

# RIPCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

A Newsletter

No. 34 SEPT. 1994

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**Ripcord Report: More  
Than a Newsletter**

## A NATIONAL NEWSLETTER SINCE 1983

The Battle of Fire Base Ripcord began on Mar. 12, 1970, and ended with evacuation of the base after a three-week siege by a North Vietnamese division on July 23, 1970. Units of the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division were involved, particularly the 2d Bn., 506th Inf., B Bty., 2d Bn., 319th Arty., 2d Bn., 501st Inf., and D Co., 1st Bn., 506th Inf., and many others, with special remembrance of the gallant air and ground crews of: Phoenix, Griffin, Ghost rider, Dragon, and "Charlie Medic." Although the overall cost to Americans was higher, the grim total for the 23-day siege is put at 61 killed in action and 345 wounded. One word says it all: "Currahee."

## AIR CAV DIARY

By PFC Thomas Rutledge

The war raged on after Ripcord, perhaps not as viciously, and Cav troopers from the 101st were there to fight it, and help the Vietnamization program as well.--Editor

August 5, 1970--Aircraft from the 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., while on an extensive aerial reconnaissance patrol in the vicinity of FSB Tomahawk and FSB Los Banos, spotted enemy activity on the ground. Engaging the enemy, the squadron killed 11 NVA soldiers.

August 10--Helicopters of B Twp., 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., while on a search and clear operation 20 miles southwest of Hue, spotted and engaged an estimated company-size enemy force killing 18 NVA. The cavalrymen were working in support of the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN).

August 11--Again while flying support missions for the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN) near FSB O'Reilly, gunships from the 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., engaged numerous enemy positions destroying an enemy bunker site and killing 11 NVA.

August 16--Today was the 28th anniversary of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). It was on this day in 1942 that Brig. Gen. William C. Lee assumed command and spoke of the division having a "Rendezvous with Destiny."

August 17--Col. Paul F. Gorman took command of the 1st Brigade today in a rain-drenched ceremony attended by Lt. Gen. James W. Sutherland, XXIV Corps commander; Maj. Gen. John J. Hennessey, 101st commanding general; Maj. Gen. Ngo Troung, commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN); and Brig. Gen. Sidney B. Berry, 101st assistant division commander. Col. Gorman received the brigade colors from Col. John D. White, who had commanded the brigade since Jan. 5, 1970.

Also today, troopers of Co. B, 2d Bn. (Ambl.), 502d Inf., while on a  
Continued on page 5 ...

## Commentary

### Is Military Service an 'Entitlement Program'?

By Charles F. Hawkins

OAKTON, Va.--The social agendas of liberal groups in the United States is slowly eating away at military readiness, particularly regarding unit cohesion and the fighting quality of our combat troops. As a result, America's national security is increasingly at risk. The security interests of the United States are best served by maintaining cohesive, combat-ready fighting units, trained and led to uniformly high standards. Anything less would be negligent, or worse.

Continued on page 2

Commentary from page 1

### **Military Service is Not an Entitlement**

One of the burning issues of liberal activists in recent years has been the extent they can influence assignment of women to combat units. The larger issue pits these so-called individual rights groups against traditionalists who place national security needs before individual privilege.

Army Secretary Togo R. West, Jr., is a leading Clinton administration advocate of placing women in combat MOSs (military occupational specialty), such as combat engineers, air defense artillery, air cavalry and even MLRS batteries (multiple launch rocket system). In a June 1 memo to Defense Secretary William J. Perry, West outlined an astonishing plan to do this and more.

### **One of the burning issues of liberal activists in recent years has been the extent they can influence assignment of women to combat units.**

West's memo was leaked to Elaine Donnelly's Center for Military Readiness, a national security interest organization in Livonia, Mich., and a copy was faxed to my offices. West's memo made frequent reference to "career opportunities" for women, but not once did it mention military requirements.

Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, the Army chief of staff, was away in Europe for D-Day ceremonies at the time, and had no knowledge of the memo or its contents. When he returned to the Pentagon and learned of the nine-page missive, he reportedly "hit the roof," and immediately confronted his nominal boss.

In the ensuing furor, West withdrew the memo. But Perry couldn't leave well enough alone and ordered Sullivan and West to come to negotiated agreement. That settlement, first reported by Associated Press on July 23, was a compromise that should please no one.

Sullivan held the line on opening up artillery positions in MLRS, and protected aviation billets in special opera-

tions. But West got his way concerning women aviators in air cavalry units, and in headquarters for combat engineer, special operations and divisional air defense artillery. Sullivan either couldn't or wouldn't stick to his guns.

Some Army officials called the compromise "what's best for the Army and combat effectiveness." But I don't buy that.

In many cases, Donnelly points out, women are not trained to the same physical standards as men. Donnelly, a member of the presidential commission that studied the issue throughout 1992, stresses that "all the evidence shows that in the unforgiving environment of close combat, female soldiers do not have an equal opportunity to survive, or to help fellow soldiers survive."

My testimony before the commission, based on personal combat experience and supported by scholarly research, argued that "male bonding (like female bonding) is gender-specific, and is a key aspect of unit cohesion. Disrupt the bonding by introducing members of the other sex and cracks in the cohesive armor appear."

In all, 30,000 battlefield jobs are now newly opened to women.

West wants to introduce co-ed basic training in the Army, and urges efforts to "enhance [mixed-]gender cohesion" as a means to "open very challenging positions for female soldiers." He argued recently in a New York Times interview that "everyone in this country is entitled to an opportunity to serve and should be given that opportunity." He added that "the Army is a war-fighting entity that exists to fight and win the nation's wars. So the question," West says, "is how to best utilize the available resources to do the latter with the least compromise of the former."

### **Some Army officials called the compromise "what's best for the Army and combat effectiveness." But I don't buy that.**

"Sadly, the secretary has it backward. However well intentioned his thoughts, the Army is not an "entitlement program," and the best social engineering

will not produce the best military readiness condition. National security must come first, at the expense of individual rights if need be, to produce the best common defense of America.

I urge you to write or call your elected representatives as well as Senator Sam Nunn, D-Ga., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Ask them why the committee has not had a hearing on the issue of women in combat for over three years. With chaos at the Pentagon, serious congressional oversight is long overdue.

Serving the nation is not an individual right, or the right of any particular group. Service to the nation is a duty, a sacred obligation, and it is a privilege and honor to be called to service. When we forget or ignore this fundamental distinction, when we begin treating military service like welfare or any other social program, we can kiss our national security goodbye.

### **DETAILS, DETAILS**

The Ripcord Report is still published and mailed **FREE OF CHARGE** to members of the association. There are no membership dues, and the only membership requirement is an interest in the Battle of Ripcord and the veterans who served there.

To cover publishing costs we **rely solely on YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS.**

Submissions of articles, retrospectives, book reviews, and other items of interest are encouraged. Please include return postage for items (photographs, etc.) that you want back.

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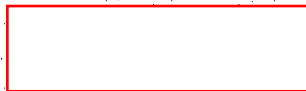


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**RIPCORD REUNION '95:  
THE ROCKET RIDGE TOUR  
JULY 1995,  
DENVER, COLORADO  
RESERVE TIME NOW**

Details? You want details?  
I'll give you details.  
Smith, KP duty.  
Harrison, you know those half-barrels  
down by the latrine?  
Marshall ... Marshall? Aww, heck,  
Marshall's gone and DEROSed back to  
the world.

Everybody will receive a REUNION  
INFORMATION PACKAGE in the  
mail sometime in January. In the mean-  
time, call Chuck Hawkins or John  
Mihalko, reunion coordinator, (or write)  
to make early reservations, offer sug-  
gestions, etc.



**STAFF JOURNAL: LZ OAKTON**



Take a brief moment this autumn to remember the start of monsoon season. Wet! You would not believe ... unless you were there slogging around in the muck and mire.

The 1970 rainy season was worse than most, and began with a typhoon. A real nor'easter as they say. But this sucker came rolling in on a black cloud bank from Laos, west of us. For the first week in October the rain fell constantly and heavily--in all, nearly 60 inches drenched man and beast alike. That's over seven inches per day!

The lowlands flooded. Remember? Half a million South Vietnamese civilians were dislocated by rising flood waters. And who was there to help out? You bet, good ol' 101st Screaming Eagles. Wet hens was more like it.

Most of the 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry, remained in the vicinity of Rocket Ridge, high but not dry. I guess someone had to stay in the field, guarding against enemy infiltration. But I reckon the North Vietnamese were just as miserable.

We (Alpha, 2/506th) were holed up at the base of Hill 506 by the Song O Lau, and didn't spot one NVA. Well, maybe one. A body from a shallow, up-river grave was washed loose and floated by our perimeter one morning. Got hung up on a branch in the middle of the torrent, and swayed there like some 2 a.m. drunk until a couple of thump gunners decided to use his corpse for target practice.

Does that sound gross and despicable? Maybe it does. It certainly wasn't the niftiest thing the company ever did. But when I think about it, and if the tables had been reversed, I'm sure Mr. Charles would have done the same for us.

War sucks. Tell your kids.

Back to the 1970 monsoons. Seems that the typhoon and extra ration of rain had a bit of "unofficial" U.S. government assistance, in the form of a CIA-sponsored cloud-seeding experiment.

The operation, which was reported briefly in the major media in the early 1980s, was one of those "good ideas" that became excessive. The plan was to time the cloud seeding operation with the arrival of the monsoons as they traveled east over North Vietnamese sanctuaries and base areas in Laos and the A Shau Valley.

No one thought there might be a typhoon.

I can just imagine a CIA operative hunkered down in a nice villa in Saigon saying to himself: "Flood those [expletive deleted's] out of their bunkers like so many drowned rats." Which, of course, is probably what happened to a lot of the enemy, but it also happened to a lot of us and the friendly civilian populace. Needless to say, the source of the extra rainfall was kept secret at the time.

A lot of other wonderful things happened in the rain, but we'll save those stories for another time.

Peace be with you. Currahee,  
Chuck Hawkins, LZ Oakton

The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies,  
With the dying sun.  
  
The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies,  
When love is done.  
  
"Light," Stanza 1 and 2, By Francis  
William Bourdillon (1852-1921)

**FINANCIAL  
CONTRIBUTIONS**  
  
Gary Jestes  
John Bowman  
Chip Collins  
Kenneth Hamilton  
  
(Helps pay for postage and printing)



# INCOMING



Dear Airborne Hawkins,

Just a note to touch base with Fire Base Ripcord to see if it is still being manned ... My last Ripcord Report was No. 32, July 1992 ... I'm hoping it is still going strong and that my name was inadvertently dropped from your list. I miss the Ripcord Report.

Thanks,  
Paul "Doc" Greaux  
Hollywood, Fla.

Dear Chuck,

I got your name from Jack Wilhite (C/2-506) who I met through Prodigy on-line computer service while going through their veteran's bulletin board. During our conversation, he mentioned the Ripcord Association and your old unit.

I was with Bravo, 2/506th in '68-'69. I was WIA by an RPG on 25 May 1969 while on a combat operation in the A Shau Valley. I was medevaced to Japan and the U.S., and never saw the unit again. In 1971 I returned to Vietnam and served with Division Advisory Team 60 (9th ARVN Div.), MACV.

In 1987, I came across my old CO (Cecil Kalealua) while I was in Heidelberg, Germany. He was an O-6 and the deputy military community commander. We had a nice visit trying to recall members of the company. Funny, we had no trouble remembering the dead ones. The names of many who lived escaped us.

In 1989, I was medically retired and am partially disabled.  
Currahee,  
Jack Graves  
Sumner, WA

Dear Chuck,

Sorry that I fell out of the loop regarding your association. But funds have been tight these past few years, though I am now getting my head out of water--so to speak.

I have enclosed some funds, and would like to be on the mailing list for the newsletter, I miss it--smile!

I read your article in the June '94 Military, very good. When you add what is in Congress right now, and the Clinton administration (and his appointees) our country will be set back for years, and I think possible peril from outside aggression. To me--Clinton and company want isolationism, through a stripped and hollow military force. Enough. No need to convert the Rabbi--smile.

Well, my book is now due out in August, and I can't wait. To be honest, what started out as a labor of love, damn near ended in a divorce because of hatred--smile.

I'll close. Enclosed are a couple of flyers regarding the book, etc. Take care.

Dau tranh,  
James "Sneaky" White  
Vacaville, Calif.

## THE LAOTIAN HIGHWAY PATROL

During the Vietnam War, from 1968 to 1971, there was a U.S. Army Cobra helicopter unit known as the Griffins--4th Bn., 77th Artillery (ARA), operating in the area of South Vietnam just below the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and home-based at Camp Evans. Many of their missions were flown into Laos. Pilots from this unit and others that flew into Laos on a regular basis were given a patch designating them members of "The Laotian Highway Patrol."

A book called The Laotian Highway Patrol, by James A. White, Jr., is currently in production. Mr. White, known to the Griffins as "Sneaky," was one of the pilots of this group from 1970 to 1971, and his service included the battle of Ripcord. This battle, along with other helicopter battles and stories, is discussed in this historical novel. If you would like to place your name on the reservation list for purchase of a copy (you will be notified when the book is released and its price), send name and address to:

Veterans About Face

## TEE-SHIRT SPECIAL!

Tee-shirt, light blue with large, four-color replica of Laotian Highway Patrol patch on front is available for a \$14.50 donation to:

Veterans About Face

3579 E. Foothill Blvd., #246

Pasadena, CA 91107

non-profit org.

fed. tax ID, 77-0254797

This patch was worn by helicopter pilots who flew missions into Laos from South Vietnam. Please specify your size: S, M, L, XL, XXL.



## Cav

Continued from page 1 ...

search and clear operation in an area near FSB Barnett, which had been the target of heavy artillery and aerial rocket artillery bombardment on the previous day, discovered 34 NVA dead and captured one .30 caliber machine gun.

August 19--In continued operations around FSB Barnett, "Strike Force" troopers of Co. B, 2d Bn. (Ambl.), 502d Inf., engaged an estimated enemy company with small arms fire and called for artillery support, aerial rocket artillery and Air Force air strikes resulting in 25 NVA killed and one enemy soldier detained. In addition, 12 AK-47 rifles, two RPG launchers and various enemy supplies were captured.

August 22--More than 12,000 Screaming Eagles and members of commands in northern Military Region 1 were treated to 90 minutes of singing and dancing by seven American beauties as they watched the Miss America-USO Show 1970 at Eagle Entertainment Bowl, Camp Eagle. Featured in the program were Michigan's Pamela Anne Eldred, Miss America 1970; Miss Alabama, Ann Fowler; Miss North Carolina, Patsy Johnson; Miss Oregon, Margaret Huhta; Miss California, Susan Anton; Miss Colorado, Andria Easton; and Miss Tennessee, May Cox.

August 23--"Currahees" of the 3d Bn. (Ambl.), 506th Inf., fresh from operations in Cambodia and the Republic of Vietnam's Military Region 2, today rejoined the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), their parent unit. Maj. Gen. Hennessey was on hand to greet Lt. Col. John E. Martling, commander of the 3/506th, and his "Stand Alone" battalion upon their arrival at Phu Bai aerial port.

August 26--Cobra helicopters from the 4th Bn. (Ambl.), 77th Artillery (ARA), flying support missions for the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN), killed 26 enemy soldiers and destroyed caches and staging sites in Thua Thien Province near FSB O'Reilly.

August 31--Aircraft from B Trp., 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., while flying support missions in an area near FSB

Barnett killed 11 NVA soldiers and destroyed an enemy bunker complex.

September 8--Helicopters from C Btry., 4th Bn. (Ambl.), 77th Artillery (ARA), killed 20 enemy soldiers in action near FSB O'Reilly. A 12.7mm machine gun was also captured as a result of the operation.

September 14--In other action involving the 4th Bn. (Ambl.), 77th Artillery (ARA), near FSB O'Reilly, helicopters from Batteries A and C killed 10 NVA soldiers.

September 19--While conducting aerial reconnaissance patrols in the vicinity of FSB O'Reilly, aircraft from the 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., engaged an unknown-size enemy force killing 19 NVA and destroying an enemy bunker.

September 25--In continued aerial reconnaissance patrol activity, gunships of the 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., engaged and killed 11 NVA in various contacts throughout the day.

September 28--Helicopters of the 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., and Air Force aircraft engaged an estimated enemy company killing 29 NVA soldiers and destroying an enemy hut south of FSB Pst.

September 29--Elements of the 2d Sqdn. (Ambl.), 17th Cav., and the 4th Bn. (Ambl.), 77th Artillery (ARA), and Air Force jets engaged an unknown-size enemy force, killing 14 NVA soldiers.

October 1--Brig. Gen. Olin E. Smith, assistant division commander, was promoted to his present rank during ceremonies at Camp Eagle. Maj. Gen. Hennessey, commanding general of the 101st, and Brig. Gen. Pham Van Phu, commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN), pinned the stars on Brig. Gen. Smith before a gathering of fellow officers and guests.

This article originally appeared in Rendezvous With Destiny, Fall 1970, a publication of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), and was provided courtesy of George Pourchot (Delta Co., 1st Bn., 506th Inf.). Although it reads like the PR (public relations) piece it is, it does chronicle some of the post-Ripcord activity in the 101st area of operations.--  
Editor

## HISTORICAL FACTS

&

## MILITARY TRIVIA

### Guided Glide Bomb

Fifty years ago, on September 6, 1944, the Navy awarded a contract to McDonnell Aircraft for development of the Gargoyle or LBD-1, a radio-controlled low-wing gliding bomb fitted with a rocket booster and designed for use with carrier-based aircraft.

### V-2 Strikes Paris, London

On September 8, 1944, the first German V-2 rockets were fired in combat. The first struck a Paris suburb and exploded; a few hours later London was rocked by a V-2 explosion.

### Army Hurricane Hunters

U.S. Army Air Force fliers made the first successful flight into the eye of a hurricane on Sept. 14, 1944. The dangerous mission didn't involve combat, but a quest for scientific data. The aviators were Col. Floyd B. Wood, Maj. Harry Wexler and Lt. Frank Reckord. They flew a Douglas A-20.

### Wingless Missiles, Pilotless Aircraft

Brig. Gen. W. A. Borden, chief of the New Developments Division of the War Department, announced in September 1944, that the Ordnance Office would develop wingless ballistic-type missiles and the Army Air Force would work toward pilotless aircraft-type missiles. Ordnance and the AAF would mutually cooperate to develop warheads for both aircraft, and other related equipment.

Also in September the Army Air Force accelerated development of the JB-2 robot bomb. The futuristic weapon's design was inspired by the German V-1, that terrorized Londoners earlier in the war.

Source: Aeronautics and Astronautics, 1915-1960, Eugene M. Emme, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Washington, D.C., 1961.

## RIPCORD: THE TURNING POINT

(C) By Charles F. Hawkins

The following is extracted from my upcoming book, The Battle of Fire Base Ripcord: Charlie Oscar's Story.

### Summary Introduction

As the siege of Ripcord ended its second week, U.S. and North Vietnamese forces were locked in what seemed a vice-grip, each contesting the other for vital pieces of key terrain--hill-mass 1000 west of Ripcord and Hill 805 to the southeast. At this time, commitment of 101st combat troops was at a high point.

Alpha, Bravo and Charlie companies of the 2d Bn., 501st Inf. (Geronimo), plus the battalion Recon Platoon, under command of Lt. Col. Otis Livingston, were working around the reverse, western slopes of Hill 1000. Their mission: root the enemy out of their bunkers, and relieve the pressure on Ripcord.

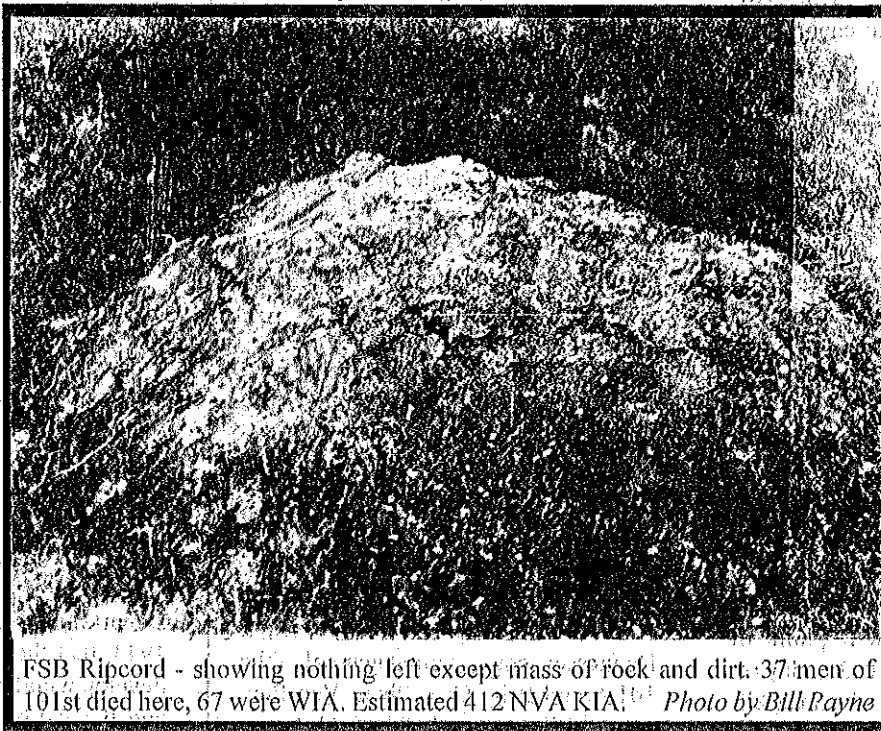
At the same time, Delta Company of Livingston's battalion had been placed under the operational control (OPCON) of the 2d Bn., 506th Inf. (Coraliee), commanded by Lt. Col. Andre C. Lucas, who was responsible for Ripcord's defenses. Delta, 2/501st, known as Delta Raiders, was commanded by Capt. Christopher C. Straub. Together with my company (A/2-506) we had attacked and seized Hill 805 on July 12th. Lucas had Straub dig in and defend the mountain top, keeping it free of enemy ob-

servers and mortar fire against Ripcord. On the 13th I was directed into the valley running southeast of Ripcord, around the base of Hill 805.

The North Vietnamese took a dim view of our presence, and launched brutal night attacks against Hill 805 beginning on the 12th and not ending until Delta Raiders were ground down to half-strength and extracted on the 17th. But we are getting ahead of our story.

### The Geronimos and Hill 1000

So far, the dual offensive operations of my and Straub's companies, under 2/



FSB Ripcord - showing nothing left except mass of rock and dirt. 37 men of 101st died here, 67 were WIA. Estimated 412 NVA KIA. Photo by Bill Payne

506th control, and the 2/501st minus operation against Hill 1000, had been successful in putting great pressure on the enemy. July 14th was, perhaps, the high point of American operations against the entrenched enemy in the vicinity of Ripcord.

The day's murderous, pre-dawn beginnings on Hill 805 presaged other violent actions.

Colonel Livingston's Recon Platoon ran into contact with an unknown size enemy force at first light. Moving north, toward the western slope of Hill 1000, the 2/501st scouts engaged three to five

enemy at 40 meters. Then, all hell broke loose as enemy small arms and RPG fire from concealed bunkers ripped into Geronimo's recon soldiers.

The fight was over quickly. Gunships from Charlie Battery, 4th Battalion, 77th Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA), arrived on station and applied their considerable combat power to destroy one bunker and permit the Recon Platoon to pull back. But there was a price to pay: nine U.S. troopers were wounded in the exchange.

The subsequent medevac requirement compounded matters for the scouts. The first, urgent evacuation took place without a hitch, but at 0912 hours a second chopper took a dozen rounds of .30 caliber fire and was forced down (and later recovered). A third medevac suffered a similar fate, but managed to stagger to a landing on Ripcord. A fourth chopper was finally successful.

About the same time, on the other side of the AO, Straub's company, with some of Delta Raiders waiting their turn for medical evacuation, observed enemy .51 caliber fire coming from the low ground south of Ripcord. Directed toward Ripcord, the heavy machine gun fire was probably meant to knock down one of the medevac hueys flying overhead. Straub radioed for an air strike, intending to help Ripcord's defenders, but other more urgent matters delayed this action.

Minutes after the .51 caliber sighting, three 75mm recoilless rifle rounds rocked the north portion of Ripcord's perimeter. There were no injuries, but it signified that the enemy was not letting up.

Neither was Col. Livingston. As air

Continued on next page ...

**Turning Point continued ...**

strikes bombed and blasted enemy positions where his Recon Platoon had been engaged, his rifle companies pressed on toward Hill 1000, Alpha Company leading on the left, Bravo trailing on the right, Charlie Company held in reserve.

Sometime around noon the Geronimo rifle companies passed the area of Recon's firefight, and were laboring up the reverse slope of Hill 1000 in staggered formation. Bravo Company's point team flushed the first quarry. At 1325 hours Bravo's lead platoon engaged an enemy .51 caliber machine gun in a bunker at 50 meters, killing its three-man crew.

Other enemy soldiers returned fire, and despite swift employment of ARA and artillery fire, Bravo lost a man killed and 11 wounded. Bravo's advance stalled as air strikes and medevacs were summoned over the radio. Livingston's Alpha Company, however, forged ahead. They had nearly reached the crest of Hill 1000 and movement through the thick jungle undergrowth was becoming somewhat easier.

At 1430 hours the 3d Brigade TOC at Camp Evans received a dour message from Livingston's CP: "We have had four wounded in Alpha Company due to ARA [friendly fire]."

Alpha Company had met the enemy:

two NVA in foxholes, who were dispatched by hand grenades and rifle fire. But intense return fire of other enemy pinned them to the ground, where misplaced 40mm grenades, fired from above by supporting cobras, felled four Geronimos. Enemy 82mm mortar fire then found the range, and Alpha Company backed off to allow another set of air strikes to go in.

**Farthest Advance Up Hill 1000 is Turned Back**

No one could have known it then, not U.S. or North Vietnamese chains-of-command, but the high point of American efforts against the encircling enemy had just been passed. It was a defining moment that was poorly defined, lost in the organized chaos that attends combat, and ill remembered. But the fact remains that from mid-afternoon on Tuesday, July 14, no unit would advance farther up Hill 1000 than had Alpha Company, 2/501st, and without control of that key terrain, the battle could not be won.

If the 14th was a high point, it was not the last highlight of the siege. The battle, which could not now be won, could still be lost--terribly, conclusively lost. But would it?

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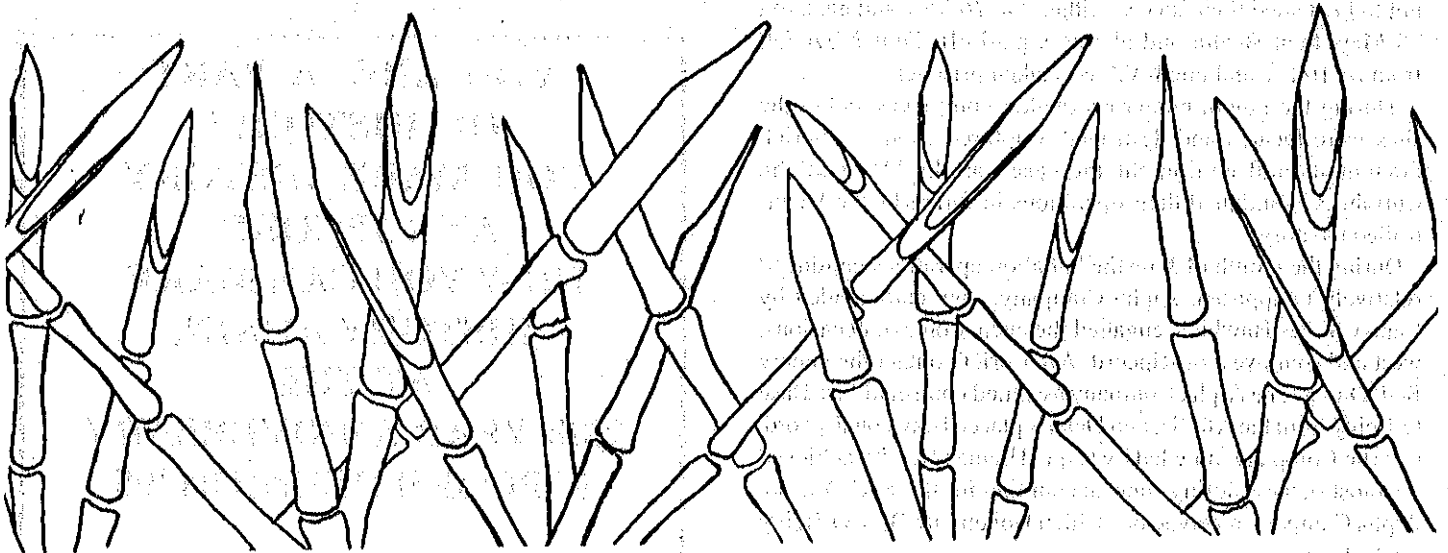
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**RIPCORN REUNION '95**

**ONE-YEAR COUNTDOWN**

Start clearing up next summer's schedule to allow some time to get together with friends, family and fellow Ripcord veterans at the 25-year reunion. Tentative location: Colorado, at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains outside of Denver--a "Rocket Ridge" sort of place. More information in the next issue.



## EDITOR'S HISTORY CORNER

Dept. of the Army  
HQ, 2d BN (Amb) 506th INF  
APO San Francisco 96383  
Unit History, March 1971

After difficult fighting from 12 March to 9 April, Ripcord's height remained unoccupied by the Currahees. But on 10 April "Charlie Company, under the temporary command of 1st Lt. Charles Hawkins" secured the hill "in squad column first and then on line." There was no enemy resistance.--Editor

### Continued from No. 31

Charlie Company dug in on the hill the first month and Bravo Company worked even harder on the defense the second month. The fire base received incoming mortar rounds on several occasions but casualties were light and progress was not hampered. The timely arrival of cobra gunships resulted in the destruction of several enemy mortar tubes and crews. Throughout the remainder of April the battalion worked aggressively around Ripcord. Alpha and Delta companies engaged the enemy in scattered contacts south of the fire base, resulting in four NVA dead. Bravo Company, commanded now by Capt. Bill Williams, assumed control of Ripcord on 12 May and Charlie Company combat assaulted into an LZ east of the fire base. The successes in May initially went to Capt. Rollison's men in Delta.

From the 7th until the 11th, Delta Company engaged the enemy who were in heavily fortified positions along the Ko Va La Dut ridge line south of Ripcord. The enemy fell back as Delta advanced. On 11 May intense enemy mortar fire forced Delta Company to withdraw. Skillfully employing air strikes on known enemy locations, Capt. Rollison and the FAC (forward air control) pilots from Camp Evans pinpointed and destroyed many enemy fortifications and an untold number of the enemy.

The Recon Platoon, now led by 1st Lt. Michael Doyle, was not to be denied their success either. On 26 May and again on 28 May, their stealth and alertness paid off. Four NVA fell from M-16 fire and one NVA was taken prisoner.

During the month numerous bunker complexes and cache sites were located and destroyed. Captured enemy materiel, documents and equipment increased as the "Best of the Currahees" continued their operations in formerly NVA-controlled territory.

During the month of June the battalion operations continued relatively unopposed. Alpha Company, now commanded by Capt. Charles Hawkins, engaged the enemy on two occasions, west and southwest of Ripcord. After brief contact the enemy fled. On 16 June Alpha Company assumed control of Fire Base O'Reilly from the ARVN, and Delta replaced Bravo on Ripcord. Charlie Company, now led by Capt. Thomas Hewitt, achieved the most success during June, accounting for three NVA dead. Alpha Company received one Chieu Hoi on Fire Base O'Reilly on 21 June.

During the latter part of June it became apparent that the NVA were preparing for a large offensive in the Ripcord area. Intercepted enemy radio transmissions, captured documents and agent reports all indicated that Ripcord was due to come under attack soon. We all felt destiny pushing at our backs. There was little we could do except prepare to meet it bravely.

On 30 June 3d Brigade received an intelligence report that indicated that Ripcord would come under attack by 1 July. The information was quickly forwarded to Lt. Col. Lucas on the fire base. If it were true, the fire base didn't have much to worry about. It was the base in I Corps, wasn't it? The bunkers with connecting fighting positions were well fortified and everything was deeply under the ground. If the enemy wanted a fight, the Currahees would certainly give it to them.

The companies in the field were of greater concern since they existed in a more exposed environment. Yet they were all confident, wary, but confident. Wasn't this the reason that the battalion had driven deep into the mountains? To meet the enemy? To take the fight to his backyard and defeat him? Certainly. And we were going to do just that.

Alpha Company was still on Fire Base O'Reilly, Delta Company was securing Ripcord, Bravo was operating southwest of the fire base and Charlie Company was securing Hill 902 to the southwest. The battalion Recon Platoon was operating on a wide front northeast, east and southeast of the fire base. The Echo Company mortars had six tubes on Ripcord and three on O'Reilly. The mortar crews worked around the clock firing defensive targets during the night and "movement" preparations during the day. The 2/506th had invested two and a half months of labor on Ripcord, and an estimated \$50,000 worth of defensive wire had been laid.

On several occasions enemy sappers had attempted to infiltrate the perimeter at Ripcord, only to fail. One captured document stated that 22 members of sapper recon teams had died while attempting to breach the wire during reconnaissance missions. A ground attack against Ripcord would be suicidal, or would it?

To be continued ...

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## Report from World War One

### FINAL REPORT OF GEN. JOHN J. PERSHING

Seventy-five years ago, nearly 10 months after the end of the First World War, Gen. John J. "Blackjack" Pershing presented his final report of the American Expeditionary Force efforts in that war to the Secretary of War of the United States. Published in booklet form in 1920, these are Pershing's opening remarks.--Editor

General Headquarters American Expeditionary Forces, September 1, 1919.

To the Secretary of War.

Sir: I have the honor to submit herewith my final report as Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe.

#### PART I PERIOD OF ORGANIZATION

1. I assumed the duties of this office on May 26, 1917, and, accompanied by a small staff, departed for Europe on board the S. S. Baltic May 28. We arrived at London on June 9 and, after spending some days in consultation with the British authorities, reached Paris on June 13.

2. Following the rather earnest appeals of the Allies for American troops, it was decided to send to France, at once, one complete division and nine newly organized regiments of Engineers. The division was formed of regular regiments, necessary transfers of officers and men were made, and recruits were assigned to increase these units to the required strength.

The offer by the Navy Department of one regiment of Marines to be reorganized as Infantry was accepted by the Secretary of War, and it became temporarily a part of the First Division.

Prior to our entrance into the war, the regiments of our small army were very much scattered, and we had no organized units, even approximating a division, that could be sent overseas prepared to take the field. To meet the new conditions of warfare an entirely new organization was adopted in which our Infantry divisions were to consist of four regiments of Infantry of about treble their original size, three regiments of Artillery, 14 machine gun companies, one Engineer regiment, one Signal battalion, one troop of Cavalry, and other auxiliary units, making a total strength of about 28,000 men.

End of section.

## Weapons of the Past

### GREEK FIRE: ANCIENT NAPALM

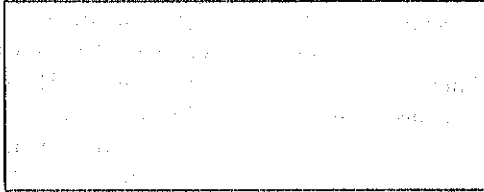
The terror weapons of their day, Greek fire has come to encompass a grouping of inflammable mixtures that burst into flame on contact with air or water, or were ignited by the sun's heat. Variants were probably known before the birth of Christ, and an early description was provided by Julius Africanus in the third century A.D. Although exact formulations have not survived, various combinations included pitch, naphtha, niter and sulfur along with lesser substances, and in later centuries saltpeter and turpentine were known. The crusaders called these fiery mixtures Greek fire and wild fire, which Muslim defenders used effectively at the siege of Acre (1189-91), and were apparently employed by both sides at Mansura (1250).

Greek fire, accurately so called, was special. It was a closely guarded secret of the Byzantine Greeks, developed by a Syrian architect named Kallinokos (Callinicus) for Emperor Constantine Pogonatus (Constantine IV) at a time when Constantinople was threatened by Saracen invasion (668-679). Used as a naval or land weapon, Greek fire ignited explosively when wetted. This force, combined with water pressure, propelled brass containers of Greek fire from siphons (wooden tubes) mounted on the prows of warships. The dry land variant was contained in glass balls or crockery, which were hurled at attackers much like present-day grenades.

When Greek fire struck a Muslim ship and its crew, or was splattered from fortress defenses upon ladder-climbing attackers, the substance caused horrible

burns. Water could not extinguish it, and only made matters worse. The secret ingredient, some researchers suspect, was quicklime, which releases energy in water. Others believe the hidden key was a distillate fraction of petroleum. We may never know.

Unlike other terror weapons of their time (the crossbow, gunpowder weapons, submarines and torpedoes, cylindro-conoidal artillery shells and shrapnel, atomic bombs), the secret of Greek fire remains hidden in the undiscovered pages of history. Its practical use in defense of walled cities and fortifications apparently waned with the advent of gunpowder weapons, which could stand off at distances greater than the range of siphons and pummel fortresses into rubble.



RIPCORD REPORT  
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