



# RIPCORD REPORT



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

Number 105

February 2016

## Free Elephants, Vietnam

*reported by Timothy J. Bohan, a Pathfinder Brother*

Free Elephants! I heard Bob Smoker, Charlie 2-506, say this at the 2014 Myrtle Beach Reunion. He was addressing a group of us one evening about a plan he had. I wondered if we would hear about elephants living free, or if we would go with him to free elephants held captive somewhere. The answer, I learned was the latter, but with a surprising twist. I was the elephant.

Bob explained to us how a baby elephant can be securely tethered to a stake driven into the ground. Pulling with all his strength he cannot move the stake.

Years pass and he grows strong. He is strong enough to easily pull the stake from the ground. But, he never loses the memory of the baby elephant, and does not try to pull the stake from the ground.

My elephant memory is that of my big brother, PFC Patrick J. Bohan. He was this 15 year old boy's idol, the cool handsome athlete that all the football players looked up to. His girlfriend was the most popular girl in the class, and when the Homecoming Queen did not have a date he

was her escort to Homecoming. And he taught this little brother about dating girls. He played every sport, rode motorcycles, was everyone's friend, and loved this country. When he was needed, he volunteered. He did not wait to be called.

When training with the 101st Airborne he learned about the Pathfinders. Or, maybe they learned about him. He continued his training with

the Pathfinders, so he could be more and do more when he got to Vietnam. And that is what he did until July 10, 1970, when he was killed on Ripcord while bringing in helicopters to evacuate the wounded.

That was when my elephant memories turned painful: There is the soldier at the front door Sunday morning, my mother screaming for God to take her, NOT her son! Taking the officer to our church to get a priest, and waiting behind the alter of the packed church to tell the priest why he needed to come home with me right

now; back home the never ending stream of family, neighbors and friends coming to see my parents; the funeral and 21-gun Salute. But, most difficult was the loss of my compass, my big brother, who was supposed to be there, to help guide me in the years ahead. The cause he gave his life to was difficult to talk about. Too many people did not understand the mission these soldiers faced, and the personal



*Thuyet Nguyen, Timothy J. Bohan, Bob Smoker*

sacrifice that required.

These painful memories were summed up in one word, Vietnam. For most of the 45 years since Ripcord I stopped telling Pat's story. The pain it brought back was uncomfortable for me and the person hearing it. It often seemed like the best conclusion was our conviction that there would "Never be another Vietnam!" And for

(continued on page 7)

# FROM THE EDITOR

Frank Marshall A/2-506



Well, it is now year 2016. Do you remember where you were in 1970? If you are like me, you remember it well. Some things you want to forget, and then there are things you just can't forget. The one good thing to remember is how the Ripcord Association has brought so many good friendships together.

I hope that you had a chance to read Chris Brady's book, *Remembering FireBase Ripcord*. I have been receiving a lot of good reviews on it. Chris interviewed over a hundred Ripcord veterans to get all the facts. It would be nice if Hollywood picked up the book and made a movie. Keep spreading the word about Ripcord and maybe someday it may happen.

The website War History On Line did a story about the worst battles of Vietnam and missed Ripcord. Thanks to Ron Hudson for contacting them, they plan on doing a Ripcord story. (see more about this on next page).

Mark your calendars for future reunions, 2016 Springfield, MO, 2017 Laughlin, NV, 2018 Myrtle Beach, SC, 2019 Indianapolis, IN, 2020 Indianapolis, IN.

We are up to 749 members in our Ripcord Association and only 198 receive newsletter via Postal Mail and 552 receive the newsletter via e-mail. **If you do not need the postal mail delivery of the Ripcord report newsletter, please let me know at [frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation.com)** and we will send you the newsletter by e-mail in .pdf

Don't miss our newsletters and updates. Remember to always update your change of address or e-mail on our membership forms on our website. We are good but we are not psychic so you will be off our mailing list.

I am hoping to see you all at future reunions. Since I am now living in Myrtle Beach, I know I will be at that one.

Opinions expressed in submitted material are not necessarily those of the editorial staff. We reserve the right to reject any material deemed to be inappropriate. We also reserve the right to edit all submissions, but we will make every effort to maintain the writer's concept and meaning. Please be brief and concise.



Visit our website at  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)

Read the **Ripcord Report** on line  
Daily updates ● History  
and much more



Join us on Facebook group  
Ripcord Association

Please continue to send your letters and  
send your comments or articles to:  
[frank@ripcordassociation.com](mailto:frank@ripcordassociation.com)

or postal mail to:  
**Frank Marshall**  
567 Circle Drive  
Surfside Beach, SC 29575

Everyone would love to hear from you.

## 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**  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)

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## **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.

Howard Strickler 158 AHB

Bill Williams B 2/506

Leigh Freeman C 2/506

Gary Watrous E 2/506

Carl Naulty B 2/506

Mark Minch B 2/319 FA

Charlie Lieb C 2/506

Ed Dunphy B 2/319 FA

Bob Seitz (B&E 2/506) in the memory of

John Mihalko (Recon)

Joe Minias in memory of

Lawrence Christman , Carl Goodson and

Steve Steward C 2/506

Checks payable to "Ripcord Association".

Mail to:

**Lee Widjeskog,**

**493 Stillman Ave.**

**Bridgeton, NJ 08302**

## **Upcoming Ripcord Reunions**

2016	Springfield, MO
2017	Laughlin, NV
2018	Myrtle Beach, SC
2019	Indianapolis, IN
2020	Indianapolis, IN

## **Top Ten Vietnam Battles Omitted Ripcord:**

I browse Facebook a great deal and came upon a military history site (War History On Line). Given the title of "Top Ten Vietnam Battles," I ran down their list expecting to see Ripcord: nothing, nada, zip, zero.

Well, I fired off an email, trying to be concise but emphatic that they had omitted a very significant battle as evaluated by any criteria. For effect, I mentioned a college of mine, and threw in some old titles I had and asked for an explanation. Being at least a fair soldier I gave a sitrep to Frank Marshall. Frankly, I didn't know if we would hear back from them.

They responded by saying that they seemed to have missed FSB Ripcord. (I'll bet no one ever said that before). They advised that they will do an exclusive article which will highlight Ripcord with more detail than putting it in with the other ten. I asked how long and they said it would take a few weeks to get a writer for it and get it out.

Meanwhile Frank fired off another volley, whereupon the Editor said he has had a number of comments regarding Ripcord and again giving the same time frame. We will continue to wait first to see if they write an article and second to see if they threw something together. In fairness, it will be an article so it won't be extensive but lets see.

Have keyboard will travel.

Ron Hudson

## **Ripcord Association Newest Members**

Killgore	Kenneth	B/1-506
Stamm	Leslie	Associate Member
Tenney	Ian	Associate Member

## **Membership Status**

749 members in our Ripcord Association  
613 are Ripcord Veterans  
135 are Associate Members  
198 receive newsletter via Postal Mail  
552 receive the newsletter via e-mail  
555 on Facebook "Ripcord Association Group"

## JERSEY RAMBLINGS

by Lee Widjeskog A/2-506



The reunion in Springfield went off very well! Kathy and I got there early and had Sunday dinner at the Hemingway Restaurant in Bass Pro. Excellent food! Once the reunion was over and all the bills paid we hopped in the truck and headed out to Arizona to spend some time with my oldest sister living in Tempe. This time we decided to take Rt. 60 from Springfield to Oklahoma and into Texas. We noted all the wind farms scattered around the horizon and a lot of open ground by New Jersey standards. Needing a place to stay for the night we stopped in the Oklahoma crossword puzzle answer "Enid". No sign of crossword puzzles there.

In Texas we picked up I-40 and headed to the Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest. Near Amarillo we passed the Cadillac Ranch. We had stopped there previously but just glanced to insure it was still there. The color of the cars has changed but that happens quite often.

We had been to the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest before but this time we went to the desert first. We found this was a better way to visit the national park if you have time. The desert is best seen in the morning light and you can appreciate the forest if you come from the north since the best portions are close to the southern entrance/exit so it just gets better and better as you travel to the south.

By this time we wanted to get to my sister's so we hustled along the interstates into Tempe. While there, we visited the botanical gardens and traveled down to Tucson and Sierra Vista to visit the Kartchner Caverns State Park and the Saguaro National Monument. The cavern was nice and cool. It is carefully maintained with special care being made to prevent the introduction of outside elements that might be attached to people. They want to be notified if you touch the wall so it can be later cleaned. I've been in hospitals that were less particular! Great tour and very interesting.

The Saguaro National Monument is all about cactus. Big, little, live, dead .... you name it. For those not familiar with the west, the saguaro cactus is the tall one that has branches to give an arm-like appearance at times. They often exceed 12 feet in height! Amazing!

After a week we decided to head home once more but not directly. We drove north and stopped at the Tonto Natural Bridge State Park. This natural bridge

is composed of travertine, a sedimentary rock form by the precipitation of carbonate minerals, and is the largest known of this material. Its existence was first documented in 1877 by David Gowan who found it while being chased by Apaches. We saw no Apaches but did have a nice hike down to the base.

Later that day we visited the Sunset Crater Volcano and Wupatki National Monuments. Such a visit gives you an appreciation for all the lava and cinders that form a lot of the hills in the southwest. The remains of the Wupatki Pueblo, shows the abilities of this early American people. It was inhabited during the 1100's and shared techniques from a number of different native cultures.

Following a night in Flagstaff, we proceeded to Monument Valley. This land contains many lone standing monoliths we have all seen in Westerns for years. These structures have been created by wind, water and ice erosion over the past 65,000,000 years. The orange-red sandstone helps give it its unique appearance. It is a color that is found all over Arizona, Utah, Colorado and elsewhere in the western states. We took the driving tour and found it just as amazing as it was when we first saw the area in 1976.

As time was getting short, we motored on down Rt. 160 into New Mexico and dropped down to the Three Rivers petroglyph site off Rt. 54. Here a short walk exposed us to hundreds of pictures carved on the rocks. It was truly interesting to see and realize another culture was attempting to tell what they knew and saw. Some of it we might understand but much is long lost to current memory. Much as this newsletter may be in 300 years or less!

From New Mexico we went back to Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio (with a quick stop at the American Motorcycle Hall of Fame), West Virginia, Pennsylvania and finally New Jersey. It was great to be home once more, but we are already planning our next trip to the far west. It is time to do our 10 year inspection of the progress on the Crazy Horse Mountain in South Dakota so that may be where we head in 2016. But in the meantime we must prepare for the Springfield, Missouri reunion this coming October!!

*See you there!*

*Lee Widjeskog*

**Visit our website at  
[www.ripcordassociation.com](http://www.ripcordassociation.com)**

## Ripcord on Facebook

by Anthony Chritchlow



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ripcordassociation/>

Hello from sunny Idaho. We continue to grow on our Facebook page. 555 as of Jan 22. Seems to me we get about 7 to 10 people a month.

I hope everyone survived the big snow of Jan 22/25 2016. If you have any pictures of Ripcord please post them on our facebook page, also pictures of your time in Vietnam are welcomed on our page.

But still keep your jokes and non Ripcord posts to a minimum. I'm ok with 1 a week. That still means we will be buried in them with 555 members. Use your best judgment on this. We want this to be about FSB Ripcord.

I'm interested in if you have read the book remembering FSB Ripcord. Keep us informed on what you thought about it. I'm currently reading it. I cannot tell you guys too many times, thanks for keeping me safe on Ripcord. To tell you the truth I always knew we were in a bad place on that mountain. I just never knew how much danger there was out there. So again guys my never ending thanks.

Enjoy your spring and summer.

## "Remembering Firebase Ripcord" New Ripcord Book



### How to order the book:

email [rememberingripcord@windstream.net](mailto:rememberingripcord@windstream.net) if you are interested in obtaining a personalized copy of the book.

It can also be ordered online at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).

## Anna Britt Nolan Trust

by George and Mary Murphy



Hi, Everyone,

We hope you had a Very Happy Holiday Season! With the new year, we ask that you continue to keep Keith Nolan's daughter, Anna Britt, in your thoughts and help her make her college dreams come true. She is now a Sophomore in high school and, like her father, loves to write.

Take care,  
George and Mary

The address where donations may be sent for the trust fund is:

**Anna Britt Nolan Trust**  
c/o First Bank  
6211 Mid Rivers Mall Drive  
Saint Charles, MO 63304-1102

## 2016 Ripcord Reunion

### Springfield, MO

Wed. Oct 5 thru Sat. Oct 8, 2016  
with check out on Sunday 9 Oct.

The University Plaza Hotel  
333 John Q. Hammons Parkway.

The rooms cost is \$82 per night  
before taxes.

Breakfast is included.

# INCOMING MAIL



Lee,

I have just found out that Jacob Pioche “Chief” of C 2/506 died of pneumonia almost a year ago at his home in Farmington, NM. Condolences can be sent to his wife Larissa Pioche at 3809 Buckingham St., Farmington, NM 87402

*Charlie Tipton*

.....

Lee,

Sorry to hear about the death of “Chief”. A clerk typist that wanted to walk point!!! He was quite a character! I remember an occasion when we were at Eagle Beach on Stand Down and he snuck out of the compound and went to the Seabee’s bar and really got in trouble with Lt. Lieb. He was a very brave soldier. I was always a little at ease when he was on point.

*Andy Giles*

*C 2/506*

.....

Frank,

I am trying to find Clifford Franks from A 2/506. He was with me and John Kreckle all the way on July 22 during the battle. If anyone knows where he is now let me know.

*Tommy Webster*

*webco31549@yahoo.com*

.....

Dear Lee

First of all, I was saddened to hear that John Mihalko passed away on the morning of 18 Sat. 2015. I spoke to Kathleen Mihalko on Monday, she called me about John, and from diagnosis to his passing was 4 days. I spoke with her about 30 mins. and she called me from her daughters home in Nebraska.

Lee, I’ve enclosed a check for \$50.00 for the Ripcord Association in memory of John Mihalko.

I have also recieved word about the new FSB Ripcord book, maybe will be out by 1st week of November.

Lee, another donation will be sent to you in November for the Anita Britt Foundation.

Take care, I hope the reunion was a great success

*Airborne/Air Assault*

*Lloyd J Rahlf*

# THE BIG READ

*Jeff Wilcox*



The Big Read is a nation-wide month-long program where high school seniors read a book and then there are events throughout the community about the book. This fall they read *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien. Unlike his other war books, this one is fiction. Because O’Brien was an infantryman in Vietnam his characters, dialogue, situations, stories, and technical aspects are right on.

Two things from the book struck me. The first is what it means to be a soldier. Humping through mountains, boredom, and moments of panic in combat. He wrote with great respect for the Combat Infantryman’s Badge. Also, I learned that from the top down officers were expected to treat soldiers as interchangeable units. However, at the company level, with some exceptions, they were treated as human beings.

As part of The Big Read in West Michigan, students filled an armory with art based on the book or their feelings about it. It was really impressive. There were 24 activities - discussion groups, film screenings, concerts, lectures all over town like at the library, restaurants, churches, and the senior center. Tim O’Brien gave a speech and met with veterans for breakfast.

As one of 6 area vets selected to go into classrooms to talk about my experience of Vietnam, I visited 3. My talk was based on the things we carried (ammo, water, etc.), the things I carried (such as photos), and what many veterans still carry today (memories, PTS and Agent Orange). The students had a lot of questions about what I had brought that day - the wallet I had in Vietnam, my photos of Ripcord, my CIB. In a thank you note one student said, “Hearing about the conflict directly from a veteran really helped me understand its reality in history.”

I heartily recommend *The Things They Carried*. Maybe your school district would be interested in assigning this book. As one teacher said, “You gave history a face and a voice.” It was a very satisfying experience.



## KIA photos needed

by Lee Widjeskog A/2-506

We are planning ahead for the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Ripcord. I would like to get a photo of each of the men who are listed as casualties of the battle.

Using the list Frank Marshall published in the August 2015 newsletter I have assembled pictures of all but the twenty listed below. If anyone reading this has a picture of the soldiers listed please contact me so I can get a copy for the 2020 reunion.

I know this is a little in advance but time goes by so quickly and sources of pictures change all the time with deaths, moving, marriages, divorces etc. So if you can help do so right now!

*Thank you!*

*Lee Widjeskog*

*493 Stillman Ave., Bridgeton, NJ 08302*

*ltwidjeskog@aol.com*

*856-451-1108*

### Pictures needed of the following:

<b>Allen, Gus</b>	A 2/506	KIA	23 July 1970
<b>Babich, John Michael</b>	A 2/506	KIA	22 July 1970
<b>Christman, Lawrence Paul</b>	C 2/506	KIA	6 April 1970
<b>Fisher, Dennis Fay</b>	326 ENG	KIA	20 July 1970
<b>Flores, Roberto C.</b>	B 2/506	KIA	21 July 1970
<b>Grahan, Bruce Eliot</b>	326 Dustoff	KIA	26 May 1970
<b>Heimark, Don Ray</b>	B 2/506	KIA	1 April 1970
<b>Heinze, Dennis Ralph</b>	C 2/506	KIA	16 April 1970
<b>Howard, Lewis Jr.</b>	D 2/506	KIA	7 July 1970
<b>Johnson, David Earl</b>	A 2/11 FA	KIA	21 July 1970
<b>Mauney, Gerald Clinton</b>	C 1/506	KIA	16 May 1970
<b>Milburn, Albert</b>	D 2/506	KIA	11 May 1970
<b>Miller, James Calvin</b>	C 2/319 FA	KIA	1 April 1970
<b>Nelson, Leroy</b>	B 2/501	KIA	9 April 1970
<b>O'Brien, Edward Terry</b>	326 MED	KIA	26 May 1970
<b>Ragsdale, Donald Ray</b>	B 2/506	KIA	1 April 1970
<b>Ray, William Clayton</b>	58 <sup>th</sup> INF	KIA	4 July 1970
<b>Susi, Raymond Peter</b>	E 2/506	KIA	28 April 1970
<b>Underdown, G. Michael</b>	B 2/506	KIA	1 April 1970
<b>Vagnone, Michael John</b>	A 2/501	KIA	18 April 1970

### *Elephants (continued from page 1)*

myself I found a confidence that I could face any trial, after losing my big brother.

However, a few years ago I read Keith Nolan's book, Ripcord, and learned that Pat was part of a story that needed to be told. I got to my first Ripcord Reunion in Myrtle Beach, and also learned how new memories of Vietnam could soften the pain I still feel. They could free my Elephant memory! It was time to follow my brother's path; to add another chapter to his story; to my story.

In November, 2015 I traveled to Vietnam and to the A Shau Valley where Ripcord is located to honor my brother's memory. I went with my son, Louis Bohan, Bob Smoker C/2-506 and our friend Gary Zimmerman. In Hue we were joined by Thuyet Nguyen, a South Vietnamese soldier interpreter for Delta 2/506. Thuyet was in the Ripcord AO up to the last weeks in July. Though he has continued to live in Vietnam, this was his first return to the A Shau Valley. Ripcord remains inaccessible. But with Thuyet and a government official from A Luoi we climbed Hamburger Hill just 10 miles to the South to honor our fallen brothers. This remains a sacred ground for all who paid the ultimate price. Under a Pagoda near the top we paid tribute to their memory. There I presented Thuyet the Ripcord coin that Major General Ben L. Harrison entrusted to my care at the 2015 Ripcord Reunion in Springfield, Missouri. It was a rewarding moment to return a favor on this remarkable journey of discovery. Thuyet's communicating for us opened doors to a Vietnam we may never have seen.

Vietnam and Ripcord are no longer names or memories to painful to talk about. They are living growing stories of a journey to honor our brothers who gave their all, and discover a beautiful country full of welcoming people.

*Timothy J. Bohan,  
a Pathfinder Brother*



# RIPCORN REUNION 2016 SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

[ ] 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) be attending? If yes what are their names? (For name tag purposes only).

---

Arrival Date \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Date \_\_\_\_\_

**THE HOTEL PROVIDES FREE TRANSPORTATION FROM THE AIRPORT.**

Registration fee of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed for # \_\_\_\_\_ Adults and # \_\_\_\_\_ children under 18.  
\$35 for children under 18. For adults see discounts below !

## **DISCOUNTS FOR EARLY REGISTRATION:**

**Before June 30, 2016, \$75 per adult**  
**July 1 through 31, 2016 \$80 per adult,**  
**August 1 through September 6, 2016 \$85 per adult.**  
**After September 6, 2016 \$90 per adult.**

Your registration fee covers the cost of the snacks, beverages, hot hors doers on Friday night and dinner on Saturday.

## **Registration fee due no later than September 29, 2016.**

Make your check payable to "RIPCORN ASSOCIATION"

Mail your check with this form to:

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

Questions? Call Lee at **856-451-1108** before 29 Sept. 2016. (After call 609-774-6951)

## **AGENDA**

**Wednesday, October 5:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Self guided tours and shopping)

**Thursday, October 6:** Hospitality suite opens at 1200 hours. (Golf in the AM) (Self guided tours)

**Friday, October 7:** Hospitality 1200 Hours. Ladies raffle 1800 hours (6PM)

**Saturday, October 8:** Business meeting for association business in Hospitality room.  
Dinner with cash bar starting at 1700 hours done by 2200 hours.

**Sunday, October 9:** Homeward bound

**Thursday golf outing (a separate fee). Check if you will play [ ] .**

## **HOTEL RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE SEPERATELY**

### **BY September 2, 2016**

### **CALL 417-864-7333**

Ask for HOTEL RESERVATIONS and mention the  
**GROUP CODE: RIPCORN**

(Price is \$82 per night plus tax: breakfast is included.)