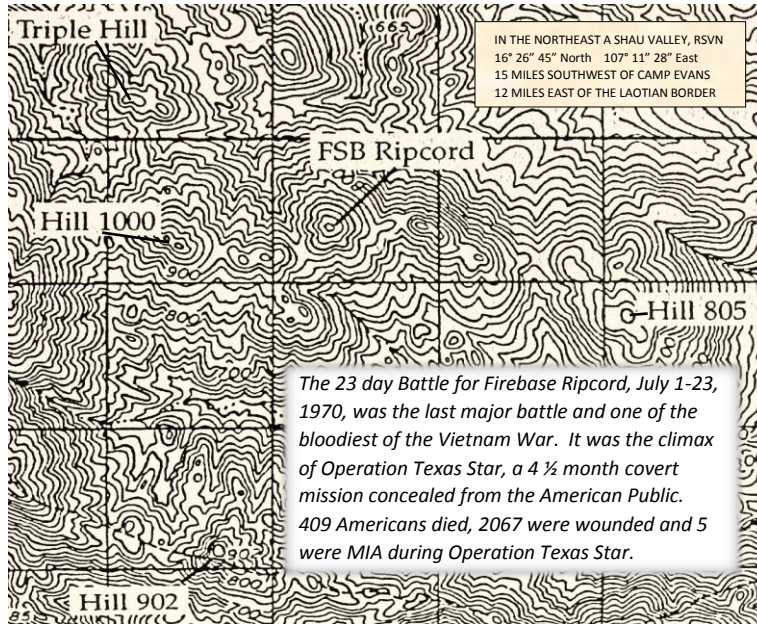


**CONSTANT TERROR BECAME THE NEW NORMAL, PART 2: HILL 1000**  
**MAJOR ACTION INVOLVING ALPHA COMPANY 2-501<sup>ST</sup>, 101<sup>ST</sup> AIRBORNE DIVISION**  
**SOUTH VIETNAM, JULY 12<sup>TH</sup> – JULY 18<sup>TH</sup> 1970 DURING THE 23 DAY NVA SIEGE OF FSB RIPCORD**  
*Written by Guy Rudawski, Company Medic for Alpha Company 2-501<sup>ST</sup>, 101<sup>ST</sup> Airborne Division*

Hill 1000 was fiercely held by the well trained and well-armed North Vietnamese Army. They fought from fortified bunkers, connected by an extensive tunnel system, which were seemingly impervious to US airstrikes and artillery shelling. Firebase Ripcord, operated by the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, was only 1 km east of Hill 1000. NVA mortars and .51 Caliber machine guns on Hill 1000 relentlessly battered the



firebase. Hill 1000 was the greatest threat to the security of Ripcord.

In the surrounding mountainous jungle were 4 infantry companies from the 501<sup>st</sup> and 4 from the 506<sup>th</sup> battalions of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Our mission was to defend Ripcord from ground attacks by the NVA's 324B Division, 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment and 7<sup>th</sup> Sapper Battalion, a formidable enemy force who outnumbered us at least 6:1. They stood their ground and were willing to die for their cause. It was close range jungle fighting . . . violent and bloody.

It would take boots on the ground to force the tenacious NVA from Hill 1000.

On July 6<sup>th</sup> Charlie, Delta, and Echo Companies, 2-506<sup>th</sup>, began the offensive on Hill 1000 and immediately took taking heavy casualties. July 7<sup>th</sup>, 21 year old Lewis Howard Jr volunteered to walk point for 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Delta Company, and he was cut down by 3 enemy grenades. Charles Beals, age 22, took a burst of bullets from an NVA machine gun. The intense enemy fire continued for 6 hours, making repeated attempts to recover Beals and Howard impossible. They are both presumed dead based on eyewitness accounts, however their bodies were never recovered and they are classified as Missing In Action.



**LEWIS HOWARD JR**  
 MACON, GEORGIA  
 10/03/1949 – 07/07/1970  
 PANEL 9W LINE 128  
 STATUS: MIA



**CHARLES ELBERT BEALS**  
 FRENCH LICK, INDIANA  
 09/27/1948 – 07/07/1970  
 PANEL 3W LINE 103  
 STATUS: MIA

*"...that hill wasn't worth one more life"* insisted Captain Jeff Wilcox, Commanding Officer of Charlie Company, 2-506<sup>th</sup>. Captain Wilcox was relieved of his command on July 8<sup>th</sup> for refusing orders to continue sending his undermanned and exhausted company against the heavily armed NVA on Hill 1000.

After 3 days on Hill 1000, the 506<sup>th</sup> suffered 5 killed, 2 missing and 44 wounded. Further ground attacks on Hill 1000 were halted until July 12<sup>th</sup> when the 2/501<sup>st</sup> "Drive On" Battalion would combat assault to locations North at Triple Hill (Alpha) and South West at Coc Muen mountain (Bravo, Charlie and Echo). Our orders were to converge on Hill 1000 and force the NVA off the Hill. At the same time, our brothers from Delta Company, 2-501<sup>st</sup> would begin their heroic 5 day bloody battle with the NVA on Hill 805. *Firebase Ripcord was imperiled by constant mortar attacks and they were becoming deadly accurate.*

*"Ripcord was just another exercise for us. We were the swing battalion.*

*We bounced from brigade to brigade, getting inserted into whatever area was hot at the moment."*

*Lt. Col. Otis W. Livingston, Jr. Commanding Office, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 501<sup>st</sup> Infantry, "DRIVE ON", 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division*

**CONSTANT TERROR BECAME THE NEW NORMAL, PART 2: HILL 1000***Written by Guy Rudawski, Company Medic for Alpha Company 2-501<sup>st</sup>, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division*

Captain Donald Goates and Alpha Company 2/501<sup>st</sup> combat assaulted onto Triple Hill July 12<sup>th</sup>. The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Otis W. Livingston flew in with us. Impressively, the 40 year old Colonel was humping a rucksack and sleeping in the dirt like the rest of us. Goates and Livingston were considering a plan to conduct a night operation on Hill 1000 but it would require 20 volunteers. Captain Goates approached me with his idea about a tactical night operation. I understood the strategy was not a reconnaissance mission, but a night ambush to surprise the NVA. *“Doc, I know you have Special Forces training and I’ll need a medic to go with us. I want you on board.”* (Captain Goates was a professional soldier and he seemed willing to take risks to promote his career. Some of the men, however, considered his actions reckless and an ominous undercurrent developed, *“he’s gonna get us killed . . . someone might have to take him out.”*) I responded to Goates: *“I’ll go if you get enough volunteers but I don’t like it, the men aren’t trained or disciplined for a night mission.”* Only ten soldiers volunteered.

July 13<sup>th</sup> was spent bombing Hill 1000 in preparation for our assault on the 14<sup>th</sup>. On July 14<sup>th</sup> Bravo and Charlie Companies encountered heavy NVA resistance in a camouflaged bunker complex southwest of Hill 1000, taking one KIA and 20 wounded. An NVA .51 Caliber machine gun had them pinned down while a mortar tube zeroed in on their position. Alpha Company advanced from the NE to take out the machine gun and mortar position. Overhead, Cobra gunships swooped in for air support but were greeted with intense enemy fire and resupply helicopters were getting shot down. As Alpha 1 and Alpha 2 were closing on the machine gun we got fired up mistakenly by our own Cobra gunships that were sent to support Bravo and Charlie; Alpha took 5 wounded. Bravo and Charlie were forced to pull back to evacuate their casualties. The NVA counter attacked, pursuing Alpha as we withdrew to Triple Hill. Skyraiders saved us by providing close air support, dropping deadly cluster bombs to cover our withdrawal. Alpha medivaced it’s wounded from Triple Hill then swiftly moved 1 km west to set up a night defensive position (NDP) and prepare to assault Hill 1000 again on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

*After 8 hours of heavy combat we were fatigued, our nerves were frayed and it was a muggy 100 degrees. Division and Brigade level Commanders were incensed that we didn’t capture Hill 1000 on July 14<sup>th</sup> and they were looking to blame someone. The Hills around Ripcord were crawling with NVA and Command and Control did not yet appreciate the magnitude of the enemy buildup taking place around Firebase Ripcord. Commanders who gave orders without a clue about what was happening on the ground were hated.*

Besides the tenacious enemy, 60 knot howling winds started kicking up on the 14<sup>th</sup> and continued for three days disrupting air support and resupply. On the 15<sup>th</sup> more artillery was called in before we cautiously advanced toward Hill 1000, however, this attack was aborted under heavy enemy fire. More artillery firepower was called in hoping that would drive the NVA off the hill. Alpha pulled back to set up an NDP west of Triple Hill. We expected new orders to take Hill 1000 on the 16<sup>th</sup> and we were ready to go.

**REFERENCES:** *The Coffelt Database of Vietnam Casualties*; [RipcordAssociation.com](http://RipcordAssociation.com)  
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*Hell on a Hilltop, America’s Last Major Battle in Vietnam* by Major General Benjamin Harrison, 2004;  
*Remembering Firebase Ripcord* by Christopher J Brady, 2015;  
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*My Personal Letters* Home from Vietnam and my recall of events as a member of Alpha Company 2/501

*“I stuck with my atheism for a number of years, but God finally reached out and brought me home.”*

*Lieutenant Jim Kwiecien, Platoon Leader, Alpha Two, Alpha Company, 2/501<sup>st</sup>*

*Wounded July 14<sup>th</sup> during Alpha Company’s Assault on Hill 1000.*