

RIPCORD REPORT

A Newsletter

No. 31, March 1992

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

IN MEMORY OF
THOMAS J. SHEPHERD
1949 -- 1991



VIET 1960-1970 - TOMMY

RIPCORD REPORT: FOR FRIENDS AND SURVIVORS

The Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord extended from 12 March to 23 July 1970. During the peak of the battle, from 1 to 23 July, there were 61 KIA, 345 WIA, and one MIA. It was the most costly action by US Forces during 1970. It was the last major battle of the Vietnam War that was fought by purely American units.

At the center of this cauldron of fire on the northeast rim of the A Shau Valley were soldiers of the 2/506th Infantry Battalion, and Bravo Battery, 2/319th Artillery Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. There were others: Infantrymen from sister battalions (2/501 and 1/506); Artillerymen on neighboring fire bases; men who flew F4 Phantoms and Forward Air Controllers in observation aircraft; Army Aviators in gunships and utility helicopters; men who pushed supplies forward; men who kept vigil by radios; men and women who staffed hospitals; and others, who provided support in a thousand different ways.

For 23 days in July 1970, three to four regiments of a North Vietnamese Army division laid siege to Ripcord from the surrounding mountains and rain forested valleys. It was a time of violence and death. Enemy rockets, recoilless rifle fire, and mortar rounds slammed daily into the perimeter. Heavy machine guns, and small arms ripped into the hill and tore helicopters out of the sky. Grisly fire fights broke out on the peaks and in the valleys around Ripcord: Hill 902; Hill 1000; Hill 805; and other nameless places that remain seared into memory.

The men at Ripcord fought aggressively, and well. Their courage was beyond measure. Their steadfast loyalty to a nation divided by the war remains unquestioned. The name "Ripcord" is graven in stone on the granite wall of the 101st Airborne Division Memorial at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, silent testimony to those who were there, who gave the full measure of their devotion to duty.

Membership in the Ripcord Association and subscription to the "Ripcord Report" is free. Anyone may join who was involved at the Battle of Ripcord, who knows someone who was there, or who simply has a genuine interest. The intentions of the newsletter are to share information, clarify events, offer occasional opinion, and promote better understanding of the battle. The association does not mean to offend, or cause renewed suffering due to the content of the report. Many of the members have benefited from the report, hopefully, many more will in the months and years ahead.

The "Ripcord Report" and the Ripcord Association were founded by Chip Collins (B & RCN, 2/506, 70-71) in 1984. From an initial membership of four, the association has grown to over 200 members. Any advertising accepted will be published free of charge. The newsletter makes no guarantees regarding acceptance or publication of an item. Material will be returned if so requested (please include return postage).

BASIC LOAD

Art/Photos Contacts/New Faces Staff Journal Incoming Editor's
History Corner

CONTACTS/NEW FACES

Joseph P. Shepherd, Sr. Jim Catlin Gib Rossetter

DONATIONS

Joseph Shepherd, Sr.; James McKinley, Jr.; Jim Catlin; Wayne Kabat.

There be of them that have left a name behind them.
And some there be which have no memorial...
Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore.

-- Ecclesiasticus, XLIV, 8-14

STAFF JOURNAL: LZ OAKTON

This has been a difficult newsletter to put together and edit. The loss of Tom Shepherd is felt very keenly. Men of Charlie Company, 2/506th will remember his service, courage, and devotion to duty. Tom lived his civilian life as he did in the army: taking care of his fellow veterans. His example in life serves as a reminder of the good a man can do in this world. He will be sorely missed.

Break.

The world map has been redrawn since the last newsletter. The breakup of the Soviet Union guarantees interesting times in the years ahead. One young doctor of philosophy student who works with me made an attempt to journey to Moscow, Russia to watch the Soviet flag lower for the last time on 31 December 1991. (Not my idea of a vacation, but perhaps he wanted to cheer the successful end of the Cold War.) Although times have changed, unfortunately the bureaucracy of the former USSR hasn't. After successive delays it became impossible to obtain a visa in time to realize the objective of the trip. Moral of the story: If Russia wants visitors to spend hard currency inside its borders, it will streamline the visa application process.

Drop a line, or give me a call if you're going to be in the DC area. Keep the faith, give 'em hell, and "CURRAHEE."

Chuck Hawkins, LZ Oakton.

INCOMING

Dear John "Custer" Mihalko,

I am taking this opportunity to let you know about my son, Thomas J. Shepherd, who served as a medic and was wounded at Firebase Ripcord. He never talked much about Vietnam. Tom carried the scars of Firebase Ripcord and had trouble walking, but he carried on and worked for the Veterans Administration in Newark, NJ, but cancer took his life on November 17th, 1991. I saved all his Ripcord bulletins.

I am enclosing a copy of the local paper with regard to the write up. I am also enclosing a donation to your association.

With best regards to all,

Joseph P. Shepherd, Sr.
Tom Shepherd's Dad "Pops"

PS: I don't know what unit he was in. We lost much of the data. I do know he was with the 101st Airborne unit the Screaming Eagles, and he talked about a CO, Col. Lucas being killed and his buddy medic, Thomas Powell.

Dear Chuck,

Enclosed you'll find some correspondence I received from Tom Shepherd's father. The news came as a shock to me to say the least. I thought it might be a good idea to run Tom's

obituary in a future newsletter. I wrote Tom's father a letter of condolence and told him that I would forward his correspondence to you.

I received the last newsletter, and as usual, it was great. From what you wrote in the last issue, it looks like you had a busy summer. I'm glad that Chip paid you a visit. I also got a call from Bob Seitz and it was great hearing from him.

Sorry that I've been out of touch for so long. It's just been that kind of year. Well guys, I hear a mini firefight going on downstairs between the kids, so I'd better close. Take care.

John "Custer" Mihalko
Lakewood, Colorado

Editor's note: After receiving John's letter and the letter from Mr. Shepherd about Tom's death, I sent the following letter to Tom's family.

Dear Mr. Shepherd:

Today, I received word from John Mihalko of your son's death. I am so very deeply saddened; mere words simply can't say what my heart feels. I knew Tom Shepherd. I didn't just serve with him, I fought by his side over 21 years ago in Vietnam.

Tom was the medic for 2d Platoon, Charlie Company, 2d Battalion 506th Airborne Infantry, 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Infantry Division -- the famous Screaming Eagles. I was assigned as platoon leader of that platoon in March 1970. Tom was part of my platoon command post (CP). He was part, an integral part, of a four-man team that ran the platoon day-to-day. Tom was with me -- next to me -- in my first fire fight with the enemy; an experience seared into the memory of every combat veteran.

Take justifiable pride in your son's accomplishments, they were the stuff of legends. Tom was a true hero in every sense of the word. He was also a leader of men, and a champion of the less fortunate. He was reliable, steadfast, and courageous. He was a man of valor, and while I have known many men of such quality, I have known none finer, or more brave.

Tom and I renewed our association in the fall of 1986 at a Ripcord Reunion in Whippany, New Jersey. For me, it was a happy surprise (and I think, also for him) for us to meet after all the intervening years.

I hope you will find the following personal recollections of Tom's service to his country of interest. They are supported by archival documents and from my letters home at the time.

I joined 2d Platoon on 9 March 1970. The platoon was participating in company operations to disrupt enemy infiltration into the populated coastal plain north of the old imperial Vietnamese city of Hue. The monsoon rains had begun to wane, and the partially-clearing weather permitted us to move westward into the first line of rugged mountains that lie east of the A Shau Valley. Opposing us were members of the North Vietnamese 612th Sapper Battalion, and soldiers of the North Vietnamese 6th Independent Regiment. They were tough, seasoned veterans, and would give us a fight whenever they could.

Specialist Fourth Class Tom "Doc" Shepherd was one of the first men in the platoon that I met with and shook hands. The out-going platoon leader was a West Point classmate of mine, Charlie "Tuna" Lieb, and he and 2d Platoon had established a reputation for toughness and courage under fire. As the new guy in charge, I knew that a lot would be expected of me, and that I would have to measure up. The other guys in the CP were Platoon Sergeant Queen (Queenie), the radio/telephone operator (RTO) SP/4 Rainwater, a southerner from Georgia.

The platoon was situated on a finger that came off a larger mountain ridge. Nearby was a small helicopter landing zone (LZ) where the platoon received a resupply of food, water, and ammunition, and most importantly, mail from home. The LZ, and the comings and goings of the resupply helicopter, attracted the attention of some unwanted guests -- North Vietnamese soldiers.

Early in the afternoon of 11 March (a Wednesday) the men in the platoon defensive perimeter were standing watch, cleaning weapons, and taking care of personal hygiene. Doc Shepherd had made his rounds a couple of times to ensure that everyone had taken the daily antimalaria pill, and to check on assorted nicks and cuts from jungle vines that we all suffered from time to time. Now back at the CP in the center of the perimeter, Doc, Queenie, and I were playing a game of cutthroat pinochle.

It was a fun, relaxing way to relieve the combination of stress and boredom that every combat veteran knows. We were sitting on our upturned camouflaged steel helmets, and using an acetate-covered map as a playing surface. I had noticed that Doc didn't carry a weapon, but that he had three hand grenades inside his helmet; like a bird on a nest of eggs -- some eggs.

I asked Doc why he didn't carry a weapon, but did carry hand grenades. He explained that he wasn't a conscientious objector, but rather that he considered himself a rather poor shot, and that during a firefight he was usually too busy worrying about wounded men to return fire anyway. The hand grenades, he explained, were easier for him to use if he got in a tough spot while tending a wounded buddy. Sergeant Queen, perhaps sensing my concern that a man should have a rifle, nodded agreement with Doc: "He's right, Ell Tee (meaning LT for lieutenant). Doc's a tough one in a fight. Seen him go after more'n one down man with the bullets flying. He won't ever let you or the platoon down."

Queenie won the next hand, and as Doc was marking the scores, we heard the muffled "thunk, thunk, thunk" of enemy mortars firing about 100 meters away. All I could think was: My first firefight has just begun.

If you've ever been in a fire fight, you know that it's a crazy, chaotic thing; nothing ever seems to happen the way you think it should, or the way it's shown in movies. One minute we were sitting around doing the routine things soldiers do, the next minute all hell breaks loose, and fear and adrenalin levels go sky high. Enemy mortar shells began crashing and exploding everywhere, mostly around the LZ. Queenie jumped up and headed for the sector of the perimeter he thought was receiving fire. I was frozen, trying to remember what it was lieutenants were supposed to do when stuff like this happened.

Doc was quick on his feet, grabbing his aid bag and his helmet full of grenades. Quickly, realizing that he couldn't wear the helmet with the grenades in it, he scooped them out and handed them to me. "Here, sir," he said, "You'll need these more than me," and he ran toward the sound of guns firing.

Later, after the short fight was over and I had figured out to call for our own artillery against the enemy, we agreed with Doc that playing pinochle was probably bad luck. GIs are often superstitious, and we never played pinochle in the field after that day.

In the days and weeks that followed there were other fire fights, night ambushes, and helicopter combat assaults into new places deeper in the mountains. Sergeant Queen was reassigned out of the platoon and Sergeant Foret, one of the squad leaders, became the new platoon sergeant.

In the first ten days of April, the company, along with the rest of our battalion, fought a series of bloody, grueling actions against a determined enemy for control of a 1,000-meter-high hill we would later make into a fire support base called Ripcord. On 9 April we were finally given the mission to conduct a ground attack to secure the hill the next day.

Before dawn on Friday, 10 April, the company was up and moving to platoon and then squad release points halfway up the mountain. Concentrations of artillery preparatory fire thundered and boomed, and cobra attack helicopters circled high overhead as we made the final assault over the crest of Ripcord. By 0730 hours we were in control. Ripcord belonged to us and the enemy faded into the jungle where he would regroup to fight another day. Doc Shepherd was with us every step of the way -- aid bag, 90-pound rucksack, hand grenades, but no rifle.

The company built defenses around the hill top, which was hard, backbreaking work. Everyone gave their best efforts; we knew the enemy might come back in strength at any time. By the time Charlie Company turned the defense of Ripcord over to another company, it was well on its way to becoming the best defended fire support base in the entire 101st Airborne Division's area of operations (AO). It was also a thorn in the side of the enemy, and became a major objective for the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

On 11 April, when we were first concentrating on digging foxholes and bunkers, and stringing concertina wire around the hill, disaster struck. The 2d Platoon CP needed a bunker and fighting position dug. SP/4 Denny Helnes had volunteered to help Sergeant Foret, Doc, and Rainwater at the CP. (I had been temporarily given duties as the company commander and was at the company CP about 50 meters away.) The weather was hot, the sun bright in a near-cloudless sky, most guys were in tee-shirts working doggedly on foxholes or keeping guard with machine guns.

Ripcord had been a fire support base the year before, and had been abandoned as the winter monsoons forced a reduction in combat operations deep in the mountains. Some former occupant, too lazy or careless, had buried a half-dozen hand grenades in his foxhole before leaving the year prior. That old foxhole, now filled in, was the exact location where Denny

Heines was helping to dig the 2d Platoon CP position.

Denny was up to his chest in the six foot by foot-and-a-half trench. Just a few more inches of dirt to scoop out, and he could call it a foxhole. He shoved the tip of his D-handle shovel into the bottom of the hole and felt it strike a hard object. He placed his foot firmly on the shovel, pushed hard, and lifted up a load of dirt with a grenade; a live hand grenade that his shovel tip had activated by removing the safety pin. Denny had the shovel at chest level, ready to dump it on the side of the foxhole. The grenade exploded.

Everyone on the hill heard the explosion, but Doc Shepherd was the first man on the scene. I got there moments later along with Foret and Rainwater. Denny was a bloody mess of puncture wounds from grenade fragments, and burned, torn skin from the blast, but he was still alive and fighting for his life. Doc worked quickly and feverishly, shouting orders between life-giving breaths to Denny's bloody mouth. He needed plastic, a poncho to cover and seal Denny's sucking chest wounds. He was pumping Denny's chest with one hand to keep his heart going. Rainwater had called for an urgent helicopter medevac; someone had come up with a litter.

It took the medevac chopper about ten minutes to arrive, and hover into Ripcord. In that time Doc had gotten Denny stabilized, but was still giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Denny would live as long as he kept receiving life-giving breath from his fellow soldier.

As Denny and the stretcher were lifted into the waiting helicopter the critical transfer of life care between Doc and the medic on the chopper took place. Doc motioned to Denny's chest and made signs to continue giving mouth-to-mouth. Doc tried to shout the instructions over the roar of the helicopter's turbine engine. Maybe the chopper medic didn't understand, or was a new guy and didn't know. Maybe he was overcome by the sight of Denny's bloody torso and face, and of Doc, also covered with the blood of his patient. In any case, the chopper medic made no motion to continue the first aid.

Doc tried to climb aboard, but the chopper lifted, hovered above Ripcord for a second, and spun toward our secure base camp in the lowlands and the battalion aid station. Doc was screaming now, cursing at the departing chopper. Denny would die if the first aid he had started was not continued. Doc grabbed me: "Do something, sir! They don't know what they're doing!"

I tried. Rainwater gave me the radio and I called the battalion operations center; I told them to call the chopper pilots and have their medic breathe for Denny, to push his chest to keep his heart going. It was too late. SP/4 Denny Heines was already dead -- "died enroute," was the radio report we got back.

It was a bad day. A sad day. Doc had almost pulled off a miracle, but some greenhorn medic had blown it. He was inconsolable, his tears mingled with Denny's blood, and he looked like a wild man. We were all in a dour, sullen mood. There is no good thing to come of war, and Denny's death reminded all of us how human, and vulnerable, we really were.

I didn't work with 2d Platoon after we left Ripcord to the defense of others. I was promoted

to captain in late May and took over command of Alpha Company -- that is another story.

However, I did stay in touch. I had friends in Charlie Company, and when the battalion got to the secure base area in the rear, I would visit my old outfit to say hello. When we were on operations in the field around Ripcord, I would occasionally listen to radio messages from the men of Charlie Company as they talked to the battalion operations center, or to Lieutenant Colonel Andre Lucas, the battalion commander (who was killed by enemy mortars on 23 July).

On 1 July, Fire Base Ripcord began taking enemy mortar and recoilless rifle fire. Resupply choppers were shot at and hit. The North Vietnamese had encircled Ripcord with an infantry division, but we didn't know at that time how strong the enemy force really was. The enemy fire attack continued. Mortar shells, rockets, and recoilless rifle rounds slammed into the defenders on Ripcord. Casualties began to mount. The battle for Ripcord had entered its final phase.

Like a miniature Dien Bien Phu, where French forces were defeated by Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh soldiers in 1954, Ripcord was dominated by surrounding mountains nearly as high as Ripcord itself. Hill 1000 lay just one kilometer west; Hill 805 was two kilometers southeast; Hill 902 was almost due south and two and a half kilometers away. These areas gave the enemy the ability to direct observed fire against Ripcord; they also provided sanctuary and easily defensible positions.

During the day on 1 July, Charlie Company was directed to occupy defensive positions on top of Hill 902. Two platoons, the 2d and the 1st did so, while the 3d Platoon was sent to Ripcord for a "day of rest." Some rest, in the midst of rocket and mortar attacks.

That night -- after Doc Shepherd had tended to the medical needs of 2d Platoon and had bedded down on the jungle floor to sleep -- an enemy sapper unit crept silently toward the Charlie Company perimeter. It is not possible to know how many enemy soldiers there were. Some reports indicate about 40, others say it was higher, as many as 100. The truth is probably somewhere in between: Thirty sappers to penetrate the GI defenses; thirty riflemen to provide covering fire outside the American perimeter. With only two platoons and a CP, Charlie Company had about 60 soldiers, roughly equivalent to the attacking enemy.

Early in the morning on 2 July I was awakened and called to the radio by my Alpha Company RTO. We were on Fire Base O'Reilly, nine kilometers north of Ripcord, and even farther from Hill 902. Still, we could hear the radio messages from Charlie Company quite clearly. They were in serious trouble.

The North Vietnamese had gained the element of surprise, and were among the defending Americans before many knew what was happening. Some GIs mistook the sound of exploding satchel charges for bursting mortar rounds. These men took cover in their foxholes, which sappers eliminated one-by-one. Other men, who realized what was happening, formed into teams of two and three men, and set about the deadly task of hunting down the enemy. Rifle fire from U.S. M-16s and enemy AK-47s chattered back and forth across Hill 902. Exploding grenades and satchel

charges punctuated the night. Illumination rounds fired from mortars on Ripcord lit the night with a flickering, strobe-like light, giving the defenders an advantage in finding and killing their tormentors. I can attest to how grisly and eerie the battle must have been.

In the end, Charlie Company prevailed, but at a terrible price. Eight men, including the company commander, Captain Hewitt, lay dead, and about three times that number were wounded. The enemy had paid dearly as well, and their dead littered the slopes of Hill 902; numerous blood trails told of others being dragged off into the jungle.

It was probably this firefight where Doc Shepherd was wounded, receiving multiple fragment wounds while going to the aid of his fallen comrades in Charlie Company.

After the Cambodian incursion by U.S. forces in April-May 1970, Ripcord, beginning on 12 March, and lasting until 23 July, was the next largest action of that year -- equivalent to Hamburger Hill the year before. In the final days, our battalion suffered over 60 dead and about 340 wounded -- roughly half our strength. Unfortunately, the press was kept largely unaware of Ripcord, and little word of the harsh realities made it back to the United States. The name of Ripcord, however, is graven in stone on the base of the 101st Airborne Division Monument at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, just south of the Potomac River from our nation's capital of Washington, DC.

I hope this letter helps a bit, Mr. Shepherd. It helps me to write it, to let others know what it was like, to share what Tom and his fellow veterans went through. I'll miss Doc Shepherd, and I'll say a prayer for him, but he's in good company, really good company -- the best a generation of America had to offer.

Thanks for the donation to the Ripcord Association. Please know that we are with you in spirit, and that the news of Tom's death will be shared with our membership. God bless.

Chuck Hawkins

Dear Mr. Hawkins,

I can't put in words how thankful I am along, with my family, with regard to your letter on "Firebase Ripcord." As you know, Tom was a very private person; his letters home indicated he was at a "MASH unit," and "not to worry." His mother was relieved, but we did not believe him.

Tom and I rarely spoke of our war experiences: I in World War II with the 69th Infantry Division in the Battle of the Bulge; and of course Tom and you in Vietnam.

I can still see Tom when he came home from a long day at the Veterans Administration in Newark, and after supper, someone would call or come to the house, and Tom would advise and help the Vet solve his problem if it was possible. He never stopped helping anyone who needed help.

We were going to see the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC, but we never got to see it. He actually was afraid to go, fearing he would break down. So, I bought him the book, The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, put out by Collins Publishers.

Well, time to close. Again, my grateful thanks for your letter and I remember all the boys living and dead in my daily prayers. I hope you will continue to send me the Ripcord newsletter.

Respectfully yours,
Joe P. Shepherd, Sr., Tom's Dad.

Dear Chuck,

I understand you were a friend of Don "Ranger" Workman. I was too. I was a platoon sergeant for 2d Platoon while Ranger was with us. I owe him a lot. He was a great man and soldier. I have many strong remembrances of him.

I have been a closet vet since 1971 and only five years ago would admit my Vietnam experience. In the past two years I have found five other buddies that served in my platoon sometime during my duty. It has been a great healing process and I am now proud to be a Vietnam Veteran.

I was wounded on 21 July and medevaced out of the area about one hour before the rest of the company was evacuated. Our company was never the same after that day. Ranger was a leader!

I have many memories of that operation, and many I choose to forget. I remember Ranger telling the platoon leaders and sergeants our mission that day and how nervous he seemed.

Well, I've rambled on enough. It's people like you who help people like me to find peace -- thanks for not letting Ripcord die. Thanks for giving of your time to help us.

Gib Rossetter, D Co., 1/506th Infantry
North Platte, Nebraska

Dear Chuck,

Sorry I haven't been able to keep with you and the rest of my old "Ripcord" buddies. We left the DC area in '88 and have been back only in passing. We kept our house in Burke and hope to return and claim it from the renters. We are doing fine and have survived another tour of commanding troops. Now I'm just another "staff weenie" and looking forward to returning to the USA and getting back in touch.

I believe you will remember Gully Warren from the 101st. He was a college mate of mine. He's in Langley, Virginia now, I've heard. Maybe you are in touch with him.

I still enjoy the Ripcord Report, and hope everyone associated with it is well. Take care and have a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Jerry Rodgers, "Screaming Eagle -- Dustoff 94"
Zweibruecken, Germany

OBITUARIES

The Daily Vignette

Thomas J. Shepherd, decorated Vietnam vet

By MARK C. GRIBBEN

The Daily Journal

ELIZABETH — Thomas J. Shepherd, a lifelong city resident who spent his tour of duty in Vietnam saving lives and then went on to advise veterans of their rights, died Sunday at his home. He was 42.

A senior medical corpsman with the Army's 101st Airborne Division who was seriously wounded at Firebase Ripcord, a battle which rivals Hamburger Hill in its ferocity, Mr. Shepherd never let his disability prevent him from helping others, said his father, Joseph P. Shepherd.

At Firebase Ripcord, Mr. Shepherd was hit by more than 150 pieces of shrapnel, his father said.

Even as he spent seven months in a military hospital recovering from the wounds that left him almost totally disabled, Mr. Shepherd continued to treat his fellow soldiers, his father said.

"When Tom was able to walk again, he used his skills treating the other soldiers," his father said. "He would give needles or change bandages."

For his work at Walton Army Hospital at Fort Dix, Mr. Shepherd received a letter of commendation, his father said.

Mr. Shepherd also received letters from some of the many soldiers he treated in Vietnam.

"He got letters from wounded soldiers who he treated," his father said. "They wrote to tell



THOMAS J. SHEPHERD
Was corpsman, adviser.

him that he did an excellent job."

While serving in Vietnam, he was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Army Commendation Medal. He was discharged from the Army in 1971.

He rarely spoke about his tour in Southeast Asia, his father said.

"He looked down on people who bragged about their war records," he said. "He used to say a war wasn't won in the barroom."

Mr. Shepherd worked for the state upon his return, but saw that many of his fellow veterans were not able to find suitable employment and decided to help them.

"He said, 'Dad, I'm sick of that and I want to get into something where I can do more good,'" his father said. "I'm going to make it my business to make sure veterans get their due."

He worked as an intake interviewer at the Veterans Administration, Newark, for seven years.

"He did more work at home at night for veterans who came to the house and needed advice," his father said. "His idea was, if he couldn't do any good for someone, it wasn't worth doing anything."

Even with the shrapnel left in his body serving as a constant reminder of his disability, Mr. Shepherd refused to let his injuries hold him back.

"He never let anything get in his way," his father said.

Mr. Shepherd was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed hiking and gardening.

"He loved flowers," his father said. "He had the most beautiful gardens."

He was a communicant of Holy Rosary-St. Michael's R.C. Church, a member of Disabled American Veterans, Admiral Halsey Chapter, 73 and Alpha Sigma Mu (Allied Servicemen Inc.).

Mr. Shepherd was a 1977 graduate of Kean College, Union.

His mother, the former Marion Elizabeth Koch, died in 1989.

In addition to his father, he is also survived by a brother Joseph P. Jr. of Linden; and two nephews.

Services for Mr. Shepherd are to be held Thursday, Bannworth Funeral Home, 1055 E. Jersey St., is in charge of arrangements.

Nov. 19, 1991

EDITOR'S HISTORY CORNER

Dept. of the Army
HQ, 2d BN (Ambl) 506th INF
APO San Francisco 96383
Unit History, March 1971

Continued from No. 30

Death is the handmaiden of the Infantry Soldier. Though we must all go to her sooner or later, the Infantryman walks with her constantly. How well we tread with her, and how well we meet her certain destiny becomes the final measure of a man.

The delta model Huey settled smoothly on Currahee Pad. A giant caricature of Snoopy, his dog-house [Sopwith Camel] riddled with mock bullet holes, sat daringly on top of the control tower as LTC Andre C. Lucas walked from his helicopter to the tactical operations center. On 4 March he had assumed command of the 2d Battalion (Ambl) 506th Infantry from LTC Howard G. Crowell. The battalion was still working the coastal plains region, occasionally breaking out of the piedmont into the tropical rain forest that covered the first ridge lines of the towering mountains southwest of Camp Evans. Very soon, LTC Lucas knew, the battalion would puch deeply into those densely vegetated peaks. Deeper than anyone had been in a long time. His Currahees had found the enemy and they would now make an effort to meet him in pitched battle before he could gain access to the populated lowlands.

As Operation Randolph Glen drew to a close, all companies in the battalion experienced contact with the enemy during their counter-insurgency operations. Alpha, on an exploratory insertion into Fire Base Ripcord on 12 March, received RPG, mortar, and small arms fire. They withdrew after taking moderate casualties. During the next five days, Charlie Company, acting as a blocking force along the Dong Ke Me ridge line, engaged an estimated enemy company in a running fire fight. Although the company received moderate casualties, the enemy lost five confirmed dead, three of them sappers from the dreaded K-12 Sapper Battalion. On Easter Sunday, 31 March, Operation Randolph Glen ended.

Operation Texas Star began on 1 April. Texas Star, it was hoped, would take the fighting into enemy territory causing him to make a stand before he could move in strength to the lowlands. Delta Company now under the able command of CPT Rembert Rollison was on temporary loan to the 1/506th and was securing Fire Base Granite as Charlie Company conducted a combat assault into what would shortly become Fire Base Gladiator.

Fire Bases Granite and Gladiator were the first steps in the operation designed to enable our forces to move deeply into the mountains. On 1 April we again combat assaulted by helicopter onto Ripcord -- Bravo Company met with even stiffer resistance than Alpha Company had two weeks prior.

As RPG, mortar, recoilless rifle, and small arms fire raked the cratered hilltop, Bravo dug in and prepared to hold. All the efforts of the

battalion were directed toward the Ripcord area with the exception of Charlie Company still on Gladiator. Alpha Company combat assaulted into an LZ next to Ripcord and the Recon Platoon under the command of 1LT John Wilson was inserted onto the hill with Bravo Company. Delta Company was tasked to sweep south toward Ripcord and pass eastward searching for enemy mortar and recoilless rifle positions. As the day wore on it became apparent from the mounting casualties that our position on Ripcord would become vulnerable and extraction would be necessary. Elements from Alpha moved by foot to the hill and aided in carrying off the dead and evacuating the wounded. For the entire day Bravo Company, the Recon Platoon, and elements of Alpha Company remained in contact. Cobra gunships were continuously on station providing suppressive fire as everything from log birds, command and control ships, and medevacs evacuated the wounded. Finally, on 3 April all elements were extracted from Ripcord. Friendly losses stood at six US killed and 21 US wounded. Ripcord was still in enemy hands.

LTC Lucas, determined to take Ripcord, intensified his efforts to clear out the enemy mortar tubes and recoilless rifle positions surrounding the fire base. On 4 April, Charlie Company under the temporary command of 1LT Charles Hawkins, combat assaulted to an LZ neighboring Ripcord and secured by CPT Burkhardt's men from Alpha. As Charlie Company jumped off the choppers they saw for themselves the damage that the NVA had wrought. Men from the pathfinders, engineers, and other elements who were with the Bravo Company assault into Ripcord, crawled on the lift birds as the men from Charlie Company got off. Alpha Company continued southeast toward Hill 805; Bravo Company was reinserted north of the fire base; Delta was paralleling Charlie Company to the south.

The operation now began to show signs of success. Delta, Charlie, and Alpha began uncovering enemy bunkers and mortar positions. Contact was scattered and brief; the enemy was withdrawing. On 9 April, LTC Lucas decided it was time to try and take Ripcord again. In the pre-dawn darkness of 10 April Charlie Company crept forward to squad release points, and as the first pink streaks of the new day flashed across the sky, the hill top shuddered with the thud-boom of supporting artillery fire. Charlie Company assaulted, in squad column first, and then on line. They met no resistance as they swept over the hill; as the first helicopters carrying supplies moved onto the hill, the expected enemy mortar rounds were not fired. The NVA had vanished, and Ripcord was won.

.... to be continued.

And now these waiting dreams are satisfied;
From twilight to the halls of dawn he went;
His lance is broken; but he lies content
With that high hour, in which he lived and died.
And falling thus, he wants no recompense,
Who found his battle in the last resort;
Nor needs he any hearse to bear him hence,
Who goes to join the men of Agincourt.
-- Herbert Asquith, 1881-1947, The Volunteer

THE ENEMY

Major Malcom A. Danner
Major Billy J. Biberstein

Editor's Note: This article is from the May-June 1969 issue of Infantry, "...the professional magazine for infantrymen," and is the third in a series reprinted in the "Ripcord Report."

"The North Vietnamese don't like it under the yoke of the Communist party ... American Infantry Units are weak, their fire power is poor and their equipment is poor ... We know we cannot defeat the Americans, as it is almost impossible to defeat you ... We will win the war politically, not militarily...."

These are some of the random thoughts and views of a young lieutenant in the North Vietnamese Army who was wounded in action and subsequently captured by an American unit in South Vietnam in 1968.

The information, views and opinions in this article are those of the NVA lieutenant and do not reflect the official position of any Department of Defense agency.

This is his story, continued....

THE DAY I WAS CAPTURED

I will never forget the day I was captured. We had finished our recon and were returning to the base camp area when my unit of eight men became surrounded by an American Infantry company. Artillery was fired on us and I received a serious wound in the stomach and another wound in the left thigh. I felt mad that my unit was leaving me but I knew they must or they would all become wounded or captured. I gave my friend my pistol, machine gun, watch, ring and a map. I kept only my compass and placed two grenades under me. I expected to die and today I can hardly believe I'm still alive. I was going to use the grenades on my capturers if possible and kill them if they hit me or it appeared they were going to kill me. Leaving the grenades with the wounded is not a policy, I just thought maybe I could kill some of you.

Instead of being mistreated, as soon as I was found, a medic came up and started giving me medical treatment. I could have killed the medic, a US captain and two other men with the grenades as they never searched me, but after getting the medical help I gave them the grenades.

I am glad to get good treatment as a PW and the doctors and people have been very kind to me but I would rather be with my unit so I could move freely. I want to feel free. If I could I would accept South Vietnam.

The political officer tells us that if captured by you, we will be tortured and killed. When I was wounded and captured, I expected to be killed. Of course now I have changed my mind. An ARVN major showed me a South Vietnam brochure on treatment of PWs and I realized then I would not be killed.

I don't know how you could make the NVA soldier believe you don't kill PWs; one way might

be to let some PWs return after you have given them proper medical treatment. However, if I was released and went back to my unit I would be watched very closely and at all times.

We are told to try and capture American soldiers if at all possible because they are very valuable to our propaganda effort. I have never seen an American or South Vietnam prisoner. While in training we were told not to hit any PW we captured and to give them good treatment. I have never heard of any PW being mistreated by the NVA.

The only soldiers who enjoy the army are the young hot-blooded ones. Most of us are draftees who don't enjoy it. We don't care about not getting paid as we couldn't spend it anyway but there are many hardships. Many times there is a shortage of food and equipment in the NVA while in South Vietnam and this really affects the morale of the troops.

... to be continued



Dear Chuck,

Greetings from MOI Here's some cartoons, if you like them, I'll send some for further issues also.

Airborne all the way!

Jack Whilhite, 2/506
Springfield, Missouri

Dear Chuck,

Here's my donation to the Ripcord Assn. Please see that I am on the membership list for the newsletter, etc.

"Currahee." "Strike Force."

Jim Catlin
Pottstown, Pennsylvania

Dear Chuck,

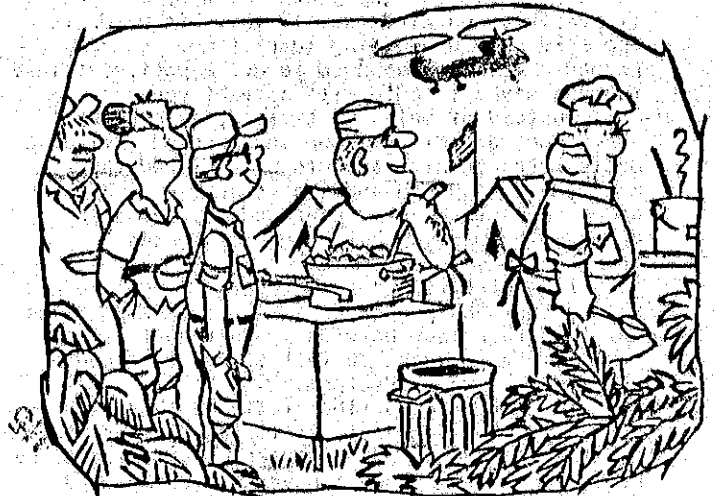
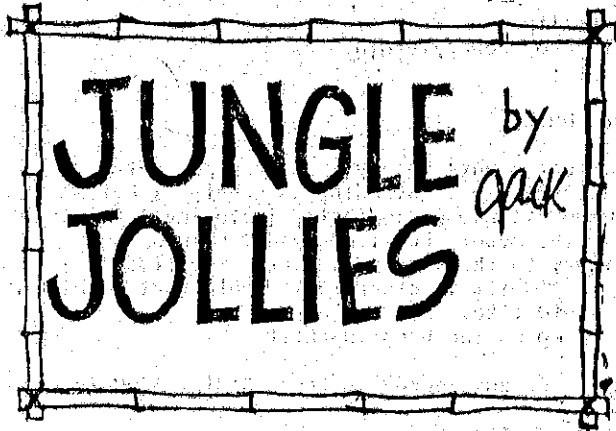
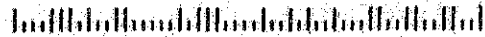
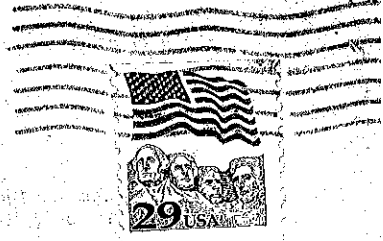
Just a note to say that your 30 September newsletter was outstanding as usual. I belong to many Vietnam periodicals, including the 101st Abn. Div. Assn., but find myself with an affinity to the Ripcord Report. Sometimes I see little tidbits in other periodicals that I think you would like. See enclosed.

Keep up the great work!!!

Paul A. Greaux, 68/69 Currahee Medic, 1/506th
Inf.
Hollywood, Florida

RIPCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN



"Sarge, here's a gentleman who eats only THREE-MINUTE eggs.. What should I tell him?"