

A NEWSLETTER

ON RIPCORD



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NO: 8

1970 CHRONOLOGY

JUNE 1986

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"A FIRST MISSION"

J. MIHALKO

EDITOR: Chip Collins

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

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CONTACTS (NEW FACES)

- Charles Hawkins: [REDACTED]
ton, VA 22124. "Chuck" was C.O. of A 2/506 thru out the Ripcord action. Later he was to go to battalion S-1. Discussion finds he was responsible also for writing the 19702/506 Unit History that many of you now have. Chucks recent correspondence is featured in the INCOMING section and as you will note he graciously agreed to be tapped as one of those in command to write a retrospective for the July Ripcord Anniversary Newsletter

INCOMING: EXCERPTED LETTERS FROM THE MAILBAG

Following the reading of John Ketwigs book I sent a brief congratulatory letter thru his publisher. Thought you guys might appreciate my sharing his response. Editor

6-1-86

I wish I had known about you last year on Veterans Day, when I did a talk at East Tennessee State. I would like to shake your hand. I spend my days in the automotive corporate world, and feel my contribution to the agony of Vietnam Vets is small...I know you spend hours working with your Ripcord project. Isn't it a damned shame that vets have to heal themselves?

Do you ever get to Washington to visit the wall? Well, I'm about 45 minutes away, so if you're ever up this way, please let me know.

Your letter arrived on Memorial Day weekend, and I can't tell you how much it means to Carolyn and myself. I haven't had much time for writing lately, but one of these days I want to try it again.

Thanks so much for writing, and good luck with your efforts to help other vets.

Dare to hope!

John Ketwig

McClean, VA 6-3-86

I sat down the same day we talked and began composing my thoughts for a piece for the newsletter. The more I got into it the more I remembered. So naturally, I began checking maps and journal entries, etc. to make sure of some of my recollections. This of course, began to consume some time...and so it goes. You will have the article, RIPCORD: A Commander's Retrospective, in time for the next issue: but it won't be for another week.

INCOMING: (CON'T)

Like it has for all of us, Ripcord made a significant and lasting impression on me. And, like many who felt the weight of responsibility for the decisions we made during that period, I've spent a lot of time exorcising the demons of guilt and losing that plagues us. Good friends and whiskey help a lot.

I've pretty much settled down these days. As you can see I work with Sperry and have for the past two and a half years. I began kicking around the computer industry when I left the service in 1977. I like it fine.

I don't miss the Army at all; the National Guard takes care of any latent desires. Occasionally have to be a grunt. I'm the XO of an Infantry Battalion here in Northern Virginia. I like that fine too.

Please use the enclosed for expenses on the newsletter. I know it doesn't publish itself.

CURRAHEE,

Chuck,

(Cpt. Charles Hawkins
C.O. A 2/506)

Mc Clean, VA 6-5-86

Received your recent letter with the May Newsletter. Terrific!

I spent the large part of my tour in the bush (9½ months) as both a platoon leader and company commander. Even after I became the S-1 I spent a week as B CO. C.O. when their C.O. went on R&R. I survived by being a grunt not by being an "Officer". My job description just read differently from that of the Point Man or a machine gunner.

My view (not necessarily shared or understood by all) was that a leader, squad leader, company commander, etc., had these primary duties.

1. He had to be able to listen. The most important aspect to survival was information. A good leader got this information by asking his men (and others) questions and then listening to the answers. The life and death decisions a leader had to make were based on this information.

2. He had to be able to say "no" both up and down the chain of command-and know why "no" was the correct response. Which is to say that a leader must have the courage of his own convictions. When a leader learns how to do this he begins to earn the respect of his peers, seniors and subordinates



INCOMING: (CON'T)

alike.

3. A leader has to be able to tell his men why a decision is important... Soldiers at all levels fight better when they understand their leaders.

4. A leader must be technically and tactically proficient. He must know his men. He must understand the enemy and how to deal with him. He must know all the resources that are available to him and how to use them. A few of the things a company C.O. had to know, for example, were; available air assets, what they carried, how long it would take for them to get on station, how long they could stay; where were the supporting fire bases, was he within their range, did they have 155's, 105's, 8" etc; where the many LZ's were located. And, the leader had to know how to influence the action - how and what it would take to win.

A quick note on winning; We were all winners. Surviving in the bush was a matter of luck and a winning attitude. And, many times because we were good and did our jobs well, we made our own luck. I have no doubts at all as to whether or not the NVA F4 Division could have rolled over Ripcord - they could have but didn't. Why? Perhaps they had experienced too many losses during the siege. Perhaps it would have been too costly for them to make a final assault. Perhaps they knew they had won and didn't need to take the Hill. But we won also - we survived. A lesser unit may not have. Was it luck or did it have something to do with our abilities as soldiers?

And those who didn't survive that cauldron of Fire; were they losers? I don't remember Bill Pihassa as a loser. LTC Lucas wasn't a loser. They were winners who got unlucky. And God Bless us who stayed lucky.

But somewhere up the chain of command there was a loser(s). Somewhere there was someone, general or politician or whoever who was a loser, or worse, didn't know how to win. And it snowballed. Those who could have stopped its spread didn't or couldn't. And 12,000 miles away a nation became infected with the ignorance of what winning was all about. Even then it took another four years to get us home - Too late for too many.

INCOMING: (CON'T)

A poignant experience I had a month or two after Ripcord illustrates what I consider to be the mainstream grunt attitude toward the war at that time. We were on some nameless spineback ridge north of FSB Kathryn and four of my guys were due out on the next bird to go home-Deros to the world. I'd sent them back to Camp Evans once but some REMF came along and sent everyone with over a week left in country back to the field. So the guys had a right to be hacked off. I was. Not too many folks questioned decisions I made and sending them to the rear had been my decision.

Anyway, they approached me, all Ripcord Vets, and wanted to talk a minute. OK. One of the guys had sort of been selected as a spokesman and he began by saying Good Bye. And he talked about having been glad I had been their C.O. and wishing me and the company good luck and keep your head down and all that. And I thanked them not really knowing what to say. Then the guy kicks his feet a bit and looks me in the eye, (and I know he's going to say what they really wanted to say all along), and says; "Sir, ain't nobody gonna win this son-of-a-bitch. We know it and you know it. That's why we are going home. If we thought we'd win--if we were going to combat assault into Hanoi tomorrow and win - We'd stay. Just wanted you to know. Currahee, Sir". And we shook hand and they left.

Well Chip, this has turned into more of a letter than I started to write. Feel free to use it as you will.



INCOMING: (CON'T)

I vote for late September for a reunion in Whippany, NJ. Fall is beautiful and just starting that time of year; we'll enjoy it. For future gatherings I am happy to offer the Northern Virginia (near Dulles Airport) area as a possibility.

CURRAHEE,
Chuck
(Cpt. Charles Hawkins
C.O. A 2/506)

VALPARAISO, NE. 6-9-86

I got the May Newsletter yesterday. It was great!! Thanks for telling everyone that I had eaten EGGS. Oh well, it was bound to come out sooner or later. As you know, one didn't have to like something to do it. Just grin and bear it!

I got a letter from the Vietnam Veterans Art Group the other day. They asked me to join and send more examples of my work. It seems that they have a big art show touring the U.S. and might put some of my sketches in it. A big pat on the back for BLACKIE!!

Next months ON RIPCORDER sounds like a real good one. By the way, the drawing you used for the face sheet has a story behind it. It's pretty self explanatory but some day I'll write a retrospective about it.

Oh, by the way, do you happen to have the grid coordinates for O'Reilly? I think it's on the same map that we got from the Library of Congress.

Guess that's it for now. Keep up the good work.

BLACKIE Blackman

Does anyone know the grids for O'Reilly as well as other Firebases and points of interest in Ripcord Area? Editor

WATKINS GLEN, NY 6-9-86

I'm sorry for not having been in contact with you sooner. Thanks for the copies of "On Ripcord". I've had to suppress my thoughts on Vietnam since I left. Last summer my squad had a reunion, then the copies of "On Ripcord" came and then the other night I saw a program called "For Vietnam Veterans - and anyone else who should care". I felt it was time to write.

INCOMING: (CON'T)

Our squad, Platoon and Company were the first to land at what was to be Ripcord. It was a hot LZ. Not long after we landed I was wounded. I remember the place well because it was the heaviest action I was in. Compared to what you people experienced, I barely touched Vietnam or combat.

I bear scars, both physically and mentally from Vietnam. The reunion, copies of "On Ripcord" and the program were all healthy for me.

Please keep in touch about the reunion.
Thanks.

George D. Westervelt
1st Squad, 1st Platoon
A Company 2/506
101st Airborne

UPDATES

- Have gotten a lot of positive feedback on the newsletters new look. As Blackie would say "Thanks for the Thanks"!

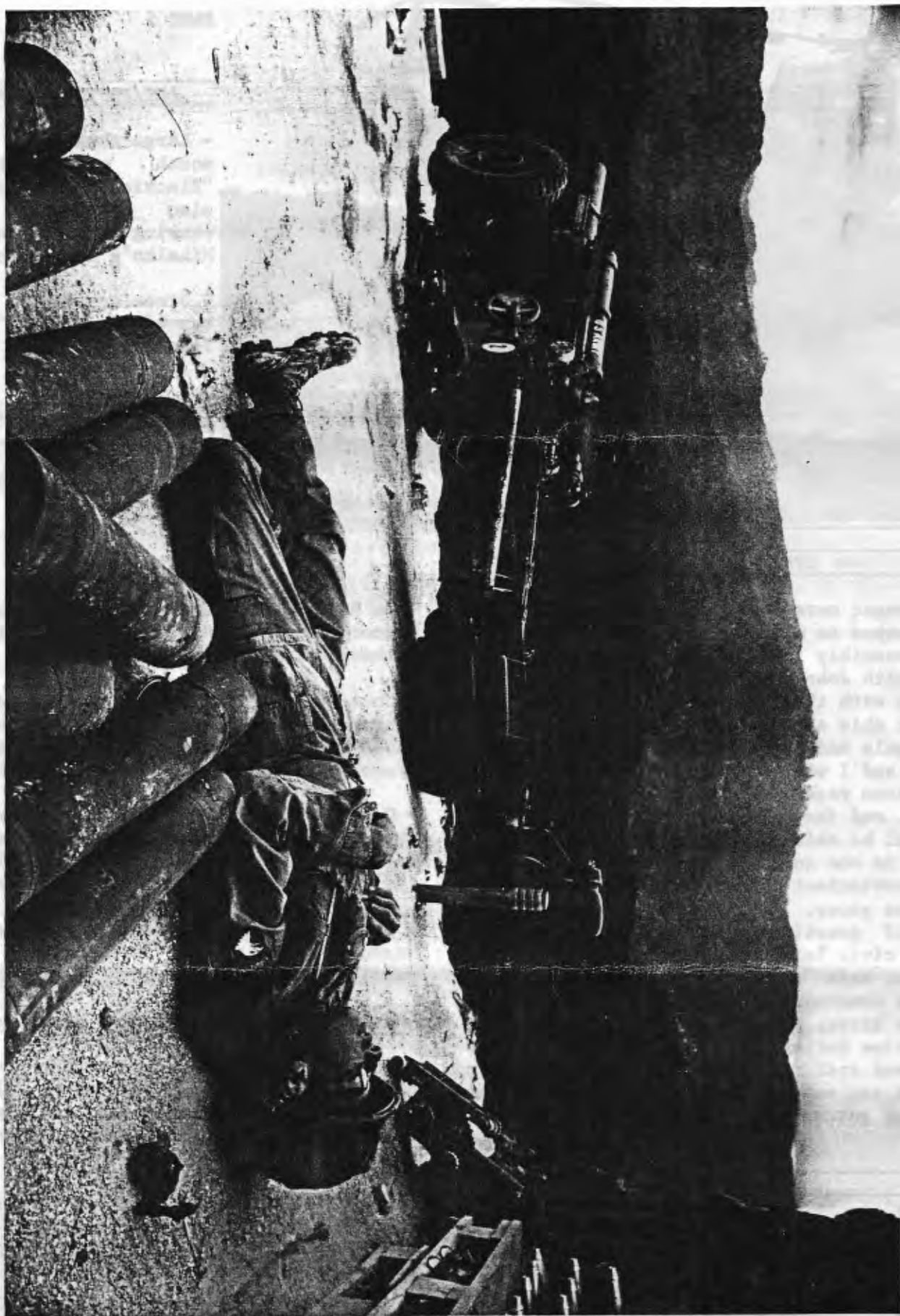
- The July Ripcord Anniversary issue of the newsletter is shaping up. I would encourage those who have committed to pieces to get them in as soon as possible. Those of you who have never submitted before but have considered it should give it a try. No better time to get your feet wet than now. As Mihalko later notes in this issue we're not looking for any Micheners or Hemmingways just some good stories.

- A decision has been made regarding the reunion. A combat assault will be made into the "peace and serenity" of Whippany, NJ the second weekend of October (10-10-86 thru 10-12-86). John Mihalko is now making preparations with the citizens of this respectable community so as not to induce a long lasting cultural shock.

This is a tentative date at this point folks. Please consult your calendar, if it's a bad time let us know now!! Later will be too late once preparations are further along.

John and I are working on an agenda which we feel will be exciting and do the group proud as well as provide plenty of time to







ART/PHOTOS: (CON'T)

- Large sketches this month compliments of "Blackie" Blackman who also provides accompanying sketches for Mihalko's Retrospective.

- Other Art/Photos courtesy of "69" 101st Yearbook.

RIPCORDER AREA CHRONOLOGY

Taken from 2nd 506th Unit History for 1970.

UPDATES: (CON'T)

be amongst ourselves just enjoying. The editor hopes to make an advance trip to Whippany possibly in late July or August to work with John and others on the reunion. Anyone with the time and resources to help out at this advance session let us know. Your help and input will be appreciated.

John and I will be passing information along soon regarding lodging, travel arrangements, and the agenda. It is expected that we will be able to lodge the entire reunion group in one quality site. We hope to work out convenient transportation arrangements for the group. John is doing an excellent job of coordinating our event with his towns civic leaders and VFW.

He has made an eloquent request to our former Commander in Chief (who resides in Saddle River, NJ) to make an appearance at some time during the event as well as other esteemed speakers. John can use some help and he can answer any questions you might have at 201-386-9862.

ART/PHOTOS

- This issues large black and white photos by Chris Jensen include (1) an artilleryman relaxing on Ripcord. (2) fighting position on the bunkerline. Chris answered the obvious question for the disarray by noting that the positions inhabitants were "very tired boys".

FSB RIPCORDER

- On 3-12-70 A 2/506 exploratory insertion Ripcord. Met by RPG's. Mortars. Small Arms. Withdraw with moderate casualties.

- On 4-1-70 B 2/506 inserted Ripcord. Met by intense mortar, small arms thru out day. Later joined by Recon. Final result withdrawal at dusk after 6 KIA and 21 WIA.

- On 4-10-70 C 2/506 assault first in Squad formation and later on line across hill. No return fire. Firebase secured Supplies by air begin. Charlie remains on thru April.

- On 5-12-70 B 2/506 returns as security. Random mortar attacks persist with light casualties.

- On 6-16-70 D 2/506 assumes security role.

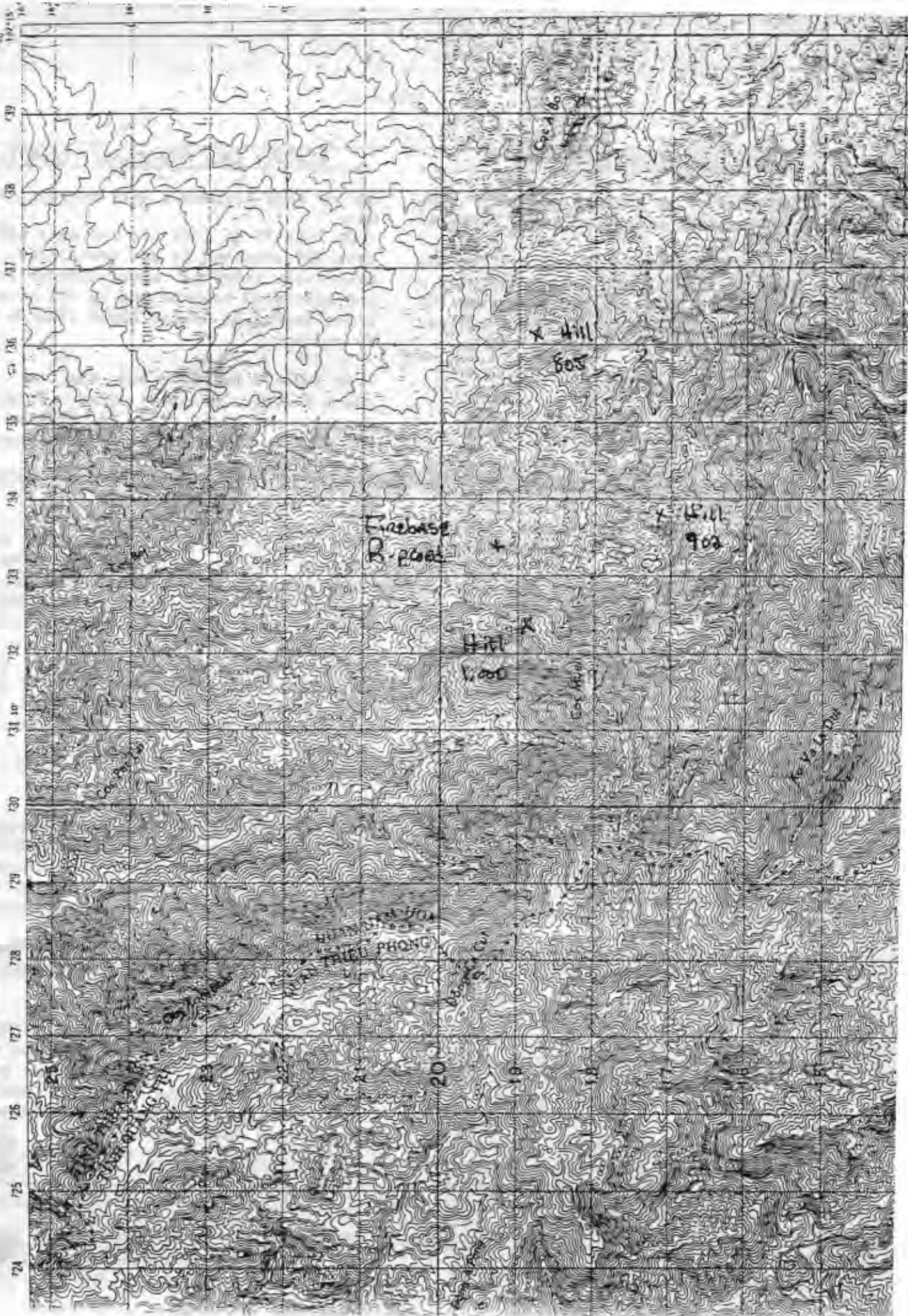
- On 6-30-70 intelligence report that Ripcord would come under attack by 7-1-70. A report received later would confirm death of some 22 sappers who had died during Ripcord probes.

- On 7-1-70 at 0730 hrs Ripcord erupts with recoilless rifle fire, mortars, and small arms. Seige begins. 1st of several Chinooks shot down.

- On 7-2-70 2nd Chinook shot down, 1 WIA.

A LƯỚI

SHEET 644
SHEET 644



RIPCORDER AREA CHRONOLOGY: (CON'T)

- B 2/506 returns as Ripcord security. No change in tactical situation until 7-18-70.
- On 7-18-70 Chinook shot down and crashes atop main artillery ammo dump destroying a large portion of base including entire 105 mm battery, two 106mm recoilless rifles, counter mortar radar, UHF radio, etc....

HILL 805

- On 6-30-70 C 2/506 secures Hill 805.
- By 7-2-70 B/2/506 in and around Hill 805. Capture 12.7 M.G.. Three dead NVA.
- On 7-10-70 A 2/506 and D 2/506 tasked to jointly assault 805. By 7-12-70 hill again secured with only light casualties and contact. That soon changes. At 2030 hrs Cpt. Straubs mechanical ambushes are set off. At 2045 hrs mortars, RPG's and small arms fire pour in. A 2/506 in position to render effective return fire. D 2/506 with 16 WIA. Nighttime attacks persist with increasing casualties.
- On 7-18-70 A 2/506 moves toward valley between Ripcord and Hill 805 to Southwest.
- D/2/506 departs 805 after increasing casualties from nighttime attacks.
- On 7-19-70 D 2/506 inserted LZ near 805 and met with intense fire. Later able to depart area but not before taking tremendous casualties.
- On 7-19-70 A 2/506 kill 2 NVA who yield a wealth of intelligence information.
- By 7-20-70 A 2/506 at base of 805. At 1210 hrs high speed trail with adjoining commo wire discovered. Tapped with the help of an interpreter we realize for first time that a division has moved in and around Ripcord. (not a regiment). At one end of line is Regimental HQ at other end a Divisional HQ. Men of A 2/506 assholes draws up very, very tight. And another NVA dead reveals written plan for attack of Ripcord apparently being sent to various commanders. A 2/506 makes plans to get the fuck

RIPCORDER AREA CHRONOLOGY: (CON'T)

- out of this Southeast Asia version of Dodge City.
- On 7-22-70 at 1245 hrs and only 100 yards from NDP attacked by NVA battalion. Attack eventually rebuffed after intense fighting and misplaced bomb breaks up NVA attack. D 2/506 tasked to assist Alpha find CA has to be aborted.
- On 7-23-70 Rollison and men of Delta reach A 2/506 in short order. Prepare for evacuation. Alpha finds it suffered 12 KIA and 50 WIA the previous day. Evacuation goes without incident.

HILL 902

- On 7-1-70 C 2/506 in position to hear mortars firing on Ripcord from 902 area. Direct accurate return fire. Intelligence report of probable attack on C 2/506 never reaches Lucas or Cpt. Hewitt of Charlie..
- On 7-2-70 at 0345 hrs C 2/506 attacked by company of sappers. 8 KIA and numerous WIA. 20 dead NVA, KIA's include Cpt. Hewitt. Charlie CA's from area. Cpt. Wilcox assumes command.

HILL 1000

- By 7-6-70 Recon Lt. Romig approaching 1000 and hear mortars popping. D 2/506 also tasked toward 1000. Bravo Team Recon (Junior, Mihalko and Co.) with almost 100% WIA forced to withdraw. Delta moves forward but not into main force. Eventually 2 KIA and several WIA plus four dead NVA seen and Delta withdraws. Hill 1000 pounded with Arty and Air.
- On 7-7-70 Charlie and Delta 2/506 join for 2nd assault. Even more intense exchange than previous day. Lucas arrives and discussion reveals decision that cost of taking hill to great. Ripcord continues to receive fire from 1000.

BOOK REVIEWS

ONCE A WARRIOR KING/MEMORIES OF AN OFFICER IN VIETNAM: By David Donovan (a pseu-



BOOK REVIEWS: (CON'T)

donym) 1985 McGraw-Hill Book Co. The story of the 1969 tour of an Army Lieutenant fresh out of Ft. Bragg's, Special Warfare School.

Donovan is in for the usual rude awakening of Southeast Asia as he shortly becomes the leader of a four-man Military Assistance Team (MAT) in the Mekong Delta on the Plain of Reeds.

As an advisor to the Vietnamese he and his team are placed in the unenviable position of having to depend on almost all support and supply coming thru the corrupt Vietnamese pipeline. He is not able to call on the huge American Divisions for help and deals admirably with RF-PF troops and the inevitable corrupt or almost to good to be true village chiefs.

When he has emergency need for Air support, medvac, artillery etc. his remote area is the last on the list of priorities. It is surprising that group does as well as they do even though there are the occasional inevitable results.

Conditions in the Delta (as well as elsewhere in Vietnam) are hostile. They have the most basic of compounds and much of the area they are responsible for is inundated several months a year. Still Donovan and his group are fortunate in that they have to make their successes thru the Vietnamese which results in an education regarding the Vietnamese and their strengths that we were rarely able to see. Donovan not only becomes aware of the problems of the Vietnamese but wisely assesses the problems we represent to them as well.

His in many ways was a morally "sterile" tour given his circumstances and location. Toward the end of the book are some excellent insights into the "whys" we have all asked about Vietnam.

BOOK REVIEWS: (CON'T)

The book's title is a reference to the awesome life and death power a young lieutenant responsible for an area that included some 30,000 plus Vietnamese peasants could wield in his role as advisor.

Overall the book is well written, Vietnam's history including our involvement has always been a rich one. This story represents another facet of the country we once knew with fear, consternation, awe, and any num-



ber of other confusing emotions.

BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY: By Ron Kovic, 1976 McGraw-Hill Book Co.

Editor tried every way in the world to like this book but couldn't. Thought I would at least examine why I didn't and pass on some of its strengths.

I kept thinking as I read that maybe what I was reacting to was the fact that this is the story of a man who became a paraplegic which is depressing but what the book is about. But it wasn't just that, a good portion of un-related narratives was complex, difficult to read, and depressing numbingly depressing.

BOOK REVIEWS: (CON'T)

The book does portray some excellent recollections of an athletic young mans all-American childhood. There is considerable information on Vietnam Veterans Against the War as the group gained impetus in the late 60's and early 70's. Kovic apparently was good friends with VVA founding director Bobby Muller.

A good portion of the book documents the abhorable conditions in VA hospitals where Kovic spent a considerable amount of time. Kovic's narrative of his unit in action and tragedies that took place is only luke-warm

Maybe what the book is best is one mans reaction to the many horrors of Vietnam. And war in general. Perhaps that is its sole premise...simply a reaction piece. If so it accomplishes its purpose but in doing so makes it so difficult to read and react to that I was very uncomfortable with it. There are any number of books about horror, tragedy and war that have gotten the point across but gave us something else that made the work one which we could live with.

In Kovic's defense his book has been around a good while now and has received from different quarters good reviews. It is quoted often in other literature on Vietnam.

LATE INCOMING

ARLINGTON, VA

June 17, 1986

Dear Chip:

Yes, I will be glad to support The Ripcord Association by contributing an article for the July issue of your newsletter or in any other way, for that matter.

I joined the Screaming Eagle division on 1 July 1970 as a brigadier general and was assigned as the Assistant Division Commander for Operations. My duties were to represent the Division Commander in overseeing the tactical operations of the division. The second brigadier general in the division served as Assistant Division Commander for Support. He oversaw the logistical and administrative support activities.

LATE INCOMING: (CON'T)

My duties as ADC(0) gave me the freedom-indeed the responsibility-to go directly and immediately to wherever the action was in the division area so that I might assist as appropriate you soldiers on the ground (or in the air) who were doing the fighting. Most often my contribution was to make greater resources available to support you troops in the fight and to use the power and authority of a general officer to make things happen faster in your support than might other wise have been the case.

About the 13th of July, Major General John Hennessey, the Division Commander, departed on a three week leave. (He had already served for about a year as ADC(0) before assuming command of the division two or three months before I arrived). Being the senior of the two Assistant Division Commanders, I became the Acting Division Commander during General Hennessey's absence. This is how I came to be in command of the division during the latter part of July 1970 when events on and around Ripcord reached a critical mass.

The shooting down of the artillery ammunition resupply Chinook helicopter the early afternoon of 18 July and the resulting destruction of guns and ammunition supplies set in motion our re-evaluation of the situation at Ripcord which resulted in my decision to withdraw from Fire Support Base Ripcord. As you know so well, that withdrawal took place on 23 July, 1970.

The decision to withdraw from on and around Ripcord was the most difficult decision I have ever made. No soldier, least of all a commander of the 101st Airborne Division, ever wants to withdraw or retreat. That goes against our nature - and should. Yet, all things considered, I made what I believed to be the correct decision; and I believe the subsequent events confirmed the soundness of my decision.

I would appreciate receiving the newsletter. Enclosed is a check to help defray the many expenses that I know are involved with such an undertaking as yours.

Sincerely,
Sidney B. Berry
Lieutenant General
United States Army,
Retired

Greetin9s once again from the Peacefull serenity of Whippany, N.J. Before I start in on this months episode, I have a few other things I'd like to say. First of all I'd like to thank Chip Collins for taking the time to Put out this newsletter. It really is a monumental task and I don't know how you do it, Chip. Keep up the good work. I'm really looking forward to meeting you.

I'd also like to thank the regular contributors and everyone else who has taken Part in our undertaking. Without you guys, we wouldn't have this newsletter. That brings me to my next Point. I see by our last roll call that we now have about 50 guys getting this newsletter. I know that all of you have stories to tell, so let's hear them. They don't have to be Grandiose masterpieces that look like they've been written by James Michener. Take a little time, jot something down, and send it in.

I, for one, would like to hear about your thoughts and experiences. Bein9 from Recon, I only know what it was like for me and my fellow team members. My final Point is this. Chip hasn't mentioned it much so I will. It costs money to Put out this newsletter and the brunt of this burden has been Picked up by Chip. My contributions will be greatly appreciated. I want to see this newsletter continue to grow. It means a lot to me and with everyones input and support it will. Thank you.
John Mihalko

RETROSPECTIVE

Well, when I last left you guys, I was sitting on a slick waiting to go out to the field for the first time. I'm sure you all remember your first time out in the bush. There were five of us on the slick and I was Positioned in the middle. The weight of my ruck made it impossible for me to sit up straight, so I just let Gravity take over and leaned back to enjoy the ride. As we lifted up and made our way through the lowlands, I remember looking down at all the water filled bomb craters. It looked like the craters on the moon. On future missions I took Pictures of those craters.

Naturally, I was very scared not knowing where we were going or what to expect once we got there. I was getting used to the ride and I must admit that everything looked so beautiful from the air. We Passed over "Rocket Ridge" and the foothills and the further out we went, the taller the mountains got. I wondered how far out we were going. The mountains looked so calm and Peaceful but they also had a foreboding look about them. I wondered just how many Gooks were out there and if they were watching us.

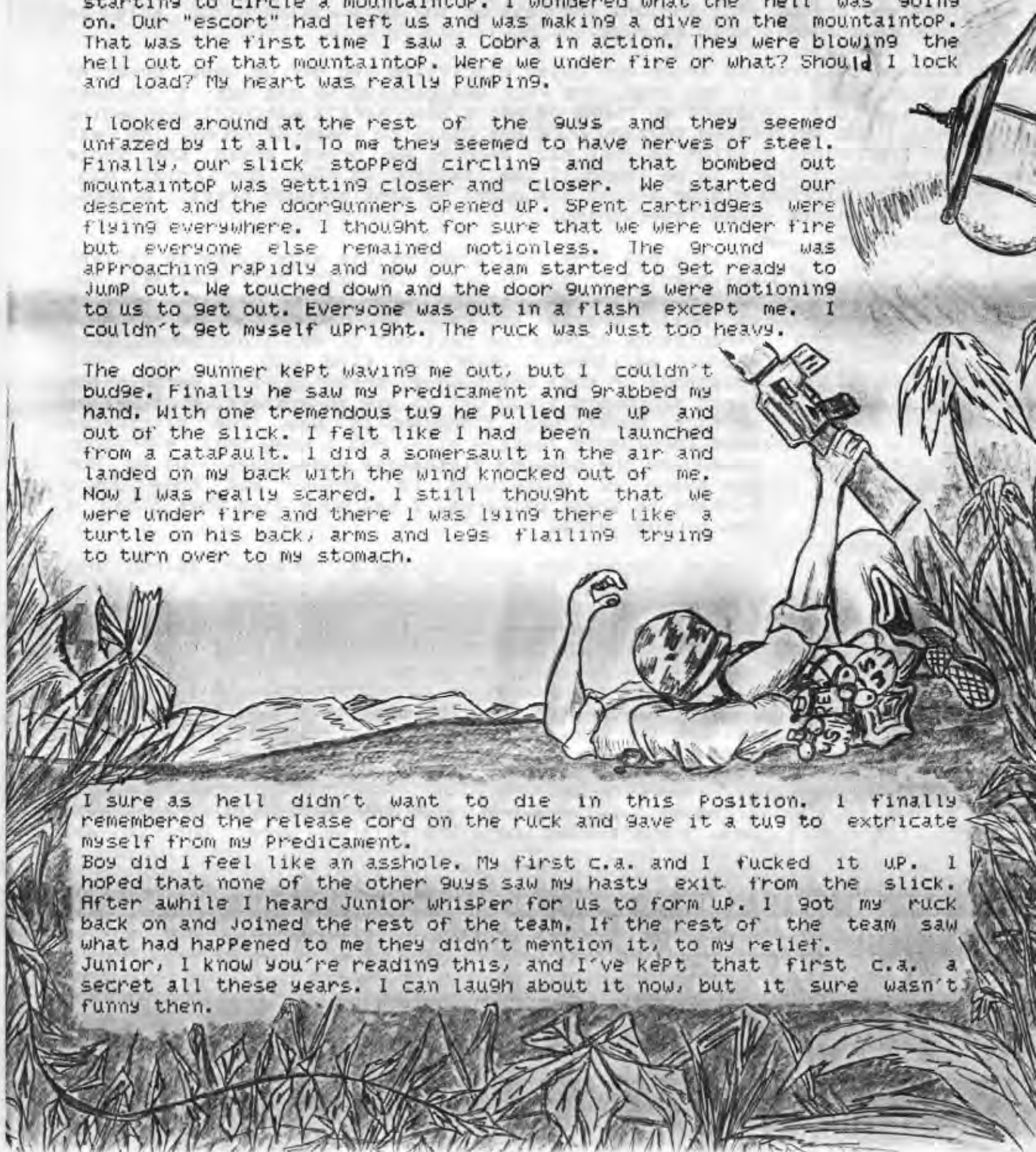
After awhile I noticed that we had Picked UP an "escort." I had never seen a Cobra before and wondered what the hell it was. Oh well, nobody seemed to notice or mind so I tried to look as cool and calm as I could. Our ride seemed to take forever. I then noticed that we were starting to circle a mountaintop. I wondered what the hell was going on. Our "escort" had left us and was making a dive on the mountaintop. That was the first time I saw a Cobra in action. They were blowing the hell out of that mountaintop. Were we under fire or what? Should I lock and load? My heart was really PUMPING.

I looked around at the rest of the guys and they seemed unfazed by it all. To me they seemed to have nerves of steel. Finally, our slick stopped circling and that bombed out mountaintop was getting closer and closer. We started our descent and the doorgunners opened up. Spent cartridges were flying everywhere. I thought for sure that we were under fire but everyone else remained motionless. The ground was approaching rapidly and now our team started to get ready to jump out. We touched down and the door gunners were motioning to us to get out. Everyone was out in a flash except me. I couldn't get myself upright. The ruck was just too heavy.

The door gunner kept waving me out, but I couldn't budge. Finally he saw my Predicament and grabbed my hand. With one tremendous tug he pulled me up and out of the slick. I felt like I had been launched from a catapult. I did a somersault in the air and landed on my back with the wind knocked out of me. Now I was really scared. I still thought that we were under fire and there I was lying there like a turtle on his back, arms and legs flailing trying to turn over to my stomach.

I sure as hell didn't want to die in this position. I finally remembered the release cord on the ruck and gave it a tug to extricate myself from my Predicament.

Boy did I feel like an asshole. My first c.a. and I fucked it up. I hoped that none of the other guys saw my hasty exit from the slick. After awhile I heard Junior whisper for us to form up. I got my ruck back on and joined the rest of the team. If the rest of the team saw what had happened to me they didn't mention it, to my relief. Junior, I know you're reading this, and I've kept that first c.a. a secret all these years. I can laugh about it now, but it sure wasn't funny then.



Junior checked his map and everyone took up their positions. Since he had two "cherries" with him he assigned D.J. and me rear security and slack rear security. I drew rear security and wasn't at all crazy about it. Suppose the Gooks sneak up behind us, then I'd be the first guy to get it. Crazy things run through your mind when you're "cherry." There was one bright spot though. The rest of the team wouldn't be able to see me struggle with my ruck.

Junior reminded us about our noise discipline and off we went breaking brush, with Ox in the lead. The ruck was kicking my ass but I managed to keep D.J. in sight in front of me. I also kept a watchful eye behind me. I was determined that no Gook was going to sneak up on me. The rest of that first mission is just hazy memory. We broke brush the whole time. Not a trail to be found. I was amazed at Ox, our Point man. Nothing stopped him or slowed him down. He went through trees, bushes, wait a minute vines, everything!

Ox is a big dude. For a man of his size to be so silent was amazing to me. He was a one man trail maker. You appreciate things like that when you're my size, scared as hell, trying to keep up. Some of the jungle inhabitants scared the hell out of me. I had never seen spiders so large. I never did find out if they were poisonous or not, but I gave them a wide berth. The first earthworm I saw was as big as a snake. As a matter of fact, that's what I thought it was. The millipedes were formidable looking also. And I know that everybody remembers the dreaded Vietnamese mosquitoes. We've got our share of mosquitoes in Jersey, but they don't compare to these bastards. I was sure glad that I had a lot of bug juice.

I also learned the usual things a "cherry" learns his first time out; like making a stove out of a C ration can, and setting up a hooch. Guard duty was pretty scary, but I never even got the least bit drowsy. I was much too scared for that. After about a week I guess I was getting the hang of things. The ruck was getting lighter and not giving me as much trouble. All in all I was feeling pretty good about myself. D.J. and me were holding our own. Not only were we getting the feel of the jungle, we were getting to know our team members as well.

I couldn't believe how quiet and peaceful the jungle was. I don't know where the hell we were, but it was obvious that we were the only humans there. Maybe we were seeing parts of the jungle that no one had ever seen before. It was almost like the Lewis and Clark expedition. There we were blazing a trail to who knows where. Our mission was finally coming to an end. Junior informed us that we had a full days hump to reach our l.z. He was right. When we got there dusk was not too far off.



Junior then radioed in and gave our Position and was told that our slicks were enroute to us. That was good news to hear. We were just about out of food and water and we were all dog tired. No sooner did Junior get off the horn when the weather changed and we found ourselves "socked in." I could barely see a few feet in front of me. All week the weather was beautiful and now this. Our spirits started sinking. The slicks will never be able to pick us up.

Sure enough, by the time the slicks reached us, visibility was zero. The hell with popping smoke, we were popping flares to no avail. I give that Pilot a lot of credit. He tried his best to find us. We could hear him hovering overhead, but we couldn't bring him in. The fog was just too thick. It was a miracle that he got as close to us as he did. He apologized to us and headed back to Evans. I don't remember exactly how long we were stranded out there. Two days, maybe three. We survived on a couple of B-2 units I had left and the water we collected off our hooches. Finally the weather broke and we were extracted. We were all very glad to kiss that area goodbye.



It's funny but I draw a blank on the ride back to Evans. I remember everything on the way out but nothing on the way back. Maybe I was just too preoccupied with my growling stomach. I do remember that when we touched down at Evans, I felt about a foot taller. I had fought the jungle and had come out a winner. I had learned an awful lot in those ten days. I didn't feel like a "cherry" anymore. I even managed to get off the slick unassisted. Having an empty ruck made it quite easy. I still wondered about how I would react in a firefight, but I felt like a veteran. For the first time I felt that Recon was for me and I was part of the team. We made our way back to the company area tired and grubby but happy nonetheless. I was looking forward to mail call, a shower, and the traditional Recon Party.

Till next time.

John Mihalko



Junior then radioed in and gave our position and was told that our sticks were enroute to us. That was good news to hear. We were just about out of food and water and we were all dog tired. No sooner did Junior get off the horn when the weather changed and we found ourselves "backed in". I could barely see a few feet in front of me. All week the weather was beautiful and now this. Our spirits started sinking. The sticks will never be able to pick us up.

Sure enough, by the time the sticks reached us, visibility was zero. The hell with popping flares, we were popping flares to no avail. I give that pilot a lot of credit. He tried his best to find us. He could hear him hovering overhead, but we couldn't bring him in. The fog was just too thick. It was a miracle that he got as close to us as he did. He apologized to us and headed back to Evans. I don't remember exactly how long we were stranded out there. Two days, maybe three. We survived on a couple of 3-5 units I had left and the water we collected off our hootches. Finally the weather broke and we were extracted. We were all very glad to kiss that area goodbye.

It's funny but I draw a blank on the ride back to Evans. I remember everything on the way out but nothing on the way back. Maybe I was just too preoccupied with my growling stomach. I do remember that when we touched down at Evans, I felt about a foot taller. I had fought the jungle and had come out a winner. I had learned an awful lot in those few days. I didn't feel like a "cherry" anymore. I even managed to get off the stick unassisted. Having an easy trick made it quite easy. I still wondered about how I would react in a firefight, but I felt like a veteran for the first time. I felt that Red was for me and I was part of the team. He was our back to the company and I was tired and grumpy, but happy nonetheless. I was looking forward to will call, a shower, and the traditional Nelson party.

Till next time.

Frank.
Does this Revision Site and
date help. Hope you can attend.
This Reunions Really going to fly.
Ohio