



RIPCORD REPORT

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



Number 79

Spring, 2009

WORDS FROM NEW JERSEY

by Lee Widjeskog

Since the last newsletter, we received the sorrowful news that Keith Nolan has passed away. Those who fought in Ripcord will always owe Keith a debt of gratitude for his able telling of our story to the rest of the world. The efforts of Chip Collins and Keith Nolan have kept the story of the sacrifices and hardships endured by the 101st alive for all to recognize. They and others who have died before them will be greatly missed by their friends, family and brothers in arms.

On a lighter note, Kathy and I had a great time at the Laughlin, NV reunion in October! We left on October 2 and arrived on the 6th. With the able help of the Bob and Red Judd and Fred Spaulding, we loaded up the smaller than usual hospitality room with snacks, beer, soda, water and liquor in anticipation of the 100 plus friends attending the reunion.

Some people had been there since Saturday and as the week progressed just about all came in so that by Friday we had a full house.

Between the casino games on the bottom two floors and all the things to see and do in the area it was hard to meet with everyone for more than just a few minutes. While it was tough to get together with everyone during the week, all seemed to have a really good time. It appeared that most of those attending donated a fair amount of money to the Nevada State coffers.

At the business meeting a couple of things were decided:

1. We must always be certain the hospitality room is large enough for our group.
2. The association will spend about \$100 for memorial wreaths for those who pass away while we can afford it.
3. A raffle will be held each year for the benefit of the Anna Britt Nolan Trust Fund.

4. In the next 3 or 4 years we will try to start holding our reunion in one semi-central location for an extended period. (possibly Springfield, MO) to reduce costs and ensure the gear for the reunion will always be there. This will require purchase of an enclosed trailer (5'x 8') and rental of a storage place close to the selected location.
5. It was voted to give the Judds and the Widjeskogs \$300 each for gas expenses for hauling all the gear to Laughlin.
6. Reunions are set for 2009 in Myrtle Beach, SC and 2010 in Springfield, MO. It is also likely that we will be in Fort Worth, TX in 2011.

The report by the treasurer was as follows:

We ended the Springfield (2007) reunion with a balance of \$18,640. From the end of the Springfield event to end of the Laughlin reunion we have accumulated the following expenses and received income as listed below.

Expenses: Newsletter, postage, website since Springfield was \$ 1,360.26

Income: Donations and book sales: \$5,624

Laughlin Reunion expenses: \$7,832

Laughlin Registration fees: \$ 8,030

Laughlin Raffles & sales: \$3,028

Anna Britt Trust raffle & donations: \$1,600

Giving the Association a **balance** of \$27,730 in the account at the end of the Laughlin reunion.

Overall, the association is doing well financially for the present time and our expenses are being met.

FROM THE EDITOR

I hope everyone had a safe and warm winter. I also hope everyone survived the horrible recession we are in. Save your money for this year's reunion, because it is going to be great. Not only will there be a great turn-out of Ripcord Veterans, but there is a lot to do in the Myrtle Beach area. The dinner shows and Casino cruise and the Theatres, etc. Book the The Casino Cruise for Thurs evening, as the weekends will be too crowded. There will be a a Golf outing also. For more information, contact Lee Widjeskog or Fred Spaulding.

I have been asking for Ripcord Biographies, to put on our website. Please check them out and send me your bio. It is a well reviewed webpage on our website.

I hope you are all enjoying the newsletter and website and would really appreciate if you could send me e-mails, letters, photos, etc. pertaining to FSB Ripcord or anything about Ripcord veterans to put in the newsletter and on the website.

Also, very important! I need your e-mail address. If you are not receiving updates and information about the Ripcord Association via e-mail, you may be missing out on a lot of news. Please go to our website and update your information. (Our website membership page has been hit by Spammers! I am adjusting it now, and it should be back up and ready shortly)

ARTICLES

Deadline for the April issue will be August 1st 2009. Please send all articles, photos, incoming mail and interesting reading to:

Frank Marshall

5 Taconia Ct

Mt Laurel, NJ 08054

or e-mail to: frankmarshall@comcast.net

IMPORTANT:

Please note my new mailing address

DONATIONS:

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

Lee Widjeskog,

493 Stillman Ave.

Bridgeton, NJ 08302

Donations, the life blood of our Association

The following have given donations to the Ripcord Association since the last newsletter. These donations help keep the newsletters free to all who wish to receive it.

Bill Williams

John Marlowe

Greg McCracken

Phillip Kallas

Wilburn Wall

John Nicoson

Dave Kreckel

Richard Blythe

Mike Griffin

Marc Nolan

J. Carter

Rich Drury

Myrtle Beach Registration for the 2009 Ripcord Reunion

Uwe and Diane Meyer

Fred Spaulding

Ben and Caroline Harrison

Lee and Kathy Widjeskog

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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2009 Ripcord Reunion

October 7 - 11, 2009, Sands Ocean Club Resort, Myrtle Beach, SC

By Fred Spaulding

Registration:

1. Call 888-265-8846 and book your room with the "Ripcord Group"
2. A Dinner boat serves dinner on the ride out to the 12 mile mark. It then turns into a casino and returns to the dock around 11pm. You must let Lee Widjeskog know well in advance if you are taking this Dinner Cruise so he can make the arrangements.
3. There are several country western theatres there - The Dixie Stampede - Dolly Parton - A Medieval Dinner Theatre - Grand Ole Opry and a few others. A more detailed list will be furnished to you when I get the schedule of what "stars" will be appearing in "09" and at what theatre. I get the schedule in April.
4. There are 7 beautiful plantations in the area to see. Brookgreen Gardens is just one.
5. There are over 100 Golf Courses in the area (but that had nothing to do with me picking Myrtle Beach). go to <http://www.sandsresorts.com/resorts/oceanclub/> for more info on the resort.

Special Links

SunCruz Casino Dinner Cruise / Casino

<http://www.suncrucasino.com/myrtle-beach.asp>

Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede

<http://www.dixiestampede.com/myrtlebeach.php>

The Carolina Opry

<http://www.thecarolinaopry.com/>

Alabama Theatre

<http://www.alabama-theatre.com/>

Sands Ocean Club Resort, Myrtle Beach, SC

You have to mention "Ripcord" when you make reservations

- The above rates of \$75.00 per night do not include state & local taxes or applicable hospitality and resort charges of 18.25% per night.
- Maximum permitted occupancies for each unit is determined by Sands Ocean Club Resort. Rates are based on two (2) adults per bedroom. Additional adults (18 & over) add \$18.00 per person, per night.
- An access charge of \$2.14 per night is applied to all guest folios and includes free local calls, as well as toll free 800 numbers and unlimited use of the in-room personal safe.
- Cancellation of individual room reservations up to 96 hours prior to arrival is subject to a \$50.00 processing fee. Cancellation of individual room reservations within 96 hours prior to arrival date is subject to loss of the first nights deposit.

IMPORTANT

- **Room block will be held until September 7, 2009. Any rooms not reserved from this block will be released back into hotel inventory with no penalty to the FSB Ripcord Association. Room reservations made after September 7, 2009 are based on availability.**
- Golf for FSB Ripcord Association will be booked for (TBD) persons, however, course selection and tees times are also TBD. More info to follow.

The minimum stay requirement over the dates of October 7 - 11, 2009 is (3) nights. It is necessary for all units within your room block to fall within this requirement. Sands Ocean Club Resort will honor up to (10) rooms to stay a minimum of (2) nights during October 7 - 11, 2009.

We understand that reservations for your meeting are to be made by your attendees on an individual basis by calling our Reservations Department at 888-265-8846. All reservations must be guaranteed by one night's deposit to be received within ten (10) days of the reservation, or a one night's deposit charged to a major credit card at the time of making the reservation. Advance deposits will be credited to the last night's stay as indicated by individual reservation request.



KEITH NOLAN

Frank e-mailed us today, letting us know the upcoming *Ripcord* newsletter would be a tribute to Keith Nolan. He asked if we would like to write something. Of course we would . . . and if you've checked out the link to the on-line memorial book for Keith, you will find there are many others who want to write about Keith and express their gratitude for all he has done for Vietnam vets by telling their stories.

Like so many others, Keith found us-or, I should say, George-by way of writing *Ripcord*. My husband had never spoken much about his tour of duty in 'Nam. In the early years of our marriage, it was something we didn't talk about because I felt it was a subject not to be discussed and therefore I didn't pursue it. Let sleeping dogs lie, I thought to myself, but the sleeping dogs weren't lying. In retrospect, like so many other Vietnam vets, my husband had unresolved issues from his days in the service. After we became a part of *Ripcord*, my husband became a different man-more open and communicative, and at last willing to talk about the war . . . and I have Keith Nolan to thank for that.

Despite not having met Keith in person, I was impressed with the way the guys at the *Ripcord* Association had such high regard for him. I kept thinking that this guy has really brought a lot of lost souls and broken spirits together . . . and they are healing and becoming a real family-all because he told their story. This has been affirmed over and over again at each subsequent reunion.

Then in January of 2008, we learned the news of Keith's terminal cancer through the *Ripcord* website. Not long after, my husband said to me, "I want to do something-I want to see about starting a college fund for Keith's daughter." He contacted Lee and was told that he wasn't the first to come up with the idea; however, the Association needed someone who was willing to put the idea into action. My husband immediately went to our local bank for information and we consulted an attorney who specializes in trusts. We then e-mailed Keith and he promptly



Mary and George Murphy with Keith Nolan (center), November 2008

replied, telling us how happy he was that his friends at *Ripcord* were willing to do this for his daughter and how it comforted him to think she might have the opportunity to get a college education. Unfortunately, Keith's health declined and months went by with no communication. We kept e-mailing and then started sending letters, hoping if Keith wasn't able to read them, someone close to him might . . . and one evening the phone rang and it was Keith's mother. She explained that Keith was quite ill due to the chemotherapy treatments and was unable to do much of anything, so she would work with us. After that things fell in order and the trust fund was established.

During this time, we became friends with Keith's family, and then Keith invited us to come for a visit in November. We had a wonderful visit and I was instantly impressed by his attitude. Here was a man who, despite facing death in the near future, had such a great outlook on life. He told us about writing his books and how he got started-hanging out around Viet Nam veterans at the college where his father was a professor. He spoke about Britt and how much he loved being her father and how much he would miss seeing her grow up. He told us about wanting to write his life's story to her in the form of a letter and he was just hoping he could finish that goal. He said the *Ripcord* veterans were by a great group of people to work

with on his book. His mother was so full of pride over Keith's accomplishments. She was so thrilled he was still with her, but so aware he was deteriorating.

We were saddened when she called the evening of February 19th and said he had passed away. We had hoped arrangements would be made for a memorial service, but after a year of struggling with Keith's illness, we were told the family is just not ready to do anything at this time. However, on short notice, Keith's former wife planned a memorial mass at a small church in the area they had resided. We felt a need to go and give our condolences to Keith's family. At the church, Ulla Nolan, Keith's mother, came up and thanked us for coming. Afterward, there was a luncheon at a church hall down the road. There we spoke with family and friends of Keith and we had a chance to meet Britt, his daughter. She is cute as a button and seemed to be handling everything quite well. Keith's ex-wife, Kelly, seemed intent to make it a pleasant experience for Britt and Keith's family. After the luncheon, she asked everyone to come up and give an anecdote about Keith and light a candle. Various friends and acquaintances spoke of their favorite memories of Keith, and George went up and told of Keith writing *Ripcord* and how his books have meant so much to veterans. After that, Tony DeLuca introduced himself. He had come from Philadelphia and said he was in the Big Red 1 during Tet in Saigon and Keith had written about that in his book, *House to House*. Afterward, he visited with us and told us he had never met Keith personally, but had spoken with him on the phone. Like us, he felt a need to come. He had learned about the mass from reading about it on the Ripcord website. A little later, Bill McClellan, a reporter from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, came over and introduced himself. He was there to give his respects to Keith's family. He told us how much he enjoyed his interviews with Keith and found Keith's books so interesting.

Keith's mother and brother Erik asked us to extend their warm wishes to everyone at Ripcord, and to thank everyone for all of their generosity, concern and prayers during this difficult time. We will continue to stay in touch with them.

And, finally – Keith, you were called to rest too soon. You did so much for so many in the short life you had – and you will never be forgotten.

Mary and George Murphy



TRUST FUND FOR KEITH NOLAN'S DAUGHTER

For those who have missed the sad news, earlier this year Keith Nolan, the author of "Ripcord, Screaming Eagles Under Siege", and friend to many of the Ripcord survivors, has been diagnosed with fourth stage lung cancer. Many Ripcord Association members feel they owe a debt of gratitude to Keith for putting together the pieces and telling the story of our battle. By doing so, he has helped us get together once more and for many, vanquish some of the demons of the past. Keith continues to hang on, but the prognosis is not good at this time. In an effort to take some of the worry from Keith's mind, Chuck Hawkins suggested a trust fund for Keith's daughter be established. George and Mary Murphy took the idea and after a lot of hard work and continual effort, we now have an education trust fund set up for Keith Nolan's daughter Anna Britt Nolan.

Robert Patterson made the first donation. This was followed up by money donated at the reunion totaling \$1,550. Let's see if this organization and its members can continue the donation efforts for Anna Britt.

Anyone wishing to make a donation can send a check payable to the

"Anna Britt Nolan Trust"

Send it to:

Anna Britt Nolan Trust
C/O First Bank
6211 Midriver Mall Drive
St. Charles, MO 63304

Ripcord Reunion Registration 2009

Firestore Ripcord Association Reunion, October 7 – 11, 2009
Sands Ocean Club Resort, Myrtle Beach, SC

Yes, I'll be there!

I have not attended a Reunion since 1997 and have not received a Ripcord Coin.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ UNIT IN 'NAM _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Will a family member(s) or guest be sharing your accommodations? Yes No

How many including you? _____. If yes what are their names? (For name tag purposes only).

Arrival Date _____ Departure Date _____

TRANSPORTATION FROM THE AIRPORT IS PROVIDED BY COMPLEMENTARY AIRPORT SHUTTLE. MAKE RESERVATIONS FOR PICK UP AT LEAST 48 HOURS BEFORE ARRIVAL! (888-265-8864)

Registration fee of \$_____ is enclosed for #_____ Adults and #_____ children under 18.
\$50 for children under 18. For adults see discounts below !

DISCOUNTS FOR EARLY REGISTRATION:

Before June 30, 2009 – \$75 per adult

July 1 through 31, 2009 – \$80 per adult

August 1 through September 1, 2009 – \$85 per adult

After September 1, 2009 – \$90 per adult

Your registration fee covers the cost of the hospitality room, snacks and beverages, and dinner on Saturday.

Registration fee is due no later than September 30, 2009.

Make your check payable to "RIPCORDER ASSOCIATION"

Mail your check with this form to:

Lee Widjeskog, 493 Stillman Ave., Bridgeton, NJ 08302.

If you have questions call Lee at 856-451-1108 before 30 September 2009

AGENDA

- Wednesday, October 7:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Self guided tours and shopping)
Thursday, October 8: Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Golf in the AM) (Self guided tours)
Friday, October 9: Hospitality 1200 Hours. Ladies raffle 1900 hours (7 PM)
Saturday, October 10: Business meeting for association business in Hospitality room.
Dinner with cash bar starting at 1730 hours done by 2200 hours.
Sunday, October 11: Homeward bound

Thursday Golf Outing (not included in the registration fee) Check here if you will play

HOTEL RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY AND BY SEPTEMBER 9, 2009

USE THE OTHER FORM OR CALL 888-265-8846,
ASK FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS AND THE "RIPCORDER GROUP"
AND REFER TO THE GROUP CODE: "RIPCORDER"

Hotel Registration 2009

Firebase Ripcord Association Reunion, October 7 - 11, 2009

Hotel Reservation form for
Sands Ocean Club Resort
9550 Shore Drive
Myrtle Beach, SC 29572
Phone: (888) 265-8846
Group code: **RIPCORD**

Group Room Rate: Sunday thru Sunday \$75 per day + tax
(Breakfast included)

**A deposit for the first night's room and tax or a
Credit Card Number is required to guarantee this reservation.**

Room rate is available three days before and after the group-blocked dates.

Your Name: _____ Telephone # _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____ No. of Rooms _____

Roommate Name(s): _____

Room needs*: _____

** Although we cannot guarantee special requests, every effort will be made to meet your request.*

Deposit Enclosed: _____ Credit Card Number: _____ Exp: _____

Cardholder Signature Authorizing Hotel's Use of Credit Card: _____

PLEASE NOTE: *Those guests sending a cash deposit should be aware that a credit card imprint and valid, state-issued ID will be necessary upon check in. Should you wish to pay for your stay with cash, a credit card imprint and valid ID will still be required upon arrival to secure your accommodations.*

All cash payments are accepted upon departure.

Check-in time: 3:00 PM Check-out Time: 11:00 AM

To confirm reservations, please return form to the hotel or call by September 7, 2009.

We look forward to seeing you in October!

INCOMING MAIL

Hi Frank

Just wanted to say thank you again for welcoming me and Mary to the reunion. We had a wonderful time even after driving over 5,000 miles.

Good Luck Bro.

John and Mary Marlowe
Paratrooperjohn@aol.com

Hi Frank,

My name is Steve Cooper. I was drafted in September of 1969. Did Basic at Ft. Leonard Wood and AIT at Fort Ord. I arrived in Vietnam on March 10, 1970, and returned home May 14, 1971. I arrived in Vietnam with a 11B mos but was pulled to work at Division HQ when I arrived at the 101st. I worked in the Casualty Branch of the the Division at Phu Bai and was given the job of casualty reporting and letters of sympathy. Guess I ended up being a REMF but dealt with the tragedies of the war daily. A few years ago I bought Nolan's book and talked with him on the phone. For some reason I only got about half way through it until just recently when I picked it up again and finished it. Much of the Ripcord battle and others of 1970 and early 1971 are still in my memory. Thanks for having the web site and thanks to the men of the 101st and other units that served with honor during that difficult time. I remember sending a letter home after seeing an article in the army new paper in Nam.....I corrected the incorrect KIA's...WIA's...MIA's that were far below the totals for the period of July 1-23rd. Well I could probably ramble on for a long time but just wanted to say thanks again.

Sincerely,
Steve Cooper
sgcoop2@ckt.net

Frank,

Yesterday, Feb 3, 2009 I boarded a flight from Fairbanks to Anchorage. I was on my way to see the "Great Oz" aka the VA. As I boarded I noticed an Iraq Vet in a seat in front of mine. As I passed him we locked eyes and nodded. When I was seated I got up and went back up to him and thanked him for his service and mentioned I was on the way to the VA for repairs. After taking my seat I noticed him retrieving his back pack then he got up and came back to me. He then took my hand and shook it saying "Welcome Home" and something about we were never treated right. As he was shaking my hand he "coined" me with a spectacular medallion! He was a 1st Sergeant Medic with the 101st. The coin is gold with royal blue border that reads on one side "USA MEDDAC ALASKA" & "ARCTIC MEDIC" with a bear and mountains engraved. The other side has a black ring with "ARMY STRONG" & "ABOVE ALL WE CARE". The center of the coin is Royal Blue background and had the stars of the Big Dipper and Colonel's

insignia along with the 1st Sergeant strips then a serial number. I nearly lost it as I was already in an emotional unstable state due to my trip for a C & P exam. This was a gesture that I was very unfamiliar with. Over the years I have grown accustomed to being ignored all together or shunned as if I were a leper. I thought that you might like to know that the present Screaming Eagles are still wearing the patch with much pride and a lot of class.

John Lawrence
62nd Avn Co 212th CAB
1st Avn Brigade
69-71
lzflatfish@gci.net

Hi

I'm looking for anyone who may have served with my father in Vietnam. William Edward Whittaker. He was crew of Eagle 119, 159th Aviation Battalion Company C. He was a medivac pilot. He passed away in 1983, and I'm just trying to find anyone who knew him. Thank you for your service.

Sincerely, Lara
Mrs. Lara L. Townsend
hairbylara@gmail.com

Frank

We saw the National Geographic Special (at least the last two hours of it) and you certainly represented the Ripcord members well. It was the first time I had seen some of the footage. I still can't believe the carnage. You all are to be commended on what wonderful folks the Ripcord men have become after such an experience. You were all so young! (Even Bill, although he was almost 29 when he was there.)

Better go. Take care of yourself,
Sheila Williams
SNOMOLD@aol.com

Dear Frank,

My name is Gary Hill, and I just wanted to tell you that I work with a guy whose brother was killed on Jul. 2nd on FSB Ripcord. The soldier's name is Roger Dale Sumrall, a Sgt. with company E 2/506th. He is mentioned in the book by Mr. Nolan. I have read the "Hell on a hilltop" book, but not the other yet. I think my friend found out more about his brother's last day from the book than from the Army. I salute you all.

I was there at the same time, but further south and in an assault helicopter co. Our company took part in Lam Som 719.

Gary Hill
hill_g@bellsouth.net