



# RIPCORD REPORT

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



Number 69

Spring, 2006

## Ripcord Reunion 2006

### Ripcord Reunion 2006 Charleston, SC July 26 - 30, 2006

Charleston is America's most beautifully preserved historic treasure. Surrounded by antebellum plantations and lush resort islands, it has been named one of the "Top 25" destinations in the world by Travel & Leisure, and one of the "Top Ten" destinations in the US by Conde Nast Traveler.

Charleston's 300 year heritage features magnificent churches, houses and commercial buildings which give the city a decided European feel. This also includes the cobble stoned streets which can be very difficult to walk on in ladies' dress shoes. Wear comfortable walking shoes and be prepared to walk.

World-class recreational opportunities (golf, tennis, fishing and boating), the South's most celebrated restaurants, and an unmatched selection of antique and specialty shops complete the area's widespread appeal.

A private word about a very special place: Waterfront Park. Built on land fill at the point of Charleston overlooking the convergence of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, this popular park offers a quiet, relaxing, nicely shaded spot to sit and watch the boats (and people) go by. Just follow King, Meeting, Bay or any of the north-south streets to the park (the building numbers descend as you approach the park).

This Ripcord Reunion will have a lot of new members there. It will truly be a Reunion to remember.

We are getting older, so do not put off any more reunions. Come to Charleston, SC this year.

### Make Your Hotel Reservation for the 2006 Reunion Now!



The Town & Country Inn & Conference Center  
2008 Savannah Highway  
Charleston, SC 29407  
Phone 800-334-6660  
Fax 843-766-9444

Guest Room rate  
\$89.00 plus 12.5% tax per day

Please Call NOW  
and make your reservation  
Mention Group Code RIPCORN

Remember to send your registration form  
to Lee Widjeskog

# FROM THE EDITOR

Well, I hope everyone enjoyed the holidays and you are getting ready for the 2006 Ripcord Reunion. This year's reunion seems to be shaping up very nicely. There are going to be a lot of new faces at this reunion. Don't miss out on this one.

In the beginning of the winter, I had made a lot of improvements on the website. I added a lot of past newsletters from the start of The Ripcord Association. So, if you have not visited our website this year, check it out at [www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)

The only problem is that I got so busy in my Real Estate career, that I had not updated it during Jan and Feb. I also lost my father in Feb and would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the members that sent me their condolences. You really helped my family thru the hard time.

I will be updating the website before this newsletter is delivered to you.

I am sorry to say that The Ripcord Carribean Cruise has been cancelled due to lack of support. Only a few reservations were made and we could not keep the other cabins reserved. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Do us a favor and send your registration for the 2006 Charleston Reunion NOW, so we can plan on agenda. As members register, it will be posted on the website and this will let other members know who is coming. Other members may see a name and decide they want to be at the the reunion also.

Frank Marshall

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## Members Registered for This Reunion

Lee & Kathy Widjeskog (A 2/506)  
Bob & Redd Judd (B 2/506)  
Al & Bonnie Martin (2/11th Arty)  
Ben & Carolyn Harrison (3rd Bde)  
John & Debbie Sherba (E 2/506 Recon)  
Isabelino & Uthoomporn Vazquez (C 2/506 and HQHC)  
Ben & Lillian Peters (B 2/506)  
Craig & Sandy Van Hout (B 2/506)  
Uwe & Diane Meyer (B 2/506)  
Frank Marshall and Arlene (A 2/506)  
Frank & Peggy Delfino (1/506 and HHC)  
Tiny & Irene Aanonsen (A 2/506)  
Jim & Gwen Cobb (2/11 Arty)  
Audrey Wrightsell (2/11 Arty)

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## Cruise Cancelled

The Ripcord Carribean Cruise has been cancelled due to lack of interest. There were not enough bookings to keep the cabins reserved.

## DONATIONS

Checks should be made payable to "Ripcord Association". Please send all donations to:

Lee Widjeskog  
493 Stillman Ave  
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

*E-mail: [leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com)*

## ARTICLES

**Deadline for next issue: June 1, 2006**

Send all articles, photos, incoming mail, and interesting reading to:

Frank Marshall  
224 Derry Hill Ct  
Mt Laurel, NJ 08054-3709

**e-mail: [frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)**

## RIPCORD BIOGRAPHIES...THEN AND NOW

Please send us a brief bio on yourself. Please include which company you served with, the dates you were in the service, the dates you were in Vietnam, your rank, any interesting facts about your involvement with FSB Ripcord, what you did after Vietnam, career, family, and some comments of your choice. You may include a picture if desired. Send all information to:

**Lee Widjeskog, 493 Stillman Ave., Bridgeton, NJ 08302**  
**e-mail: [leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:leewidjeskog@ripcordassociation.com)**

## E-MAIL ADDRESS

To receive immediate Ripcord updates send your e-mail address to: **[frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frankmarshall@ripcordassociation.com)**

## THE RIPCORD ASSOCIATION WEBSITE

Check in often for all the latest Association news at:  
**[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)**

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## Donations

Donations, the life blood of our Association came from the following generous members during the past three months:

Bill & Sheila Williams,  
Paul Buhr,  
Isabelino Vazquez,  
Jay Weatherby,  
Dave Kreckel,  
Phil Kallas,  
Ben & Carolyn Harrison  
Lee Trembly.

We thank all these and others who have helped to keep our organization in the black.

## News from New Jersey

As I write this winter has finally shown it's chilly and white side here in NJ. Over night we received 5-6" of snow locally and as usual the Philly news media is in a big up roar about it all. If we lived in Florida it would be big news, but it is supposed to snow in New Jersey and Philadelphia. I guess it beats telling about the latest murders and house fires.

OKAY FOLKS!!! If you want to save some money and plan to come to the reunion in July, make sure you get your registration fees in prior to March 12, 2006. After that it goes up \$5 per person. After May 1 it goes to \$85 per person and those who cannot decide until the last minute the price is \$90 a person after June 25.

In the price of the registration is the cost for the banquet, cost of running the hospitality room and a poolside lunch at the hotel on Friday.

The Super Bowl and playoffs are events followed by many people and none more so than that dufer from Indianapolis, Fred Spaulding. He has a ritual whenever his Colts are playing with the idea that it will enhance their chances to win. Based on the outcome of the playoffs, I suspect he may not wish to discuss the 2005 season when you get to Charleston. However, I am certain he will be able to tell you how well the Colts will be doing come September. On the other hand our Pittsburgh reunion attendees are sitting high at this time.

For the readers in our Association, be sure to check out another book about the 101st and our brigade during the 1969 to 1970 period. Art Wiknik formerly of A 2/506 (April 1969 to March 1970) has written a book about his experiences in the area many of you humped, slept, ate, fought or were wounded while searching for NVA in the jungle. In years past Art has sent us well-written and thoughtful letters about what had happened. In some cases people have not fully agreed with his comments, but they are always thought provoking. His book is called "Nam Sense" and can be purchased from Amazon.com or at local bookstores. In reading the book I found it gave a reasonable viewpoint about what the "grunts" saw, felt and thought about while in the jungle searching for the NVA and booby traps. Art also gives a critical appraisal of most of those who were directing his part of the war. Some who read it will agree with his views and others will think he must have been somewhere else. His comments are generally quite candid and he doesn't mind belittling himself as well as other NCO's and officers he dealt with. In all it appears to be a reasonable picture of a year in the life in the bush of one man's efforts to stymie the efforts of lifers and incompetent officers.

As you may have noted in the last issue we covered information about a Vietnam Memorial in Indiana. As space and time permits we will write about others in the future. If you know of a favorite one please send us some pictures and information so we might do an article on it.

Lee Widjeskog

## INCOMING MAIL

Hello Lee...

I know this email is a bolt out of the blue, but this afternoon I spoke with a mutual acquaintance of ours, Mike Stepanovich, now living in Bakersfield, CA. You and I have never met, but there is another connection... during the period encompassing the battle for Firebase Ripcord, I was the duty NCO in the TOC for Base Defense at Camp Evans.

I served under Ben Harrison when he was a colonel, have read the book many times, and just today received in the mail a VHS copy of the battle, narrated by Ollie North, and there you were in a photo, flanked by Mike Step and Rod Minto !!

You know, I fancied myself as being coordinated and on top of things while in the TOC, but this battle really slipped under my personal radar, as I was so busy keeping things together and making sure the parade of Lt's assigned to Base Defense didn't screw up things, that I never fully realized the magnitude of what was happening at this besieged firebase until about three weeks before the evacuation.

I do remember very well the final evacuation and all of



(L-R) Rod Minto, Lee Widjeskog and Mike Stepanovich

those hueys landing up on the helipad, and the death stares of those gallant soldiers as they alighted the choppers. I can never forget it !!

You are all heroes and true warriors! Because of my role as an E-5 just trying to do my job to the best of my ability, I never felt a part of the true warrior clan as here I was under a helipad in a TOC in the middle of a large basecamp, while you guys were getting pounded, while being outmanned and outgunned. There was so much more I wish I could have done to help you guys out.

I will be at the reunion this year in Charleston, and I will introduce myself to you so I can shake your hand and tell you what a hero you and all Ripcord survivors are. Also I want to see Ben Harrison again, the last time being

*Continued on page 4*

# INCOMING MAIL

*Continued from page 3*

in 1971, after I had returned home and was working at a post office at the Harvard Business School and he walked in to buy stamps ! I recognized him and he damn near fainted !!

I will be sending you a check for a copy of Ben Harrison's book, and I certainly hope I haven't shocked you too much.

Take care and hope life is treating you well.

ciao...

Frank Delfino

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Sir,

First of all, let me say thank you for everything you and the men who were at Ripcord did. Whether you know it or not, the actions of you and your fellow soldiers have had an effect on others.

About myself: Had I been 6 years older I might have been one of those replacements dropped in with you. I have just complete 22 years of service making the rank of SGM in the Reserves.

I was with V Corps during OIF and the move to Balad, Iraq, later on to Baghdad on Victory Base. After the base was established and some what settled in (as settled in as you can get, getting mortared and snipers doing their thing), there was a work force of local national developed (sound familiar?). While the workers were on base there was required a guard, 1 for every 5 workers (minimum). Many of the soldiers and units who had to supply the soldiers took this as a shit detail. After I got to the base I was appalled at the attitudes I witnessed. I would find soldiers with their backs turned to the workers, not paying attention. I even found one asleep with her weapon across her legs with local nationals all around her.

The next morning I went to the Senior NCO meeting and when ask if I had anything to say I said yes. I ask "Who here knows about Firebase Ripcord?"

No one raised their hands. I then explained a bit about it. I then opened my notebook which I carried all the time. In it I have a quote from LT. Campbell, "In a firefight, they were hellacious soldiers. They'd do whatever you told 'em to do, every damn one of 'em. But there's no sorrier bastard in the world, soldiering-wise than a U.S. soldier who's not scared, and that's the never-ending problem of being a commander – trying to keep the men combat ready when they decide there's nothing to worry about and get complacent." (Ripcord, Screaming Eagles under Siege. Vietnam 1970 by Keith W. Nolan, p 48) I read this to all present. There were no replies.

I then said LT. Campbell was correct, our soldiers were too complacent and relaxed because they think guarding local nationals was a shit detail. They didn't realize that local national might be pacing a target, locating a target

from a TRP. They were the first line of defense for our camp.

Even today you and your soldiers are making a difference even though you don't know it. I have read and reread the book. I have taken it apart by company and would follow one company through the action. I continue to marvel at the strength both physical and mental it must have taken to get through that mission. I have learned a lot from you all – thank you.

I just felt I needed to write you and let you know that in a different time and different action, you are still setting the example.

MIKEL W. DAWSON

SGM, USAR

mwd@dawson-horses.dk

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Wow - where do I start.

First, I would like to receive the "Ripcord Report" via E-mail.

That would be at phubai70@comcast.net . I have tried for years to make contact with old comrades from C Company 2/501 to no avail. I was doing some research for a fellow veteran and came across this site. Reading your newsletter stirs memories.

In country Jan 1970 thru Dec 1970. Pointman thru April when a Lieutenant and I had a fubar thing going on. Choice of the army hotel or extend commitment.

After my decision I was at Alpha Company 426 Supply and Service Battalion on Camp Eagle. I was not a remf at heart and did not fit in to well with any "rear" jobs. I opted for a position not many wanted. Green Tag Missions. I would make regular runs to firebases to rig and sling ammo returns by chinook. I was there on the 18th when the CH-47 crashed, because of the crash and subsequent fire a Lieutenant Colonel cancelled my mission and kicked me off his hill. I had to be pulled out that day and numerous other times. This writing prompted by articles by Chuck Whitacre, Bruce Bender and David Rich. I may well have crossed paths with one or all. God bless

Chuck Rimbey

phubai70@comcast.net

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Frank,

Believe or not , I'm coming to the reunion this year. Had no idea all this stuff was going on. Had a wonderful talk with Jim Noll yesterday, it was great to hear him again, and it will be super great to see you guys again. See you there.

Randy (Baldy) Baldwin.

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# INCOMING MAIL

My youngest son Petty Officer 2nd Class Zach Boles (Hospital Corpsman) leaves for Iraq Tuesday. I ask that you keep him in your prayers. Thanks

Bill Boles  
bboles6166@yahoo.com

My name is Bill Holmquist, I was eighteen years old at Camp Eagle in B Trp 2/17 Cav Aero Scouts. We flew many missions at Ripcord, I remember how bad it was out there. I was shot down by a 51. I really thought we were a goner that day, scared the shit out of me. Love your web site,  
William Holmquist  
william\_holmquist2000@yahoo.com

Hi Frank. I have been checking the Ripcord Association site for my Uncle who is like my older brother. He's not in the computer era. I will send him a copy of the newsletter with the Charleston reunion and cruise information. I do have a request . On the membership page could it be possible to put Fred Lathan C/O Joe Gibson. That way if someone recognizes his name. They could to get in touch with Joe thru me. Using my name nobody would know it from Adam. Joe served at Firebase Ripcord I didn't. Joe is mentioned on page 198 of Keith Nolan's book. Thanks for all you do for the association. I hope my request will not be an inconvenience. Joe keeps saying he would like to go to the Charleston reunion. I feel he maybe a little reluctant he never been to one. Maybe dealing with old memories concern him. I'm sure he would like to hear from any of his buddies. He can be contacted at 910-997-3541/ Cell 910-206-2025 or write Joseph Andrew Gibson. 145 Snead ave. Rockingham. N.C. 28375. May you and yours Have a Very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! Fred L. Lathan C/O Joe Gibson

Hello Frank;  
Arthur Wiknik here. The attached article appeared in the November 14, 2005 edition of the Hartford Courant in Connecticut and is probably too long for the Ripcord Report. If you cannot print it, this shorter version may work:

A few months ago, Vietnamdogtags.com contacted me regarding a dog tag they had recently purchased in Vietnam that had my name on it. I was skeptical but agreed to give them my home address. A few days later, a tiny package arrived with the dog tag inside. The instant I saw it, a rush of emotion came over me - it was my dog tag and I suddenly remembered how I had lost it. I paid no money and the only thing these people want to do is reunite lost tags with their owners or families. To see if your name is

listed, check these sites: Vietnamdogtags.com, founddogtags.com, topvietnamveterans.org and canamission.com  
Arthur Wiknik  
mucketman@juno.com

Double thanks, Frank. First, for the newsletter, and second, for helping me get in contact with Phillip Michaud. Phil was the commander of A Battery, 2/319th, while I was one of its medics. He and I were the only members of the battery who were wounded on 20 March 1970 at FSB Granite. In addition to the PH, both of us received the Silver Star for actions that day. He returned to the field the next day (21 March), and eventually was reassigned to command B Battery in June or early July 1970 after its BC was severely wounded. Phil then got his 2nd PH at Ripcord and went home (back to "The World"). He eventually retired as a bird-colonel. Spends the winter in Florida and summers in Maine. Thought you'd be interested.  
Ralph Matkin  
rmatkin82@aol.com

Dear Frank,  
I just wanted everyone to know that there is a 2nd Vietnam Veteran's Homecoming this year in Branson, MO.

See website: <http://www.welcomehome2006.org/> for all the info.

Big thanks,  
Linda Calhoun

## Ripcord Reunion Yearbook

At the Indianapolis reunion we tried a different approach and had a professional photographer prepare a yearbook for us. A number of members purchased the books but we still have a small supply on hand. It includes individual pictures of couples, unit pictures of the attendees, candid shots and old photos from Vietnam. The 20 page book is nicely done and the photos excellent. If you are interested you can purchase it at the Charleston Reunion or contact Lee Widjeskog. The price is \$19.



## Floyd Alexander FO's RTO B 2/319 (Attached to A 2/506)

In June of 1968, the high school in Jerseyville, Illinois sent Floyd Alexander into the working world to work in a local steel company. By 1969 Floyd had decided to volunteer for the draft rather than wait for them to come get him.

He took his basic in Fort Leonardwood, Missouri that summer and then took AIT in Fort Sill, Oklahoma for artillery. The need for men was high in Vietnam at that time so he went from Fort Sill to his thirty-day leave right to Vietnam and started his tour on December 22, 1969.

His first assignment was with B 2/319 Artillery on Fire Support Base (FSB) Jack located just west of Camp Evans and Camp Eagle in I Corps. This base was on a low hill in the flat lands just east of the mountains and jungle. It was used during the rainy season since it could be re-supplied by road if the weather stopped the helicopters.

In April 1970, FSB Ripcord was re-opened and B 2/319 set to work on the hill under Capt. Rich providing fire support for the troops in the area. Shortly after moving to Ripcord, Floyd was selected to replace Jim Hill as RTO for the Forward Observer (FO) Tom Brennon attached to A 2/506, which at that time was run by Capt. Burkert. By the end of May Burkert was replaced by Charles Hawkins and in June Lt. Steve Olson had replaced Lt. Brennon but Floyd remained as RTO. Alexander and Lt. Olson quickly became good friends and felt like a brother to Floyd. He was invited to be Olson's best man at his wedding planned for his return to Georgia in 1971.

Today Floyd doesn't



*Floyd Alexander*

fast as they got down under cover.

Lt. Olson got up to see where to direct fire while Floyd pulled on him to stay down. At that moment Lt. Olson was hit with an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) which killed him instantly. Nearby, Sgt. Wagon, the secure radio operator, had a satchel charge explode in his face, blinding

remember much about his tour. It was just lots of days walking through the jungle with occasional encounters with the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and a hot LZ (landing zone where you are receiving hostile fire). However, he was glad to get off the firebase where you were subject to sniper fire and mortar rounds dropping in unannounced.

On July 22, 1970 Alexander remembers standing next to Olson as usual in preparation for moving out. Being with the Captains CP (command post) there were two platoons ahead of them and one behind. Suddenly they heard rifle fire and explosions to the front. Everything was happening

him. Floyd who was between the two received only minor shrapnel wounds. Alexander saw five NVA by a nearby tree up on the hill. He emptied his magazine at them and saw them all fall. Whether they were hit or seeking cover Floyd didn't have time to discover. During the battle Floyd saw one of the medics (Fry?) get killed as he tried to work on one of the wounded soldiers. He remembers Sgt. Long our Vietnamese interpreter, getting shot in both legs and bleeding to death before he could get adequate medical attention. Floyd thought



*Floyd and his wife, Diane*

*Continued on page 7*

## Floyd Alexander

Continued from page 6

that Wagon was dead and was about to leave the site when he heard him hollering. Knowing that he could not drag Wagon out without help and not wanting to leave him behind, Floyd lay next to him and covered Wagon's head with his arm and chest. They lay there pretending to be dead as the battle raged about then for hours. Others reported that Floyd saw NVA moving among our dead and wounded and shooting them again to be certain. NVA were reported to have moved to within a few yards of Alexander and Wagon before being chased off by fire from US troops.

As the battle wore down, Floyd was able to crawl back. He hollered "Currahee" and got the same response but was not sure it was our guys. But once he was sure he got help bringing in Wagon. During the long night he helped call in artillery fire for Capt. Hawkins but was certain the NVA would return and Alpha would be over run before dawn. He remembers being scared, praying and just wanting to go home.

On the 23rd, Delta 2/506 walked into the battle area and helped extract Alpha Company. Floyd was treated for his wounds and had numbness in his leg for a long time after due to the injuries. Even today the numbness comes and goes.

A week later he had a new FO and was once more walking the jungle hills with Alpha Company. He got an early out and left the country in November and then finished his enlistment at Fort Hood serving on an honor guard.

Service over he returned to work at the steel company till it closed 25 years later. He followed this up with a job on the state highway department till his present retirement.

Three years after service he married the lovely Diane Crotchett who has loved and encouraged him ever since. They have two daughters and presently four grandchildren with a grandson due in March 2006.

Life is good!

## Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Recently I was driving down Rt. 290 in Massachusetts on my way to a used bookstore in Worcester. Along the roadside I spotted a sign about the Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Since I had time, I followed the signs that eventually led me to Rt. 9 and then into Green Hill Park on the east side of Worcester. The road through the park wound around ball fields, a National Guard Armory, past tennis courts and finally to a parking lot in a cul-de-sac. This was next to the site of the memorial. I got out of the car and wandered through the site, took pictures and found out what I could about this peaceful location.

In the 1980's the Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund was established to pay tribute to those residents who died in Vietnam. This first attempt at a memorial failed but shortly a group in Worcester formed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Trust. This new group initiated a statewide design competition for the memorial. It was also able to get private donations and \$1.4 million from the state legislature for the project. On 9 June 2002 the memorial park was dedicated.

The competition was won by a firm from Belmont and the design consists of three units: A

### A letter to Mom at the Place of Words

Place of Flags, A Place of Words and A Place of Names connected by walk ways and surrounding a pond as part of a four acre site in Green Hill Park in Worcester.

The Place of Flags is an open structure where the flag of our nation is flown and ceremonies held.

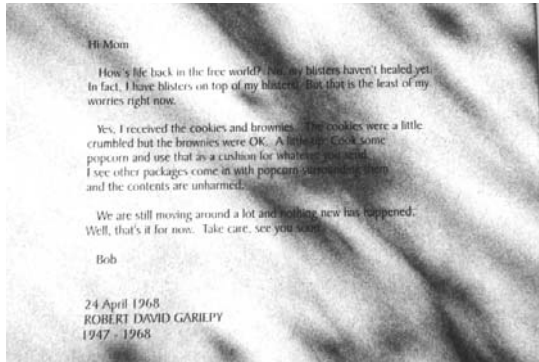
The Place of Words consists of four granite monoliths. Each stone has three sides containing engraved reproductions of letters sent home by servicemen and the fourth side is left unfinished. The letters sound like something all veterans have written at one time or another and are all the more poignant since the writer died shortly after the letter was written.

The Place of Names contains the names of 1,544 men and 1 woman veteran missing or died in Vietnam due to combat. The names are engraved on four monoliths as in the Place of Words and in a similar fashion.

I visited the site on a cold day in February yet found visitors at the site. It is quite serene and peaceful and I would imagine it to be lovely in the spring. If you find yourself in the Worcester area, the memorial can be found off Rt. 9 on the east side of the city. It is well worth the stop.



*The Place of Flags*



*The Place of Names*

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# **Ripcord Reunion 2006 Charleston, SC July 26 - 30, 2006 Make Reservation Now!**

## **RIPCORD REPORT**

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

### **Ripcord Report**

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