy has resigned from the Board. Jim has been an important contributor to our Board and we truly appreciate all the time and effort he has devoted to our organization over the years. Jim has assured us that he and Michelle will continue to attend our reunions going forward. Again, we thank him for all he and Michelle have done. Paul Buhr was asked to replace Jim on the Board through the remainder of Jim's tenure. Paul accepted and we welcome Paul to the Board and know he will play an important role going forward. Paul will also continue

to be our resident photographer and we thank him for continuing in that role.

I hope this Newsletter finds everyone in good spirits and ready for a wonderful summer. Remember, get those registration forms in for our Reunion in October.

Future Reunions

2023 Ripcord Reunion

Springfield, MO

University Plaza Hotel

Springfield, MO 65806

October 22nd- 25th, 2023

2024 Ripcord Reunion

Myrtle Beach, SC

DoubleTree Resort by Hilton

Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

October 27, 2024 – October 31, 2024

2025 Ripcord Reunion

Myrtle Beach, SC

DoubleTree Resort by Hilton

Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

October 26, 2025 – October 30, 2025

2023 Ripcord Reunion

Sunday, October 22nd

through

Wednesday, October 25th

with departure on

Thursday, October 26th

University Plaza Hotel,

333 S. John Q. Hammons Pkwy

Springfield, MO 65806

Call Hotel 417-864-7333

for hotel reservations

Group Code: **RIPCORDER23**

(on line reservation link is on our website
www.ripcordassociation.com)

HOTEL RESERVATIONS MUST BE
MADE SEPARATELY
BY September 5, 2023

Price is \$94 per night plus tax:
Breakfast is included.
\$129 for King Suite or Poolside

Ripcord on Facebook

by Anthony Critchlow



It's spring, yea! As I sit here, it's snowing and we are expected to get 1 or 2 more inches here and up to 5 inches in the mountains. I know I'm with everyone, its time for the snow to stop.

Our Facebook page is up to 1247 people. They are no longer called members because the new Facebook rule says anyone can join in their own or just drop in and post on our page. I have deleted and blocked over 5 people this month alone. I want to thank all of those who have notified me about the posts.

I hope everyone is having a better spring then me. Keep safe. Keep posting on our Facebook page.

Join our Facebook group:

Ripcord Association

Hosted by

Anthony Critchlow

1,247 current members



Visit our website at
www.ripcordassociation.com

Read the **Ripcord Report** on line
Daily updates ● History
and much more

Opinions expressed in submitted material are not necessarily those of the editorial staff. We reserve the right to reject any material deemed to be inappropriate. We also reserve the right to edit all submissions, but we will make every effort to maintain the writer's concept and meaning. Please be brief and concise.

Donations

The life blood of our Association

The following have given donations to the Ripcord Association since the last newsletter. These donations help keep the website and newsletters published, and all our Ripcord members up to date.

- Phillip Michaud
- Darryl Reina
- Jim King
- Joseph Jungles
- Bill and Lynn Hand
- Joe Smith
- Elijah Todd

Checks payable to:
"Ripcord Association".

Mail to:
Pete Meloro
107 Maple Drive
Spring Lake Hts, NJ 07762

RIPCORD REPORT

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

Ripcord Report
www.ripcordassociation.com

Editor: Bill Heath
email: editor@ripcordassociation.com

Design & Layout
Frank Marshall
email: newsletter@ripcordassociation.com

Everyone is **WELCOME**
to join our Association:
www.ripcordassociation.com

MEMBERSHIP IS FREE !

For our membership request form,
download at:
www.ripcordassociation.com/membership-form

696 members in our Ripcord Association
584 are Ripcord Veterans
112 are Associate Members
152 receive newsletter via Postal Mail
544 receive the newsletter via e-mail
1,247 on Facebook "Ripcord Association Group"

If your contact information has changed, please go to our website and update your membership to keep getting important information about our Ripcord Association

TO ALL MEMBERS

Please continue to send your letters, comments and articles to:

newsletter@ripcordassociation.com or
postal mail to:

Frank Marshall
567 Circle Drive
Surfside Beach, SC 29575

Everyone would love to hear from you.



FSB Ripcord veterans attend Battle symposium in Columbia, SC.



Eight Ripcord veterans attended the Saturday, 29 April, Second Symposium on the Battle of Firebase Ripcord in Columbia, capital of the great state of South Carolina. In alphabetical order (so as not to offend anyone!) they were Albert Burckard, Ray Hines, Bob Layton, Bob Leibecke, Walter Lyssy, Frank Marshall, Fred Shuttleworth and Craig Van Hout.

The symposium's three discussion sessions were held in the Confederate Relic Room of the South Carolina State Museum. This museum is in the historic, and very imposing, Columbia Mills building that was once the world's first textile mill powered by electricity. The wonderfully detailed 10 x 12 foot diorama model of FSB Ripcord dominates the entranceway into the museum. It is the highlight of the museum's temporary exhibit "A War with No Front Lines, South Carolina and the Vietnam War 1965-1973."

The second symposium event was the detailed story of the origin, construction and placement of the FSB Ripcord diorama project presented by Jeff Nelson and Ralph Nardone. They represented the 25 member team of the Central South Carolina Wildcats Chapter of the Armor Modeling and Preservation Society (AMPS) who labored lovingly for 2 1/2 years to construct this model of FSB Ripcord for the museum. This highly accurate 1/72 scale construction is really a "must see" for all Ripcord veterans. You can point to the precise spot on Ripcord to tell your grandchildren, "...that's where I was!"

James Smither, history professor at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, whom we all know and respect, gave the second symposium presentation. Based on his twelve-year professional study of the Battle of Ripcord and over 100 interviews with veterans,

he spoke eloquently about our war and specifically the place that the Ripcord battle holds in that story. We look forward to the publication of his book on this subject.

The last event was in two parts. First, Bob Leibecke, Bob Layton and Fred Shuttleworth gave short synopses of how they came to be involved in the fight for Ripcord. Prof. Smither interjected questions to demonstrate how he conducts oral interviews. It was a truly enlightening experience to hear firsthand the personal stories of three of our fellow Ripcord veterans.

Lastly, Fred Shuttleworth showed some of the hundreds of photos he took while part of an 81mm mortar crew on Ripcord during the final siege. His photos were dramatic and portrayed the messy terrain of the "real" Ripcord that most of us knew. The main complaint whispered about the wonderful FSB Ripcord diorama in the museum is, "it's too clean!" Fred's pictures graphically show how really all mucky and dirty it was up there. But, in fairness to the AMPS team who made this incredible model, if they had actually tried to put in all the yuck and debris, it probably would distract too much from the extreme detail that they worked so hard to put into the model. It is probably just as well they did not have access to Fred's images while they were building the model!

The symposium ended with several discussions about the fate of the large FSB Ripcord diorama when the museum's exhibit on the Vietnam War closes. There is a possibility the model may end up somewhere on Fort Campbell, the home of the 101st. But that discussion and decision is probably several years in the future.

I think all guests and participants in this symposium were very impressed with the great presentations and the outcome of this event.

*Albert P. Burckard jr.
Captain, Infantry, A/2-506.*



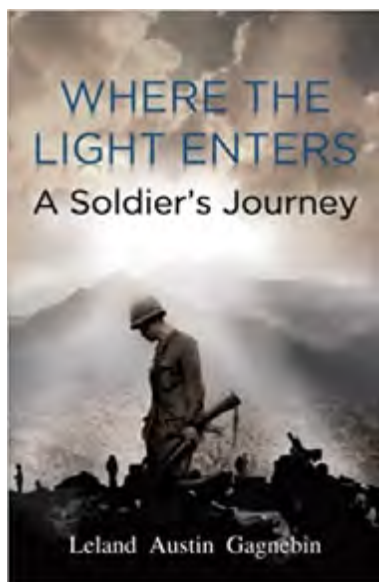
Leland "Al" Gagnebin 3rd Bde Air Cav Where The Light Enters A Soldier's Journey

Over 20 years ago one too many people said to me, "You tell a compelling story, you should write." So I did. As many of you, I had these memories and thoughts that just kept rolling around in my head. And I also wanted to leave my son something to help him understand what his dad had experienced as an Infantry Rifleman with the 3rd Bde's Air Cavalry Platoon during the spring and summer of 1970. So, I committed to write the stories down. I also made a commitment to go back to Vietnam as was suggested to me, to make sure I left nothing unfinished. The result of that trip culminated in sitting by the side of the road in the A Shau Valley and having lunch with an NVA Captain who fought in the same area as did I during the same period of time. It was a remarkable experience.

As my writings unfolded I became aware that I had something that just might help someone else. That anyone touched by the harshness of war, whether veteran or non-veteran, regardless of conflict, just might benefit from my story. And with so many veteran suicides occurring, I was pushed to finish.

WHERE THE LIGHT ENTERS A SOLDIER'S JOURNEY is now available through Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, and also through Barnes and Noble. Through the telling of my story I have no doubt told a bit of yours. I have endeavored to honor all of you as best I could. My hope is it will help others find their way further along their own path and help prevent veteran suicide. My editors describe it as a story of hope and courage, one thinks it should be required high school reading. I would be honored if you would take a look at it, and if you read it share your thoughts and comments with me. Thank you and my very best regards to you.

I can be reached directly:
Leland "Al" Gagnebin
lelandgagnebin@gmail.com



Registered to Attend the 2023 Ripcord Reunion in Springfield as of April 22nd

William Tex Campbell
Melvin and Mary Olsen
Bill and Lynn Hand
Douglas Puffer
Rick and Racquel Montgomery
Jerone Buffington
David and Ingrid Lockwood
Peter and Chris Meloro
Joe Smith
Bob and Maura Gustafson
Ron and Linda McCrory
Tony Little
Uwe and Diane Meyer
David and Connie Cote
Don and Linda Holthausen
John and Barbara Hedrick
Bill Boles
Paul Buhr and Chris Courtney
Bob and Red Judd
Korky Buhr
Marc Skinner
Everett Slaughter
Wayne Spruill
Merle and Ruth Delagrange
Lin and Pinkey Bashford
Diane and Joe McCarville
David Hilleren & Marlene Smith
Paul and Laura Hansmann

INCOMING MAIL

The reunion was great. Thanks to all who made it work.

Dale Lane

A/2-506



I'm looking for the new member that attended the 2022 reunion. He is a doctor from Nebraska.

Thanks

Bob Jones

bojo48490@gmail.com



I much enjoyed reading about the Battle of Ripcord. It amazes me that all of you members not only risked your lives, but dedicated so much time and effort in organizing the Ripcord Association, that future generations can learn about Ripcord. I would like to make a donation to Ripcord Association in memory of Spec 4 Roy Albert Johnson, who was killed July 10, 1970. If anyone served with Roy, I would like to hear from them and please let me know your address. God bless the members of the Ripcord Association. Thanks so much, your website is great! I was somewhat aware of Ripcord because I believe it was once in our Navy bulletin. Future generations need to hear the Ripcord story. Thanks to all of the great Ripcord veterans. I really enjoy your website and keep up the great work

Robert Roby

rroby7355@gmail.com



I'm honored to be in this group. I'm a former 11B Infantryman from the 25th DIV. I served long after you all paved the way and cleared the LZ. I served in 1986. My uncle Allen Harper chaperoned me to the recruiters office when I was 17 in 1986.

Sadly, Our family and his 3 surviving children laid him to rest at Arlington National Cemetery on April 27, 2023. Section 18, Marker #30405. He has the perimeter! He was a Screaming Eagle in Delta Company 2nd of the 506th. He was involved in the battle of "Operation Firebase Ripcord" He would have been 11H20. I believe that is some sort of Tow Gunner??

He left the army as a Spec 4. Sadly he lost a leg to a landmine at some point in his 10 months in Vietnam. I

know for a fact, that his Lieutenant was Robert St. Onge, who later became the "Secretary of Transportation" for South Carolina about 10 years ago.

Is there anyone in this esteemed group that knew my Uncle Allen Lee Harper from West Chicago, Illinois?

I see that I have 19 friends in my Facebook group that also know members of this group. My hope is that it leads to healing conversations for all. I always knew my uncle Al was bad ass, but I had no idea that he was involved in this operation until we laid him to rest.

Dan Noel

cabinetm8kr@cox.net



Ripcord Book Project and Interviews

Jim Smither

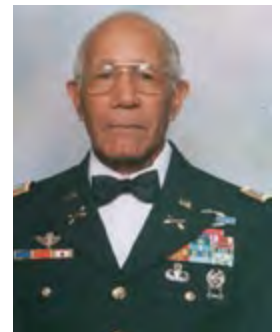
GVSU Veterans History Project

If you would like to be interviewed by Jim Smithers at the next reunion, the best way to contact him will be by email at: smitherj@gvsu.edu. You can also leave him a voice mail message on his office phone, (616) 331-3422.

Tribute to Isabelino Vazquez-Rodriguez

by James Campbell

Jim Campbell (LT) from Charlie Company composed a tribute to Isabelino Vazquez-Rodriguez who passed away peacefully on January 7, 2023 at the age of 92. Isabelino was revered by the men of Charlie Company for his leadership and military acumen. You can find Jim's tribute to this great man on the Ripcord Website.



What were YOU carrying in the field as a Grunt?

March 7, 1970.

Eleven days following my 21st Birthday and being resupplied in the jungle by helicopter, all of us infantrymen in 3rd platoon, Alpha Co. 2/506th were finishing putting our rucksacks together. We had received water, food, mail and ammo, so boxes of C-rations had to be opened and divided. Then the cardboard had to be buried and food cans slipped into our socks for storage across the top of our rucks. I always put the can of food that I liked the least in first, followed by the second choice and so on. Then when full, tie a knot in the end of the sock. Done with main meals, move onto fruit cans and B-units. Usually, four socks held the majority of food. Canteens were filled, ammo sorted out, magazines reloaded and if time allowed, read mail and maybe respond. I had my girlfriend write me on one side of her letter, then I would answer her by writing on the back and returning it to her on the next chopper out. Since we weren't supposed to keep personal letters in the field, the military didn't want the enemy to find them and use them as propaganda against us. My idea was to return the letters so we could keep them after my Vietnam days were over.

As I was gathering all my resupply items and having to find room among what I already had in my ruck, I thought about writing down what I was carrying. I knew I couldn't remember all this gear in the future, so I put pen to paper. This is my "stuff" as of 7 March 1970, five days before our first assault onto what would become FSB Ripcord, beginning 12 March.

FOOD: (2) Spaghettis, (2) Ham & Eggs, (2) Beef Steaks, (1) Spiced Beef, (1) Pork Slices, (1) Ham Slices. **B-UNITS:** (2) B-2, (2) B-3A, (5) B-1A **JELLY:** (2) Blackberry (1) Pineapple.

FRUIT: (2) Pineapple (1) Applesauce (1) Apricot (1) Pears (1) Peaches (1) Fruit Cocktail. **LRRP MEALS:** (2) Pork & Potatoes (1) Beef & Rice **WATER/DRINKS:** (7) Quarts Water (1) Rootbeer (2) Chocolate Milks.

EXTRAS: (3) Fruitcake Bars (1) Lemon Corn Flake Bar (1) Hershey Syrup (1) Can Tuna Fish (2) Onions (1) Quart Catsup, Books of Matches, Sugar Packages,



Cream Packages, Cocoa Packages and Toilet Paper.

EQUIPMENT:

M-16 Rifle, (21) M-16 Mags, (4) Hand Grenades, (2) Star Clusters, (1) Trip Flare (1) Claymore Mine, (2) Smoke Grenades, 100 rds. M-60 Ammo, Gas Mask, Shovel, Pack & Rack, Cleaning Equipment, Ammo Pouch, 1 Quart Canteen Cover, (4) Socks for Food, (1) Canteen Cup, 1 Quart Canteen & Cover, 2 Quart Canteen & Cover, 5 Quart Canteen & Cover, (2) Poncho Liners, Air Pillow, Claymore Bag for Ammo, Rain Jacket, Jungle Sweater, Poncho, Heat Tabs, M-16 Ammo Can, Cassette Player, 10 Tapes, Extra Batteries, First Aid Dressing, Extra Spoons, Insect Repellent, Ear Plugs, Playing Cards, Tooth Brush, Tooth Paste, Soap, Towel, Shaver/Blades, Mirror, LZ Ball Cap, Steel Helmet, Helmet Liner, Pistol Belt, Dictionary, Ink Pens, Stationary, Envelopes, Bag with Letters and Personal Items.

I have often wished I could assemble all these items together again and see how much they all weighed. Then challenge young people to try to pack and wear what we carried. Then put them in the rain/mud and ask them to climb a mountain full of jungle with sticker/thorns while watching for bad-guys. Just another day in the bush.

What else did YOU carry? PRC-25, M-60, LAW, XM203, M79 or half your LT's gear?

BILL HEATH Editor



Photo represents what many of our rucks looked like. Not actual photo of us in Alpha Company.

RIPCARD REUNION 2023 SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

I have not received a Ripcord Coin. I require a Reunion Name Tag and Lanyard

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ UNIT IN 'NAM _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-mail address _____

Will a family member(s) be attending? If yes what are their names? (For name tag purposes only).

Arrival Date _____ Departure Date _____

Registration fee of \$ _____ is enclosed for # _____ Adults and # _____ children under 18.
\$35 for children under 18.

Your registration fee of \$75 per Adult covers the cost of the snacks, beverages, (includes beer and wine) hot Hors D'oeuvres on Tuesday night and dinner on Wednesday.

Registration fee is now due!

Make your check payable to "RIPCARD ASSOCIATION" Mail your check with this form to:

**Peter Meloro, 107 Maple Drive, Spring Lake Hts, NJ 07762.
Questions? Call Pete at 732-947-1664 or Frank Marshall 609-472-0970**

AGENDA

- Sunday, October 22: Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Self guided tours and shopping)
- Monday, October 23: Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Golf in the AM) (Self guided tours)
- Tuesday, October 24: Hospitality 1200 Hours. Hot Hors D'oeuvres 1730 hours
- Wednesday October 25: Business meeting for association business in Hospitality room (1100 hrs)
Dinner with cash bar starting at 1700 hours done by 2200 hours.
- Thursday, October 26: Homeward bound
- Monday golf outing (a separate fee). Check if you will play []-.

HOTEL RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY

BY September 20, 2023 CALL 417-864-7333 for Univ. Plaza Hotel and ask for HOTEL RESERVATIONS and mention the GROUP CODE: **RIPCARD23**

(on line reservation link is on our website www.ripcordassociation.com)

Price is \$94 per night plus tax. Breakfast is included.

\$129 for King Suite or Poolside