

History of The Ripcord Association

The Ripcord Association and newsletter were the brainchild of Chip Collins (B 2/506). After returning from Vietnam and re-starting his life in "TheWorld" Chip found a need to talk to others who served in the Ripcord AO in 1970. Gradually Chip began to make contact with men he served with during Ripcord. By 1983 he was producing a small, irregularly published newsletter in which Ripcord Veterans related their experiences during the Ripcord siege. He soon heard from others and the newsletter grew in size and distribution. By July of 1985 Chip Collins was putting out a 14-page newsletter on almost a monthly basis. Soon Bill Heath (A 2/506) assisted Chip by taking over the publishing. Through the newsletter Chip met John Mihalko of E 2/506 Recon. John and Chip shared a feeling that there was a story that needed to be told and soon enlisted the aid of Jim Fairhall who offered in the 1980's, to do a book about Ripcord.

Meanwhile other veterans of Ripcord were getting together for reunions in small, scattered groups around the country such as A 2/506, E2/506 Recon, and D 2/501. Chip Collins and John attempted to set up a reunion at Fort Campbell for 1986 but things did not quite jell and there were concerns the Ripcord guys would get lost among the bigger 101st reunion. Finally, later that year, John Mihalko organized the first official Ripcord Association Reunion with the help of VFW Post 5351 in Whippany, New Jersey. Thirteen veterans from the Ripcord Battle, along with various wives and girl friends, attended. The veterans included Ray Blackman, Fred Behrens, Rick Blyth, Dick Cable, Chip Collins, Jim Fairhall, Chuck Hawkins, Bill Heath, Frank Marshall, John Mihalko, John Sherba, Tom Sheppard and George Westervelt. Moving along on the wave of success from the first event a second reunion was organized by Chuck Hawkins and held during October 1987 at the Westpark Hotel in Rosslyn, VA outside Washington, DC. General Berry and General Harrison both attended and the highlight of the reunion was a very emotional visit to "The Wall". Changes were occurring in the newsletter. By 1987 Chip had Ray "Blackie" Blackman (D2/501) on board as the co-editor. In 1989 Ray assumed the duties of editor as Chip moved onto another stage of life. Late in 1989 Chuck Hawkins (C, A 2/506) assumed the mantle of editor. In 1994 Frank Marshall (A2/506) assumed the duties of publisher and John Mihalko and Ray Blackman assisted Chuck as Contributing Editors. Try as Ripcord Association members might, the next reunion did not happen until 1995 and finally took place

in Golden, Colorado. Again John Mihalko, who had recently moved into the area, organized it. Since the Colorado reunion the events have become annual affairs. The next was Fredericksburg, Virginia (1996) with another visit to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Then Mobile, Alabama (1997). The reunion of 1998 in Atlantic City, New Jersey came with a floor show and all the gambling you could afford. The Savanna, Georgia 1999 event proved to be the home of the tour that never ended. Shreveport, Louisiana (2000) included a moving dedication ceremony, excellent speakers and a lot of hard work by Jim Campbell and Fred Spaulding.

The year 2000 also saw the start of the Ripcord Association website www.ripcordassociation.com created and managed by Frank Marshall. The following year (2001) Carlisle, Pennsylvania included a tour of the Gettysburg Battle grounds which made us once more realize every war is hard on the participants and even the folks back home. In 2002 we returned to Colorado this time to Colorado Springs where a demonstration of the new equipment carried by the grunts made us wish we had most of it in Vietnam. The most recent reunion was of course in Charleston, South Carolina (2003) where Fort Sumter and the naval ship displays were visited by most.

The newsletter had another changing of the guard in the Fall of 2003.. Frank Marshall has taken the reins of editorship with Lee Widjeskog (A 2/506) as Contributing Editor, Pattie and Gary Radford (D2/506) handling the mailings and Dennis Bloomingdale (B 2/506) taking care of the publishing. From the rather small beginning we have seen our mailing list go from 40 plus members to over 600. The goal of getting a book written about our shared experiences has become a reality thanks to the efforts of Chip Collins and Jim Fairhall who started the project to get everyone thinking along those lines. Keith Nolan, at the urging of Chuck Hawkins and Sid Berry, whom Keith got to know while writing his first book, Into Laos, took the shared remberances of the Association and put it into book form. The reunions have gone from a group of 13 guys to over 250 attendees in Shreveport. Each year new faces show up and the results always seem to be positive.

In 2010, The Ripcord Association started a group on "Facebook" and thanks to Anthony Critchlow, Ripcord veteran of HHC 2/506 who continues to monitor and update it.

In 2016, Frank Marshall is still the Editor, taking care of the publishing and

handles the mailings. Lee Widjeskog (A 2/506) is Contributing Editor. The Association has almost 800 members, which 600 of the members receive the newsletter by e-mail or our website. Our website has been a large factor in obtaining new members who "google" ripcord and find us. There have been two TV shows that have featured the story of Ripcord, War Stories with Oliver North and National Geographics "Inside the Vietnam War"

However, the best part of the association is remembering friends you made during the tumultuous times of FSB Ripcord and the new ones you discover at the reunions.

CURRAHEE !!!!