



# RIPCORD REPORT

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



Number 84

Winter, 2011

## Jersey Ramblings

by Lee Widjeskog

Each year as September rolls around I find myself wondering where all the time has gone. This is due to the habit of volunteering for various organizations such as the local South Jersey Sportsmen Jamboree, Ducks Unlimited, Cumberland County Federation of Sportsmen, and the Ripcord Association. It seems that by September all of them need some of my time and it is soon apparent I do not have as much to go around as I once did. Very gradually I am reducing my volunteer load or will at least distribute it over a wider range of months. In recent years my priority has been the Ripcord Association and it will be in the foreseeable future. I absolutely enjoy preparing the reunions for our members. The best part is when new guys show up and go away glad they came!

This year we held the biggest and best reunion since the spectacular one put on by Jim Campbell and his helpers! With 24 new first time attendees we were kept busy trying to insure that they were introduced around and made to feel at home.

As usual, Mike "The Barber" Chiarelli came and cut hair for donations to Ripcord. This year he brought in \$300, his best year ever! We would like to thank Mike and to those who got a good haircut for their donations!

While that was one of our high lights, we were all concerned when General Harrison had to be hospitalized after a gall bladder attack. Dr. Harris was on the scene and finally convinced the General that he needed to get treatment now. He has since had his surgery and has recovered and is running about almost as good as new. His wife is also doing fine after getting a pacemaker installed. At this rate the two of them will be dancing on tables at the next reunion!

As often is the case, following the reunion, Kathy and I took some time to vacation in the area of the reunion. We traveled down to the Corpus Christi area to visit a friend from New Jersey. A few days later we headed towards the river and eventually spent time in the Big Bend National Park. From there

we headed up towards Kermit and discovered fields of inland sand dunes deposited and shifting over the millennia. For us this was quite exotic and made for an interesting personal discovery.

Up in Lubbock, TX we met with Col. Buessler and his wife Kathy. We presented them with a pair of the coffee mugs the Colonel donated to the reunion and talked about their work for a time.

The next day we traveled to the small farming community of Littlefield. Amid miles and miles of cotton fields we met with the mother of my college roommate. She used to send me reward posters offering pecan pies for information about her son who never seemed to find time to write home. Thanks to his lax writing efforts and my response, I was able to get many pies while in school.

We finished off our tour of Texas with a visit to the Palo Duro Canyon State Park. This was once part of a million acre ranch which kept the cattle in the canyon during the winter to protect them from the cold and pasture them in the high ground during the summer. Quite an operation with over 100,000 head of cattle.

When our trip was over we had driven over 6,000 miles with 2,500 miles in Texas alone. An amazing state!

See you next year in Indianapolis!

**Ripcord Reunion 2011**  
**Oct 5, 2011 thru Oct 10th 2011**  
will be held at  
**Indianapolis Marriott East**  
**Indianapolis, IN**  
More information in the next  
newsletter and on our website  
**[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)**

# FROM THE EDITOR

Our 40th Anniversary Reunion in Ft Worth Texas is over. Wow, what a great reunion this one was. Everyone had a great time. As mentioned a few times in this newsletter, there were a lot of "Cherries", ( first timers) that were welcomed and everyone enjoyed having them there.

If you have never been to a reunion, you just have to try one. To me, it is like a family reunion (many others have also said this too).

I look forward to the next four reunions that are already planned. The next two are in Indianapolis, and the following two are in Myrtle Beach. I am not saying one is better than the other, but don't miss the sun and fun, the beach and ocean, the big patio on the beach with a bar and band, and October in South Carolina, you can still hang out on the beach.

Hope to see you all at the next reunion.

## E-mail address

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.

## Postal Mail Delivery

If you get the newsletter by Postal mail, and you DID NOT send the postcard enclosed in the mailed newsletter. back to us, then you ARE NOT receiving this newsletter! If you wish to continue receiving the newsletter by postal mail, please contact me at [frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation.com) or at my address below.

## Biographies on our website.

I still need a lot of you to send me your biography for our website. Let me know about your Ripcord experience, and you can also tell us about your family and life after Ripcord. Send them to:

[frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation.com) or at my address below.

## ARTICLES

Deadline for the Dec. issue will be Feb. 1, 2011. Please send all articles, photos, incoming mail and interesting reading to:

**Frank Marshall**

**5 Taconia Ct**

**Mt Laurel, NJ 08054**

**or e-mail to: [frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation.com)**

## 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 website and newsletters published to keep all our Ripcord members up to date.

Bill Williams

Dick Cable

Wilburn Wall

Dale Tauer

John Lawrence

Dave Bridges

Daryl Reina

Steve Morgan

James Mccooy

Dale Falconer

Isabelino Vazquez

Jim Harris

## DONATIONS:

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

**Lee Widjeskog,**

**493 Stillman Ave.**

**Bridgeton, NJ 08302**

## 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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# Ripcord Reunion 40 years later!

In early October 2010, survivors of the Battle for Fire Support Base Ripcord, got together in Fort Worth Texas to see how everyone was faring after 40 years. A total of 168 men, women and children showed up to celebrate the survival and remember the many that we lost over the 5 months operating in and around FSB Ripcord.

The hotels was great, Fort Worth was warm and friendly, the pleasant hotel staff worked very hard to make up for the short comings of the reservation staff, the hospitality room generally well stocked and there was plenty of room to visit and talk with the old and new friends that come with attending the reunions.

Many of the attendees were able to get downtown to see the demonstration put on in the streets with local cowboys and the long-horned steers that were once the main stay of Texas cattle production. Others went to the museum which houses a variety of significant art work from through out the world. And of course, all spent much time in the hospitality room meeting long forgotten buddies and seeing how recent friends had fared over the past year.

As an added bonus this year, Col Buessler generously provided a commemorative coffee mug with each registration. There was also a CD of the great work Robin Graham put together to allow us all a chance to solidify or enhance our memories of the battle and where we were on a given day. A printed copy of the CD was available for the attendees to read and peruse as they tried to see what happened on a certain date in the Ripcord battle.

One of the Kingsmen (Gerry Morgan) was able to persuade Bobby Hawk of Argyle, TX to fly in his own personal UH-1 helicopter. It was landed in the parking lot outside the hotel. The sight, sound, and nearness of this machine that meant so much to all the troops in the 101st, still sent chills up spines and dredged up deep feelings of anticipation as the appearance and thump, thump, thump of the Huey did when you were in the field. Suddenly we were all 20 years old again and nervously ready to fly into a jungle LZ. Thoughts and feelings come pouring out of the depths of our minds with the sound, sights and nearness of the UH-1. You're brain is saying "Stay low !" "Keep away from the tail rotor!" "Get in quick!" "Get off fast and get away from the chopper!" Luckily, it was not necessary to move fast or jump into the plane, because the floor of the chopper presently looks a lot higher than it did 40 years

ago. Who would have thought that metal could expand and grow that much without breaking !!! I am not certain how we managed to jump up onto the floors carrying our weapons and 60 to 90 pound rucksacks. (Oh! To be young, agile, light and in great shape once more!).

While the days were busy site visiting, the evenings were well used at the hospitality room and going out to eat. Thursday night Fred Gilbert and friends hustled out to a steak and rib place and met a couple of police officers. He told them what we were doing and invited them down. Before long we had three or four officers chatting with the Ripcord guys learning about the war. It was a great time for all.

On Friday night hot food was served in the hospitality room and the annual Ladies Raffle held. Items were donated by the men and women of Ripcord and raffled off by placing tickets in a cup. This year \$2,400 was raised and used to offset the cost of the hospitality room. Following the raffles a group headed out to "Billy Bobs" for steak and ribs. It seems they even made it back before dawn!

Saturday night found everyone attending the annual banquet. This year we were treated to a buffet Texas Bar-B-Que style. From the corn bread to the ribs, chicken and brisket it was a delicious meal.

Perhaps, since it was the 40th Anniversary, we had a lot of first time people attend. This year we were able to give Ripcord coins to 24 men as well as Jan Kalsu, the wife of Bob Kalsu who died on Ripcord and Ulla Nolan, mother of author Keith Nolan who's writing about the battle has helped to bring us together once more.

First timers were Bob Worrell B 2/501, Bill Best HHC 2/501, Roger Black and Jim McCoy both of D1/506, Fred Connor HHC 2/506, Bruce Brady, Bill Heath, Bill Helvey, Bill Rose and David Yonts all from A 2/506, Raulend Whiteis B 2/506, Dale Cooper, John Kuenen, Bob Leibecke and Bob Tarbuck all from C 2/506, Dave Bridges 426th S&S Bn., Gerry Morgan B 101st AHB, Bill Ianniello, Kirby Schaffer, and Don Stamps of the 159th AHCB, Jim Joyce and Benny Mulkey of the Pathfinders, Gene Marshall B 2/319 FA, and John Reilly 2/11 FA, Each man is a brother to us and was welcomed by the group. We are thrilled to have them attend the re-union and hope they can attend again in the future.

Lee Widjeskog

# INCOMING MAIL

Frank

Thought you may enjoy my recollection of our July insertion on hill 902:

We were at Camp Evans on stand down (we were the ready reaction battalion for the division) when we were told we would be relieving a company that had been in contact for several days and had lost their company commander (found out when reading the Ripcord book that it was Hill 902); most of the details weren't passed on to the rank and file, probably better that we didn't know. We took heavy artillery & mortar fire as we were lifted in, the 506th guys were scrambling to get on the birds and off that hill as fast as possible while at the same time our pilot hovered above the LZ.

I decided it wasn't in my best interest to be hovering above a hot LZ; I leaped from the Huey while forgetting about the 80 lbs of rucksack on my back. The short jump closely resembled a front 1/2 flip which landed me on my back, lost most of my C rations, cut my arm, I crawled into the nearest hole, I then had an opportunity to look around me to see the total devastation. Needless to say, we soon found out this was not a very good place to spend a summer day.

Once again you are doing a great job with the Ripcord website.

Thanks,

Brian Eveleth

BEveleth@gwu.edu

Frank,

I am trying to find out if anyone in the association was in Co. D, 2/506th on July 21, 1970. Co. D was sent in to help a company from the 501st I believe. I along with Marc Skinner was on the first two helicopters to come in on the hot lz. a bunker was knocked out and a 51. cal machinegun was captured. I was point and a guy named "snake" was my slack man when we moved off the lz. unfortunately snake stepped on a mine or booby trap and lost his right leg below the knee. I took a lot of the shrapnel in my backpack and a piece got me in the buttocks. A guy that carried the m60 was hit in his hairline also. We finally reached the company where Cpt. Rollison called in an airstrike to take out a mortar position within a few hundred yards. If there is anyone out there who remembers this

event please contact me.

Larry King

king.larry4771@yahoo.com

Sir:

I served in the Marines in Nam (India 3/4 1967-68). I read "Ripcord" several years ago and was fascinated by it. I was trying to remember, and maybe you can help me, wasn't there a passage in the book regarding the lack of immediate artillery support when certain units were heavily engaged with NVA infantry? Something about the U.S. Congress had allocated a certain number of rounds for the batteries and therefore fire support was delayed? If you know where that is in the book it would be most appreciated or any other information you might have on that subject.

James Cool

jamesdarelcool@yahoo.com

To whom it may concern;

I was a pointman, with the Geronimo's, C- Co- 2/501st, 101st Airborne Division Airmobile, during the battles of Operation Texas Star, Firebase's, Gladiator, Granite, & Ripcord, and saw the build up of the NVA before & after the withdrawal & return. The surrounding hills 902-Re-up Hill, Hill 805, trails etc,.... See attachment; I was there & survivor. What has been lost in translation of what happened during those battles. We were attached with 2/506, and remember LTC. Lucas, working out every day on Ripcord. I pretty much blocked out, what happened during those battles, after returning home August 8, 1970, tour completed. But, in the last 3 years its all coming back as if it was 40 years ago. I am proactive in my experiences in battle, and remind our grunts what we faced, having walked that path, and advice those grunts who are in harms way as I write. Those who we lost during those battles will always remain on the wall. We returned after your withdrawal, of Ripcord to Hill 902. I volunteered along with another grunt on a forward observation post, we would take 4 hour watches. When we finally left, I was on the last bird out. I salute your site and all those who are still with us & welcome home.

Mondo,

titanmondo@aol.com

# INCOMING MAIL

Dear Frank,

Thanks for the recent Ripcord newsletter!

On the 22d of July my wife and I went up to the Johnson County Iowa Vietnam Veterans Memorial to place Virgil Bixby's cross, wreath and flag at the stone for the day. We do this 9 times a year on the dates of the loss of our Johnson County Vietnam Vets. I could not help but think of all you men from the 101st that took part in Ripcord, that any of you survived that ordeal is a miracle.

My wife bless her heart had purchased me a copy of Keith Nolan's Ripcord Screaming Eagles Under Siege in early July, once I started reading it I could not put it down. What all of you went through those four months in that AO was put into true perspective as I read the book. Prior to our dedication of the memorial I had the honor of speaking to you about Virgil and about the 22d of July in particular, you shared a great deal with me that morning and for that I am most appreciative, the book brought it all together for me. It is hard for me to put into words my emotions about what went on there and about how I feel for all of you.

Just know that like thousands of others I CARE about each and every one of our Vietnam Vets. Having served with the 101st tho I will always have a special place in my heart for all of the Ripcord Veterans.

In Keith's book he writes about a SSG Ronlad L. Henn from Co. C 326th Engrs. and how he worked tirelessly to remove 105 shells (page 363) that were strewn about when a CH-47 was shot down during a resupply. Ron Henn was my 1SG when I arrived at Co D 326th Engrs. in May of 75. He retired in Dec of 75 and taught elementary school at Campbell for 20 years, retired and is now a Methodist minister in the Hopkinsville, Ky area. My wife and I see him every couple years and hear from him each Christmas. He was a good 1SG and I think that for the most part he spent all his time with the 101st, airborne all the way.

Enough of my ramblings. may God continue to bless you Frank as I know he did forty years ago when he brought you and the rest of those men back from that hill.

With the greatest respect,  
Brad McGowan  
Kalona, Iowa  
iowashovel@earthlink.net

To Editor

While I understand that the site is originated by my infantry brothers I would like it if some recognition be given to the arty guys. If nothing else I believe Capt. David Rich is a very good and colorful candidate to give recognition to. Just a thought.

rd719@roadrunner.com

Russ Dixon

2nd/319th

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Dear Ripcord Family

I want to thank each of you with all my heart for such a wonderful time at the Ripcord Reunion Dinner!

My sister Gerri and I thoroughly enjoyed being with our "Ripcord Family" and soon realized we wished we would have been there for the whole weekend!

We left that evening with the best laughs with each of you that I have had in a long time and at the same time we were able share the deepest thoughts and sorrows of our hearts (as you could with us) knowing that we understood each other.

It was so heart warming to be with old friends again and meet so many new ones. What a beautiful family God had given me with each of you.

I know without a doubt that I could call on any of you for help and you would be here in a moments notice to assist me in any way.

I hope that you always know you can call on me also. I'm not very good at tasks, but I sure can be a good prayer warrior anytime you need one!

General Harrison I was so sorry that I missed seeing you but was so relieved to hear that you are getting back to good health.

I look forward to seeing you next year.

I can tell you all without a doubt that my sister Gerri and I will not even think of missing the 2011 Reunion in Indianapolis and already have it marked down on our calendar!

All of you are my heroes!  
With love and gratitude,  
Jan Kalsu

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Frank,

We had a great time in Fort Worth, Texas! We want to thank Fred Spaulding, Lee and Kathy, Red

# INCOMING MAIL

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and Bob Judd for all of their hard work. Our hotel accommodations were great and there was more to see and do than time allowed. We truly appreciate the time and effort you have made to make the reunion such a success.

We want to thank Ulla Nolan for coming this year. We knew she would be embraced by our Ripcord Family and she is already talking about coming again next year!

Frank, you're doing an outstanding job with the website. It's great to see the pictures being sent in by everyone . . . and allowing us to share the photos.

Thanks to all of the Ripcord Members who made this year's raffle for the Anna Britt Nolan Trust so successful. We are another step closer to the dream of a college education for this young lady.

George and Mary Murphy  
racenpace@sbcglobal.net

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Dear members of The Ripcord Association,

Thank you Thank you for the wonderful weekend I spent with you. I had such a fun and healing time.

You were all so kind and loving talking about our Keith. I am grateful to George and Mary Murphy for pushing me into coming. You gave me a beautiful room. I had fun in the bed!! one side hard ,one side soft and then like goldilocks finding the perfect spot.

I am grateful love, Ulla A. Nolan

Special thanks to Frank for the newsletter and to Lee and Cathy Widjeskog for working so hard and mr Barber I love my haircut.

Ulla A. Nolan  
ullaanolan@hotmail.com

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After Action Report-Fort Worth Reunion  
Gentlemen:

One of you made a request that all first time attendees send you an email with impressions, opinions, etc. That is the purpose of this email.

I have attended a couple of my company's reunions (B-2/501), and I enjoyed the Ripcord reunion every bit as much, maybe more, than my unit's. I thought the hotel was excellent, and the staff were well prepared for our

group. The table at the entry to the hospitality suite that was manned by Lee and his wife was well organized and got folks off to a good start; the "goody bag" was great, and Robin's CD is priceless! The table with stickers, books, plates, shirts, etc. to buy also was well done, and reasonably priced. The golf outing on Thursday was at a nice course, very reasonably priced, and everyone enjoyed the round (even if Fred did school us big time!). I would have liked to have seen one or two organized outings on Thursday and Friday that might appeal to couples or wives abandoned by their golfing husbands. I'm thinking that a bus trip to the Stockyards or some other touristy place(s) in Fort Worth or Dallas paid for by those that signed up for it would have been nice had my wife attended. Spouses of first time attendees probably don't know anyone else, and organized outing(s) might help break the ice.

The dinner Saturday evening was excellent and nicely done. I like the idea of having a coat and tie function (my unit's Saturday outing is always informal and, while nice, doesn't quite send the same message of honor/respect/patriotism. Most of the guys wore lapel pins or badges which was nice. The unit flags behind the podium were amazing-somebody did a lot of work on that. I've never seen so many pictures taken at a dinner like this- I look forward to the yearbook. It did go a little long- I dashed up to the room after 3-1/2 hours to get a pill that I needed to take, and missed the picture of first time reunion attendees. Lee, you did a great job as MC for the evening-thanks for all your hard work!

Guess that's about it, other than to say what a great thrill it was to meet you guys and other Ripcord vets in person. I felt very honored to be able to sit next to Chuck Hawkins and Doc Harris at dinner. Thanks for everything- I'll see you in Indianapolis next year!

Bob Worrall  
bob@thewoodagency.com

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The Ripcord 40th Anniversary Reunion Was Great!! I'm so glad that I attended and met a 100 guys and now have friends, that we can meet at the Indy 2011. I enjoyed and will add this to my calendar every year.

Lucky Bill Rose  
Co A 2/506 Inf.  
lostowl@sbcglobal.net

# INCOMING MAIL

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Frank,

Please send my copy of updated newsletter to the above email address. The reunions are great for my morale. I don't suppose you get thanked much for decades of unpaid service. As a journalism professor I know how hard it is to get clean copy out on deadline. I know about all those sticky fingered details that consumes so much time... I thank you. I think the only thing that can sustain you, besides the help of like minded people, is the passionate belief that something of great significance happened at the battle no one ever heard of-Ripcord.

Thanks again,

Tim Haley

haley95123@sbcglobal.net

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Frank

I just want to thank everyone involved in putting together the 2010 Ripcord Reunion. I've had the pleasure of attending a few reunions over the years and I appreciate all the effort that is put into such an enjoyable event. And thank you to all the veterans who allow me to share in such a personal and important moment in your lives. It's an experience I will always cherish. Thank you.

Sean Cox

(son of Tony Cox D 1/506th)

southernharmony@aim.com

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Frankie:

The reunion was great this year. Mary and I particularly enjoyed the evening spent with you at Billy Bob's. You are a most remarkable person and dear friend. Keep me posted from time to time.

Your pal,

Jim

james.campbell@cookyanacey.com

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Interesting Book

"Warriors Remembered" by Al Nahas, USMA 1967  
Maybe our members would find this interesting.

Thanks again for a great job on the newsletter and the reunion. It was remarkable to see 20+ who have never attended before.

Jeff Wilcox

jeff@jeffwilcox.com

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From Gen Ben Harrison

Carolyn had a routine checkup with her pacemaker Friday, 5 Nov. Everything works just like it is supposed to. She sleeps better and starting to have more energy. My tummy area of the gall bladder surgery is still a bit tender. The catheter hole is healing nicely, and I too am getting a bit stronger.

We just spent Friday and Saturday out at our deer camp for opening weekend. I shot a nice size doe to give to a friend who wanted some deer meat. The land owner is always wanting us to thin out the doe herd.

We are going to a dinner tonight honoring Veterans Day and I will be putting on my Dress Blues for the first time in 31 years.

Ben L. Harrison

bharr7232@aol.com

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Frank,

I came across your contact info tonight on the Ripcord website. is the site still active/do you still get email at this address?

I ended up on the website as I was researching Lt. Bob Kalsu. I'm now a 35 year old who was deployed to FOB Kalsu in Iraq in 2008. From time to time since I've been home (I'm now separated from the military), I find myself interested in Bob Kalsu and thus Firebase Ripcord as well. I have uncles who served in Vietnam and I'd like to read more about Ripcord to connect their/your experience in Vietnam to my own at FOB Kalsu.

I realize it's possible you or others didn't know Bob Kalsu. That happens sometimes in the military and in life. If so, let me just say I'm here because I deployed to a FOB named after him and it connected me to a time 40 years earlier. this isn't anything personal. but, if you could send me some info or a reading list, that would be great.

to a fellow vet, happy veterans day!

brock

brock.p.nolan@gmail.com

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*Above: Photos of the helicopter Gerry Morgan and Fred Behrens had arranged to fly in to the hotel parking lot .  
Below: 2010 Ripcord Reunion attendees.*

