

BAN ME THUOT BARB*Aug 97***SINGLE DIGIT MIDGET, TAKING FIRE!**

Even though my last combat flight wasn't as horrific as some, it remains a vivid memory to this day. In August, 1968, I had been Stallion 505 at Dong Ba Thin with the 92nd AHC for several months, but the 155th was taking it on the chin around that time and we had to transfer some ships up to Ban Me Thuot. I was not pleased when "my" ship, 69-16505, was one of those sent to the 155 AHC - and I was even less happy to hear that 505 was shot down and destroyed two days after arriving in the Highlands! And shortly after that, with the 155 seriously short of pilots, I was among several pilots sent to bolster the unit. I had arrived at Ban Me Thuot on August 28, 1968, and had been flying in support of operations near Duc Lap. Parts of the 4th Infantry Division, MACV, 5th Special Forces, and some ARVN units had taken quite a pounding during that time - as had we. I flew more "hot" missions during that time than during my entire time with the 92nd. As the days ground on, I became a short-timer who wanted to stop flying as early as possible. I figured that just surviving our nightly rocket attacks would be a miracle. The platoon leader promised that once we were under ten days our combat missions would be over.

But wouldn't you know! Seven days to DEROS - a single digit midget - and we were so short of pilots I had to fly again. I tried to talk my way out of it, but was assured it would be quiet. We were to support the MACV compound at Gia Nghia, where things had been relatively quiet for the past week. The typical MACV mission was a little recon of the area, transport a few supplies, and lift some people from place to place. As we flew west, with great weather and the promise of a milk run, I began to feel better. That feeling didn't last long. Soon after we arrived at Gia Nghia, we were informed that a "hot" mission had developed for MACV at Duc Lap. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up; I couldn't believe this was happening to me! We headed toward Duc Lap, the scene of heavy fighting.

Immediately upon arrival at Duc Lap, we were briefed. The ARVN outpost just to the southwest had been under siege for a week without resupply. The men were holed up in their bunkers and desperately short of ammo. We would be the ammo resupply ship. Somehow, I managed to keep quiet and look confident, but I really wanted to scream, "I'M TOO SHORT FOR THIS SHIRT!!!" MACV knew it would be hot, and had requested gun cover. Shortly after, a Falcon light fire team landed. We put our heads together and decided that the best flight in would be a low level approach with Falcon lead prepping ahead and Falcon trail behind me, and then a daisy chain to provide fire support while we were on the ground and coming out.

I don't think I've ever been as scared as I was climbing into that chopper at Duc Lap. Seven days!!! It just didn't seem fair - but off we went. And it started well. Falcon lead was first in, putting rockets both left and right. Following close behind, we flared and touched down just in front of the closed compound gate. As the crew threw off the ammo boxes, I saw two VC atop the Volcano to my left adjusting a 60 mm mortar. As if in slow motion, I saw them drop a round into the tube, and I urged the crew to hurry with the unloading - and then the round hit about 15 meters to our front left. Instinctively, the new (2 weeks in country) peter pilot pulled the collective full-up into his armpit and pushed the cyclic to the front stop! As we rotated forward, the low RPM audio began blaring and I saw 5600 on the tach. Still in slow motion, I out-muscled the peter pilot to lower the collective and pull back the cyclic, and we somehow managed to stay in the air. As we recovered and broke right to exit, we took some small arms fire, which the Falcons promptly returned with a vengeance. We made it!

Unfortunately, back at the MACV compound, we were told that we had landed (and dropped the ammo) in a mine field. WE LANDED IN A WHAT????? No one had mentioned a mine field in our first briefing. AAUGHHHH!!! They begged us to make one more trip, to try to get the ammo inside the

compound. With the Falcons, we agreed to give it another try. We decided to use the same method in, but not to land this time. We stacked the ammo boxes on each side of the ship, and took off again. Eighty knots, on the deck. A great prep (again) from Falcon lead. As we slowed over the compound, the crew chief and door gunner kicked out the boxes. BULLS EYE! The ammo was inside the compound, exactly where it was needed. We nosed over and picked up speed as Falcon trail escorted us out. Evidently we had scared the bad guys the first time, because they didn't even fire at us the second trip. In fact, we didn't take a single hit during the two flights.

Thank the good Lord, that really did end my combat flying. It was the only mission I can remember where two gunships covered a single slick. The Falcons were great, and to this day I thank them. I sure do wish I could remember who they were.

Jim Koch, Stagecoach 13 (Fall 68)

CAN YOU HELP US FIND . . . Capt. Wayne Eagle, XO in late '69; Capt. Chism, the XO in late '68; 2nd platoon CE Chandler, '69; Mr. Melvin, Maint. pilot in '69; Falcon CE Solis & door gunner Tasker, '70. Lt. Norm Simpson had a short but eventful career as a Falcon peter pilot. Norm was shot down in a secret country in October '69 (see Denny Fenlon, Craig Mosher, or Vince Giarratano for details), but made it out OK. He wasn't as lucky at Bu Prang a month later. We were a heavy fire team looking for bad guys, when the CE called "Taking fire!" Norm sort of flinched, but didn't make a sound. In fact, I had to ask if he was hit - a gutsy guy. Norm was last seen sporting a HUGE smile as he and his million dollar leg wound were helped into a Dustoff chopper at Nhon Co. If you have any idea as to the whereabouts of any of these guys, please contact any 155 AHCA occifer.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE 155 AHCA

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who attended the November reunion and those of you who wanted to but could not. It was so great seeing old friends again after all those years. It has always been a dream of mine to see something like that happen. I can't possibly say enough about Earl, Mary, and Alex Baldwin, they are great people and really got the ball rolling to find 155 people. Words cannot describe what the visits to the Wall and the evening picture sessions were like. Mike Law from the VHPA commented that the reunion was one of the best he had ever attended, we can't take credit for that, it was you who attended who made it what it was; a wonderful time, a huge success, and our dream come true for Mary & I.

The 155 AHCA was formed to promote the togetherness and closeness we all knew in the 155 many years ago. It is open to all former members of the 155 and their spouses. It is our hope that the association will continue to grow as we locate other former 155ers. We look forward to your suggestions and comments in helping us make this a great organization. Once again, thank all of you who attended the reunion and made it so wonderful. We look forward to working with many of you to plan the next reunion, to make it even bigger and even better. We'll see you there!

Tom Mullen (Door Gunner, Falcon 077)

MAIL CALL - sharing letters from our friends:

Tom Ricciuto - Just got the May 97 issue, thanks for your efforts and good work. I was an avionics line repairman during most of 1970, our equipment truck was named "Semi-Hemi." Does anybody remember it? I also worked at the MARS station.

Jim Ferris - Wanted to let you know that I talked to Johnny Gann last week. It was great how he'd remember something I had forgotten, then I'd recall something he couldn't remember. Once we filled each other in, we'd both recall something else new, unthought of for three decades. Thanks to the 155 AHCA.

Ken de Russy - I so much appreciate being included in the goings on of the 155 AHCA. I was USAF Security Police assigned to Camp Coryell from Oct - Dec, 1969. Most nights I was in the tower by the O-club, watching and ducking the nightly (or so it seemed) incoming - those were the most intense three months of my life. Having contact with you guys, even though I don't know any of you, gives me a great sense of camaraderie and proof that it wasn't all a dream.

Bill Zierdt - Just received the roster. I'm easy to find, I'm the last SOB on the list. Thanks to all of you who are working so hard to make this 155 stuff happen.

Bob Gardner - My Vietnamese neighbor happened to see the latest issue of the *BMTB* in the mailbox, and by the time I got it back it was covered with beetle nut juice and nuoc maum. Reading the stained & smelly newsletter took me back poolside again! Who were those virual (sic) skinny young men on the back anyway? Do they still have any of that hair?

Dean Owen - I'm really enjoying the *Ban Me Thuot Barb*. Keep up the good work.

Larry Gaines - It's been a long time, but as I've talked with several 155 friends again, things are coming back. I was in second platoon, I gunned and crewed on 832 during 1969. Thanks for the newsletter.

Herb Hess - I certainly appreciate all the work you guys are doing. The newsletter is sure a welcome sight for me. I could have hugged ol' Tom's neck that evening he first called me. He and everyone else involved will never know how that made my day.



2nd Platoon Flight Crew

May, 1969 - Standing, L to R:
Crouse (???), Danny Lauer, Gilliken.
Kneeling, L to R: Jimmy Brodrick,
Mike Wilcox, Terry Thompson.

Lauer photo.

FLASHBACK 1969 - from the *VAGABOND VOICE*:

The 155 has been as active as ever these last two weeks, lending support to the forces in the highlands. One of the more interesting events occurred on 27 June, when a convoy element of the 2/35 Infantry returning to the BMT area struck a mine, resulting in five WIA. The five had to be medevaced, and the 155 had the only aircraft in the area. CW2 Larry Pluhar, called in to perform the medevac, went into the LZ in which the wounded lay, east of Chu Kuk Mountain. Setting his "Coach" down in the insecure and possibly mined LZ, he completed the medevac without damage to ship or crew. CW2 Pluhar and his crew have been nominated to receive the Soldier's Medal for their efforts.

With an aviation unit being the way that it is, oftentimes attention is given only to those men who fly, officers and enlisted. But for them to fly without our ground maintenance crews would be worse than running in the Indianapolis 500 without a pit crew.

The "pitcrew" of the 155 is one of the best in the battalion. The Maintenance Section and our crew chiefs get a tip of the hat for their efficiency in giving us the highest C and H model availability in the Battalion. These figures cover the month of June, a month in which the 155 flew more C model hours than any other unit in the 10th Battalion.

Vagabond Voice may have been the newsletter of the 17th Aviation Group. Can anyone confirm?

AT THE 1996 REUNION, AGAIN

Early Friday evening. I had just arrived, so had not yet introduced myself to everyone. I joined a gathering of mostly pilots while Ken Donovan told a story to a group that included Dave Churilla, Russ Kogut, Bob Gardner, Rein Hofgesang, Tom Mullen, and HC Watters. Listening to Ken, I glanced around the group - and noticed that Russ was staring at me: his eyes were like saucers, and the color had drained from his face. Just then Ken paused, and Russ said quietly (to me, across the group), "You tried to kill me." Heads turned. Bob asked, "What was that, Russ?" Russ pointed at me and repeated, "That guy tried to kill me." Jeez, what a memory - after all, it had been 27 years. But, yes, he was right. In fact, I had tried to kill us both.

March, 1969: FNG pilot! What with Xmas vacation, flight school graduation, M-22 Wire Guided Missile School, and several weeks leave amongst all of that, I had flown less than 10 hours during the previous 3 months. At best, brand new guys were rusty - I was scrap metal! Upon arrival at BMT, I had been assigned to Second Platoon. As the platoon IP, Russ had to give me a check ride before I could fly missions. Russ was so short he could barely see over a dime. Since he slept late every morning, our flight was put on the board for early afternoon, to fit his schedule.

I was apprehensive, but it started off well. We went over by POL, and the hover autorotation was perfect. I thought, "Hey, this might not be so bad." But after that . . . We bounced, flopped, twisted, and everything else you could imagine. It was horrible. Old Mr. Bell sure built that helicopter well, because it took a massive pounding from my flying "skills." It was awful. Russ was pretty quiet to start, and he got even quieter as the flight went on. I didn't dare look over at him. Did I mention it was the worst flight in the history of rotary aviation? At one point I noticed that my UHF switch was turned off; and when I turned it on I caught the end of Russ' transmission to the tower, asking them to have the fire truck move closer to the runway. It was REAL bad. How we got through that flight with the three of us (two persons and one UH-1H) intact remains a mystery to this day.

Anyhow, we did survive, but just barely. After we shut down, Russ signed me off & headed straight to the Club. In fact, I don't think I ever saw him anywhere EXCEPT the Club after that. And then he was gone, back to the world. All these years later, it didn't surprise me to find that Russ couldn't remember my name - but he sure remembered how I had tried to kill him.

Les Davison, Falcon 2, 69-70

THE GATHERING IN OHIO Who would have ever guessed that we could have such a great time in Crestline (???) , Ohio! For those of you who couldn't make it, Pam and Danny Lauer threw one heck of a party. Lots of stories, lots of food, lots of pictures, & great friends - a truly great time! We'll have a full report in the next issue.

FALCONS WIN! FALCONS WIN!! FALCONS WIN!!!! In a stunning victory, Falcons swept the field in the first annual 155 AHCA golf tournament held in Crestline, OH. Rein Hofgesang, Earl Baldwin, and some guy in sandals and a "Beaver Lumber" cap all report playing extremely well. (In fact, the course manager told Danny on the Monday after, "They tore up the course.") Unfortunately, in the celebration, the score card was misplaced and is not available.

TREASURER'S REPORT Thanks to the following dues-payers: James Ferris, Gerald Hallfin, Leon Wozniak, John Grow, Dennis Lajoie, David Churilla, Bob Gardner, Robert Rackoff, Wayne Cranford, Harry Vogler, Doug Kahler, Bob Beaudreault, Dean Owen, Roger Elliott, Leonard Orr, Robert Leahy, Johnny Gann, Danny Lauer, Dale Davis, Ken Acker, Robert Albracht, Robert Blake, Doug Adams, Norman Swafford, Robert Weimer, Denny Fenlon, Herb Hess, Daniel Fox, Jerry Burton, Geoff Jones, Bob Alberts, Anthony Giordano, Harold Gay, Jr., and all six officers. We've had just 38 guys ante up their dues for the 155 AHCA. Dues are only \$25 per year to support our new group, and we had hoped for better support. Make checks payable to 155 AHCA, send them to me at the address below.

Outlays to date have been \$297 for two newsletters, and \$111 for search fees looking for new members. Current balance is \$1,079, but I still owe Les for the roster mailing and this newsletter.

Special thanks this time to Bob Beaudreault, for sending more than his fair share. We'll do our best to put it to good use, Bob.

Jeff Schrader, Treasurer

ASH & TRASH

THE '98 REUNION It's going to be June 26-28, 1998, in Fort Worth. We're going to try for some organized activities for families and for the ladies, too, so they won't have to listen to 72 STRAIGHT HOURS OF HELICOPTER TALK. Mark your calendars now, it's set! We'll pass along more info as it becomes available. FYI, the annual VHPA (pilots only) convention will be in Fort Worth one week later, over the 4th of July weekend, 1998.

OLD GUYS It struck me the other day that the three newsletter issues this year have focused mostly on events that occurred after fall, 1968. Partly that's because the editor was class of '69-'70, and those of you who have been good enough to share your stories in the *BMTB* have been "new guys" too. What's the deal here, old guys? We want to hear from you, too! I'm told that some 155 ships & crews participated in the Ia Drang battle, others were at Dak To, and some even went to bases far up north, to fly into countries that might not have been South Vietnam. Tell us what you remember, so we can share those memories with the whole group. Or, on a more mundane level, who can tell us how Camp Coryell came to have a world class swimming pool inside its concertina perimeter? Can anyone think of a more incongruous sight? And, perhaps even more amazing, FLUSH TOILETS in a combat zone??? When I arrived, it was all in place: just like stateside - except for the live fire! C'mon old guys, tell us newbies how it all came to be - *please?*

155 AHCA ROSTER Everyone should have received a copy of the roster last month. If you didn't, contact any officer. Please check your listing, to be sure we've got all the right info. Send additions and/or corrections to Orrin. We've gotten several roster data sheets (*BMTB*, May 97), but would like to have more, so please take the time to send those to Orrin, too. Use of e-mail is encouraged. Also, if you're a 155 person who would rather not be listed in the roster - for whatever reason - just let us know and we'll take care of that, too.

A SERIOUS NOTE On the drive home, it struck me that several of the guys in Ohio who were attending their first 155 AHCA get-together mentioned something like, "I hadn't thought about this stuff for 25 (or more) years." Reading between the lines, I was reminded of my own thoughts and emotions when we started getting the 155 AHCA together. It's great to hear the funny stories and remember the good times, but, unfortunately, there were also sad stories and bad times. When each of us starts to think about "this stuff" again, the sad stories and bad times will be part of that.

Dealing with our Vietnam experiences is/will be a very personal matter for each of us. In searching out former 155ers, we've come across a few who have said, "I'm just not ready to get together yet." That's fine, here is the address of the 155 AHCA, contact us when you're ready. And a couple others have said, "Yeah, send me the newsletter, but don't list my name and address on the roster." No problema! We can do that. No one should feel pressured to join the 155 AHCA, or to attend our gatherings. It's up to each of you, individually.

And another thing. You guys out there who are starting to think about "this stuff" don't have to do it alone. Talk with a close friend who's on the roster. Or, talk to any one of the 155 AHCA officers. I don't know a single guy in the 155 AHCA that wouldn't honor a request to "Keep this just between you and me, OK?" For most of us, it helps to talk with others who can relate to our experiences. The 155 always has been about helping each other - and it still is.

155 ON-LINE NEWS Check out "[HTTP://SIGNET.ORG/HELI-VETS/155TH.HTM](http://SIGNET.ORG/HELI-VETS/155TH.HTM)" for pictures of Stagecoach 586. It was just a little more than one year ago that the Huey Memorial featuring our very own 586 - with full-color Stagecoach nose cover - was dedicated by the Vietnam Vets of America chapter in Cheboygan, MI. Better yet, if you're anywhere near Cheboygan, stop by and see the real thing.



CONGRATS TO THE NEWLYWEDS The 155 AHCA family extends a warm welcome to its newest member, Mrs. Mike Stark. Best wishes to the happy couple. Mike says he will still be answering to "Falcon 6" - but if it's important, you might want to check with "Falcon 6 Actual," just to be sure.

WALLY KNOWS ALL Wally Foster, Falcon 6, called to say that Wayne Eagle was the XO involved in the abortive shakedown inspection (*BMTB*, May 97) during the latter half of '69. He also knew that Falcon pilot Charlie Marvin called the Comm Center to request the announcement. (Charlie may be a missionary pilot in New Guinea, can anyone confirm?) And, Wally told me that Falcon pilot Keith Marchbanks threw the CS grenade into the O-club during the 1970 farewell celebration for the battalion commander (*BMTB*, Feb 97). Thanks for the call, Wally.

PATCHES Ken Acker reports that, in rounding the price for the patches he has sold, he didn't feel right about keeping the "profits" - so he contributed those to the 155 AHCA. Thanks, Ken. And he still has some patches, both Stagecoach and Falcon ones. They're good quality, just \$5 per patch.

155 AHC PHOTO ALBUM Everyone at the Ohio party enjoyed looking at the pictures and slides that others had brought. Everybody had good ones - my favorite might have been Doug Adams' shot of a formation of four B model gunships - but truthfully, everyone had lousy ones, too. (Especially the editor.) It got me to thinking, and here's what I'd like to do. I want to put together a photo album of great 155 AHC photos from all eras. I'd caption them, and put them in an album in chronological order: helos, men, places, action, bent birds, scenery, Camp Coryell, etc. It won't be my album, it will be ours, & could be sent around to gatherings of 155ers everywhere. But I need your help. If you will send me your great photos (prefer 3X5 or 4X6), originals or copies, with caption information (where, when, who, what, why, etc.), I'll go to work. If you send originals, I'll make copies and return the originals to you. Captions will include photographer's name. So please, pick out a couple of great photos (more if you've got more) and send them off to the editor. I'd really appreciate your help.

VHCMA REUNION Alex, Mary, & Earl Baldwin and Judy & Sonny Hampton attended the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmen's Ass'n reunion in Richmond this past June. All report having a great time, seeing old friends and sharing stories long forgotten. And the 1st Cav firebase diorama was incredible. Group trips were made to the Wall, Ft. Eustis, Williamsburg, and Busch Gardens. Alex reports that the helicopter stuff was OK, but the BG roller coasters were awesome! During his trip to the Wall, Earl placed a 155 AHC memorial at the apex, highlighting the Stagecoach and Falcon patches and honoring the names of all 155 KIA's.

CONTINUING THE TRADITION The novel involves a present-day mad scientist who engineers an ebola-type problem in Africa. The US gets involved, and the only solution is to helicopter assault Army Rangers on a suicide mission against the heavily-defended compound. It's so scary that the President decides to address the troops, and asks for volunteers. Of course, every person steps forward. The President looks to the Commanding General and asks, "Was this a set up? Why did every single one of them volunteer?" The answer: "They're Rangers, sir." The President, taken aback, pauses and looks over the group again. "What about the helicopter crews?" he asks. Reply: "They're just crazy, sir."

COVER PHOTO Bob Alberts sent in the photo, he got the picture from photographer Roger Thompson. Bob thinks it's a First Platoon ship headed east, back to South Vietnam after a B-50 extraction sometime in 1970. Good shot!

155 AHCA officers are:

Orrin Messinger, Pres.

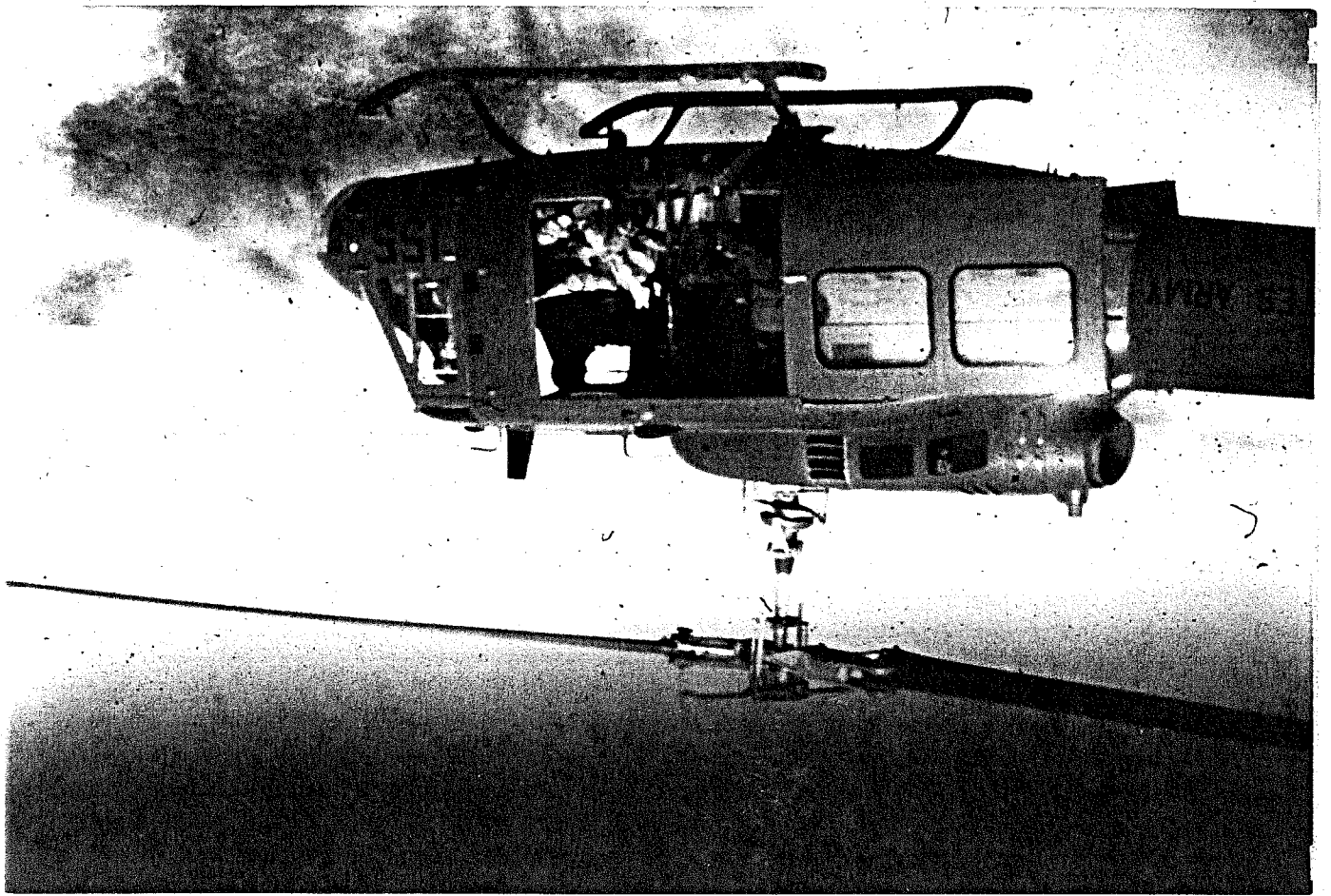
Ken Donovan, VP

Jeff Schrader, Treasurer

Earl Baldwin, Net Guy

Tom Mullen, Aide-de-camp

Les Davison, Newsletter



155 AHC Assn.