

# RIPCORD REPORT

For friends and survivors of Fire Base Ripcord, 12 March to 23 July 1970, Republic of Vietnam

No. 39, February, 1995

## Commentary

### HILL 805 AND THE FEMINIST AGENDA

By Chuck Hawkins

OAKTON, Va.--It began suddenly with the pop-hiss of a trip flare going off in the dark jungle, then the whoosh-craack of North Vietnamese rocket propelled grenades arced through the night and slammed into the rocky outcrop of mountain identified by GI maps as Hill 805.

American defenders--troopers of Delta Company, 2d Battalion, 501st Infantry, 101st Airborne Division--reacted in an instant. Claymore anti-personnel mines flashed and thundered, M-16 rifles spat angrily into the night, grenade launchers fired, thumping their 40mm high explosives into the ranks of the attacking enemy. The company commander called for artillery fire support.

Attacked from all sides, the Delta Raiders responded with carefully planned fires along predetermined intersecting lines. M-60 machine gun and rifle fire ripped outward, only inches above the barren earth on Hill 805's crest, striking and stopping North Vietnamese infiltrators a few feet from the GI's ring of foxholes.

Fighting raged for nearly one hour, and in the flickering light of mortar illumination rounds a neighboring rifle company on a nearby promontory on Hill 805 joined in the fray. Attacking enemy formations, caught in a murderous cross-fire and scythed down in a welter of mortar and artillery shells, began falling back, dragging their dead and wounded comrades.

The Americans on the rugged peak of Hill 805 suffered 16 wounded men, many of whom refused evacuation, determined to stay with their friends and stick it out to accomplish their defense of the key mountain top.

*Continued on page 6 ...*

### VIETNAM, 25 YEARS AGO

Feb. 1, 1970, North Vietnam's first secretary of the Communist Party, Le Duan, spoke at a celebration in Hanoi marking the 40th anniversary of the party. He warned the North Vietnamese people that they "must be prepared to fight for many more years" to force the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam.

In the United States, on February 2d, members of the anti-war movement filed suit against the Dow Chemical Company in a Washington, D.C., court. Their intent was to force the company to reveal that it still made napalm.

In the air war over North Vietnam, U.S. fighter-bombers attacked a missile and gun position for the second time in a week after an unarmed reconnaissance jet came under intense anti-aircraft fire. This was in the area of Bankarai Pass, along the infiltration route between Laos and North Vietnam, just 20 miles north of the DMZ.

On February 3d the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reopened hearings on the Vietnam War. The sense of Republicans backing President Nixon was that the Vietnamization program was a "great success." Democrats, including Senators Harold Hughes of Iowa, Thomas Eagleton of Missouri and Alan Cranston from California testified in favor of a resolution calling for termination of America's commitment to South Vietnam unless reforms were made.

While politicians were jacking their jaws in Washington, D.C., Viet Cong gunners shelled Bien Hoa airbase. U.S. helicopter gunships responded, killing 23 enemy. Another 52 Communists were reported killed by U.S. forces in two battles north of Saigon.

On Feb. 5, a friendly fire incident by U.S. attack helicopters killed eight

*Continued on page 2 ...*

## Congressional Update

### PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH

The strategy of "Peace Through Strength" that helped win the Cold War has been updated for the 1990s and beyond. Presented as a resolution to Congress by the American Security Council Foundation and its U.S. National Strategy Commission, the 11-point strategy gained the attention of Congressman Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., head of the Military Procurement Subcommittee.

Hunter, who is drafting legislation for the National Security Act, has asked for input from the commission. The act is designed to "establish a blue-ribbon panel of national security experts who will make recommendations to Congress on restoring military readiness and maintaining U.S. leadership around the world," according to John Fisher, chairman of the American Security Council Foundation.

Members of the U.S. National Strategy Commission include luminaries such as Adm. Thomas Moorer (USN, Ret.), a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Dr. Ray Cline, former deputy director of the CIA, former Air Force chief of staff Gen. Charles Gabriel, former Ambassador Edward Rowny and retired Navy Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, a past chief of naval operations.

For more information on the American Security Council and how you can help, write to 1155 15th St., N.W., Suite 1101, Washington, D.C., 20005; or call 202/484-1676.

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RIPCORD REUNION  
'95  
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BE MAILED TO YOU!  
PLEASE RESPOND  
IMMEDIATELY!**

Continued from page 1 ...

## Vietnam, 25 Years Ago

South Vietnamese soldiers and wounded 31.

On the 10th, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird paid a visit to South Vietnam. He called the pace of Vietnamization "adequate," but stated that ways to improve the program were being examined.

The next day Laird reasserted that U.S. warplanes would continue to take whatever steps were necessary to protect themselves during reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam. Laird said that the policy of "protective reaction" applied to North Vietnam as well as for U.S. troops in Laos and Cambodia.

On the 13th Communist forces ambushed a U.S. Marine detachment killing 13 and wounding 12 at a cost of six enemy soldiers dead.

On the home front a Gallup Poll of February 14th showed that 55 percent of Americans continued to oppose an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam, but that the proportion favoring such a withdrawal had risen from 21 percent in November to 35 percent.

After repeated courtroom violence, Judge Julius Hoffman sentenced four of the Chicago Seven defendants to lengthy prison terms for contempt of court.

Also on this date a fire fight along the Cambodian border claimed the lives of 31 North Vietnamese soldiers at a loss of only eight U.S. troops killed and 30 wounded.

On the 15th, Judge Hoffman sentenced the other three Chicago Seven defendants to long prison terms for contempt of court and, because of their outrageous behavior, Hoffman sent defense attorneys William Kunstler and Leonard Weinglass along with them.

Near Da Nang a South Vietnamese force aided by armor and U.S. air power, disrupted a Communist battalion preparing to attack. The enemy lost 145 killed, while South Vietnamese losses were four dead and 26 wounded.

From the 17th through the 18th U.S. B-52 bombers shifted their bombing emphasis from South Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to interdict North Vietnamese forces attacking the Plain of Jars in Laos. Listed as routine missions these bombing strikes caused a new wave of congressional criticism when they were made known on Feb. 19th.

On the 19th all Chicago Seven defendants were acquitted of the charge of conspiracy to incite riot during the 1968 Democratic National Convention, but on the 20th five of the defendants were sentenced to serve five years and pay a \$5,000 fine each on the charge of actually inciting riot.

Twelve thousand miles away Communist forces struck an armored unit of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade of the Americal Division near Da Nang in the Queson Valley. Fourteen Americans were killed and 29 wounded.

On Feb. 21, 1970, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho held the first of three clandestine meetings in Paris. Nixon's special assistant held the position for mutual withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese forces; Hanoi's fifth-ranking Politburo member remained fixated on unconditional U.S. withdrawal on a fixed date and abandonment of the Thieu government in Saigon. The other

two secret meetings, on Mar. 16 and Apr. 4 produced a similar standoff.

The Laotian government finally lost its last stronghold on the Plain of Jars on the 21st as 3,000 Communist North Vietnamese overran the airfield at Xiengkhouong, 100 miles northeast of the capital of Vientiane.

On the 26th Laird faced down strident congressional criticism of the administration's use of air power in Laos.

A salvo of U.S. Marine artillery fire accidentally struck a South Vietnamese hamlet on the 28th, killing three civilians and wounding 19.

Worse, on the last day of February 1970 terrorist actions by Viet Cong guerrillas claimed 10 South Vietnamese civilian lives and injured 15 when a bus struck a mine near Da Nang. Eleven other civilians were wounded by grenades thrown at a truck in the same area.

Source: *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War*, John S. Bowman, gen. ed., Pharos Books, New York, 1985.

## DONATIONS COUNT



## THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT



## STAFF JOURNAL: LZ OAKTON



### 'Commo Checks'

It is Christmas time, so that means February 1995's *Ripcord Report* is being cobbled together from bits and pieces of the past and present. (Yes, we try to look a month or two ahead. Saves wear and tear on the ol' bod.) Anyway, Christmas is a time of pleasant conversations with old friends and new. I report on a few of these "commo checks."

Mary Pahissa and I made the Arizona-Virginia phone connection. She's mother to 1st Lt. William Pahissa, a courageous West Pointer whose life was cut short on July 22, 1970, as he rallied his 1st Platoon to meet a vicious North Vietnamese mass attack against Alpha Company, 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry. After catching up on past events, we discussed Ripcord Reunion '95 in Colorado.

"Everyone would be happy for you to join us," I assured Mary. So, with luck, we'll have some of the Pahissa clan present at our simulated Rocket Ridge getaway.

As for family members joining the reunion, Mary won't be alone. John Palm, father of Terry, a platoon leader with Delta Company, 2d Battalion,

501st Infantry (the famous Delta Raiders), plans to attend. Terry was killed on the night of July 14, 1970, on Hill 805, the scene of brutal enemy assaults just east of Ripcord.

More recently I spoke with Jerry Rodgers, a Virginia-based Texan who is now an Army colonel working with the Department of Energy. Twenty-five years ago Jerry flew dustoffs in the Ripcord AO. Today, Jerry assists in moving hazardous materials around the globe. Remember the weapons grade plutonium the United States recently purchased from Kazakhstan? There's a story there that only Jerry and a few others know about.

Veterans Day saw Tony Cox and Merle Delagrangé journey from Indiana to Washington, D.C., and link up with George Pourchot. I spent a pleasant morning over breakfast and many cups of coffee with these former stalwarts of Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry. Tony works for the city of Indianapolis, George is with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and Merle splits his time between the National Guard and his own business.

Delta, 1/506th, as many will recall, was OPCONed to 2/506th on July 17, and spent the 20th and 21st in nearly constant contact with the enemy. Ten men died in those two

days, including the company commander, Capt. Don Workman, a classmate who had just three days left in country. Today, Delta, 1/506th, has formed a company association with nearly 40 members. We hope to see all of them at the reunion.

There have been other commo checks. Notably with John Mihalko, our reunion coordinator at Lakewood, Colo., and with Bob Seitz, here in northern Virginia. John practically made a career walking point with Team Bravo of the 2/506th Recon Platoon, and helped show Bob the ropes when he became their platoon leader after Ripcord.

Another recon stalwart, Lenny "Ranger" Long, of Antwerp, Ohio, called to check into the net. Among other things, a hunting trip with former recon medic Ron Will, of Quicksburg, Va., was discussed.

Thanks to Chris Garrett of Bemidji, Minn., a number of former Bravo Company, 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry, troopers have come into the Ripcord Association. Among these is a former company commander, Carl Jensen, of Every, Iowa, and former platoon leader Sam Knipmeyer of Reno, Nev. I recognized the names. When

Carl went on R&R in January 1971, I was assigned as the acting company commander for the week he was gone, and at that time Sam was brand new to the unit. Sam and I talked about those post-Ripcord days and how he got the nickname "Rifmaster." More stories for the reunion.

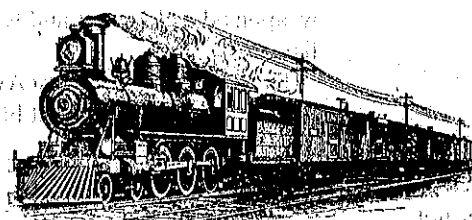
And, I've had several enjoyable conversations with Ben Harrison, the former 3d Brigade commander, who is now concentrating on being a grandfather in Belton, Texas. Ben sends his regrets for the reunion. A long-standing commitment will see him in Europe during July. No matter, we can still share a long-distance brewski on July 23d.

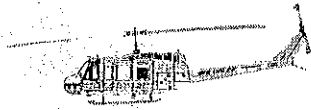
Not least, Chip Collins called in to commend the December issue. *Ripcord Report's* founder is eager for the '95 reunion and looks forward to reacquainting and acquainting himself with one and all. Chip works for the Commonwealth of Virginia in a sometimes frustrating, but often rewarding position as a manager of social services.

Time to get back to my real job. We'll have more "commo checks" in future issues.

Currahee!  
Chuck Hawkins  
Oakton, Va.

## REUNION BOUND





# INCOMING



## Airborne Tour de Force

Thanks for keeping alive the spirit of Ripcord and the heroic deeds of splendid soldiers who served.

My recollections of Ripcord have been muddled over the years. With the comprehensive accounting and research of *Ripcord Report* I have been able to see again the big picture. Thanks.

Upon my arrival home, after Ripcord, I retired from the Army and the airborne. I served with the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment in the Pacific for three years during World War II, and in the 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment during Korea--I was never prouder than having served with the 2d Battalion, 506th Airborne Infantry in Vietnam.

## Forgotten Hero

I wish to mention one specific heroic action that, to my knowledge, has not been addressed. Major Lawrence Law, the executive officer of the 2/506th, was the on-ground commander during the 2/506 assault on Ripcord (April 1, 1970). Major Law was severely wounded but refused evacuation until the assault was completed and Ripcord was secured. Lt. Col. Lucas recommended Maj. Law for the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions. Major Law was within 10 days of retirement before this event.

Best wishes to all--Merry Christmas.  
Jim Williamson  
Winnsboro, S.C.

## When Ripcord Happened

Hi,  
My name is Randy Thompson. I was the 1st Platoon lieutenant, 1st Bn., 506th Inf., when Ripcord happened.

On July 20, 1970, the company was inserted near Ripcord. We were in contact

immediately. I was wounded early and medevaced that day.

Enclosed is a check to help with the *Ripcord Report*. Happy holidays,  
Randy Thompson  
Grand Canyon, Ariz.

## Florida Update

I read the recent *Ripcord Report* No. 36 with interest. The name James C. Smith (brig. gen. then, retired maj. gen. now) caught my eye in Ben Harrison's report and I was wondering if you knew where Smith was. "Hawkeye" is retired (sorta) in St. Petersburg, Fla., but is still an active consultant with the U.S. Army--weapons development and testing, I believe.

His address is 6037 - 21st Ave., N., zip: 33710. Thought you might like to know.  
Richard Green  
Lake City, Fla.

See Richard's "Victor Charlie, The Bee" in this issue.--Editor

## Funniest Christmas Card

On the cover, Santa's reindeers sing:  
Oh, you better watch out. You better not cry.  
You better not pout. We're telling you why ...

SANTA HATES WIMPS  
Letter to *Ripcord Report* follows:  
Certainly hope this finds the everyone doin' well. Thought I might have lost you there for a while.

Just returned from a trip to Wash., D.C., where I finally placed a journal I had been writing for three years to rest at The Wall, so I could share it with all our brothers and sisters there.

Also, want to help out, so please accept this check to "continue the mission"! Take care, fraternally airborne,  
Bil "Doc" Payne

Shady Cove, Ore.  
*Readers are invited to check out Bil's ad for T-shirts, cards, jackets and patches. Call or write him for a free catalog.--Editor*

## USPS Strikes Again

I enclose my address label. The last four numbers of the zip code have been corrected. I also enclose \$5.00 to cover the cost of mailing me another December newsletter: I only received the cover of this one. The rest must have been lost in the mail.  
Thanks for your trouble.  
Ken Hamilton  
Mendon, Ohio

*A number of December's Ripcord Reports were damaged in the mails. Maybe it's us, maybe it's the Philadelphia postal folks. We'll try harder. Let me know if you need a replacement copy.--Editor*

## Just Say No

On a U.S. Postal Service routing slip, the following:  
To: Ripcord Report  
From: \*\*\*\* \*  
Dear Sir:

No disrespect to your paper. I wish my name removed from your mailing list, and do not wish the newsletter sent.

I went through 10 years psychological treatment to erase the bad memories of war, including drug and alcohol abuse. Respectfully yours,  
\*\*\*\*\*

P.S. In order to maintain full recovery the judge ordered me to stay away from veterans.

*Ripcord Report regrets the intrusion. Name withheld at the newsletter's discretion.--Editor*

INCOMING, from previous page ...

### Cobras in the Mist

Chuck--I think of you and post-Ripcord events, because I was able to find you one foggy morning when no one else could, and mostly because you and some of your buds came by to say "thanks" when you finally came out. I had purpose and could serve. Good memories.

I hope all is well.  
Rick Freeman, Griffin 93-Charlie  
Argyle, Texas.

### Florida Update Part II

Enclosed is a check for the *Ripcord Report* and some addresses of people who were there and the parents of a couple of the KIAs on Hill 805. Also, I would like to get in contact with the man in the 2/506th TOC who called me the morning of July 15, 1970, to inform me of our KIAs and WIAs. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
John T. Schuelke, MSG-D/2-501  
Fort Myers, Fla.

The following names and addresses were provided by John Schuelke:

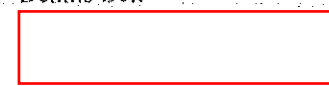
Chris Straub (Commander, D/2-501 on Hill 805)



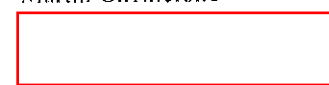
Ron Soubers



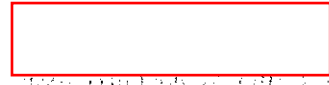
Dennis Belt



Martin Cirrincione



Mrs. Geraldine Guimond (son Paul, KIA on Hill 805)



Mr. and Mrs. Lee Utter (son Keith E. KIA on Hill 805)



### A Larger Audience?

Enjoyed the recent *Ripcord Report* No. 37. Perhaps, without losing focus, this journal can be expanded.  
Dr. Paul Braim, Ph.D., Col. USA, Ret.  
Daytona Beach, Fla.

### VICTOR CHARLIE, THE BEE

By Richard Green

For some dumb reason, each time I read, or hear, a mention of the 2d Squadron, 17th Cavalry, I flash back to the tactical operations center (TOC) at Fire Base Rendevous in the A Shau Valley. A real horror story!

The 2/17th liaison NCO, while busy coordinating some operation by radio, was attacked and severely "wounded" by an enemy agent, who had infiltrated the CP. This "agent," wearing a black uniform with yellow stripes, was promptly dubbed the "Vee Cee Bee," or more formally, the "VC Bee."

Shortly after the NCO returned from the medic (pain and swelling under control), he was presented with an impact award--"the purple hive." (This was the only evidence I ever saw that the brigade commander--Col. Siegrist--had a sense of humor!) The "VC Bee" was, of course, destroyed, and was added to the bodycount as a footnote in brigade records, and was properly buried! (I told you this was a dumb memory.)

Anyway, when the NCO was attacked, he emitted a scream and proceeded to create a "dance" that consisted of much arm movement, some rather fancy footwork and vocal renditions of choice Army phrases. This dance became known as the "Flight of the VC Bee," and ended abruptly with a loud, resounding "thud" of the right palm slapping against a counter-top. (Unfortunately, the VC Bee was caught between the palm and the flat surface.)

Although many individuals made an effort to recreate this dance in the days that followed, none ever did it justice. Capt. "K" (pronounced "Kay-e-o-lay-who-ah") said there were similarities to an old Hawaiian war dance, but unfortunately we didn't have any old Hawaiians to demonstrate.

Anyhow, a recommendation for a "Cee Eye Bee" was made, but this got nixed by the CO because the NCO wasn't in-fantry.

### NUMBER ONE, NUMBER TEN

An opinion feature of good deeds and bad acts, as in "GI Number One; VC Number Ten."

#### Number One

To incoming Republicans for immediately putting their money where their mouth is and reorganizing congressional committees, subcommittees and legislative service organizations. It won't save a bundle of taxpayer dollars, but the staff layoffs signal serious attention to more important details to come.

#### Number Ten

To the U.S. Postal Service for raising the price of a first class letter to 32-cents, and not having the foresight to plan to issue one in that denomination on the effective date of Jan. 1, 1995. Instead, funds are being spent to print and issue "G" stamps as an interim measure. Seems funny that it takes so much more effort to print a stamp with the number "32" than it does the letter "G."

Worse, on Dec. 31, 1994, the U.S. Postal Service issued a "Happy New Year" stamp, the price--29 cents.

Go figure.

By the way, if your nose runs and your feet smell, you're built upside down.



Continued from page 1 ...

### Hill 805 and Feminists

Next day the neighboring rifle company departed, ordered away on a new mission, but the Delta Raiders of the 501st would defend Hill 805 for another four days and nights. Each of these nights fresh North Vietnamese companies of battle-hardened veterans assaulted the hill, determined to wipe out its defenders, and each night they were driven back with appalling losses.

Although U.S. casualties mounted steadily with each new night attack, the Delta Raiders stood firm in their conviction to carry out their orders; no matter that many disagreed with them. When they were finally withdrawn after five days and nights of small-unit hell, company strength had been cut down to about 40 men, but their cohesion and the care of strong leaders held them together, and made them effective in the face of nearly overwhelming odds.

Over two decades later, the men who served in Delta, 2/501st, still meet regularly, some coming from as far away as Australia, to renew their fellowship and express the affection for each other that served them so well so many years ago. The cohesion of the Delta Raiders remains intact, unthreatened by outside forces.

Today, however, insidious forces inside and outside the U.S. military threaten to destroy any unit cohesion that future combat formations may have or develop.

Passionate feminist activists, having failed to secure easy passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, have focused their considerable clout against the U.S. military. Their rationale is that the military, with its well-defined structure and organization and clearly described job positions, is an easy target; all the more because it comes under the budgetary control of Congress and executive command by the president.

Feminists are urging an agenda of individual rights over the security needs of the nation in terms of cohesion in combat units. They fail to see or acknowledge the distinction that serving in combat is not about individual rights but about combat effectiveness and, ultimately, national security.

Colonel William Darryl Henderson, a professor of military psy-

chology, has studied extensively the elements that contribute to small unit cohesion, among them primary group influence, esteem and recognition, mutual affection, and strong identification with leadership. Other researchers with front line combat experience, such as Professor Charles Moskos of Northwestern University, aver that the introduction of women into combat units would cause a strong negative impact on many of the elements contributing to unit cohesion.

The feminist agenda ignores both the results of scholarly research and the real-world attitude of members of combat units, many of whom say they will leave the service if women are allowed to perform combat duty. Feminists also insist on the primacy of the individual--women in particular--over service to the nation, and the idea of putting the needs of the unit first.

Sadly, this wrong-headed campaign has begun to succeed in getting Congress and the president to change the rules that forbid women to serve in front line outfits. Intense lobbying efforts have gotten the attention of senators and members of the House who have a strong track record voting for equal rights issues. They are told that enabling women to serve in combat units is also about equal rights; but it is not. It is about what is best for national security, and the effectiveness of combat units that must fight an enemy.

Christopher C. Straub, a professional staff member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, knows something of cohesion and combat effectiveness. His 1988 book, *The Unit First: Keeping the Promise of Cohesion*, addresses the issue of revamping the Army's personnel system to support greater small unit cohesion. He states: "The way we man the wartime force and keep it up to strength is vital to combat success. But unless wartime exigencies are preceded by a build-up of cohesion during peacetime, a sound wartime replacement system will pay only partial dividends." He, too, agrees that the women-in-combat issue is about combat performance versus individual rights, and that women soldiers in combat units would degrade cohesion and overall effectiveness.

Straub's knowledge of cohesion is not merely academic. As the commander of the Delta Raiders on Hill 805, he knows first-hand the contribution that cohesion can make to the effectiveness of a unit with a tough combat mission to perform.



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#### A NATIONAL NEWSLETTER SINCE 1983

Editor:

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#### FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR DECEMBER/JANUARY

John Schuelke, Randall Thompson, Chip Collins, Jerry Rodgers, George Murphy, Larry Allen, James Catlin, Strike Force Assn.

# EYE ON AMERICA



## 400 Years Ago

### Indian Unrest

In 1595, Spain divided its New World territory (today's south-eastern states) into mission provinces, in the belief that religious conversion of natives was preferable to conquest. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, Indians were again at war with Spanish priests and settlers.

## 300 Years Ago

### Salem's Hell

Between March and October 1692, 20 persons were executed for witchcraft in Salem, Mass., and more than 50 languished in jail awaiting trial so that the "purity of Salem" might be preserved. So-called "spectral evidence"—supposedly supernatural visions of the accused performing evil acts—had been sufficient for the court to determine guilt. Ironically, those who confessed their "guilt" were spared, while those professing innocence were sentenced to death. Nineteen persons were hanged, and a 20th, a man who stonically refused to talk, was crushed to death with a boulder.

Some of the Bay Colony residents, alarmed at the self-destructive nature of the trials, warned that the condemnations might persist until all were condemned. Despite this, witchcraft persecutions continued. Rev. Cotton Mather, a leading proponent of the trials, commented that he felt compelled to act "in direct opposition to the devil."

Eventually, reason prevailed, and in 1697, collective consciousness begged forgiveness. In a day of fasting and repentance on Jan. 15th, Puritans offered a bill of confession at church. It read, in part, "We fear we have been instrumental with others, though ignorantly and unwillingly, to bring upon ourselves the guilt of innocent blood." Poor solace for the families of those who had been killed.

## 200 Years Ago

### New States

Vermont, for 14 years an independent republic, became the 14th state in March 1791. It was the first state to join the Union since ratification of the Constitution, and was the first to specifically bar slavery in its state constitution.

Kentucky, carved out of Virginia's western district, became the 15th state in 1792. Although slavery was allowed, the state consti-

tution contained otherwise progressive democratic values, reflecting the influence of the American frontier.

On June 1, 1796, the Southwest Territory joined the Union as the state of Tennessee, the 16th in the young nation.

Source: *Chronicle of America*, Clifton Daniel, ed. dir., Chronicle Publications, Inc., Mount Kisco, N.Y., 1989.

## DONATION MATH:

\$7.00 = one issue of **Ripcord Report** for one month for 10 members; or \$8.40 = 12 monthly issues for one member.

As we said "good-bye" to 1994, there was enough money in the association bank account to pay for January and February issues of **Ripcord Report**. Thanks for all the support; let's keep ahead of the curve!

## MILITARY DAY OFF

There are 365 days in a year. We're entitled to 30 days of annual leave, and a three-day pass every six weeks ... which totals 56 days; and reduces the workload to 309. There are 16 national holidays observed; and 104 weekend days ... which combine to reduce the total to 189. We're off-duty for eight hours of sleep each day, so another 126 days must be subtracted ... leaving 63 working days for Uncle Sam.

If we consume an hour every day with coffee and incidentals, then the total must be reduced by another 15 days. Troop information, character guidance, lectures and counseling occupy another 26 days each year ... leaving only 22 days for duty. Paydays occupy 12 of the remainder; and no work is ever done on a payday. The average serviceman will spend two days a year in the dental clinic, and seven days a year undergoing medical examinations or treatment. This leaves ONE DAY to serve each year!

If you aren't resourceful enough to get this one working day off each year, then you probably aren't well suited to the military, and you shouldn't reenlist! We've never had it so good!

Courtesy: Ben Myers and *Company D, 2/501st, 101st Abn. Div. Newsletter*, No. 47

## EDITOR'S HISTORY CORNER

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

*Continued from No. 38*

### THE 'OFFICIAL' HISTORY OF 2/506TH FOR 1970

Thank heavens American forces at Ripcord had control of the ultimate high ground--the air above the jungle. Without airpower and abundant use of it the battle would have taken on a wholly different character.

On July 10, 1970, to the west of Ripcord Hill 1000 remained under enemy control, to the south Hill 902 and farther on the Coc Muen remained strongholds of enemy resistance. That left Hill 805, just over a click east and a bit south of Ripcord.--*Editor*

#### Hill 805

Alpha Company had been of Fire Base O'Reilly for three weeks and had not yet been involved in any of the contact around Ripcord since the siege had begun. Ever since the battle of Hill 1000 had started, however, they had been standing by with their rucksacks ready, waiting for the word to go. On July 10 Capt. Hawkins got the word and Alpha Company combat assaulted to a landing zone secured by Charlie Company. Charlie Company then assumed control of Fire Base O'Reilly.

Working just east of Ripcord, Alpha Company was tasked to conduct a two-company assault against Hill 805 to the southeast of Ripcord. Delta Company, 2d Bn., 501st Inf., would join Alpha in the assault. On the 12th, Hill 805 was secured. Delta 2/501 secured the hilltop itself and Alpha dug in on a LZ some 200 meters west. Light contact had been experienced during the assault and numerous enemy bunkers had been destroyed.

Perhaps the enemy did not realize that two companies had dug in on Hill 805. Hill 805 offered excellent observation of Ripcord and much of the surrounding area. The two commanders knew that the enemy occupied the area, but just how many no one was sure.

That night at approximately 2030 hours, mechanical ambushes that Capt. Chris Straub's men of Delta 2/501 had placed out began to detonate. At 2045 hours Delta 2/501's perimeter on the top of the hill erupted with the crash of enemy mortar and RPG rounds. Small arms fire exchanged back and forth between the opposing forces.

Strangely enough, Alpha Company did not initially come under attack, though they were only 200 meters from the scene of the contact. As Alpha Company observed the muzzle flashes of enemy rifles and the fire trails left by the RPGs, Capt. Hawkins realized that his men were in a perfect position to provide supporting fire against two of the three avenues of approach that the enemy was using in his assault against Delta 2/501st.

As Alpha Company poured heavy fire into the ranks of the attacking enemy, they too began to receive small arms and RPG

fire. The enemy, however, not knowing Alpha's exact location, was ineffective [in returning accurate fire].

The contact terminated after an hour and gunships and artillery continued to wreak havoc on the enemy's routes of withdrawal. Alpha suffered no casualties and Delta 2/501 had 16 wounded. Enemy dead littered the slopes of Hill 805.

On the 13th, Alpha Company moved off Hill 805 and prepared for a mission that would send them into the rugged valley area southeast of Ripcord between Hill 805 and the eastern end of the Coc Muen ridge line. Delta 2/501 remained on Hill 805 until the 17th, when they evacuated after taking repeated casualties every night they stayed on Hill 805.

*To be continued ...*

**Next issue: The ammo dump explosion, and Delta Co., 1st Bn., 506th Inf.**

Also coming in the next issue ...

#### CRASH COURSE IN WAR

By Art Wiknik

I didn't know what to say. No one had ever asked me before. I just assumed that cherries picked up on things and, if they watched and learned carefully, would become an old-timer like me. But there was an apparent sadness about Bernson that persuaded me to tell him what I'd learned. I just felt obligated to give him a crash course on the war.



#### Honor Roll of the 101st Airborne Division

The 101st Airborne Division Association is establishing a Roll of Honor of all Veterans who served in the 101st Airborne Division from 1942 to present date. If you served in World War II, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Fort Campbell, KY, you are eligible to have your name included.

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## MORE ABOUT HILL 805

The stories that flow from the actions on Hill 805 from July 12 through the 17th are legion, too numerous to recount here. Delta Raiders of the 2/501st, who saw the most action there for the longest period, possess the best insights. Perhaps they will send in retrospectives for future issues of *Ripcord Report*. (Ray Blackman, are you reading this?)

In any event, Hill 805 offered the last, and perhaps best chance to keep the enemy noose from tightening inexorably about Ripcord. Despite the grim and unwelcome nature of their defensive posture on its craggy peak, Delta Raiders kept Hill 805 out of enemy hands for five crucial days. Many of Chris Straub's wounded troopers refused evacuation, preferring to stay with comrades and fight against long odds rather than take a helicopter ride to the rear base.

In the end Delta Raiders were bled white, their company strength reduced by half in five nights of savage enemy assaults. When they were finally extracted there was no other company to take their place. Like the many redoubts and strongpoints that ringed Dien Bien Phu and its French defenders in 1954, the key terrain around Ripcord was slowly and agonizingly lost, piece by critical piece.

On July 18th, enemy .51 caliber machine gun fire coming from the southeast of Ripcord brought down a Chinook helicopter on top of U.S. defenders. Volatile jet fuel flowed from the burning wreck into Ripcord's main ammunition bunker, setting it afire and causing an explosion that rocked the mountain top. Hundreds of rounds of 105mm ammunition continued to detonate across the fire base all afternoon, destroying a battery of 105s and causing other serious damage. Ripcord was all but doomed.

Would things have been different if Hill 805 had stayed in U.S. hands? The answer is probably "yes," but we can not know how different, for history does not speculate.--*Editor*



Poster from the 1995-Victory Edition, VFW calendar

## MILITARY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**gorget**--A piece of armor developed in the 15th century consisting of several articulated plates hinged to fit around the neck and fastened with a clasp. Gorgets were worn with buff coats after armor fell into disuse. The term was later used for a badge of rank worn at the throat.

**Hague Conventions**--Seventeen conventions establishing laws for land and naval warfare, peace and neutrality, adopted as the result of international conferences held at The Hague, Holland, in 1899 and 1907.

**"jam-pot"**--An early form of the fragmentation grenade, the "jam-pot" was a makeshift grenade used by the British Army in World War I; it was a tin can containing an explosive and scraps of iron.

**quarrel**--A short, heavy arrow or bolt fired from a crossbow.

From *Dictionary of Military Terms*, The H. W. Wilson Company, New York, 1986



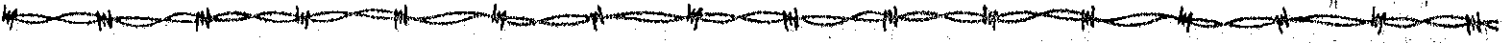
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RIPCORD REPORT  
c/o Charles F. Hawkins



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