



## BAN ME THUOT BARB

May 97

### GUARD DUTY

It was already cold as darkness overtook the compound. I had just finished pulling maintenance on "607" and then met up with the other two lucky members of 1st Flight for guard duty. Except for the nights when my ship was the standby flare ship, guard duty was pretty much every other night. What with flying, maintenance, and guard duty, it seemed we could just never get enough sleep. But I got lucky on this night, and won the first shift. After midnight, I would be able to sleep uninterrupted until dawn.

Our bunker sat near the Corral, just down the line from the mini-tower behind the officers' club. The compound lights showed the little dirt road just outside the wire, and behind that lots of trees. As I sat on top, my companions slept on cots inside the bunker. The OD had already been around once; the lukewarm coffee he brought didn't help much. Time dragged.

The ringing of the commo phone broke my reverie; the mini-tower had spotted someone in the wire. They had only seen one, and were holding their fire to see if there would be others, but wanted all bunkers alerted. I woke the others, and we readied our 60's. Without notice, the tower opened up - and so did we. ROCK & ROLL!! The sapper was hit and fell on the road. When the firing slackened, I noticed that all the lights were out and heard the wail of the warning siren. B-40's shot over our bunker, and we all dove inside and moved to firing ports. With all of us inside it was very cramped, so I moved back out and took up a position in the rocket trench.

But the B-40's seemed to signal the end of the attack. The "All Clear" soon sounded, and the three of us were sitting atop the bunker when Major Steele and the OD drove up to check our perimeter. We all talked, and showed them an unexploded mortar round in the middle of a taxiway. Major Steele was especially concerned that the lights were out, and told us to keep a sharp watch the rest of the night.

Stagecoach 6 and the OD were just readying to leave when, from the corner of my eye, I spotted movement in the wire. He was already three-fourths of the way through! I shouted to get down, and fired off a burst that found its mark. Smoke curled up from my trusty M-60 as I watched the now stilled enemy. WOW - right in front of the CO! While the others regained their composure, I saw various medals being pinned to my chest.

Major Steele led us out to the wire to see the dead sapper. When we reached the body, the OD shined his flashlight - on the biggest rabbit I have ever seen. Didn't I feel like a jerk! Thankfully, the Major didn't say a word. The rest of the night was uneventful, but the story doesn't end there. At the next company formation, Major Steele explained in precise detail the facts of our defense of the compound that night - including one enemy rabbit KIA.

*Bob Alberts (Purple Gang CE, Stagecoach 607)*

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**CAN YOU HELP US FIND . . .** Capt. **Curt Seiler**, 1st Platoon Leader & Stagecoach pilot '70; **Ron Porter**, Falcon pilot '68-9 (Scottsdale??); **Bobbie Moore**, Falcon gunner '68 (from Cleveland); **Royal Sander**, Stagecoach pilot '69; Capt. **Rodney Pimento**; SP/4 **Picou**; SP/4 **John Murphy**; SP/4 **Galen Campbell** (2nd platoon, married a bar maid & stayed in BMT after ETS). If you have any idea as to the whereabouts of any of these guys, please pass the info to any 155 AHCA occifer.

What we really need are more social security numbers from you, to find more of our guys. 155 orders are great, and stateside orders sometimes have other 155 names, too. PLEASE send orders to Tom or Earl. (And if you're looking for someone, let me know & we'll list 'em in the next newsletter.)

**TO THE BRAVE MEN OF THE 155 AHCA**

On February 23, 1970, my twin brother (David Nachtigall) was taken from this earth in the skies over Vietnam, leaving me numb with the deepest sorrow I will ever know - and many unanswered questions. Through a strange and wonderful set of circumstances and "Falcon fate," I met Tom Mullen in November, 1992, twenty-two years after Dave's death. Our story could be a Movie of the Week! My inquiries through the "In-Touch" Program brought us together. Unbelievably, here was a man who knew and remembered my twin! To make a long story short, we met, married, and have shared more than I could ever have imagined. Out of the most devastating event of my life came a love for the rest of my life. I am writing this to thank Tom and Mary and Earl Baldwin, through whose efforts I have come to meet dozens of very brave and very special men. The reunion of the 155 AHC last November opened so many doors for me, and cleared away so much sorrow. You opened your hearts, and shared your feelings and stories of Dave with me. One of my biggest fears had been that he was alone and lonely in a far-away land, but I now know that he had a wonderful family - the men of the 155 AHC. Thank you for remembering him, and for giving so much of him back to me. So much of him I couldn't share, but meeting you, his brothers, has made me so happy. I just want you all to know what a difference you have made in my life. You were brave beyond words - and I am so proud to know you now. Thank you for lessening my fears and making my thoughts happier. After meeting all of you, I now know he had the best of friends, for when he needed them most. Thank you for being there, thank you for being you - the brave men of the 155 AHC.

*Mary Nachtigall Mullen*

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**FLASHBACK 1969 - from the POOLSIDE PARABLE:**

Congratulations to the following on their recent awards: CW2 Ken Donovan, DFC; CW2 Bob Collins, DFC & Bronze Star; Air Medals with 'V' Device were awarded to the following: CPT Wally Foster, WO's Richard Arnold, David DeSio, Phillip Watson, Ray Douglas, William R. Stephens; SP/5's Ronnie Wiles, Thomas Mickey, & Donald Skeen; SP/4's Dave Dickens, Danny McCray, Gerald Locascio, Harold Nolen, and Gregory Bundros. Basic Air Medals went to: CPT Donald Wilt; WO's Bruce McInnes, Walter Sain, Keith Marchbanks, Donald Plocinski, and Robert Maddox; SP/4's James Leonard & Pete Barthman.

The awards were presented in a dual ceremony by LTC Patellos, new commander of the 10th Battalion during his first visit with the Stagecoach-Falcon team.

Trading Post - Wanted to Sell: Size 9D Corcoran Jump Boots, worn only four times. Complete with spit-shine. Only \$20. Contact SSG Wiggs, Maintenance, soon.

*Thanks to Pam & Danny Lauer for sending in the 6 Dec 69 Poolside Parable. If anyone out there has other issues, please send copies to the editor.*

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**MAIL CALL** - sharing letters from our friends:

**Johnny Gann** - It was wonderful seeing everyone after 29 years. Thank all of you who were involved in tracking down my belated Purple Heart. You touched me and my family with your kindness and generosity. *signed* Falcon 049. P.S. "Falcons, go hot!"

**Wayne Cranford** - I really enjoyed the first newsletter. The whole format is great. Hopefully we all can add a little something of each and every one of us and make it really special.

**Harry Vogler** - If anyone gets down to Fort Rucker, there are some good pix of 155 Hogs and aerial shots of Ban Me Thuot.

**Bob Beaudreault** - It was a great party, sorry I had to leave early. Next time I'm there for the duration - and let's make it soon!

**Duane Poulin** - Sure wish I could have made the November reunion, thanks for putting together a great newsletter. I'm glad to hear many of us are getting together again. P.S. Remember when you pulled the Pterodactyl pilot out of Happy Valley? I was gunner of trail ship (Falcon 504) that day. I covered YOUR ass(ets)!

**Jim Ferris** - Just read the newsletter, and the second paragraph just hit an emotional cord I've been dealing with for 30 years. Johnny Gann and I were good friends, and I've thought of him often, wondering . . . Now I know I'll see him again.

**Danny Lauer** - Just got the newsletter - very nice. If people can't get it now, then they're the ones missing out. Remember, crew chiefs rule!  
*signed Slick 276*

**Al Owen** - Here's a computer-generated Stagecoach patch, some orders with social security numbers, and pictures. I went through flight school with HC Watters and Bob Nickle, that's a great story. Thanks for the memories!!

**Jim Koch** - Does anyone remember when the entire liquor supply for the O club was destroyed? I flew the mission to Saigon to restock it.

**Denny Fenlon** - Thanks for sending the *BMTB* all the way to Saudi Arabia. It's funny how the newsletter can bring back so many memories from so long ago. The last I heard you were shot down and missing in action, I'm glad you're OK.

**Rod Waddell** - I'm very thankful to all who have taken an interest in renewing the friends and activities that were so impressionable so many years ago. (And by the way, do you need an extra R&R?)

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**OVERHEARD AT THE REUNION . . .** With 27 years of hindsight, I'm forced to admit that some of us pilots (but certainly not this editor) may have been, on occasion, rather cocky. It's probably not a stretch to say that many (all??) of us looked upon ourselves as god's gift to green things that fly. After all, we were sent to Vietnam to slay dragons & rescue damsels & generally do heroic things, and everybody else was there mainly to support our noble deeds - right? Well, at the reunion I heard some different thoughts from our backseaters and from non-fliers, too. Here's a few:

Sorriest mustache I ever saw.

Always had the best tanning spots by the pool.

OK guys, but not terribly bright. Most had flunked out of college & lost their deferments.

Decent volleyball players - but great sunbathers!

Some I'd follow to the Gates of Hell, some I wouldn't even follow to the pith tubes.

Never once bought cokes for the crew.

Getting into and out of the revetments was always an adventure.

It's a good thing he went to the Falcons, 'cause he couldn't fly formation worth a shirt.

Nice tans.

He never did a hover check, said they were stupid. I don't think he could hover!

Fortunately, the peter pilot knew which end of the map was up.

A great stand-by pilot - he could sleep anywhere.

He said he liked to fly out of trim.

I swear, one day when he was an FNG, he had "collective" written on his left wrist,  
and "cyclic" on the right one!

He wanted to fly guns because the revetments were bigger.

Carried suntan oil in his survival vest.

He was a legend in his own mind!

**“THE BEST HELICOPTER UNIT IN VIETNAM “**

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the members of the 155th AHC that responded to phone calls, messages, and mailings in our effort to locate as many members as possible prior to the reunion. Many of you responded to someone you did not know as I may have been in-country either before or after your time there. Yet you offered assistance in locating other members, dug out and copied orders and photos, and tried your best to recall names and ship numbers. Our reunion could not have succeeded without this assistance. To those of you who went to the trouble and expense of going to DC, I thank you. To those of you who were unable to attend, I can assure you that you were missed, and we look forward to seeing you in Texas next year. Reunions are not made great by associations, but by the individuals who attend them. The esprit de corps exhibited by you all proved to me - again, after 25 years - that I was privileged to be a very small part of the best helicopter unit in Vietnam. Now, as then, I could not have been in better company.

*Earl Baldwin - Door Gunner, Falcon 049*

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**WERE YOU THERE WHEN . . . ?** After reviewing administrative trivia (in triplicate) for several weeks, the new XO was impatient, and the major finally gave in. The XO's first real assignment would be to conduct a shakedown inspection of the enlisted quarters - and by god he was going to make it the best shakedown inspection this man's army had ever seen! Planning was intense and preparations were meticulous. With H-hour drawing near, the XO had gathered the platoon leaders and assistant platoon leaders to discuss their final inspection assignments. As they were meeting, the company PA system announced, "Will all 155 enlisted personnel report to their quarters for a surprise shakedown inspection." Immediately, scurrying sounds were heard from the enlisted area. But in the XO's meeting, there was a long, stunned silence. According to several reliable witnesses, the XO came to a precise three-foot hover and streaked to the Comm Center *without once touching the ground*, where he screamed for 30 minutes trying to find out who ordered the announcement. He never did. Needless to say, the shakedown inspection was cancelled - and that's the reason the XO never got his five stars.

*Can you name that XO? Do you know who made that call to the Comm Center?*

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Falcon pilot Jeff Schrader, showing early signs of combat fatigue. In the background, Jack Coonce oversees the mounting of new rocket pods, as Dan Reeves and Mike McElveen do the work. (June, 1969)

## ASH & TRASH

**NAME THE NEWSLETTER CONTEST** It doesn't have to be the *BMTB*. Enter the Name the Newsletter Contest to win fame, fortune, and humongous prizes. We're trying to line up contest sponsors, so far we've come up with a 10 cents off coupon toward your 155 AHCA dues. If *BMTB* works for you, let us know; if not, suggest something better. We're trying to get Ed McMahon & Johnny Carson to deliver the prizes - but don't be surprised if Earl & Orrin show up at your door instead. Send in your entries today - operators are standing by.

**COMPANY ROSTER** Several guys wrote to suggest that they would like to see the roster expanded to include more information on each former 155er. We thought that sounded like a good idea, and came up with the roster data sheet at the end of this issue. Everyone is encouraged (no, Dennis, it's not mandatory) to fill in the information and send it to the 155 AHCA officer of your choice, so we can add it to the 155 database. You don't have to use the form; E-mail, postcard, whatever is easiest for you, we're just looking to get the info. We'll try to mail an updated roster within the next couple of months.

**OUR FALLEN COMRADES** Tom Mullen has been in contact with the families of Lt. Fred Pratt (KIA 26 Aug 68), SP/5 Armando Ramirez (MIA 23 May 69 & later confirmed KIA), and WO1 Joseph Erickson (KIA 23 Feb 70). Their families welcome letters, cards, and phone calls from those who knew and remember them. Call or write Tom for the addresses of those families.

**HONORARY MEMBER** Some of you may have met Mike Bengé at the reunion. Mike was a civilian USAID worker in downtown BMT. During Tet of '68, when the NVA overran much of the town, Mike was taken prisoner. Immediately after his capture, Mike was held in several locations around BMT. Some of you may remember flying search missions to try to find and rescue him - but he was moved often and the intel on our side just never could catch up with him. After being marched around much of central South Vietnam, Mike eventually travelled up the Ho Chi Minh Trail to Hanoi, where he became a guest of the North Vietnamese until the general POW release in 1973. Needless to say, Mike's is quite a story. We're proud to have Mike Bengé as an honorary member of the 155 AHCA.

**GET ON-LINE!** If you've been thinking about getting a computer and getting on-line - DO IT!! It's surprisingly easy, and a heck of a lot of fun. Several of us use e-mail to trade info, barbs, and jokes almost daily, and even more of our guys participate in the evening Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network on-line chat sessions. Come on, come on . . . And Earl's upgraded our home page with more 155 history and PICTURES - helicopter shots and various Camp Coryell environs. Neato! Check it out at "[WWW.VHFCN.ORG/155HIST.HTM](http://WWW.VHFCN.ORG/155HIST.HTM)" (It's not highlighted, but if you look close, along the company Main Street - it's our beloved shirt ditch.)

**THE NEXT REUNION: sometime, 1998?** The last *BMTB* suggested that our next reunion might be in Ft. Worth over Columbus Day weekend, October, 1998. Some persons let us know that October was not a good time, and suggested that summertime would be better for those with school kids. Doubt that we'll ever be able to come up with a time to suit everybody, but we certainly want to allow as many as possible to attend. It still looks like Ft. Worth (or somewhere close), but summertime seems most likely. PLEASE tell us what works for you. We're going to finalize plans soon - they will be set and published in the next newsletter so everybody will have plenty of time to plan their trips.

**CYCLIC FEEDBACK** Happily, response to *BMTB* #1 was generally favorable. Thanks for your many kind words, and thanks even more for your suggestions to improve *BMTB* #2. I've considered ALL of those, and incorporated many. But it's an on-going process; constructive criticism is always sought, so let us know what you think of this issue, too. And please, send us the stories of your BMT adventures for future newsletters.

One note on a suggestion not adopted: at least 3 crew chiefs complained rather vociferously about the many multisyllable words in *BMTB* #1, and strongly urged that such words be banned from future editions. I started trying to write a simpler #2, but got into it and realized it just wouldn't be fair to all the gunners, armorers, mechanics, pilots, cooks, etc. who CAN read. So I'm not going to dumb it down just for you crew chiefs - have your wives explain the big words.

**CYCLIC FEEDBACK #2** In case you hadn't noticed, *BMTB* has no aspirations to be politically correct. We'll do our best to poke some fun at each and every one of you - and ourselves, too - at one time or another.

**AMERICAN HELICOPTER MUSEUM** Near Philadelphia, at the Brandywine Airport in West Chester, PA. Among the several exhibits are a Huey, a Loach, and the cockpit section from a Cobra. It's open Wed-Sun, \$5 for adults, kids are \$3.50; phone 610-436-9600 for info. Earl rates it "two thumbs up" because you can actually climb in many of the helicopters on display.

**VHCMA REUNION** Next month, 18-21 June, in Richmond, VA at the Richmond Hilton. Call 1-800-445-8667 & mention VHCMA to get the room rate discount. Several 155ers (Earl Baldwin, Tom Mullen, Bob Alberts, Jim Bales, & a couple more "maybes") are planning to attend, so if you're close, go say "hi."

**DEW DO DOES DUES - PLEASE** Just a reminder, we're asking for dues of \$25 per year from each of you to support our new group. (If that's too steep right now, please send what you can.) Make checks payable to 155 AHCA, send them to Jeff. Your contributions cover costs for the newsletter, missing person searches, and organization of the next reunion. Jeff's been laid up a bit, so I don't have the very latest figures; last I'd heard he had gotten checks from about 30 guys. If you're one who just hasn't gotten around to it, PLEASE . . . Special thanks to Jim Ferris, who sent \$50 and wrote, "This is for my dues, and for someone else who may be a bit strapped right now." Nobody special, he just doubled up. Thanks, Jim, that's really what the 155 has always been about - helping each other.

**BOOK REVIEW** Some years ago I was reading *Charley Mike* by Leonard Scott, a well-written novel about LRRP's in Vietnam. As confirmed on the book jacket, Leonard Scott had very obviously been there. At one point the LRRP's are part of the 1970 Cambodian incursion, staging out of Duc Co, and I'm thinking, "This sounds familiar." Five more pages, and I'm thinking, "This sounds VERY familiar." Three more pages and I said to the wife, "Hey, this guy is writing about a mission I flew." And sure enough, a few pages later, the call sign of the C&C ship was "Stagecoach." That's the only 155 connection, but it made my day. If you're into Vietnam novels, it's a good one.

**BAN ME THUOT VIDEO** Rod Waddell has put together a color video from 1969-70 (approx. 75 minutes) that shows Camp Coryell, 155 personnel, the #\*%&!!# elephant mascot, the pool, Owen to Luisi change of command ceremony, and aerial shots of the compound, Ban Me Thuot area, Duc Lap, etc., lots of helicopters, and much more. \$22 includes S&H. Contact Rod at 307-473-8170 or 2057 N. Sage Rd, Casper, WY 82604.

**REUNION ATTENDEES** Several of you have asked who all made it to the November 96 reunion. I almost hate to do this, because someone is sure to be left out, but here goes: Ken Acker, Cliff Allen, Bob Alberts, Steve Austin, Earl Baldwin, Jim Bales, Mike Baucom, Bob Beaudreault, Gene Breslin, Dave Churilla, Wayne Cranford, Les Davison, Ken Donovan, Paul Fadz, Bill Farnum, Johnny Gann, Bob Gardner, Les Gaul, Bill Goodness, John Grow, Larry Hannah, Dennis Harris, Herb Hess, Rein Hofgesang, Wayne Johnson, Doug Kahler, Russ Kogut, Danny Lauer, Bill Lumas, Larry Matthews, Vince McDonough, Bruce McInnes, Orrin Messinger, Dan Morton, Tom Mullen, Dean Owen, Bill Sands, Jeff Schrader, Mike Stark, Roger Thompson, Fran Tiner, Rod Waddell, HC Watters, Mike Wilcox.

155 AHCA officers are:

|                        |                          |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Orrin Messinger, Pres. | Ken Donovan, VP          | Jeff Schrader, Treasurer |
| Earl Baldwin, Net Guy  | Tom Mullen, Aide-de-camp | Les Davison, Newsletter  |

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**155 ROSTER DATA**

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE

E-MAIL

WIFE'S NAME

OCCUPATION

155 TOURS

Dates

Platoon/Org.

Primary Duty

CALL SIGN/SHIP, etc.

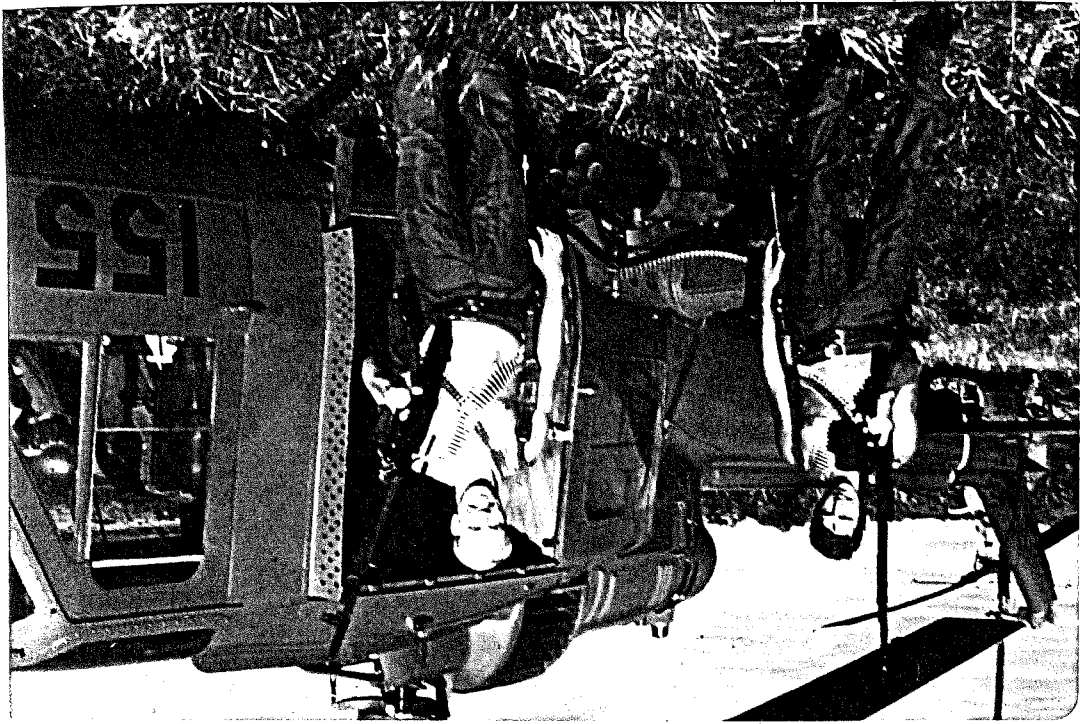
OTHER RVN UNITS

(with dates)

FAVORITE C RATION

ETC.

Please submit to 155 AHCA, 610 Louisiana Ave., Cumberland, MD 21502, or any 155 AHCA officer. E-mail submissions are encouraged.



155 AHC Assn.

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