

HEADQUARTERS  
101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96383

AVDG-CS

23 July 1970

SUBJECT: Firebase Ripcord

TO: Commanding General  
XXIV Corps  
APO 96 349

1. BACKGROUND. Fire Support/Operational Base RIPCORN was to be opened on or about 1 April 1970 as a key forward fire support/operational base in the division's summer offensive plans against the 803d and 29th NVA Regiments in the A SHAU VALLEY area. Mutually supporting firebases would be opened at FSB BRADLEY (105mm how) and AIRBORNE (105mm how). AIRBORNE, in turn, was within mutually supporting range of FSB KATHRYN (155mm how).
2. OCCUPATION. Assaults into the FSB RIPCORN area by elements of the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and 1st Regiment, 1st Infantry Division (ARVN) on 5 March 1970 were delayed due to inclement weather in the AO. On 13 March, A/2-506 Infantry was to combat assault into an LZ on Hill 902, 2 kilometers south of FSB RIPCORN. Just prior to insertion, this LZ was determined unsatisfactory and insertion was made into the alternate LZ. The alternate LZ was FSB RIPCORN. A/2-506 began to receive intense mortar, recoilless rifle and small arms fire on the LZ. This fire continued until the company was ordered off the hill to the east. On 14 March, elements of the 1st Regiment (ARVN) captured documents indicating the location of units of the 6th NVA Regiment in the RIPCORN area. ARVN and US units were extracted on 15 March. Extensive air and artillery strikes were conducted until 1 April, when US and ARVN units again assaulted into the RIPCORN area. This assault had been delayed since 17 March due to unsatisfactory weather conditions. B/2-506 Infantry assaulted onto the firebase on 1 April, and again the enemy employed intense mortar, recoilless rifle and small arms fire. At approximately 1830 hours, the company moved about 700 meters to the east and joined A/2-506 Infantry which had combat assaulted into an LZ 700 meters east of RIPCORN.
3. OPERATIONS IN THE FSB RIPCORN AREA. During the period 2-10 April, 2/506 Infantry and 2 battalions of the 1st ARVN Regiment conducted ground combat operations around FSB RIPCORN to locate and destroy enemy mortar and recoilless rifle positions. These operations were conducted within 3000 meters of and all around the firebase. On 11 April, c/2-506 Infantry assaulted RIPCORN and secured the firebase by 0800 hours. The battalion light CP and engineer support elements were lifted into the firebase on 11 April. Inclement weather precluded insertions of artillery into the firebase until 16 April. During the period 16 April to 1 July, the battalion continued construction and conducted security operations around the firebase

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without significant stand-off (indirect fire) attack on the firebase. During the period 1-22 July, FSB RIPCORDER was subjected to daily attacks by mortar, recoilless rifle, RPG, and sporadic machinegun and small arms fire from enemy locations all around the firebase. On 18 July, a CH47 aircraft was shot down on the firebase. The aircraft crashed in a 105mm ammunition storage area and burst into flames. The resulting fire and exploding artillery ammunition destroyed 5 105mm howitzers, 2 106mm recoilless rifles, one mechanical mule, and several other items of equipment. The remaining 105mm howitzer on the firebase was damaged.

4. EXTRACTION FROM FSB RIPCORDER. At 230545 July 70, the 3d Brigade began operations for the extraction of the 2-506 Infantry from FSB RIPCORDER and field locations south of the firebase. During the night of 22-23 July, massive artillery and air fires were employed throughout the area against known and suspected enemy locations. More than 2232 mixed caliber artillery rounds were fired in support of the extraction. The US Air Force, Marines, and Navy flew 35 preplanned and immediate air strikes, for a total of 74 sorties. Fourteen CH47 aircraft were employed commencing at 0545 hours to extract 22 sorties, which included 1 155mm howitzer battery (6 tubes), 2 M-405 dozers, communications equipment, 1 M55 multiple machinegun (Quad-50), and 1 damaged 105mm howitzer. The CH47 extraction operations proceeded smoothly until 0740 hours when 1 CH47 was shot down on the firebase by enemy 12.7mm machinegun fire. The aircraft was forced to land amidst the 105mm howitzers which had been destroyed on 18 July and thus prevented the landing of additional aircraft to extract the remaining artillery pieces and two 106mm recoilless rifles. The CH47 received a direct hit by an unknown type enemy mortar round, causing the aircraft to burn and explode. The aircraft was destroyed. Eight additional CH47 aircraft received hits during the extractions; 4 are nonflyable. B/2-506 Infantry began extracting at 0745 hours by UH1H aircraft but was delayed until 0935 hours by heavy enemy 60mm and 82mm mortar fires. The extractions was conducted by infiltrating one UH1H aircraft at a time into the firebase. The extraction from FSB RIPCORDER was complete at 1214 hours. Companies A and D/2-506 Infantry extracted from a pickup zone 1 1/2 kilometers south of FSB RIPCORDER commencing at 1301 hours. Sporadic small arms fire was received during the extraction. There were no casualties or damage. The extraction of 2-506 Infantry units from the RIPCORDER area was complete at 1407 hours. During the extraction, FSB RIPCORDER was under constant fire from numerous enemy mortars of 60mm and 82mm caliber. Several hundred rounds impacted throughout the firebase during the operation. Heavy 12.7mm anti-aircraft fire was directed against the aircraft flying into the firebase. Air, artillery, and ARA destroyed several enemy mortars and 12.7mm machineguns. In addition, numerous enemy driven into the open by CS were killed by air, artillery, and ARA.

5. RATIONALE FOR CLOSING FSB RIPCORDER. In early July, it became obvious that NVA forces were massing in an attempt to control the RIPCORDER area. The enemy buildup of forces and the tempo of mortar, RPG, and anti-aircraft fire steadily increased during the first half of the month. By the third week of July, it was apparent that the cost and effort required for the self-defense of RIPCORDER placed the accomplishment of the primary mission, i.e. operations in the BRADLEY-AIRBORNE area, in grave jeopardy. The closing of

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RIPCORD would make troops available for offensive use against the enemy supply caches and logistic installations to the rear of the NVA forces massed around RIPCORD. The cache sites in the AIRBORNE-BRADLEY area are believed to be part of the base areas of the 803d and 29th NVA Regiments. The concentration of NVA forces around RIPCORD would further facilitate operations in areas to the south and southeast. Therefore, the decision to extract from RIPCORD was made, and operations into the AIRBORNE-BRADLEY areas will be undertaken as a part of operations CHICAGO PEAK. Additional factors of critical importance in the decision to close FSB RIPCORD were the domestic and foreign political implications of another US firebase undergoing a KHE SANH or DIEN BIEN PHU siege. RIPCORD, in given an inordinate amount of adverse publicity, might well have jeopardized the program of Vietnamization. RIPCORD operations caused heavy NVA casualties and drew the enemy from his cache sites, causing him to mass and thus to present numerous targets vulnerable to heavy air attack and artillery fire.

6. ENEMY LOSSES. From 13 March through 23 July, the enemy suffered 422 NVA KIA, 6 NVA PW, and 93 individual and 24 crew-served weapons captured.

7. FRIENDLY LOSSES.

a. During the same period, US losses were 68 KIA and 443 WIA. Casualties during the extraction on 23 July were 3 KIA and 20 WIA.

b. Aircraft losses on or near the firebase include:

(1) UH1H	
Minor damage	13
Major damage	10
Destroyed	3

(2) OH6A	
Minor damage	1
Major damage	4
Destroyed	1

(3) CH47	
Minor damage	5
Major damage	3
Destroyed	2

(4) In addition, 60 aircraft received combat damage which required limited repair.

8. PLANNED OPERATIONS. Planned offensive operations will be initiated on or about 25 July with the combat assault of one infantry battalion to open a fire support/operational base which will provide support for the insertion of 2 ARVN infantry battalions on or about 28-30 July 1970. A detailed plan will follow.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

HUGH A. MACDONALD  
Colonel, GS