



BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155 Assault Helicopter Company - Issue #5 - Feb 98

ANOTHER OLD GUY REPORT (Or, how to fly when you can't see through the tears)

This is the sad story of Dennis Painter, Herbert Hayashida, Will Smith, Paul Larson, Janis Miculs, Frank Freedle, John Brooks, and Oren McCarroll. I want to get the names right because the only one I've been able to consistently remember is Dennis Painter. A few years ago I made my first trip to The Wall in D.C. After staring at it for about five minutes, I began to wonder where their names would be. I looked up and down, across and back, all in vain, but amazed at how many names there were. The magnitude of the crime struck me and I broke down. It wouldn't have been so bad if we'd won and RVN was free today as a result, but to have all these guys die for a war they wouldn't let us win was too much for my mind to absorb. I sat down for a few minutes to let the tears flow unwillingly from my eyes as my wife stood by me with her hand on my shoulder. After a few more minutes I turned away from the Wall and noticed a desk set up with a big book and a guy behind it. I went over to see what he was doing and saw that he had the names and locations on the wall. When I found Dennis, I went to the Wall and slowly, agonizingly slowly, fearfully, reached out to touch his name.

Cheo Reo, 19 April 1968 We flew up that morning from BMT in support of the 23rd ARVN Division as usual. I was Falcon 5, the A/C in a Charlie model gunship. A light colonel from who knows where was my peter pilot that day. He was in the right seat so I could control things better with the greater visibility of the left.

Once there, the LTC and I flew around with our door guns blazing on an elk we'd caught in the open and managed to kill it with more than just a few rounds. It took the four crew chiefs and gunners to load it into a slick to get it back to the air strip for the local village. It took eight of the smaller villagers to get it out and load it into a jeep trailer. They threw it on the fire whole, didn't skin it, bleed it, gut it, nothing. Just directly from the trailer to the fire.

We were then called up to a hill on the northwest side of town and told to shoot up an area on top. We did and got a little ground fire in return. The LTC punched off some rockets at them and I sprayed the area with the mini-gun. It was getting a little bumpy with the wind and we had some sprinkles of rain on the windscreen, so, as we were out of ammo anyway, we headed back to the strip for gas and bullets and maybe some lunch. Some major came running up to us saying what a great job we'd done on the hill. We'd shot up an NVA regimental headquarters and killed a major, a lieutenant, a radioman, and several others. Our guys (the ground grunts) had recovered some valuable papers. The major said he was putting me in for an award. The citation I received in a ceremony at Ft. Wolters in early '69 read something about high winds, heavy rain, and intense ground fire. All a matter of perspective, I suppose.

When we took off again we headed southwest and just kind of hunted around for something. We were doing this when someone on the radio started yelling about someone being shot down. We turned north and I pulled in as much pitch as the old girl could stand. I got the location and asked who it was. Someone said who and I asked if they were okay. They didn't know yet.

Dennis was an RLO, but he was a good guy. We teased him about being kind of a klutz in a helicopter, because he once managed to strike another helicopter with a blade tip as he hovered by. I remember that, because I was in the parking area by one of the gun platoon B-540's when the tip cap from his rotor blade landed a few feet from me. Dennis landed by bouncing on the heels and toes of both skids...all four corners, one at a time. He was a smidgen overweight as I remember, but probably not as much as I am now. All in all, for an RLO, he was fun to be around. I don't remember much about Herbie (I think we called him that). He was a new guy a few months before, but if I remember right, he'd just made A/C about the middle of March. Now that I've seen his name a couple of times, I remember that I thought he was a pretty good guy, too. I think I flew with John Brooks a couple of times while I was in the slicks. If he's the one I'm thinking about, he wore a western style six gun in a quick draw holster. Maybe not, but I recognize the name. Maybe it's just too painful to remember, or maybe it's just lousy brain cells, but though the other names sound familiar, I don't remember them.

While we headed north, the anger built up in me at the VC responsible for shooting down my friends. I would hunt those rotten people until the end of time and kill them all. Then I would go hunt others as retribution for hurting

my friends after I had killed the original offenders. Besides, if they were still in the area, I had to protect our guys on the ground.

We found the site in a sparsely wooded area of small trees and shrubs. Open enough to see and too thick to land. Both aircraft were on fire, one just a mass of smoking, burning metal. The other was intact, though you could see they landed hard as one rotor blade was broken. I could see the doors open on the right side, a pilot still sitting in the seat, the fire in the engine and bright showers of sparks from the transmission setting off grenades in the back. There was no movement down there, no way any of them could still be alive, and no way for me to go down to help.

Eighteen ARVNs and eight Americans! Such helplessness is difficult to express, but easy to see in someone who is experiencing it. The LTC quietly asked me if I wanted him to fly for awhile. I was obviously having difficulty seeing where I was going, snuffling frequently, wiping my nose and eyes on my sleeves, but I shouted "NO!" in frustration as the tears ran down my face. He didn't say anything, but I could see he had his doubts. The VC who did this to my friends would pay dearly if I could just find them! But try as we did, there were no enemy around.

Later we found out it wasn't enemy action after all. These guys were from two separate platoons, as I remember. We don't even know who was flying, A/C's or pater pilots. But one flew slow to the join up after take off before picking up speed. The other, used to flying with the guts pulled out of the engine to catch up, must not have realized the lead was flying slower than he expected. A screw up of the greatest magnitude! I was sick. Heart sick, gut sick, and mind sick, unable to accept this truth as I had heard it. And it still hits me that way.

Indeed, a sad story. A great loss for us all, but more so for their families. The only consolation we have is that, for those of us who believe as Christians, they have shed their Earthly shell and gone to a much better place. Many others of the 155th gave their all as did these, but these were the ones I knew and served with.

Once more for posterity, the names of the friends we all lost that day: **1LT Dennis E. Painter, WO1 Willis W. Smith, SP4 Frank L. Freedle, and SP5 Janis Miculs**, all in UH-1H #67-17255, and **WO1 Herbert R. Hayashida, WO1 Paul N. Larson, SP4 John R. Brooks, and SP4 Oren B. McCarroll**, all in UH-1H #66-16441.

Keith Lane, Stagecoach 21 & Falcon 5, May '67 - '68

CAN YOU HELP US FIND . . . Former '67 CO Major Goodall, former '67 XO Major Lackey; 2nd Plt. pilot Lt. Jim Hitch, '69; Falcon gunner Gary Benoit, '70 (Massachusetts??); '67 slick C/E Anderson & G Babcock (probably 2nd platoon, see cover photo). If you have any idea as to the whereabouts of any of these guys, please contact any 155 AHCA occifer.

May '69 view
from the Corral:
smoke rises from
downtown BMT
POL after daylight
rocket attack.

Davison photo.



FLASHBACK: 1967 - Gunships Hit Enemy Position

During a recent patrolling mission of the province northwest of Saigon, a gunship team from the Army's 155th Assault Helicopter Company engaged five enemy troops on an open ridge line. The fight that followed was "unbelievable" according to WO Albert W. Fitzgerald, Orlando, FL, leader of the Falcon gunship team. "As soon as we opened up on the five enemy," Fitzgerald continued, "the whole hill mass became alive with Charlie. Every time we hit a bush or treeline with our rockets and machine guns, several VC would pop out and fall."

WO Reid McQuinn, Russell, NY, flying the other aircraft, said, "The enemy lost their fire discipline and didn't have time to react while the two gunships swept the hill with fire." On his third pass, his ammunition almost expended, Fitzgerald's aircraft was crippled by an intense burst of automatic weapons fire. He managed to land the ship about 800 meters from the center of the activity. Seconds later a third aircraft commanded by WO Lawrence K. Hanna, Minerva, Ohio, swooped down from his control orbit above the battle to rescue the crew.

"A solid steam of lead followed Hanna's aircraft into the crash site," reported McQuinn. "He was on the ground only fifteen seconds while the downed crew scrambled on board his ship, but as I watched, rounds hit on all sides of him and I didn't think he'd make it out." The second Falcon ship was also severely damaged while covering the rescue, but McQuinn managed to limp back to the secure airfield. With the gun team gone, WO Hanna remained on station directing the VNAF and Air Force strikes on the enemy's position.

WO Fitzgerald attributes his action to luck, but one American advisor with the 23rd ARVN Division in Lam Dong said, "Luck or no luck, in destroying this enemy force before it had a chance to strike, these men have achieved a victory that neither the fortunate people of Lam Dong Province nor the Viet Cong will soon forget."

From HQ USARV AVIATION PAMPHLET, Oct 67

MAIL CALL - sharing commo from our friends:

James Abbott - Thanks for tracking me down. It's great to hear from old friends, and I really enjoy reading the newsletter.

Wes Timmons - Thanks for sending the newsletter. I used to be next door neighbors with Norm Swafford. Bob Albracht was the Ops officer when I was there, and Keith Lane was there, too. I'm already planning for the reunion, should be a great time.

Falcon 1

Larry Wyllie - I was with the 155 in early '70, & flew with Bob Beaudreault, Frank Alotta, Dan Fox, & others. Bob & I were flying the B-50 mission in April '70, extracting some interesting characters from inside Cambodia, when the tail boom of our slick was removed. Later that same day, Marlin & Darek were killed. It was a very bad day.

Tom Love - I have enjoyed reading the newsletters and learning what is going on with the company. When I came back I was with the Oregon State Police for a while, then went to college, and now own a small trucking company. I've been married 25 years to the greatest lady. Hope this finds you well.

Howard Wiggs - It was great seeing old friends in Crestline - especially those of you who flew my ship. I can't put into words how much you 155 guys mean to me.

Jerry Burton - Thanks for the memories! I was Stagecoach 12 and then Falcon 12 during my tour, '67-8. I was in BMT during Tet '68 - not a good time! Looking forward to seeing lots of friends in Fort Worth.

John LaRochelle - This newsletter is probably the best thing since bottled beer, thanks for the good vibes. I was a 1st Flight Platoon C/E on Stagecoach 090, Oct '68 to Oct '69, Paul "Buck" Pollutro was my gunner.

Rick Erickson - Here's what information I have about the mission when Marlin Johnson & Darek Richardson went down. I'd really like to hear from others who were there. Documenting what happened that day would be a fitting tribute to our friends who died.

Bo Atkinson - I sure enjoyed Bill Staubach's excellent story about his boat trip to RVN; I made a similar journey aboard the USS Upchuck (the Navy spelled it Upshur) in 1966. I'd love to hear from guys from my tour.

William Fulmer - I was a member of 155th Avn. Co. AML in Ban Me Thuot from Dec '65 to May '66, then went to the 1st Cav as part of a DEROS shuffle. Major Joe Parlas was the CO while I was there, a very good man who ran a very good company.

Mike Stark - Hey 2! Can you believe it's been (in round-off numbers) almost 30 years since we terrorized the skies over that poor little third world dictatorship? It's great that we're all getting together again.

Frank Miceli - Here's some pictures from the early days, May '65, for the 155 Photo Album. I wish they were better, back then I never thought they'd be of any significance.

Brad Marsh - Falcon 2 from May '67 to May '68. I remember hanging out at the MARS station waiting to make calls home. The air conditioning units worked great for keeping my beer cold.

David Rutledge - Memories are flooding my head! I'd love to hear from old friends - and look forward to seeing you all in Fort Worth. *Stagecoach 26 & Falcon 6*

John Finneren - I was Stagecoach 18 from May '68 to May '69. Got shot at a lot, and drank way too much, but rotated on time.

Tony Alvarado - I was with the 243rd Freight Trains (CH-47's) in '68. Remember Duc Lap & Gia Nghia that fall? You guys were terrific! I don't think I'd be around now if it wasn't for your gun support.

I REMEMBER . . . I arrived in-country in May, '67, and started out flying with Capt. Henry's platoon. I flew quite a lot with Ken Acker and Dennis Harris. One time I remember being up at Phu Bai on one of those SOG missions - you know, the really hairy stuff across the fence. Well, I was sitting there on some sandbags and Major Lackey (the XO) came out and said he needed a favor. Like majors are always asking W2's for favors, sure! But, he really was. Major Lackey was a good guy, and he was in a tight spot - and he told me that I was the only guy in the outfit that could help him. The 155 was short a bunch of its TO&E, because the first sergeant had just about drained the unit dry of anything that could be sold or traded. The XO needed a top-notch scrounge that could put us back in the black before we rotated. He wanted me to take a bird back that had the radios out of it and sign on the line for everything in the unit.

I must have had stupid written all over my face, but I did it because I had a lot of respect for Major Lackey. He told me if he made it back off the mission, the two of us would straighten everything out when he got back. I sure was glad to see him come flying in a week later. Well, to make a long story short, with my outstanding ability to acquire government property we were soon back in the black. The 155 paperwork was all in order, and the Major and I rotated with a clean slate in April '68. Back to Wolters and out for me.

Norman Swafford, Stagecoach 4

JOKER RECALLS STAGECOACH BRAVERY UNDER FIRE

I took a heavy gun team over to Ban Me Thuot in mid-'68 to help support Task Force South. At least, I think it was Task Force South, but then I can't remember what I had for breakfast, so that may not be correct. But I remember quite well that the mission west of BMT was the first time we Jokers ever came up against .51 caliber antiaircraft fire - and it scared the pants off us! We didn't have anything big enough to get close to them. We still had the four M-60 flex pack machine guns, fourteen rockets, and two door guns. We tried high angle (well, high angle for our B Model gunships) and got our tails kicked. We tried a high/low approach, which didn't work any better, and finally settled on a low level, on the tree tops, pop-up-to-take-a-shot solution. Actually, I think we settled on that approach as the one least likely to get us killed.

Talk about happy to get the heck out of your area and back to Ninh Hoa! I gained a healthy respect and admiration for the Stagecoach and Falcon guys that day. The Falcons didn't have any more firepower than we did, but they seemed to be getting the job done. Some of the coolest and bravest guys under fire I ever saw were a couple of Stagecoach crews doing medevac while we tried to cover them. They would not leave until they had the wounded on board, and then hovered over to drop off some jerry cans of water. I have no idea how many hits they took, but I know my ship took eight fifty cal rounds and one of my wingmen took three. And with all that, the Stagecoach pilots were so calm they never even raised their voices on the radio. Yes indeed, we were very happy to leave Ban Me Thuot to you guys, and get back to where we fought a civilized war.

*Will Stafford, 48th AHC, Joker 51, '68-'69
C/159th ASHB, 101st Abn, '70-'71*

HOLLYWOOD COMES TO BAN ME THUOT Day in and day out, 155 flight crews perform their sometimes dangerous missions, our maintenance guys bust their butts keeping the ships in the air, and everybody

works hard to perform the myriad tasks necessary to make the company run smoothly - while living in a war zone in a foreign country thousands of miles from home. At the end of the day, each and every one of our guys wants some peace and quiet, and maybe some mail, too.

As Stagecoach 6, I was no different. Our mission that day had been typical, except that we got back a little early, around 1600 hours. As I walked down the company street from the Corral, I saw this group approaching not unlike a scene from the movie "High Noon." I recognized most of the group, but one person in the center I did not know, and I had the feeling that something unusual was about to happen. As the group came closer, the guys I knew stopped at a distance and the one very small person I did not recognize came straight up to me and said, "I understand that you are the person I have to see to get a drink before 5 o'clock."

The Army teaches you all the tactics in the world about defending against potential enemies, you learn how to operate an airplane or helicopter in an emergency, but nowhere in the regulations and Army manuals do they teach you **what to say to Martha Raye!** Once again, the troops had set me up, and I could hear chuckles from the group. What could I say to this famous movie star? I knew that she outranked me, inasmuch as she was a Lt. Colonel in the Army Nurses Corps - and with her influence, she could tell General Westmoreland where to go. What chance did I have? None. Of course, after some flubbing, I said "Yes."

Ms. Raye's visit was a great morale builder for the men who were able to spend a little time with her. I don't remember much else about her visit, but I will never forget our meeting in the company street that day.

Bo Atkinson, Stagecoach 6, Aug '66 - Mar '67

MESSAGE FROM SYLENTWING

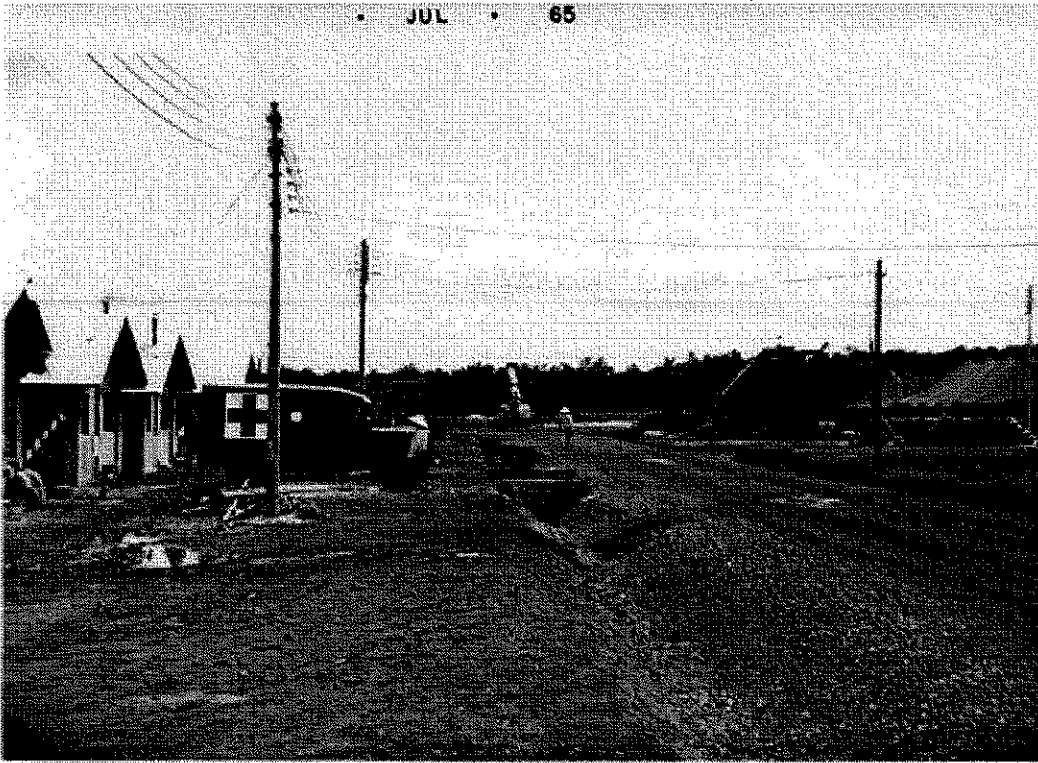
Les, I was just reading *BMTB* and decided to go through some of my archives to see what I might contribute to the history. Attached are some orders which might help in locating folks. I was assigned to the 155 shortly after its arrival in country. I was first at Pleiku, then one third of us went to BMT and another third came from Qui Nhon. This "DEROS adjustment" or "DEROS shuffle" gave all three units one third new folks instead of 155 with no experienced people. I loved getting out of old B models into brand new D's, smelling like Bell at Ft. Worth instead of all the smells we all became so familiar with. I, with others, helped train the FNG's prior to doing actual combat missions. The first XO that I remember at the start was Major Yamagatta. DeLoach was the CO, I think? The first gun platoon leader was Lt. Jim Wilkie, he had been at PKU as a gunny. Everyone on the orders would be original members of 155th at start-up at BMT. There are others but these are the original flight orders for the unit. I also include the first 759 I received from the unit depicting what we did in the early days. As you can see, the orders still show A of the 1st, not up to speed with 155th yet. I also have a few pictures of the camp being built.

This e-mail message was received by the editor some weeks ago. Unfortunately, no orders were received, and subsequent attempts to communicate with Sylentwing have been unsuccessful. Please, Sylentwing, come in from the cold. We'd love to see those orders and learn more about the early days. Coffee's on me!

155 AHC REUNION 25 - 28 JUNE 1998 FT. WORTH, TEXAS

We'll be at the Ramada Plaza Hotel, Fort Worth Downtown, 1701 Commerce Street. For reservations call 1-800-2-RAMADA or 817-335-7000. Hotel info is on the Web at "www.ramada.com". Mention 155 AHC for these room rates: \$70 per nite for single/double, \$80 for triple/quad. The hotel has 2 other conventions that weekend and expects to fill up by March, so reserve early if you can. No promises, but we're trying to arrange one or more of the following: cookout/picnic, Bell Helicopter tour, Ft. Wolters tour. When we set the agenda and know what it's going to cost, we'll ask attendees to pitch in. It's a very wild guess, but we're thinking it will be \$50 (max) per person, a bit less for dues payers. It's the first time we've done anything like this, so bear with us. And by all means **please try to attend**. This promises to be the best company party EVER!

Bob Gardner and John Grow are doing the work on this. If you have questions or ideas or whatever, contact Bob at 817-448-9232 (after 7 pm) ("ragrlv@aol.com") or John at 817-834-3975 ("growfwtx@flash.net").



Company Street,
July '65. 8th Med
is behind the am-
bulance, CO/XO
tent on the right,
looking toward
what would
later be the
Corral.

Miceli photo.

ASH & TRASH

BOOK REVIEW REDUX Several people have read & enjoyed "SOG" by John Plaster. Vince McDonough, Jerry Bourquin, Tom Mullen, Earl Baldwin, Rick Erickson, & Norm Swafford all give the book rave reviews (although we're still checking one report of "three thumbs up"). John Grow said he liked it too - and he recognized a mission that he and CWO John Forsting flew. In case you missed the review in the last *BMTB*, **read this book.**

ROCKET PARTY Tom Hunt sent in a copy of the *Hawk* magazine article about the May '69 company party & cookout that was so rudely interrupted by 122mm rockets, and suggested that it might make a good story for a future *Barb*. Good idea, Tom. If you were there, please send me a note and tell what you remember, & we'll fill up a whole newsletter. (Don't bother saying you were cowering in the bunker; the editor has that perspective well covered.)

'WELL DONE' FOR A 155 GUY The VHPA (Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Ass'n) publishes an annual directory with a roster of pilots - and a lot of other good info on helicopters in Vietnam. Even though he wasn't a pilot, Tom Mullen provided quite a lot of assistance to the VHPA for the '97 directory. In fact, the editor specifically thanked Tom for his help in putting the directory together. Way to go, Tom!

155 ON-LINE NEWS We've got our very own home page at "www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/1517", and it's looking great! Earl says it's still a work in progress, so visit regularly to see the latest changes. Be sure to check the Sign In sheet to see if any of your friends have visited lately - and to leave messages for them. There's some great pictures on here, but Earl wants more to put up; send them electronically or in the mail. He eagerly seeks ideas and/or comments from any and all former 155ers. Be sure to visit today! *Muchos kudos to Earl!*

BEST WISHES TO THE NEWLYWEDS Now it's Mr. & Mrs. Falcon 232. Craig Mosher called the other day to say that he and Maria had tied the knot last 12 September. Craig asked that an announcement be put in the *Barb* so that all his friends could send wedding gifts. (Some guys never change!) Seriously, he would love to hear from guys he knew. Congrats to Maria and Craig from the 155 AHCA.

MEDICAL ALERT The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta has noticed an unusual outbreak of Western Falconbetrothalitis over the past three issues. The affliction strikes mainly Falcon ex-RLO's, but one third of the cases have been famous former Falcon crew chiefs. It should surprise no one that warrant officers seem totally oblivious. Dr. Siegfried Pussbottom IV of the CDC told the *Barb*, "The best advice is what your mother told you when you were young: wear your rubbers."

A SHORT STORY Bob Gardner tells of the time he was VERY short, and devoting the bulk of his time to achieving a quality "Freedom Bird" tan. It seems that Bob was approached by the new XO, who wanted him to oversee a typical Army make-work project. As Bob tells it, he looked the new XO up and down and said, "Capt. _____, I've got more time in a McGuire rig than you have in-country. I'd very much like to help, but I'm on my way to the pool to work on my tan. So long."

SWEAT & SANDBAGS - FROM THE EDITOR'S BUNKER Sincere thanks to all of you who wrote in to share your memories with the rest of us. This issue reminds me very much of our days in Ban Me Thuot: sometimes we laughed, sometimes we cried - and sometimes we did both the very same day. It would be nice if every newsletter could be just a bunch laughs, but that doesn't seem right. So this issue of the *Barb* is different from the ones before. Recollection of the 155's darkest day is a very difficult memory. After all, it was a routine combat assault, something the 155 AHC did almost every day - but within just a very few seconds, eight of our guys and 18 young Vietnamese soldiers had died. A terrible, terrible tragedy. For me, one of the very best things about getting former 155er's together again is to remember - and remember for - our friends who lost their lives over there. I know it had to be very difficult to write that story. Thank you, Keith Lane, for helping us all remember our friends.

COVER PHOTO Early '67; from the left, C/E Anderson, pilot Ken Acker, G Babcock, James Garner, and A/C Jerry Bourquin. (Can anyone help with first names for the backseaters?) Jerry sent in the photo, and told it this way. "We had just come in from a mission and I was going through the shutdown procedure when a big guy jumped up on the skid, stuck his hand out, and said, 'I'm James Garner.' Didn't mean nuthin' to me, but I shook his hand and said, 'I'm Jerry Bourquin.' He hopped down, and I was just relaxing during the two minute cool-down when I finally realized, 'Hey, that's James Garner! He's a movie star!' A very nice guy, he talked with all the crew and posed for a few pictures."
Thanks for sending the picture, Jerry.

155 AHCA officers are:

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