

MAJOR DAILY INCIDENTS DURING THE BATTLE FOR FIREBASE RIPCORD

Keith W. Nolan's Notes and Timeline for his book
Ripcord: Screaming Eagles Under Siege, Vietnam 1970
(Texas Tech University, Vietnam Archives)

1 JULY 1970

The shelling of Ripcord begins at 0708. By end of day, a Chinook has been shot down, and there are 15 WIA in B/2-319th FA.

2 JULY 1970

From 0346-0420, C/2-506th is attacked atop Hill 902, south of Ripcord. Enemy sappers get inside the NDP, and NVA infantrymen attack from the outside. There are 7 KIA (including company commander HEWITT), 1 MIA (this GI was apparently blown to bits by an RPG), and 6 WIA. Despite heavy losses, Charlie Company holds (15 enemy bodies are found at daybreak, plus numerous blood trails), and is replaced in the morning by B/2-506th. At 1030, another Chinook is shot down on Ripcord. Meanwhile, the 2-501st establishes its TOC with the 2-506th TOC on Ripcord. The 2-501st was rushed in to reinforce the 2-506th.

3 JULY 1970

B/2-506th (WILLIAMS) takes 1 KIA during a patrol off Hill 902. BG BERRY joins the 101st Abn Div, replacing BG James C. SMITH as ADC(O).

4 JULY 1970

C/2-501st hits a daisy-chain booby trap made of five 82mm mortar rounds placed along a trail, resulting in 5 KIA (including a platoon leader) and 5 WIA.

5 JULY 1970

Between 0010-0605, the C/2-501st NDP is attacked. 1 KIA, 17 WIA, & 5 NVA KIA.

6 JULY 1970

On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 5 WIA. The Recon Platoon, E/2-506th, takes five WIA when it engages an NVA mortar position on Hill 1000, due west of Ripcord. The company on the bunker line, D/2-506th, moves out to support Recon, and is replaced by B/2-506th, which will secure Ripcord for the rest of the battle.

7 JULY 1970

On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 2 WIA. D/2-506th (ROLLISON) makes an unsuccessful attack up Hill 1000; pinned down, the company breaks contact after LTC LUCAS brings his LOH in low, taking numerous hits as he drops ammo and grenades to his troops. Delta Company has 1 KIA, 2 MIA (these men were wounded and apparently died during the firefight, but their bodies were never found), plus 19 WIA. Six NVA were known to have been killed. Meanwhile, C/2-506th (WILCOX), on the north side of Hill 1000, runs into an enemy force, and suffers 1 KIA and 15 WIA.

8 JULY 1970

C/2-506th (WILCOX) and D/2-506th (ROLLISON) launch another attack up Hill 1000. Charlie Company takes 2 KIA and 5 WIA. WILCOX refuses to make a second attack on the grounds that his company is only at platoon strength. WILCOX is relieved of command.

9 JULY 1970

No major action this day.

10 JULY 1970

On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 2 KIA and 17 WIA.

11 JULY 1970

The 2-501st is pulled out of the Ripcord AO and lifted to Camp Evans to organize for a CA behind Hill 1000 back in the Ripcord AO.

12 JULY 1970

The 2-501st combat assaults behind Hill 1000. A/2-506th (HAWKINS) and D/2-501st (STRAUB) take Hill 805. STRAUB digs in on top, and at 2222 repels an enemy attack, suffering 26 WIA. As usual, enemy casualties were considerable given the fire A/2-506th poured into the rear of the attack force, go uncounted.

13 JULY 1970

No major action this day.

14 JULY 1970

At 0203, D/2-501st (STRAUB) atop Hill 805 is hit hard. 6 KIA, 9 WIA, & 5 NVA KIA. The 2-501st assaults up the back slope of Hill 1000. The attack was repulsed with 1 KIA and 20 WIA (four of whom were hit by errant Cobra fire). As recorded in the brigade TOC, this message was sent to COL HARRISON from division: "MAJ GEN Hennessey monitored a conversation between COL Harrison and LTC Livingston where he thought he heard a conversation about storming bunkers. He advises them to use firepower instead of storming. In reply, COL Harrison says I agree with him. He misunderstood; we'll use firepower. There are no more attacks up Hill 1000.

At 1600, GEN WESTMORELAND (Chief of Staff), LTG SUTHERLAND (CG, XXIV Corps), and MG HENNESSEY (CG, 101st) visit the 3/101 CP at Camp Evans.

At 1705, an Air Force FAC spotted a .51-cal position southeast of Ripcord, and B/2-319th places direct fire on it, resulting in a secondary explosion. Because an attack on Ripcord is expected, maximum fire support is placed around the firebase. In addition, COL HARRISON, the brigade commander, spends the night at Ripcord, just in case. There is no attack.

At 2253, however, the NVA again hit D/2-501st on Hill 805. 1 KIA, 7 WIA.

15 JULY 1970

At about 1830, MG HENNESSEY departs on leave for his daughter's wedding. BG BERRY takes over as Acting Commanding General, 101st Abn Div. Starting at 1845, the NVA shell and probe D/2-501st on Hill 805. 2 NVA KIA.

16 JULY 1970

The XO of B/2-319th is injured in an ammo fire on Ripcord. A GI in A/2-501st below Hill 1000 is killed in a freak accident when strong winds blow over a tree previously shot up by Cobras. Starting at 2358, the NVA probe D/2-501st atop Hill 805.

17 JULY 1970

At 0737, two 120mm mortar shells slam into Ripcord, marking the first use of these heavy weapons. The shelling continues all day, and results in a total of 13 WIA, including a Kit Carson Scout and the COs of both B/2-319th and A/2-11th. The planned extraction of 2-501st is delayed because of high winds. Meanwhile, D/2-501st is ordered to march from Hill 805 to an extraction LZ. Along the way, one of the company's Kit Carson Scouts kills himself with a grenade, wounding 9 GIs in the process. CPT STRAUB is among the wounded. Two of the GIs will die of their injuries. D/2-501st is not replaced, and Hill 805 is taken by the enemy.

18 JULY 1970

The 2-501st (including STRAUB's Company D) is extracted from the Ripcord AO. On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 2 KIA and 5 WIA. COL HARRISON does not record the date, but perhaps this is the day he himself almost became a casualty on Ripcord: "My introduction to the 120mm mortar happened when I was standing at the opening of one of the Ripcord bunkers, talking with a sergeant as we both leaned on the stack of sand-filled ammo crates shielding the bunker entrance. A 120mm round landed at the front base of the stacked crates. It blew both of us back about eight feet into the bunker. The sergeant was evacuated with blood coming out of both ears. A soldier leaning on crates in the same fashion at the next opening to my right was killed instantly. My S-3 was approaching from the helipad to our left, and was wounded in the right leg." In addition, a Chinook carrying a sling-load of 105mm ammo is shot down and crashes into the B/2-319th area, setting off a major fire that destroys all six howitzers and all the battery's ammunition. Five helicopter crewmen are injured, and the flight engineer killed in the fire. To provide Ripcord with 105 support, the 1-501st (LTC AARON) opens up FSB Gladiator, almost eight kilometers northeast of Ripcord. B/2-320th (105mm) is lifted in.

19 JULY 1970

On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 12 WIA. CPT HAWKINS kills two enemy soldiers who walk right into the A/2-506th CP. One of the dead is an NVA recon sergeant. The other man appears to HAWKINS to be Chinese.

20 JULY 1970

On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 2 KIA and 1 WIA. D/1-506th (WORKMAN) is combat assaulted three kilometers east of Ripcord on a mission whose objective is unclear at this point, and runs into a hornets nest. 4 KIA, 5 WIA; 3 NVA KIA. Meanwhile, A/2-506th (HAWKINS) discovers an enemy high-speed trail southeast of Ripcord, along which is strung comms wire. Tapping into it, the company Kit Carson Scout eavesdrops for five hours on conversations between an NVA regimental and division headquarters. Numerous NVA troops are killed by Alpha Company as they come to check what's wrong with their comms wire, or stop to fill canteens at a nearby stream. Thanks to the wiretap, COL HARRISON writes, "It was learned that there were four regiments surrounding

Ripcord, for the purpose of seizing the fire base. This told me that we finally had them (the NVA) bunched and not going anywhere. I told my brigade staff to develop plans to destroy the four regiments. The staff came up with a plan calling for six additional U.S. battalions."

21 JULY 1970

D/1-506th is mortared in its NDP; pulling downhill to its LZ of the day before, it is then assaulted by overwhelming numbers of NVA. There are 5 KIA (including CPT WORKMAN who is decapitated by the main rotor of a shot-down Huey), and approximately 35 WIA. One of the KIAs is actually MIA; the man fell out of a medevac and his body was never found. D/2-506th (ROLLISON) CAs in, and secures a new LZ for the extraction of D/1-506th. D/2-506th, reinforced by C/2-506th (LAMB), go out last. In the chaos, seven bodies from D/1-506th are accidentally left behind (not counting the man who fell out of the medevac). On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 2 KIA and 4 WIA in B/2-506th, and 3 KIA and 7 WIA in A/2-11th (the dead include LT KALSU, the acting battery commander). The MACV J3 visits the 101st Abn Div. BG BERRY writes home: "The J3 stated that our division area is the most active in Vietnam and has been for some time. We have the most and the toughest enemy in country, have been involved in the heaviest fighting, and have been taking the most casualties. Which concerns people up the chain of command." "The MACV J-3 also stated that within the prevailing political atmosphere accompanying Vietnamization of the war and US troop withdrawals it simply doesn't make sense to accept heavy casualties. Yet, he said, the Screaming Eagles' planned offensive operation, CHICAGO PEAK, is the only operation on the books for this summer that has any hope for hitting the enemy where it will hurt him and where we can destroy the enemy's supplies and disrupt his plans for a monsoon season attack into the coastal areas. In summary, MACV's hopes for some kind of successful summer 1970 offensive depend on the Screaming Eagles, but we cannot afford to take heavy casualties. There's a dilemma here, isn't there?"

22 JULY 1970

In the morning, BG BERRY makes the decision to evacuate Ripcord. "I was dumbfounded," writes COL HARRISON. "It had never, ever occurred to me to cut and run. However, if the Ripcord situation had been presented at Ft. Benning or Ft. Leavenworth, and I was asked to make a decision, mine would have been the same as Berry's. General Berry was able to see the battle from a more detached view. I was too close, I failed to step back from the immediate problem." On Ripcord, the continued shelling results in 1 KIA and 3 WIA. In addition, a Huey is hit by mortar fire on the POL pad, and rendered non-flyable. Four crewmen are injured. A/2-506th runs into an NVA battalion while moving to an extraction LZ. CPT HAWKINS is wounded in the throat, and the company, splintered by the onslaught, manages to regroup in a miniature NDP. 12 KIA (plus the company Kit Carson Scout), 51 WIA & 61 NVA KIA.

23 JULY 1970

From 0632-1214, FSB Ripcord is evacuated. The Chinooks take out the artillery and heavy equipment first. Eight Chinooks are hit by fire, to include mortars and .51-cals atop Hill 805, and AK-47 fire from NVA in the debris at the base of Ripcord. Two Chinooks are shot down, the latter crashing into the previously destroyed 105s of B/2-319th, preventing their extraction. The 105s are instead destroyed with thermite grenades. During the extraction of the infantry, two Cobras and twelve Hueys are hit. There are a total of 22 Chinook sorties and 100 Huey sorties. LTC LUCAS and

MAJ TANNER are killed by 120mm mortar fire. Officially, there were 3 KIA and 27 WIA. The dead were LUCAS, TANNER, and PFC Gus ALLEN, a replacement for A/2-506th. Reportedly, a Pathfinder was also killed, but his name does not show up on any KIA lists for 23 July; the rumor is that the Pathfinder's body was accidentally left behind, and is thus listed as being KIA on the date the body was recovered, not the date the man was actually killed. The last living man off Ripcord was a Kit Carson Scout. "A Cobra saw him walking around," a door gunner wrote home. "They immediately had a LOH OH-6A to go in and get him. They barely got him off in time. Five minutes later several NVA charged up the hill and threw satchel charges into the empty bunkers and operations center." Meanwhile, D/2-506th (ROLLISON) CAs in to reinforce A/2-506th (HAWKINS) and builds an extraction LZ. At 1225, the final extraction of these two companies' from the Ripcord AO begins.