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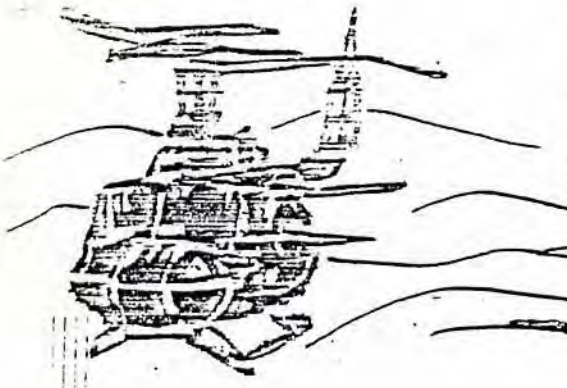

# ON RIPCORD

Dear Folks:

Last months correspondence was an initial attempt at trying to get regular comunication occurring among members of our group thru the use of a newsletter. This correspondence continues in that vein with a fairly serious attempt at putting together a newsletter that will be beneficial to you. Our goal continues to be ultimately the getting of Ripcord Veterans in a reunion event. However, until our numbers indicate we could seriously attempt that we can take time to get to know more about one another as we are today as well as reflect on what appeared to have happened from April 1, 1970 thru July 23,1970. I'm cautious about planning the reunion now because too few are aware of our efforts. The future should get more people imvolved who will be essential in organizing our events.

As was noted last month your feedback is invaluable in the putting together of the newsletter. Response to the last newsletter was very good and I appreciate those who responded with enthusiasm and encouragement. And now by overwhelming popular demand is a list of us.

THE GUYS OF RIPCORD

- Rick Blythe, [redacted] Rick was a chaplains assistant with 2/506 (Chaplain Leroy Fox) during Ripcord. He is now age 37 and works as a local legislator in New York. Rick's access to letters sent home at the time along with a keen sense of perspective provides the newsletter with its first retrospective on Ripcord.

Richard R. Blythe

Many of you will recall or identify with the events he refers to later in the newsletter.

**FRANK GONZALES, 36**
Telephone engineer
Tucson, Ariz.

- Frank Gonzales [redacted] Frank now age 36 was a Recon Medic with the 2/506 and was one of those unfortunate enough to have dealt with Ripcord on April 1 (April Fools) as well as later. He lives with his family in one of the nicer sections of Tucson and has worked for a number of years as a telephone company engineer.

- Mal Moore, [redacted] Mal was with B 2/320th Artillery on Ripcord a deadly business when the base was under seige. Mal is involved with the 101st ABN Division Association and is working to set up a local chapter of that group in Lafayette. Anyone knowing 101st people in that area may want to pass along names and addresses to Mal.

- Tom Chase [redacted] Tom was a door gunner with the 163rd Aviation Co. and was very much involved in Ripcord Operations. He was gunner early on Gen. Smiths bird and later served as crew chief and gunner to Gen. Berry on old "Triple 4".

- Bill Heath, [redacted] Bill was the pointman from Alpha 2/506 that led Bravo 2/506 and elements of battalion Recon off of Ripcord on April 1 (April Fools). Bill now owns a commercial printing company in Arizona. He remembers a lot about those days and surprisingly was able to keep a comprehensive diary of day to day events in the field.

- Loyd Fulmer, [redacted] Loyd was a mortarman with E 2/506 during Ripcord. He and his very gracious wife Suzanne were able to visit the "Wall" in late 1984. Loyd has a yen to locate people who were with him in E Co. mortars.

- Larry Smith, [redacted] served with C 3/187th during Ripcord and came in contact later on Rakkasan with many Ripcord Survivors. His unit had several missions in and around Ripcord. Larry is very active in the Legion, VFW, and in regard to POW/MIA issue.

- Bruce Updyke, [redacted] Bruce was a slick pilot with C 158th Aviation out at Camp Evans. The outfits call sign was Phoenix. Bruce was involved with evacuation several units on and around Ripcord on July 23, as well as earlier.

- Bill Aeschliman, [redacted] Bill served with the 2/320th Artillery on Ripcord as a Counter Mortar Radar Crewman (a fancy name for using radar to locate enemy mortars so our artillery could be called on to knock them out). Bill has related that although the equipment he used was "damned lethal" the enemy had several ways of rendering it less than effective. He recalls they were often under attack as much as the enemy they were trying to locate.

- Alan Riddle, [redacted] Al was a machine gunner with B 2/506 on Ripcord. He was hit by mortar fire a couple of days before Ripcord fell and evacuated to a surgical hospital. During, Ripcord Al was this writers best friend. We had both been machine gunners at one time. Although his injuries were serious he was able to serve out the rest of his time in the states. Previously one of the best damn Custom Van Painters in West Va.

he now resides in Indiana with his wife Liz and children, and works as an insurance adjustor.

- Larry C. Button, [redacted] was one of those replacements sent out to B 2/506 only a few days before Ripcord fell. Memories now are somewhat hazy but he vividly remembers the hellatious pounding the hill took with mortars landing so close they were pushing dirt in on top of his fighting position. He notes he was not the most gung ho grunt on that hill. (He needn't worry none of us were). Because of a chronic medical problem related to the tropics enviroment Larry was to later luck out and become in charge of the Division Drivers Testing Station following Ripcord. Larry now runs a business in Minnesoto and would like to hear from persons in nearby states such as Iowa, Wisconsin, the Dakota's etc.

- Ray "Blackie" Blackman, [redacted] was an infantryman with D 2/501. This by the way was the outfit that became responsible for Hill 805 security. This group subsequently caught more hell than even B 2/506 did. They remained there until approximately 7-18-70. As many of us do, Ray is able to recall the more humoroas of he and his outfits exploits like his platoon sliding off a mountain when the objective was to climb the darn thing. Ray expresses a great interest in learning all he can about Ripcord and related events. His unit by the way (also Rod Soubers) has had two reunions and are planning a third in July of '86.

- Arthur Hickman, [redacted] Arthur though not involved during the period we generally were with Ripcord served with the 75th Rangers of the 101st. He indicates he was resupplied on Ripcord for August 1970 to October 1970 and tha in January 1971 a unit on Ripcord was overrun. Interesting what?

OTHER ISSUES

In planning the newsletter I had hoped to have 2-3 articles by Ripcord people as well as to share a list of veterans resources and orgainzations. This letter got rather bulky for that. However, other articles and resources will be shared in later months. I do hope that others of you will take time to sit down and write anywhere from 1-3 pages and submit them for later editions (having them typed would help but is not necessary). They will not be used for any other purpose than this newsletter. Also let me know about veterans groups, events, resources you are aware of so that I can share them with others. Let me know what you think of the newsletter. What follows is the first RIPCORD RETROSPECTIVE by Rick Blythe. Also enclosed please find copies of pictures related to Ripcord submitted by Rick. Looking at the photos in clockwise formation is a group just out of the field from Ripcord (following evacuation) in 2/506 battalion area. The guy in the jeep is 21 year old Rick Blythe as well as one of him with a group just below. A female represnatiove of Metro-Media News following Ripcord, a dark photo of the old Camp Evans theater and Capt. Ben Peters of B 2/506 being interviewed just following the evacuation. Until next time....luck.

Sincerely

Chip Collins

Rick Blythe
July 6, 1985

THOUGHTS - 15 YEARS LATER - RETURN TO RIPCORD

Rick Blythe is now 37 years old and lives with his wife and family in Upstate New York. Rick served with the First Infantry Division between September of 1969 and March of 1970. He received his CIB while with the BIG RED ONE.

In March of 1970 he was transferred to the 101st where he was assigned as a Security Guard to the Battalion Chaplain, LeRoy Fox. Following several field trips including overnights at FSB Ripcord and FSB Granite his duties became more and more confined to Camp Evans and as he puts it he had the hated title of "REMF!!" (Not to mention the somewhat awkward title of Chaplain's Assistant)

March 14, 1970
Assigned to Co. A. Many new replacements without experience.

March 17, 1970
Assigned to HHCo. Designated as Security Guard for Chaplain.

March 20, 1970
FSB Granite hit by sapper attack. 10KIA - 10WIA. Duties expanded to include typing sympathy letters. Ugh.
Chinook crash near my hooch. 3 Killed.

April 5, 1970
Flew to some FSB today and onto Phu Bai.

April 7, 1970
Chaplain's chopper attacked on a re-supply mission to Alpha Co. Morter & Small Arms fire. I returned fire as the damn door gunner seemed to freeze. Damn, Charlie Co. had 3KIA and 11WIA last night. This is crazy.

April 8, 1970
Nuts. Delta Co. just had 11 WIA. One of our COBRA Choppers made a big BOO-BOO!!!

April 9, 1970
Actual count turns out to be 1 Killed and 13 wounded. Ugh.

April 10, 1970
Visited troopers at 85th. Med Evac in PhuBai.

April 11, 1970
I learned about someplace called "Eagle Beach" where Alpha Co. is going for a "Stand Down!" While Alpha is at Eagle Beach, the rest of the Battalion are going to try and retake some place called Ripcord.

Our Arty Bases are on the tops of mountains. First though, an Infantry Company must climb the mountain, secure it and cut a landing zone. This was done several weeks ago and the big brass finally decided to move men and artillery to Ripcord. (Just a name given for an obscure piece of ground)

We had been there several nights before when as one man put it, "Mortars started falling like rain!!" Infiltrators pierced the defensive perimeter and shot the place up.

Enemy pressure continued and we were forced (big word around here) off of this Ripcord. We're going back! Ripcord is unimportant. It was an unreported battle by the press but not to the press.

But to Charlie Company who will be the first to go in tomorrow, and the 6 men who died there and to their families, and really to all of the 2/506th. it is a very important place at the moment. Why!?

Possibly because that's where Chuck is, maybe because the enemy is stronger in this area than reported and we're going to take the initiative and play this area down. I don't know. But for an unimportant far away hill it seems to me to be a hell of a place to die.

To save face and for the morale of this battalion I'm not so sure that we don't have to go back to the place where we were knocked off of. I only hope they do it right this time.

Officially, RIPCORD is being build to support ARVN troops in the area, who, instead of Americans are going to make a big push soon. Just wait and see. I have no great military mind and things that seem screwed up, well maybe they are, but we've got to place our faith in the Lord and our Commanders. I'll keep you posted on Ripcord but with the powderkeg potential of the place you may have heard about it before you get this letter.

Gee, it's nice to know what's going on. The guys in the field are told, "DO IT!" Ugh! Bou am I ready to sow some seeds of disent! (I'll have to spell it right foist)

APRIL 13, 1970

Alpha Co. came in today. More rain. Cold at night.

APRIL 14, 1970
Things are moving fast here now. We've moved back to RIPCORD successfully this time. The BN Commander just came to hear what the Chaplain had to say about morale. The Chaplain let him have it and he took it.

So, to help bolster morale, Lt. Col. Lucas has requested that Chaplain Fox live out at Ripcord as the men in the battalion will be rotated through there. It looks as though I get to go too! He got an M-16 rifle tonight and then surprised me with a $ 45 Bowie Knife. He's ready for bear. A real combat Chaplain. I've got to keep an eye on him.

APRIL 16, 1970
Sad news. Alpha Co. was hit yesterday. 3 KIA - 2 WIA. One of the men who died was an acquaintance from the First Division.

Daylight attack on RIPCORD. 5 men wounded.

APRIL 17, 1970
What a bummer this is. Finding out stupid ways men are killed. At least on RIPCORD my only duties will be to dig in-deep!

APRIL 20, 1970
FSB NANCY was hit recently by a ground attack. ARVN sector held by the American sector was overrun. Our men beat off the attack.

I'm getting my gear together. Tomorrow we go to RIPCORD.

APRIL 21, 1970
Finally made it to RIPCORD. We rode a single chopper through mountain passes for a different type of ride. Updrafts and downdrafts are definately tricky.

This place isn't as bad as I thought it would be yet it's far worse than any that the First Division ever had. We're on top of a mountain. The fog has rolled in. Virtually no air traffic before noon of each day.

APRIL 23, 1970
Still digging and filling sandbags at RIPCORD. Some incoming and lots of outgoing. Thank goodness someone had cigarettes so I could put the filters in my ears. Guard duty on the perimeter in the rain. We made sure there was some outgoing!

APRIL 24, 1970

Flight back from RIPCORD was scary. Last flight out for the day and we had to try several mountain passes before finding a way out. The Pilot was a cherry and none of us liked it when we found ourselves in areas of only 20-ft. of clearance.

APRIL 26, 1970

Individual sapper hits RIPCORD. Satchel charge hits G.I. in head and rolls down hill where it explodes. G.I. at Camp Evans goes beserk with M-16 and Chaplain gets him to give it up.

APRIL 30, 1970

Another morter attack on RIPCORD.

MAY 1, 1970

Attack on FSB GRANITE. 7 KIA - 41 WIA. Battalion moves to another FSB called GLADIATOR. 100 degrees weather!!

MAY 3, 1970

6 rockets hit Camp Evans including Orange sector (2/506). We went over to SERTS training. Many are scared. Many have only been In-Country for a few days.

MAY 5, 1970

Went to Eagle Beach for memorial services. Harassment by lone sniper on route to Hue. Watch stolen in Hue by a little kid who grabbed it as we rounded a corner in the City.

MAY 6, 1970

FSB Henderson was hit. 29 KIA. An entire area of the base was decimated when their ammo dump blew up.

MAY 8, 1970

45 cal. pistols were issued to rear personnel. Memorial service for our Brigade Command Sgt. Major. His chopper was hit by a morter round when it landed.

MAY 10, 1970

104 degrees today!

MAY 19, 1970

I met Capt. Lamb from Susquehanna, Pa. He's in charge of S-1 (Personnel). He told me that Andy Picarsic from Windsor is here too, as a chopper pilot.

MAY 24, 1970

FSB CATHERINE was hit. 5 KIA - 20 WIA.

MAY 25, 1970

Our Communications Officer was found. His chopper was all shot up. Only the crew chief survived. He(s in a state of shock. Lt. Darling was well liked by everyone.

JUNE 3, 1970

Chaplain stayed out at RIPCORD. Two West Pointers are taking over 2 of the line companies.

JUNE 4, 1970

More rockets hit Camp Evans

JUNE 7, 1970

Rotating more troops through Eagle Beach.

JUNE 18, 1970

Chaplain out at RIPCORD again. I rode re-supply chopper out during this period.

JUNE 24, 1970

Another depressing trip to SERTS. The new Brigade C.O., Col. Benjamin Harrison is impressive. He's either 6th. or 8th. generation from Pres. Harrison.

JUNE 27, 1970

Quiet for a change.

JULY 5, 1970

Chaplain is out on RIPCORD again. It has been getting hit daily by incoming morter rounds. 8 men killed this month.

JULY 7, 1970

This has been a miserable day. In fact, the first seven days of this month have been a disaster for the 2/506th. If things continue as they have been, I don't see how this will stay out of the news. For the first seven days of July, we've had 12 killed in our battalion including one of our new Company Commanders. Also we have had 81 WIA.. RIPCORD was hit on July 2 by over 300 morter rounds. Chaplain Fox survived a gas attack. He's one of the few who carry a mask

We went to the 85th. Med Evac in Phu Bai again today. When we got back to Camp Evans, 19 WIA's were coming in. I'm fine. It's those men in the field that need our prayers now. Chaplain Fox is very concerned.

JULY 9, 1970

30 new replacements in the last two days. They are leaving to build up Charlie & Delta Companies. The contest for nameless mountain is almost over. The figures announced over the radio were 14 KIA & 110 WIA in the 3rd. Brigade. 2/506th. lost 12 KIA and 90 WIA. Quite a bitter shock.....

JULY 13, 1970

Today is Monday. The Chaplain sneaked off to RIPCORD again. My battalion has pulled back to some safer areas after losing the equivalent of a company in KIA's & WIA's. We've got a lot of new men this week. This is the first time we've fought using new green troops all the time. (?rrb)

JULY 15, 1970

General Westmoreland was here today checking out the situation with the 101st.

Replacements are coming in all the time now. Over 50 this month already. You just can't fight.....constantly using green troops.

JULY 18, 1970

The week of the winds. Out in the mountains the winds have been 50-60 miles an hour. Chaplain at some FSB. I don't know where.

Story making the rounds about an Ex-GI who flew to Saigpon and talked his way past MP's and missed Customs. He went downtown Saigon and bought full combat gear on the Black Market: M-16 too. He went into Cambodia with our men. I hear he's in jail now.

JULY 23, 1970

Today FSB RIPCORD was abandoned. The casualities were too heavy to keep the Place open. Most of the gear and equipment used to run the Place was left behind as well as a few bodies. (?rrb)

Every chopper in the Division is in on this operation. A lot of our top men have been killed. Black Spade (Our C.O., Lt. Col. Lucas) was killed along with Major Tanner, our Operations Officer.

We're still evacuating men. All 101st. troops have pulled out of thearea. A massive B-52 strike is expected.

The whole Battalion is in Evans now and the new Bn. Commander, Lt. Col. Bard was introduced. Former 1st. Div. man. Nobody seems to know where we go from here. It will depend on the tactical situation. I CORPS is the last battlefield in Vietnam.

JULY 24, 1970

Today is Friday and hordes of news reporters came to the 2/506. The news was the now abandoned FSB RIPCORD. News media that were represented were WBRE Radio of NY, NY and MetroMedia News. These two should have the best coverage because the reporters were very sympathetic young ladies.

The STARS & STRIPES was represented as well as CBS and ABC. Someone with a very familian face interviewed Capt. Benjamin Peters, the C.O. of Bravo Company. Bravo was the last Company off RIPCORD and the C.O. was in the last lift of the choppers sent out.

With phrases such as, ..."the Senior Infantry Officer Present...," Captain Peters comes off well. I had a chat with the reporter for the S & S after most of the interviewing was over with. He told me that they all swap notes around for the story. Their instructions had been to get the story on RIPCORD and its evacuation. This in itself was a very good story, but the man from the S & S was very ignorant of the overall

battalion and brigade situation.

No reporter was aware of the fact that our Alpha Co. had had 12 KIA and some 40 WIA in the defense of some lowlands near RIPCORD. This was reported on the radio as the highest company casualities in all of Vietnam in the past 3 months.

Anyway, while the reporters were here, our Alpha Company was away at a class. 5 minutes after the reporters left, Alpha returned. It would seem that all this would tie in, in the whole scope of the story, but the interest was in RIPCORD, Bravo Company, and Captain Peters who really did an excellent job directing his men.

Another fact overlooked is that the combined losses of the 1/506 and the 2/506 (who both operated in the RIPCORD area) exceeded those that the 101st. suffered on Hamburger Hill.

The combined KIA's are between 50 and 60. (Higher if you count the Artillerymen involved on RIPCORD as well as the several choppers with pilots and crews shot down either on or around RIPCORD) The WIA's have exceeded 200.

So when Chaplain Fox tells me that RIPCORD was bigger than Hamburger Hill, I have to accept that. The big difference is that RIPCORD was an evacuation under fire. Bravo Company had really small KIA's & WIA's. It was the troops in the field around RIPCORD that took the heavy casualities.

Only when you have a spectacular event, will it make news. So what I'm saying is that there is no news coverup. It was just a matter of ...the reporters asking the right questions.

The NVA took heavy losses. Probably over 1,000 men. I'll be interested to see what the Press has to say about all of this. We left RIPCORD on the 23rd. The reporters were here on the 24th. Camera crews and reporters covered this place today and for the men of the 2/506th., it was a day of confusion, sadness, recognition and Police call. Memorial service to be tomorrow.

JULY 25, 1970

0900: Battalion size service. "Boots and Saddles"

type. This is the culmination of what the news is calling Operation Ripcord. Not pretty. The entire operation lost 63 KIA's and 343 WIA's. Over 20 MIA's for the operation have been reported! (??rrb)

The shock is wearing off now. The question is: Was it worth it?

Memorial Service: After taps and the 'Retiring of the Colors' there seemed to be a mood among everyone, "Thank God it's over!"

This chapter is closed. We are all standing by awaiting the next mission.

JULY 29, 1970

5 rockets slam into Evans. Yes, we are awake!

FSB O'REILLY turned over to ARVN forces during this period.

This ends the thoughts of Rick Blythe, most of which came from very private letters sent home. Almost 15 years alter he read them again for the second time..

Time does heal wounds but it also gives one the luxury of perspective. To those who went through all or part of Vietnam, there will always be a part of us that is 21 years old and lost. When one finds that which was lost, hang onto it, but not too hard since its better to remember and let go than to remember and not.