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RIPCORD REPORT

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RIPCORD REUNION '95

Twenty-Five Year Anniversary!

July 19 - 23, 1995

Denver, Colo.



FROM 'STRIKE FORCE' TO DIVISION INTEL

Illinois member Bob Hageman wrote to *Ripcord Report* on Nov. 20, 1994, partly in response to Maj. Gen. Ben Harrison's article on the brigade commander's perspective at Ripcord, which he said was "especially well done." Bob's note is a great example of the personal profiles the newsletter seeks.--Editor

Screaming Eagles in Profile: Bob Hageman

EL PASO, III.--I am a former "Strike Force" trooper--Recon, 2/502. After being wounded in May 1970, I was reassigned to division intelligence (G-2). By the time of Ripcord I was the only person who was qualified to write the 101st Abn. Div. Intelligence Summary (INTSUM). That report was used to brief at the division level. It was also used to write the official division history.

The IINTSUM had to be written in a politically correct manner. For instance, the 101st Airborne Division never had a unit that was ambushed. Instead, they received enemy fire from an unknown sized enemy force. The reports also had to include the distance to the enemy force, size of the enemy force, type of weapons employed, indirect fire if used, and illumination if it was a night action. Needless to say, during periods of particularly heavy combat, I knew that ground commanders had more to worry about than making sure that all this information was forwarded in time for briefings. I was forced to be inventive or creative at times.

My other connection with Ripcord was more personal. The S-3 (operations officer) mentioned in [Harrison's] article was Maj. Tanner. He had worked the same shift as me for several months in G-3 before he was transferred [to the 2/506, and a few days later was killed on Ripcord with Lt. Col. Lucas.] He was a fine man who I really respected as both an officer and a friend.

My tour in Vietnam was split. About half was spent in the field where I experienced that side of the war. The last half I spent working in G-2, where I got to experience the "big picture," at least as far as the 101st Abn. Div. was concerned. It was truly a unique experience.



Bob Hageman today

Continued on page 2 ...

VIETNAM, 25 YEARS AGO

On Jan. 2, 1970, the U.S. command reported 65 Americans killed in fighting during the past week.

On Jan. 3, North Vietnamese soldiers attacked a U.S. camp near Duc Pho, south of Quang Nai. Seven Americans were killed and 11 wounded.

North Vietnamese sappers struck a U.S. Marine 7th Regiment base in the Que Son Valley on Jan. 6th, killing 13 and wounding 40, but the enemy lost 38 killed in vicious fighting.

On Jan. 8, South Vietnam's President Thieu announced that it will be "impossible and impractical" to withdraw all U.S. combat troops in 1970. Citing the "crucial question" of U.S. provision of supplies and equipment necessary to modernize South Vietnamese forces, Thieu argued that the U.S. departure should be phased over a number of years.

Continued on page 6 ...

The Washington Post

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 1995

Dean Rusk's Legacy

The Dec. 22 editorial about Dean Kusk asks the question "what went wrong?" in reference to the former secretary's policy in Vietnam. In short, my answer is—nothing. First, there is no conclusive evidence that the Vietnam War was a mistake. On the contrary, the only significant communist state today in Southeast Asia is Vietnam. Had we not contained communism there, the story would be different.

Second, the Vietnam War was not lost in Vietnam, it was lost at home. The secretary of state is not in charge of home policy.

Finally, the broad policy so successfully led by Dean Rusk was a global policy of containment. The Vietnam War was a piece of that policy. A battle was lost there (or rather, here) but the war was won. It would not have been won as soon or as well had Dean Rusk not been at the helm in the Department of State for eight difficult, crucial and historically productive years.

PETER F. KROGH
*Dean, School of Foreign Service
Georgetown University
Washington*

Continued from page 1 ...

BOB HAGEMAN (Profile)

My wife, Linda, and I just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary (Oct. 16). We were married in Columbus, Ga., while I was stationed at Fort Benning. We were married by Justice Homer Suggs, who presided at the Court of the Ordinary. It was kind of a justice of the peace with a neat title.

We have two children. Our son, Justin, is a sophomore Presidential Scholar at Illinois State University. He was awarded one of the 101st Abn. Div. Association scholarships a couple of years ago. We also have a daughter, Ashley, who is a junior in high school. I am the athletic director for the El Paso School District. It is a position that I have served in for the last 15 years.

For me the next logical step is a return to Vietnam. I would really like to go but feel inadequate to plan such a trip and am not really sure about getting in on a generic tour-type trip. Is a return to Ripcord planned, or is anyone aware of any reputable group leaders who specialize in more personal trips?

Enclosed please find a check to keep the newsletter in the mail. My best wishes to all for a safe and happy holiday season.--Bob Hageman



Bob Hageman in April 1970 on Fire Base Los Banos

Please send us your profile (300 words or less) explaining what you have been doing, how you have been doing, what your goals are and/or what you think might interest other Ripcord Vets. Tell us who you served with on Ripcord and if you have made contact with any of them and what they are doing. This feature will continue as long as we keep getting your profile, so don't delay and send them today. Send to:

Chuck Hawkins 11614 Helmont Dr. Oakton, VA 22124



MAGNIFICENT BASTARDS

Ripcord Association members might want to check out Keith William Nolan's latest work: *The Magnificent Bastards: The Joint Army-Marine Defense of Dong Ha, 1968*, Presidio Press. *Magnificent Bastards* should be available at bookstores, or you can call the Marine Corps Association with a credit card at 1-800/336-0291. Nolan is a member of the Ripcord Association, and many will remember his earlier book entitled *Into Laos*, which is the story of Operation Dewey Canyon II and Lam Son 719. An earlier book by Nolan is his *Battle for Hue*.

Magnificent Bastards is, in Nolan's words:

"The campaign described in this book began at the initiative of the 320th NVA Division, and was fought in the flat, sandy and bushy terrain below the eastern side of the DMZ where the Bo Dieu River flows into the Cua Viet River and empties into the South China Sea. The prize of the campaign, supposedly, was Maj. Gen. Rathvon M. Thompkin's 3d Marine Division CP at the Dong Ha Combat Base, which was approximately 15 kilometers inland from the ocean, and another 15 klicks below the DMZ. The NVA wanted to take the 3d Marine Division CP, but after two weeks of unrelenting close combat, the enemy was forced to withdraw.

"It is just as reasonable, in retrospect, to suppose that the NVA had no intention of trying to overrun the 3d Marine Division HQ. Instead, they thoroughly entrenched themselves in the villages north of the river--which were already deserted, cratered messes from previous fire fights and relocation operations--and fighting on ground of their choosing, turned the fallow rice paddies around the villes into killing fields for the Marine and Army grunts tasked to dig them out of their bunkers and spiderholes. The enemy foot soldiers were backed up by artillery batteries in the DMZ.

"Whatever the enemy's intentions, the "defense" of Dong Ha in April and May 1968 was one of the most intense and costly battles of the entire Vietnam War (although it received scant attention then and now, overshadowed by the recent relief of Khe Sanh and the Mini-Tet fighting in Cholon). The 3d Marine Division committed six Marine and three attached Army battalions to the fight as approximately three NVA regiments materialized in an arc above the 3d Marine Division CP. The 9th Marines controlled the fighting to the northwest, the ARVN were in position immediately north of Dong Ha Combat Base, and the 3d Marines controlled the fighting northeast of the CP.

"The fighting was most intense in the 3d Marine's area of operations, where regimental commander Col. Milton A. Hull had control of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines; the 1st Battalion, 3d Marines; and the 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry. It was the 2/4th and the 3/21st which saw the worst of this campaign, and it is the story of these two battalions, one Marine, one Army, that is told in *The Magnificent Bastards*."

SOME OF
MY
RESEARCH



Sam Spade Must'a Been a Sniper

Hey, Troops,

Sarge here. Four-man sniper team out of Phu Bai, E Co., 1/502, November 70-71, fresh from Korea, 69-70. RA, all the way!

I remember Fire Base Mary Anne. My team was pulled out of our hunting AO, the Nong Truong Nam Dong--map No. 6541 III, grids: 96-88, 97-90, 98-89--about a 10-klick camping ground. You remember those camping areas, don't ya?

We were notified the usual Army way: L.T. said be on the PZ, you'll resupply on the fire base, be briefed and go into an AO around Mary Anne for two weeks, here's a map, now, move out troop.

Our mission was to pick up any targets in the AO, hopefully some of those that hit the fire base earlier. Eighteen targets in two weeks doesn't seem like much of a dent in the big picture, but the camping was great. Sometimes I miss those sleepless, bug-filled, shadow-moving, cold-sweat, windless nights ... sometimes.

I know you guys had a bad day on Ripcord, and I am glad I wasn't there. But if you needed me all you had to do was call, and I'd have been there with Willy and our two cherries, because that's the kind of guys we troops are.

It was my understanding that one of our recon teams found bunkers under the fire base itself. Some of the stuff found in those caves included 500-pound bags of rice from California, and another state over here, and baseball mitts, balls and bats, pool balls and some other stuff.

After those two weeks we were moved to Fire Base Barbara. It was a mess. The ARVN's pulled out and threw everything in the wire--cases of ammo, mortars, LA Ws--everything "but" food, they took all that with them. Being Americans, we didn't say anything. We just cleaned up after them as always.

Yeah, I remember those days. I learned to go with the flow of things and now I use it in everyday life to help get me through life. I haven't heard anything from your snipers. Why is it no one writes about our trips to the field? Maybe you could pass on my address to your unit snipers, and we could talk?

Sarge "Jay" Tangard
12002 Lorna Street
Garden Grove, Calif. 92641

Spreading the Word About Members

A Currahee veteran, Sam Knipmeyer, was kind enough to drop the *Ripcord Report* off at the store I work at, and he said the Aug., Sept., Oct. and November newsletters will bring back a log of memories. Indeed they did. [See page 5, "A Sergeant Major Returns."]

I am also on the national membership committee of the 101st Airborne Division Association, and in February and March 1995 our chapter in northern California is having a meeting, dedicated to the Vietnam veterans. Hopefully, by that time, I can get the Lost Eagles in the Reno/Sparks area to join us. First Lieutenant Sam Knipmeyer joined us recently, and this Currahee veteran is quite a fellow.

Keep up the excellent newsletter, and I'll send an ad to you, if you care to put it in the report.

Best regards,
Lloyd J. Rahlf. Sgt. Maj, Ret.
3d Bde. S-3, 1969-70
738 O'Callaghan Dr.
Sparks, Nev. 89434

P.S. I'm going to Washington in May 1995, and Tex Turner has steered me to the S-2/S-3 staff journals and the combat after action reports in the national archives. I'm interested in getting copies for the period Aug. 1969 to July 1970, which I wrote and put together. I also have hundreds of photos of the A Shau Valley and the fire bases there, and of the Camp Evans/Camp Eagle area.





INCOMING

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A SERGEANT MAJOR REMEMBERS

By Sgt. Maj. Lloyd J. Rahlf, USA, Ret.

Lloyd Rahlf gives our readership another slant on Fire Base Henderson ["LZ Oakton," No. 35, Oct. 1994].--Editor

SPARKS, Nev.--I will never forget Fire Support Base Henderson and the events of the 6th of May and the 7th of May 1970. As the operations sergeant of the 3d Brigade I was on duty in the brigade TOC, and A Co., 2d Bn., 501st Inf., was deployed late on the 6th of May, after the [former defenders] had pulled off the hill. In the haste of their departure the defensive positions and other barriers were not the best, but A Co., 2/501st, managed to get their defensive positions set up.

That evening, in the early morning hours, they were hit with sappers and NVA. The sappers blew up the ARVN artillery battery of 105mm howitzers

deployed to the hill. The battalion Recon Platoon took the brunt of the casualties and it was a disaster that struck them. These men who were on FSB Henderson were all truly heroes, and I also lost a hero, and a friend, on Henderson on the 7th of May 1970.

At about 1655 hours, Col. William J. Bradley, commander of the 3d Brigade, Maj. Robert A. Turner, Bde. S-3, and my dear friend, Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond C. Long, the brigade sergeant major, flew out to Henderson to take a look at the fire base and assess the situation. When the helicopter landed the NVA started throwing in a hail of mortar rounds and, as described by Maj. Turner, Command Sgt. Maj. Long saved his life.

A mortar round had landed behind Long and Turner, [and the sergeant major bore the brunt of the blast].

Command Sgt. Maj. Long died on the hill. At 1700 hours I received a call at the TOC that he had been hit, and as the word of his death came over the TOC radios, all went silent in the TOC. The 3d Bde. had lost a great command sergeant major, and I lost a friend.

Those of us who were in Vietnam need to be reminded that all the battles were significant, and that the 101st Airborne Division has many heroes.

I departed the 3d Brigade on the 10th of July 1970, at 1300 hours, after saying goodbye to Col. Ben Harrison. I headed for Phu Bai in the S-3's jeep and it flew down QL-1, and homeward bound. Master Sgt. Joseph L. Barker was the operations sergeant for 3d Brigade during the Ripcord siege.

Currahee ... Airborne ... Air Assault!

THERE IS NO 'GOOD WAY'

There is no good way to enter an enemy tunnel system.

There is no good way to keep dry during the monsoons.

If there is no good way to tell the captain he's wrong, there are a hundred no good ways to tell the same to a colonel.

There is no good way to tell your wife why letters don't arrive when she expects them.

There is no good way to tell the enemy you're a conscientious objector.

There is no good way to dig a foxhole where you can see to shoot but not be seen to be shot at.

There is no good way to follow a trail without following a trail.

There is no good way to step on a booby trap; and there is only one really no good way to step off of it.

There is no good way to drink whiskey and laugh at the same time.

There is no good way to say "sir" to an officer with your mouth full of C-ration ham and eggs. (But there are funny ways to do it.)

There is no good way to land a chopper on a hot LZ.

There is no good way to take a piss during a fire fight.

When there is no good way to do something, a GI will figure out how to do it anyway.

Just remember, when there is no good way, there is always the Army way.

Drive on. Airborne. Currahee.

Okay, now it's your turn to come up with a few.

DONATIONS KEEP THE NEWSLETTER GOING.

WE NEED YOUR INPUT!

The Ripcord Report is an all volunteer effort to communicate through all Ripcord survivors and their families and friends. It does cost money for postage and printing.

YOU CAN HELP
by sending

DONATIONS
INFORMATION
PROFILES

Continued from page 1...

VIETNAM, 25 YEARS AGO

On the 8th, in the United States, Private Gerald Smith and Sergeant Charles Hutto of the Americal Division were both charged with war crimes. Due to leave the U.S. Army within the week, Smith and Hutto were alleged to have committed murder and sexual assault against Vietnamese civilians at Song My.

On Jan. 8-9, U.S. troops, aided by armor, artillery and air strikes, battered Communist forces near Tay Ninh. At least 109 enemy were killed against U.S. losses of two dead and 10 wounded.

On Jan. 15, South Vietnamese Senator Tran Van Don and 14 other senators declared the establishment of the Peoples Bloc, a new political group dedicated to finding a political solution to unification of North and South Vietnam under a non-Communist regime. The following day terror struck as a Viet Cong force attacked civilians in a refugee camp in the village of Chauthan on the Batangan peninsula. Exploding dynamite charges destroyed numerous homes, killing 16 citizens and wounding 21.

On Jan. 18, 16 South Vietnamese officer cadets and their instructor were killed and 33 wounded in a command detonated mine attack by Viet Cong guerrillas against the Thu Duc Officers Training School 12 miles northeast of Saigon.

The ground war became vicious on Jan. 22d. An abortive attack by a joint force of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong against a South Vietnamese marine brigade in the Mekong Delta resulted in 72 Communists killed, while the South Vietnamese lost 15 dead and 41 wounded. On the same day, at a U.S. artillery base 55 miles north of Saigon, 13 soldiers were killed and three injured in an ammunition dump explosion.

The U.S. command announced on Jan. 26, that increased combat activity in all four military regions resulted in enemy indirect fire attacks on 29 friendly targets. The Communists reported 75 of their troops as killed in these actions. Nine Americans lost their lives and five were wounded.

On the 28th, U.S. fighter-bombers blasted anti-aircraft missile positions 90

miles inside North Vietnam after missiles were fired at an unarmed reconnaissance plane. One F-105 jet was downed by Communist ground fire, and a rescue helicopter was subsequently destroyed by a MiG-21 near the North Vietnam-Laos border. The helicopter's six-man crew was listed as missing. Reconnaissance flights were a regular feature since the November 1968 bombing halt.

President Richard Nixon announced at a Jan. 30, news conference that "the policy of Vietnamization is irreversible," regardless of lack of progress at the Paris peace talks. However, Nixon warned North Vietnam that any increases in combat activity during the withdrawals will be dealt with "more strongly than ... in the past." U.S. policy is aimed at withdrawing combat troops, not necessarily combat support troops.

At the Paris peace talks the U.S. delegation affirmed that reconnaissance overflights of North Vietnam with fighter escort are routine, but that this does not violate the bombing cessation understanding. North Vietnamese delegates countered with charges that U.S. planes bombed and strafed several populated areas during the bombing lull.

The last day of January 1970 turned murderous as over 100 rocket, mortar and ground attacks by enemy forces from the DMZ to the Mekong Delta cost 19 Americans their lives and wounded another 119. South Vietnamese forces lost 11 killed and 86 wounded. For the Communists the price of these attacks was high: more than 400 enemy soldiers lost their lives on Jan. 31st.

Source: *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War*, John S. Bowman, gen. ed., Bison Books Corp., N.Y., 1985.



NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS FROM RIPCORD, SORT OF

Next time, I will take the lens-cap off my Nikon.

I will stop filing little Xs in the tip of my M-16 rounds.

I will remember that heat tabs, not C-4, are for cooking C-rations. Moreover, I will not stomp out burning C-4 with my boot.

Never again will I season food with pepper from South Vietnamese LRRP rations. Never.

Monsoons and enemy contact permitting, I will write more letters home.

I will remember that if a footprint in a trail looks fresh, it probably is.

Never again will I be the only one to go on a RIF with the lieutenant.

I resolve to improve my professional knowledge by learning to call for naval gunfire.

I swear I will vote in the next election.

When I get home, I'm going to buy a bottle of whiskey for the dude who stole my girl; then I'm going to give his name and address to the nearest recruiter.

I will remember that the words "FRONT TOWARD ENEMY" on the claymore antipersonnel mine mean what they say.

I will remember to say: "My map must be screwed up," not: "The captain is lost."

HAPPY NEW YEAR

PASS IN REVIEW

D-DAY JUNE 6, 1944: The Climatic Battle of World War II
By Stephen E. Ambrose, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1993,
655 pp., \$30 (\$38.50 Can.)

Based on 1,400 oral histories of men who were there, D-DAY JUNE 6, 1944, is a masterful telling of preparations for and first day of the Normandy invasion--Operation Overlord.

Indeed, Stephen Ambrose emphasizes actions on June 6, 1944, like no other. His first 10 chapters set the stage. The remaining 22 chapters focus entirely on that first day of dramatic combat, from airborne landings behind enemy lines to the first waves of American, British, Canadian, Free French, Polish, Norwegian and other nation's troops hitting the beaches.

D-DAY is authoritative, as it should be, for the subject has been previously covered in numerous works. Ambrose is equal to the task. For example, the University of New Orleans history professor reveals for the first time that the detailed plan for the invasion of France had to be abandoned before the first shot was fired.

In the prologue, Ambrose tells who fired the first shots and the circumstances, and who were the first to die. British Lt. Den Brotheridge, a platoon leader with D Company, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Regiment (the "Ox and Bucks"), 6th Airborne Division, was the first Allied soldier to be killed. Lt. Bob Mathias, a platoon leader with E Company, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, U.S. 82d Airborne Division, was the first American officer to be killed by German fire.

Ambrose writes: "If Hitler had seen Den Brotheridge and Bob Mathias in action at the beginning of D-Day, he might have had second thoughts. It is Brotheridge and Mathias and their buddies, the young men born into the false prosperity of the 1920s and brought up in the bitter realities of the Depression of the 1930s, that this book is about. The literature they read as youngsters was antiwar, cynical, portraying patriots as suckers, slackers as heroes. None of them wanted to be part of another war. They wanted to be throwing baseballs, not hand grenades, shooting .22s at rabbits, not M-1s at other young men. But when the test came, when freedom had to be fought for or abandoned, they fought. They were soldiers of democracy. They were the men of D-Day, and to them we owe our freedom."

Ambrose's "love song to democracy" also makes good his argument that D-Day was the critical battle of World War II, and carefully avoids the subtle distinction of decisiveness. Had D-Day ended in a German repulse of the Anglo-American landing forces, it might well have been the decisive battle of the war. But that did not happen.

D-Day was critical because it was necessary to keep Stalin's Soviet Union in the war and not make a separate peace with Hitler; and because Hitler knew that Allied forces in France would directly threaten Germany's industrial heartland, whereas "the vastness of space" in the East provided a large buffer. "If the enemy," Hitler said, "succeeds in penetrating our defense [on France's coast] on a wide front, consequences of staggering proportions will follow within a short time."

There were other critical battles in the war--Midway in the Pacific, Stalingrad and Kursk on the Eastern Front--which if the Al-

lies had not won, and bled the enemy white in so doing, might have prolonged the war or changed its eventual outcome. But the D-Day effort was paramount.

Operation Overlord, which Winston Churchill called "the most difficult and complicated operation ever to take place," was enormous in scope. Over two years in the making, preparations for D-Day involved literally millions of people and a fantastic amount of materiel. Then, early on June 5, when Gen. Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower uttered the decision, "OK, let's go," 175,000 fighting men and their equipment were committed to battle.

It took 5,333 ships and nearly 11,000 airplanes to transport the invasion force 60 to 100 miles across the English Channel. Their cargo included 50,000 vehicles, from motorcycles to tanks and armored bulldozers, and they had stout German defenses to worry about.

In the end, D-DAY JUNE 6, 1944, is about human beings going into battle, fearful of what might happen, more afraid of their own frailty than the enemy. Typical of many, Lt. Richard Winters, a member of the 506th Parachute Infantry, U.S. 101st Airborne Division, "prayed the whole way over, he prayed to live through the day, prayed that he wouldn't fail."

"He didn't fail," Ambrose reports. "He won the DSC that morning."

Twenty-one years later members of the 101st Airborne Division were again committed to combat against an enemy of democracy, this time in Southeast Asia. Sadly, the outcome was different in Vietnam, but not because there was any flaw in U.S. troops or deficiency in their quality.

Read Ambrose's book. If you are a veteran of combat in any war, you will see yourself or a comrade somewhere on the pages of D-DAY. Veteran or not, the book will reveal a bit more of the mystery of why and how men fight.

Then, when you are finished, in remembrance of those who have fought in all of America's wars, share D-DAY with a friend.



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101st Veteran
and
Ripcord Association Member

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. 37

THE 'OFFICIAL' HISTORY OF 2/506TH FOR 1970

This segment of the history deals briefly with Delta and Charlie Company's combined assault on Hill 1000 on July 8th. They attacked upslope to the west, heading away from Ripcord. Because of the relationship of Ripcord and Hill 1000, these attacks were termed "frontal." Later attacks up the reverse or western slope of Hill 1000 by 2d Battalion, 501st (Geronimo) Infantry (-), which were equally unsuccessful, are not part of the 2/506th history. --Editor

Throughout that night [7-8 July] and during the next morning, Hill 1000 was pounded again and again with air strikes and artillery. Charlie Company moved from a location northwest of the fire base where they had been experiencing light contact to assist Delta Company in a second assault on the hill. The second assault was as ferocious as the first.

Delta and Charlie Companies managed to advance only slightly farther than the day before. The enemy had dug in so well that only a direct hit from a 500-pound or 250-pound bomb could destroy their bunkers. As friendly casualties increased it became apparent that Hill 1000 was not going to be taken that day or any other. Delta and Charlie withdrew under cover of air strikes and Cobra gunships.

Late in the afternoon, after the contact, Lt. Col. Lucas landed and discussed operations with Capt. Rollison and Capt. Wilcox. He determined at that time that the efforts against Hill 1000 would be too costly to justify further assaults. Delta Company was combat assaulted on the morning of the 9th to the O'Reilly area and Charlie Company was moved east of Ripcord.

That night and the next day, time-on-target artillery preparations were called on Hill 1000, but American forces no longer ventured up its scarred slopes. Ripcord continued to take incoming mortar and recoilless rifle rounds.

To be continued ...

Editor's Note

At this point in the Ripcord siege Alpha Company and I were securely ensconced on Fire Base O'Reilly, about nine klicks north of Ripcord, and, as it turned out, with a line-of-sight view of Hill 1000. Very little that had gone on in the battalion AO had been lost on me or Alpha's men, and we knew that our time would soon come. The next issue will recount the official version of Alpha Company's introduction to fighting around Ripcord.

For this issue, however, excerpts from my letters home to wife and family reveal some of the sense of foreboding we felt, prepa-

rations for battle and my personal anxiety. The following detail has never before been published.--Chuck Hawkins

LETTERS FROM FIRE BASE O'REILLY

June 18, 1970, to my wife.

... I'm sorry we have to be apart on our anniversary ... I took over Alpha Company on 30 May, and five days before our anniversary we made contact. ... two men were wounded and one young kid with a wife and two-week old daughter was killed.

The men were then too scared to move, so I moved forward with my CP ... pretty soon I had two squads firing and maneuvering toward the enemy. ... We secured the hill top and I spent the night giving a wounded man cigarettes and water, and listening to him moan. ... No medals, no heroes, just my job. But it makes me sick and numb afterward.

... Then, on the eve of our anniversary, about six NVA slipped within two hundred meters of our NDP and hit us with RPGs and small arms fire just before dark. The 1st Platoon reacted well ... [and] drove the enemy off. Another man wounded, another man killed.

... [It's] a dirty, stinking war and every man here has a dirty, stinking job. And I'm responsible for a company of dirty, stinking soldiers, and I love every one of them, and I don't want them to die any more. So I push and I drive them, and we are on a fire base (O'Reilly) digging in and laying wire from dawn to dusk and I will not lose more men. And when we leave this fire base I will have a company of killers who know how to survive....

July 2, 1970, to my wife.

... I think my stay on [Fire Base] O'Reilly is drawing to a close ... in a day or two perhaps. There has been a great deal of contact around Ripcord in the past week, and lots of action yesterday and last night. My old Charlie Company raked a company of NVA over the coals, but were badly hurt in doing so. I think Alpha Company will [combat assault] near Ripcord to take off some of the pressure. Ripcord also has been hit recently, but we built that fire base well and casualties were negligible. Don't worry, honey, but don't look for a lot of letters either. ... I had a lot of friends in Charlie Company, ...

July 4, 1970, to my wife.

... here I am on O'Reilly enjoying the 4th of July, while just a few klicks away Ripcord is under mortar attack. They have been under seige for three days now, and have weathered the enemy thrusts without any fatalities and only a few wounded. A lot of the enemy rounds are duds. ...

I am trying to objectively look at the facts so I can organize and prepare my people ... I know it sounds sick, honey, but this IS my war and it gets more personal every day. I wish the NVA would hit O'Reilly. It would give me a great deal of animal pleasure to watch them die; tangled ribbons of flesh in the wire. ...

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July 7, 1970, to my aunt and uncle.

... I've been meaning to write and I've started to, but words don't come that easily these days. Too many men are being killed and wounded. There has been almost daily contact in the battalion for the past month. ...

We leave our fire base in a few days. The NVA aren't leaving, and neither are we, so I guess the name of the game is: Stay alert, stay alive. I'm getting old.

... [T]ell [the war protesters] that by not supporting us, they're aiding the enemy. I'm sick, alright, but let me tell you how I feel. There aren't enough grenades and bullets in my rucksack to kill the [North Vietnamese] I'd like to see dead in a day. Nixon is okay. I've got men in my company who would extend to stay in the Army and in V. Nam if we were to make a thrust into Laos, Cambodia or North Vietnam. ...

July 8, 1970, letter to my wife.

... Honey, seriously now. We're going on a [combat assault in two days]. Back to the field. I'm not 10 feet tall; I'm only six feet ~~high~~ and made of flesh and bone. I'm scared. We all know we're going into a bad AO. There will be contact. No doubt about it. I am anxious for my men. I have enough worries for 10 people and I pray it will not get worse. All of a sudden, I find that I have more field experience than the majority of my men. ... it has made the war just that much more real. I have no doubts about myself. I have a good plan, my men will be careful and do their jobs well, but I still work at improving odds and ends. I have the largest company in the battalion ... 75 men. NOT a very big company.

I am looking forward to it in a way. It's funny, but I still find myself proving me to myself. Major Davis told me to be very careful, and [Lt. Col. Lucas] talks to me like a son. You know they are worried too. I want to do my job. I want to do it well. ... I owe a debt to Harry and Norris and Davis and Smith and Herndon and Lenz and ...

The war has become real these past few weeks. ... There are four officers and 70 [enlisted men] trusting in me and looking to me for guidance. They must have confidence in me ... and I can't show any signs of weakness--none. That's the hard part, because I do have weaknesses and that's where I need you. With you I am 10 feet tall ...

Honey, I've got to grab some sleep now. Wish me luck. I'll write more later when I get the chance, but it may be a while until the next letter. I know you understand.

July 9, 1970, to my aunt and uncle.

... Today, I am a company commander preparing for combat. Tomorrow we will engage the enemy. I take a few moments of my time and look away from my maps and grease pens. The sky is clear. Clean, fresh air ripples my hair, and my mind is lost in days gone by. Lonely country music wafts upon the breeze from a nearby bunker, and my soldiers joke nervously and clean weapons. Tomorrow, we will kill, and perhaps know death ourselves. ...

I see in my men, who, uncomplaining, go to meet their fate, my brother who is their age. I see young John, who soon will be, and a thousand others. ... I am not their Maker, only a leader. Only another flesh-and-blood person with hopes and fears the same as they, but I am the company commander. ...

I enjoy your letters. They give me much food for thought, and help to pass the occasional wearisome hours. I want you to know how very deeply I feel about all of you folks at home. I miss you dearly, and anticipate the day when I can walk in your front door and spend a few happy moments. ...

God bless you all, and may He keep you well. Say a prayer for the men of A Co., 2/506th. They are all good people, and are needed at home. ...

**Next month's official history:
THE ATTACK TO SIEZE HILL 805**

**AWARD AND DECORATION SUMMARY
FOR 2D BN, 506TH INF, FOR 1970**

	<u>Awarded</u>	<u>Pending</u>
Medal of Honor	0	1
Distinguished Service Cross	1	0
Silver Star	48	8
Legion of Merit	1	1
Distinguished Flying Cross	0	0
Soldier's Medal	7	0
Bronze Star "V"	157	39
Bronze Star	907	0
Air Medal "V"	0	0
Air Medal	781	13
Army Commendation Medal "V"	60	9
Army Commendation Medal	768	0

MILITARY QUOTES

Learn to obey before you command.--Solon of Athens, 638-559 B.C.

Often the test of courage is not to die but to live.--Vittorio Alfieri, 1749-1803

In war, truth is the first casualty.--Aeschylus, 525-456 B.C.

Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us.--John F. Kennedy, 1961