



RIPCORD REPORT

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



Number 80

Summer, 2009

NEW JERSEY RAMBLINGS

by Lee Widjeskog

New Jersey Ramblings, June 2009

This past July, Kathy and I flew to Finland so I could meet my cousins and see where my father grew up before coming to this country. Needless to say I had a great trip! I have 6 first cousins that have had 14 children who in turn have had 26 children and some of these have been able to produce 4 more offspring. We met most of them and kept a genealogy table at hand to keep track of whose kids we were meeting.

I am fortunate in having a cousin who has retired and has a wealth of knowledge which he was able to pass along. This made the trip very interesting and helped me see how the Finns ended up where they are today.

The country has been over run by glaciers in the past, but the greatest elevation is not much above 1700 feet. There are lakes and ponds everywhere. With an area the size of New Mexico and only 5,000,000 people, there is a lot of room to roam. Over 70% of the land is covered by forest with the rest covered with farm fields. The people are concentrated along the south and western coast where the climate is generally mild even though they are far north. During the summer it is light out from June through August but then it is dark in the winter months much like Alaska. While we were there the weather was mild (in the 60's) and quite pleasant.

For history buffs, Finland did not become an independent country until 1918 during the Russian Revolution. Finland had been a Duchy of Russia and when the war broke out, the "White Finns" in Finland broke from the Communist "Red Finns" and set up their own independent country with an elected president and parliament style government.

During the battle for their independence, Field Marshall Mannerheim, formerly of the Czar's army, led the whites. His troops were successful in defeating the Russian backed "Reds" and establishing a new country. This new country went through the Great Depression much better

than most other nations due to frugal and conservative nature of the people. Their army was small and basically poorly armed.

In November of 1939, Russia invaded Finland in order to establish a greater buffer around Leningrad in case their German allies were to turn on them. Mannerheim was once more called upon to lead the troops, this time in defense of their nation. The heavily outnumbered Finns used guerilla tactics and the speed of ski mounted troops to disrupt, cut off and destroy divisions of Russian troops. Stalin who had purged the army of all officers with experience under the Czar made this easier. Additionally, The new officers had to share command with political officers who had to weigh in on all decisions to ensure they were the right ones for the people and the country. This dual command left field leaders unable to employ rapid decisions often needed in battle. The Finns took advantage of this as long as it lasted. After 6 months of "Winter War" 25,000 Finns had perished and over 200,000 invading Russian soldier had been killed, died of exposure, starvation, suicide or disease out of an army of 1,200,000 invaders. The Finns, while successful on the battlefield, were short of people and were forced to sign a peace treaty and cede land to Russia. The problem was they simply could not replace their losses.

The Finns fought the war with the whole country. In order to raise money to buy airplanes from Britain they asked all the married men and women to donate their gold wedding bands and in return they received a steel band. Over \$300,000 was raised in this manner and the planes were purchased as the war wound down.

Today, Finland still is concerned about their big neighbor to the east. All young men must report for duty by the time they are the age of 18. They spend 6 to 8 months in training (depending on their MOS) and then are given the option of service in the armed forces or going back to

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FROM THE EDITOR

Here it is "The Summer of 2009". I sure hope the economy is not going to stop you from coming to the reunion this year!. That would be a poor excuse to not see all your buddies from 39 years ago. The guys you were in combat situations with, the guys that helped you thru one of the worst battles in Vietnam, the guys you can't wait to see again, the guys that are waiting to see you again. So, I guess I just made your mind up for you. See you in Myrtle Beach this year. MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW!

Send me your Biography

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 is now working again)

Postage Stamps rate goes up again! So, if you can get the newsletter off our website, and do not need your newsletter mailed by Postal Service, please let me know at frank@ripcordassociation.com

ARTICLES

Deadline for the December issue will be November 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

(Please note 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

Wilburn Wall

Paul Buhr

Bill Hunt

Audrey Wrightsill

Charlie Tipton

Myrtle Beach Registration for the 2009 Ripcord Reunion

Uwe and Diane Meyer B 2/506

Fred Spaulding HHC

Ben and Caroline Harrison 3rd Bde

Lee and Kathy Widjeskog A 2/506

John Beadle & Noreen Labadie A 2/11

Alfred Martin 2/11 Arty

Terry Stanger A 159th ASHB

Rob Lloyd

Bob & Red Judd B 2/506

Tex Campbell D 2/506

Paul Buhr A2/506

Ben & Lillian Peters B2/506

Floyd & Diane Alexander A2/506 & B2/319th

George Stenehjem 158th Assault Bn

Peter & Chris Meloro C2/506

Wilburn Wall 2/506

Audrey Wrightsell A2/11th

Charles & Juanita Tipton C2/506

Craig & Sandy VonHout B2/506

Tim & Susa Newman A2/506

Bill & Ruby Hand B2/506

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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SURVIVAL IN THE JUNGLE

by Lee Widjeskog

An infantryman in the jungles of Vietnam needed two essential pieces of equipment with him at all times to stay alive and healthy. The M-16 and the P-38.

C-Rations, just the word strikes cords in the memory bank of time spent in Vietnam. Those who were grunts with the 101st during the Ripcord adventure lived for weeks at a time on this nutritious if not tasty food source provided by our Uncle Sam.

According to the Army, each complete meal contained approximately 1200 calories. That assumes that you would actually eat all you were given. If you kept all that was issued in the box the total weight was 2.7 pounds. Since we carried our meals and water on our backs, the first thing you learn was to take only what you know you would eat in an attempt to keep the weight down.

Each case of "C's" came with boxes known as B-1, B-2 or B-3 units.

B-1 units would contain one of four meat choices: Beef-steak, ham slices, turkey loaf or chopped ham and eggs. Deserts would have been applesauce, fruit cocktail, peaches or pears. This was supplemented by a can of four crackers, a can of peanut butter and a candy disc wrapped in aluminum foil contained chocolate, cream chocolate or coconut chocolate.

B-2 boxes held beans and wieners, spaghetti and meatballs, beefsteak w/ potatoes and gravy or ham and lima beans for the meat choices. Desert was fruitcake, pecan roll or pound cake. To round out the meal you got a tin of four crackers and plain cheese spread, caraway flavored or pimento flavored for your crackers.

The B-3 units were to include boned chicken, meat loaf, spiced beef or chicken and noodles for meats. Another can held the white bread in a can about 2 inches high and 2.5 inches across. You might have received 4 cookies along with jam choices of apple, berry, grape, mixed fruit or strawberry. Last but not least you got cocoa beverage powder.

With each meal box came an accessory pack, which contained salt, pepper, instant coffee, sugar, non-dairy creamer, 2- chicklets, a pack of 4 cigarettes, matches, toilet paper and a plastic spoon.

Generally, for most guys the least desired meals were ham and eggs or the ham and lima beans. Not many liked the fruitcake but it was edible, as was all the food. Many of the troops carried some hot sauce or tabasco sauce to spice things up. Some of us carried quick cooking rice (Minute Rice) which was supplied in Alpha 2/506 by our Vietnamese interpreter, Sergeant Long, whenever he went



Above: The M-16 rifle went where ever you went and could shoot faster than you could load it.



Left: P-38 The G.I. can opener, it went with you at all times and there was not a can of C-rations it couldn't get into fast.

to the rear. This was cooked with water and added to the basic meal or in some cases eaten dry while on the march. Sweetened Kool-Aid was a favorite for adding to the water in an effort to kill the taste of treated water.

The cans were opened with a P-38 can opener, which we all carried and new ones came with a case of C's. If you haven't seen one, it is a piece of steel, 1.5" long and 1/2" wide with a notch and a sharpened crescent that swung out and cut into the can. (See the photo). Once opened the can was heated over heat tabs that came wrapped in aluminum foil or if you were out of them you would use a small piece of C-4 plastic explosives. This could be lit with a match and the white-hot flame would quickly heat your cup of water for coffee, tea or cocoa.

In Alpha Company 2/506, we had our own "Iron Chef" in the person of Tom Swayne. Tom carried the M-60 machinegun but also toted a frying pan his mother sent from home. In this pan he combined many of the ingredients found in the food boxes and added garlic salt, onion salt, hot sauce, ketchup or onions to perk up the taste. One of his favorites was ham slices heated with the cheese spread poured on top. During one of the times when the unit was many days between re-supply he had a meal of ketchup and onions.

Others would take the spaghetti and meatballs and add the cheese spread over the top for a taste treat.

Another concoction made by many of the grunts was to add cocoa powder, two packs of instant coffee, creamer and sugar to 16 ounces of hot water. Great way to end a day of trudging through the jungle.

After a few weeks in the jungle all the C-rations were the same to the grunts but it was filling and generally nutritious. You seldom gained weight in the jungle since you would burn off all the calories you ate. Possible the only meal most would still eat is the beans and wieners.

Today the C-Rations are a thing of the past. Soldiers are given MRE's (Meals Ready To Eat). These come in foil and plastic with a built in heater and all you need to do is add water. No can opener needed today but the rifle is still an essential item. Some things never change.

Ramblings

Continued from Page 1

civilian life. But even as a civilian, you are in the reserves until you are 40 years old just in case your country needs you.

I have given you all this information in hopes it might explain what I felt while there. As my cousin introduced me to his friend and associates, he always mentioned that I was a Vietnam veteran and it always drew a positive response. This was because in Finland, veterans are greatly appreciated for having sacrificed and helped their country and it seemed that the people always hold them in honor. Apparently they feel a similar way towards all war veterans. Many of the little villages had memorials to their veterans both dead and alive. It seemed that all were quite interested in the condition of Vietnam Veterans and how they are doing today. I was more aware of being a veteran while there and in a very positive mode, than I do in most cases back home. In all it was a great visit!

Now I am preparing for yet another positive event where being a veteran is well appreciated. The Myrtle Beach Ripcord Reunion!!!! I am looking forward to meeting the new people who have signed up as well as renewing friendships with those that have been able to come once more. See you in South Carolina!



The Dedication of the Johnson Co. Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Photo of Karen Bixby wife of CPL Virgil M. Bixby A/2-506 KIA 22 July 70 THUA THIEN VN.

Just wanted all to know that on May 30th 2009 we will be honoring one of your fallen comrades, CPL Virgil M. Bixby KIA 22 July 70 THUA THIEN VN. We have a new Johnson Co. Iowa Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I served with the 326 Engrs. and am an era vet. God Bless You and thanks!!

INCOMING MAIL

HI FRANK

THANKS FOR THE NEWSLETTER MY SELF AND REX MILLER WILL BE THERE REPRESENTING THE 158 TH ASSU-ALT HELICOPTER BN WHO SUPPORTED YOUR BN THRU THE WHOLE BATTLE I WAS JUST AT WEST POINT FOR MY AND ANDRES 55TH REUNION I HAVE THE DVD OF THE DEDICATION OF THE LUCAS HISTORY CENTER AND WILL BRING IT TO MYRTLE BEACH IN OCT 09 THANKS AGAIN SEE U IN OCT COL RET GEORGE STENEHJEM

Gjsten@aol.com

Hello Frank.

This is Sean Cox, son of Tony Cox, D 1/506th. My Dad usually forwards the Ripcord newsletters to me, as he did today, and it reminded me that I've always meant to send you and they guys of the Ripcord Association a note and I figured there's no better time than now.

As I get older and I learn more about the Vietnam war, I am intrigued by people, like my father and the many men who served in Vietnam, who were put into a situation, and while trying to survive and look out for their fellow brothers who served beside them, become men of heroic actions and ideals. The same men who served their country, day after day, promising to do what they could to never to leave a soldier behind and creating a bond of brotherhood only men of a greater cause can experience.

I mention this because, thanks to the kindness of the veterans who attend the Ripcord reunions, I was able to experience and catch a glimpse of this special bond. I've been fortunate to have attended three reunions and they are memories I will always cherish. I don't know if those who have yet to experience it can fully appreciate it, but to be invited into a Vietnam veteran's inner circle of fellow veterans, and to sit and listen and take in what these men went through is such an appreciative and humbling experience. These guys allowed me to share in their experiences and their personal feelings towards the Vietnam war. That is something not to be taken for granted and for that I thank every veteran who has allowed me to do so.

I feel the term "hero" is thrown around too easily these days but I try to take it seriously. It's common for people to claim athletes and entertainers as their childhood heroes, and I have no problem with that if that's how they truly feel, but the men who served in Vietnam are the definition of a hero in my book. They simply tried to survive and look out for their brothers on the battlefield and I have a lot of respect for these men. I am proud to call my father a hero.

Thank you,
Sean Cox
Indianapolis, IN
southernharmony@aim.com

INCOMING MAIL

Frank,

I'm trying to find out information about my 1st cousin Marshall K. Jones, 101st Airborne Div. He died August 20, 1970, which is listed on the Wall. His tour in country started in 1969. Please help if you can.

Thank you,
James Wooley
jhw_n@windstream.net

Sir,

I would like to inquire about possible membership(associate) in the FSB Ripcord Association. I am interested in directing my future academic studies in the direction of the American war in Indochina.

I am currently a senior at MONTREAT College, NC, and am majoring in History. I am currently working on my senior thesis which is titled American combat in Indochina: 1968-1971. I have become absolutely intrigued with the history of FSB Ripcord. My main goal is to bring more recognition to the aspects of the Vietnam conflict, in particular the later years.

I truly look forward to associate membership in this society.

God Bless,
David Long
longds@montreat.edu

Frank

I saw you on the National Geographic channel last night.....very good.....

I wasn't on the ground but I was overhead every day and most nights. As you moved southeast after the main event I came in one morning to stop a firefight, it was very foggy in a tight valley. I checked on you, called Chuck every day after that, after D Company joined up and the extraction, I called at least once a day sometimes twice, would shoot when asked, spoke to the RTO when Chuck got hit in the neck, I could hear him mumble in a whisper. I personally have an emotional tie to A Company because of that ten days or so, however long it was..... You earned the right to be heard and you did well, I am proud to know you..... thanks.... rf

Rick Freeman
Cobra pilot at Ripcord

Frank,

Just finished reading "Ripcord." Holy Shit!!!! Our little skirmish on FSB Granite on 22 March 1970 was hardly more than a popgun fight by comparison. Was surprised Nolan even bothered mentioning it, other than as back-

ground on CPT Phillip Michaud (who took over running B/2/319th Arty when CPT Rich was evacuated). Michaud was formerly the BC of A/2/319th - he and I were the only members of the battery at Granite awarded the Purple Heart and Silver Star. Now I know how he was awarded both again at Ripcord, not to mention the 24/7 heroics everyone else performed there for 23+ days. Once again, HOLY SHIT!

BIG Welcome Home, Bro!
Ralph "Doc" Matkin
rmatkin82@aol.com

Hi Frank,

I have been trying to read all the info on Ripcord I can find, to make sense of the experience I had with my involvement of the situation.

I've read most of the newsletters, but not all.

I am wondering what happened to a fellow by the name of Bill Aeschliman? He was in some of the first newsletters but isn't listed in the membership now.

He was listed as being in the 2/320th and I was wondering if he was attached to B Battery or what? His name sounds familiar. It would be great to contact someone else that was in my unit.

It doesn't look like I can make the reunion this year. My wife's Grandparents live in Springfield Mo. so maybe in 2010.

I have attached two letters I sent home from Firebase Gladiator that I transposed word for word, and a preface letter that I typed today.

I hope you can use them in an issue of the newsletter.

Let me know what you think.

They are genuine, and from the heart.

Thanks for the welcome email you sent the other day.

I'm looking forward to meeting everyone one day soon.

Take care,
Steve Farling
Stephen Farling [stevefarling@yahoo.com]

(Editor note: I am going to put Steve's letter on our website in the future)

Another great newsletter. I will be at the National EOD Association/Vietnam EOD Veterans Association convention at the same time as yours. I am also going to Afghanistan in June to work for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for 90 days. I'll put you on my blog list.

Stu Steinberg
287th Ord. Det. (EOD)
Phu Bai, Vietnam

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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

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Frank,

I just watched the TV documentary "Inside the Viet Nam War" on National Geographic aired on January 19, 9-12 PM Mountain Standard time and recognized your name, nice job. I was with the Charlie Company 2nd/506 from November 69-June 70.

Also, have Firebase Ripcord - War Stories with Ollie North recorded. Good stuff with Doc Cafferty and Burke. I remember Doc and Paul Burke well.

Nearly 40 years since we went there. I was with the 82nd from June 69-November 69, then transferred to the 101st in November 69.

Maybe sometime I'll try a reunion sounds like Laughlin was a good time. I look at the website often.

Welcome home!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Rick Walsh

rsjkb@msn.com

Another Wash. D.C Gathering

Carol and Fred Gilbert D/2-506 are planning another Ripcord Gathering in Wash. D.C May 14 - 16, 2010

Check out the last gathering we had on our website.

If you are interested in attending, call Carol at 4106722311/4102943519/ or e mail carolg50@verizon .net May 14-16 go to DC on the 15th all day trip.

Hi Frank,

Kathy and I have returned from our auto tour to the west coast and back without mishap!

While in Seattle I met a member of D 2/506 by the name of Jim Russell of Wyoming. I gave him my e-mail and phone number and told him of the web site and the reunion. He was on Ripcord in May and June but said he had tried to put it out of his mind since then. Who knows he may contact me and come to a reunion. Time will tell.

Frank,

My name is George Toole Jr., my father was a green beret assigned to the 101st on fsb Ripcord. He was there early in his tour in Vietnam and often spoke about this place. I remember him saying that after going through what happened on Ripcord he was sure he would never survive a whole year in Vietnam. Fortunately he did survive, physically at least. I have heard the story of the Chinook getting shot down several times and about the hill being so overrun with NVA that he had to flee in a hail of bullets, just like on TV I thought as a child. I do not doubt my father was a hero as are all of you that survived such atrocities but I never met the man who was a hero just a shell of a once proud man. This is actually why I am writing you, I am now 33 years old, born July 4, 1976 on Ft

Cambell, which made my father very happy I'm told but am estranged from him now. Growing up with this man was very difficult to say the least as I am sure many children of Vietnam vets went through the same things my sister and I did. What I'm trying to find out is who he was in 1970. Is there anyone you have contact with that might have known him or may have pictures to go with some of the stories I heard growing up maybe it could help me on the path to forgiveness and reconciliation with my father. His name is SSgt George Toole although he may not have been a Staff Sgt at that time. As I wrote earlier in this letter he was a green beret, Irpp, assigned to the 101st E company 2/506th. I tried to learn what I could from Keith Nolan's book and Ollie North's special on TV but his unit was barely mentioned. Any help you could give me would be appreciated and I thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely, George B Toole Jr.

gtoolejr@gmail.com

I will never forget

I was on firebase ripcord two days before it was run over, I was with the 1/ 506
harolddharrod@aol.com

War Stories with Oliver North

"Martin Hinton sent a link to hulu.com where you can watch several episodes of war stories. Ripcord isn't one, but if you request it and more on Vietnam he can use that interest to help get more on the site."

Click this link and send in your request

<http://www.hulu.com/war-stories-with-oliver-north>

National Geographic Channel

"Inside the Vietnam War"

Date to be aired: Thursday, September 10, 2009

8 PM ET/PT on NGTV

Several Ripcord Veterans, Fred Spaulding and Frank Marshall, were interviewed for this show which includes The Battle of Ripcord

Make Your Reservations Now Don't Delay

2009 Ripcord Reunion

Oct 7 - 11, 2009

Sands Ocean Club Resort

Myrtle Beach, SC



<http://www.sandsresorts.com/resorts/oceanclub/>