



BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155 Assault Helicopter Company - Issue #6 - May 98

THE OLD SWIMMIN' HOLE

Fall, 1966 - Everyone in Ban Me Thuot, the 155 compound, and the Army Advisors' compound knew that a swimming pool had been sitting at East Field for more than a year – maybe two. The story I heard was that the Navy, being in charge of recreation activities when the Advisors were the only military personnel in Vietnam, had ordered a number of these Olympic sized pools for the Advisory groups. The Colonel in charge at BMT at that time didn't think they had the space nor could they find the water for the pool, so it was just left sitting at the airport.

One evening I was approached just outside the Officers' mess by Lt. Betz (the PX Officer), a WO whose name escapes me, and the USAF Weather Officer. Betz spoke for the group, and said that if I gave them enough time off, they would get the swimming pool installed inside the compound. I took this as a slight challenge, and asked how they planned to get the hole dug, and whether we could get water to the pool? Betz's bunch had it all set up. The civilian engineering group, PA&E, had been consulted by the threesome. PA&E had lots of building materials: wood for framing, cement for the sides, and all the piping were available. They had lots of expertise. And yes, the PA&E guys liked to swim, too. The PA&E head man had agreed to offer labor and materials to support the effort. I was obviously outflanked on this one, so I told them to go to it. Actually, they needn't have gone to all that trouble. Little did they know that I had worked in the summers of my high school and college years as a life guard and swimming pool manager. I was probably as excited as they about having a pool for the men of the company.

This group did not waste any time; work began the next day. It turned out that the Weather Officer was in because he could operate a transit to get the elevations and layout done. The pool layout was soon marked with stakes. It was then that I stepped in to ask that they stretch the pool liner out before digging, because I had a suspicion that the pool was a special size and might not be as described in the handbooks. Sure enough, the liner was larger than expected. Mark one up for the Old Man! By October 15, after remeasuring and remarking, the hole had been dug. Lots of dirt had been moved, with the help of many, many people from the 155 and attached units - even visitors helped out. Of course, this still being the Army, we used the opportunity to fill some sandbags with some of that dirt.

There was still piping to install, cement to lay around the perimeter, and, as luck would have it, there were a number of small pin holes in the pool liner. Fortunately the installation kit included patches for this purpose, and installation proceeded without undue delay. The pool was completed in November, and grand opening was set for Thanksgiving Day. After an impressive ribbon-cutting ceremony, visiting dignitaries were served hamburgers and hot dogs at poolside. A good time was had by all. The 155 had its pool!

Postscript: Ever since that first conversation with the pool conspirators, I had been working to come up with something that might pass as a plausible excuse as to why the 155th had taken the pool from the airport at East Field. Frankly, that part of the pool project had not gone well. My best shot was going to be, "We had to protect it from the VC." I'm sure glad no one ever asked.

Bo Atkinson, Stagecoach 6



ORIGINAL FALCON PATCH (Grey, with red letters, black & white falcon with gold beak & talons, green rocket pods.) John Grow sent this in, Earl's got it up on the Home Page, too. John says that when he got to BMT in Nov '66, Falcons were changing over to the "new" patch that most of us know. Can anyone fill us in on the origins of either patch? Who designed them? And why the changeover from the old Falcon patch to the newer design? Or, even further back, who knows how the 155 came to be "Stagecoach" and "Falcon," and where did the Stagecoach patch design come from?

FLASHBACK: 1967

Aviation Unit Has Pool

Nha Trang (1st AVN-IO) Helicopter crews of the 17th Combat Aviation Group's 155th Assault Company, 52nd Battalion have a flair for civilization despite the rough board-and-canvas surroundings of their Central Highland base camp. The Army unit, famous for their "couth tables" to re-humanize combat aviators nearing their stateside rotation dates, recently added a 40-foot square swimming pool to its cultural effects – this one open to roughly 900 troops of various units stationed at Ban Me Thuot, 723 (sic) miles northwest of here.

Long on the drawing board, pool plans were finally pushed into the construction phase in early October by 155th commander, Major Robert V. Atkinson. It was opened late last month to a formation fly-by of smoke-streaming 155th Hueys. It is made of a heavy plastic attached to a framework of metal steps, anchored by steel stanchion embedded in cement, all resting on a foundation of packed sand.

Private First Class Robert Spuller, a former YMCA swimming instructor, stands by to prevent non-battle losses among the splashing soldiers. Planned additions to the eight foot deep pool include two dressing rooms, a weightlifting room, and a five foot wide poolside apron enclosed by a fence.

From THE ARMY REPORTER, 14 Jan 67

POOL IS RED-X'ED

I ran into my brother Len while at Camp Holloway, where I was serving with the 1st Cav as a grunt machine gunner. With help from my congressman and General Westmoreland, I got reassigned to the 155th. When I joined Len at Ban Me Thuot, I thought I had died and gone to heaven. Camp Coryell was like a Boy Scout camp - even better! It had civilian KP's plus hootch maids and a message parlor. WOW! And to top it off, a great swimming pool. Life at BMT was great! We could fly out to shoot up the enemy, then return for a nice dip in the pool, beer, and a movie. Man, war was hell!

My most vivid memory about our pool was when the 82nd Airborne was on a mission in our area. Somehow those grunts invaded our Kingdom and jumped in the pool with their web gear and boots on. They not only muddied the water, but also damaged the liner and put our pool out of commission. What a bunch of animals! Having been a grunt myself, I sensed that they probably had nasty dispositions and that they were somewhat envious of our good fortune and were not likely to give a shirt - so I held my tongue and allowed them to have their way with us. To this day I feel violated and probably should seek therapy and a large sum of money for pain and suffering. Are there any 155 AHCA lawyers who will take my case?

Fran Tiner, Falcon gunner

COWTOWN IS A COMIN' -

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 be full, 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**. Last I heard we have filled 33 rooms, 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"). If you're on-line, Fort Worth info is at "WWW.FORTWORTH.COM/ATTRACTI.HTM", and Six Flags amusement park info is at "WWW.SIXFLAGS.COM". Y'ALL COME ON DOWN!!!

BRING YOUR PICTURES, SLIDES, MOVIES, MEMENTOES, TAIL ROTORS, ETC.

CAN YOU HELP US FIND . . . Falcon Peter Pilot **Gibson**, tall, curly black hair, wounded on night mission (perhaps near Lac Thien) during summer of '69; Capt. **Jerry Sobel**, Maintenance Officer, '69; Lt. **Betz**, PX Officer, '66; SFC **Al Moist** from Maintenance; Tech Inspector SP/5 **Tim Grimland**; PFC **Robert Spuller**, pool manager, '66; Capt. **Barney Hancock**, '67. If you have any idea as to the whereabouts of any of these guys, please contact any 155 AHCA occifer.

Departing Runway 06, City Field. Harry Vogler found this at the US Army Aviation Museum at Ft. Rucker. No caption or date or nothing. Harry says, "With the signal vans being moved and the parking revetments built, I think it was sometime after March '67." Harry also said to say nice things about Ms. Burns, the Museum Director, for her help in getting the photo.



(During '69-'70, we called the parking area on the left "The Dustbowl," it was mostly for 1st platoon slicks. And a POL refueling station had been installed on the right side of the runway.)

EARLY DAYS HOME PAGE Art Rizza went over on the Iwo Jima, he writes, "We arrived at Ban Me Thuot to find a lot of mud and a lot of empty sandbags. My first recollection of a shower was standing under a tent flap filled with rain water." He's put up his own home page, it's at "<http://members.aol.com/rriz/nam.html>". There's some great pictures of the very early days, and a roster with lots of early names, too. Art makes a big deal out of the fact that he's NOT on that roster of guys that went over on the Iwo - but hey, if he got on the wrong ship, that's his problem! Anyhow, he (and we) would very much appreciate any assistance in locating any of the guys on that roster. Check it out!

MAIL CALL - sharing commo from our friends:

- Dick Sperling** - I'm sending some orders and a few other things that might be of interest. Barney Hancock was my first platoon leader at BMT, he was a good mentor and great friend. Does anyone know where he is?
- Jim Bales** - Hey, this Web Page is GREAT - but it would be even greater if you had more SLICKS! Looking forward to it growing, and to seeing you and everybody at LZ Fort Worth.
- Phil Lehman** - As everyone, this was a time in my life I will never forget . . . the friends I made and lost, and the personal mistakes I made and had to endure later . . . and have. I'm looking forward to renewing friendships and healing some wounds . . . thanks for everyone's efforts in making this site possible and available.
- Mike Stark** - Johnny Gann and I will be cruising to the reunion in his vintage '67 Chevelle. We could possibly pick up riders on the Phoenix - Ft. Worth route. It beats hitchhiking. Should be a great party!!
- Jack Coonce** - It was great to get together again after all these years. Here's some pictures for the 155 Photo Album. I'm looking forward to seeing lots of friends in Ft. Worth.

- Bob Alberts** - I'll be driving to the reunion from Maine, would be glad to detour to pick up riders.
- Mike Lovell** - I don't remember too many names. One I do remember is SP/5 Tim Grimland, he still owes me \$50 for the fridge I sold him before I went on re-enlistment leave. The 155 was the best and worst times of my life. I'd love to hear from other 155 guys. *Tech Inspector, '68-'69*
- Steve Harrison** - Ban Me Thuot forever! You guys were always there when we "little brown airplane" recon needed something. 155 was the best! *Pterodactyl 33, '68-'69*
- Bud Henry** - I was Stagecoach 16, later Stagecoach 3, from Nov '66 to Nov '67. If any former Stagecoaches or Falcons come thru Jackson, MS, please give me a call for a taste of Southern hospitality.
- Joe Puhl** - Thanks for the initiative. I hope to see you all soon. *Stagecoach 16, '70*
- Dale Davis** - Great work.
- Jerry Hallfin** - Super job on the Web Page! Thanks for all your hard work in bringing us together again. And thanks especially for remembering and honoring those from the 155 that never came home. *Maint, '66-7*
- Pete Cosmos** - I've been reading the *BMTB* and I guess, like so many, it's hard to imagine where nearly 30 years have gone. Keep your head on a swivel and your knots up.
- Curt Seiler** - I literally stumbled on to the 155 web site, left a message, and in a matter of days was delighted to hear from an old friend. Needless to say, you made my day! *Stagecoach 16 and 3, '70*
- Dan Gwaltney** - The Home Page is a fine tribute to all the guys who served in the best darn AHC in Vietnam. *Stagecoach 17, '68-9*

I REMEMBER . . . TET, 1968

As I write this, it was exactly 30 years ago today when I was an FNG in-country and not flying yet. I was in the mortar pit, blowing stuff up. Our CO had some knowledge of what was about to come down as he had us ready. He had us out . . . just waiting. We didn't know exactly what we were waiting for, but wait we did. Around midnight all hell broke loose. They were up on the north side of the fence and the incoming was intense. I remember being so tired I couldn't see straight.

I remember that on the first day, towards afternoon, we were told that back home it had been reported that Ban Me Thuot had been overrun. They gave us postcards, and told us that we had to write home right then and there to let the families back home know that we were still alive. A plane was sent in (I'm pretty sure it was a Caribou) to pick up the postcards. There was nothing else on the Caribou, to the best of my knowledge. They just came in and picked up the mail and took off again.

I remember, after two or three days, falling asleep just leaning up against a wall. The helicopters were working out almost constantly, and when I left the mortar pit I went to the Maintenance area to repair blades. We would get the helicopters back up and then it was back to the mortar pit.

I remember going downtown into Ban Me Thuot in a sandbagged deuce-and-a-half. I was armed with a CAR 15, although I never knew why we went. I remember the roads being clogged with people either trying to leave BMT or get back in, and we were sent to turn them around and prevent them. I stood in the middle of the road, armed with a 60.

I remember working on the helicopters and the sniper fire whizzing all around. At first I ducked every time and then I realized that by the time I heard it going by it was already too late for me to worry, so I just quit ducking and kept on working.

I remember thinking how nice it would be to get home.

And after I was home, I remembered that my friends were still there . . . and I wished that I was back.

Earl Baldwin, Falcon 049 Door Gunner, '67-'68

ROCKET PARTY I remember the '69 party well. I think I was flying in Falcon 232 with Craig Mosher during that time. I remember a day or two before the party and we spotted a bunch of deer in a field and swooped down to get some meat for the party. The deer were running across the nose of the ship, and I managed to stitch every blade of grass in the field - but all those deer skillfully dodged every single bullet. I remember the pilot (it might have been Bob Gardner) being slightly puffed when a slick then got the kills and supplied steaks for the party.

A few beers into the party, and I mean quite a few, I recall the 122mm rockets impacting. After the smoke and noise had cleared, a number of slightly disoriented pilots and crew took off to see what could be seen. A poor Yard villager happened to be hunting birds with a knife and string. Someone opened fire on him and eventually lit his clothes on fire with tracer rounds. I don't remember who jumped out of their birds and got cut trying to capture this most offensive individual, but I do remember he received a medal for his bravery and most likely a purple heart as well. Anyway, the suspect rocketeer was captured and brought back to the base. He was tortured with beer and steaks, but no one spoke Viet or Yard so little cultural exchange transpired. After sufficient interrogation, no one knew what to do with him, so he was flown back to Rocket Ridge and sent on his merry way. What a story he must have had around the campfire that night!

As long as I'm writing, I'm reminded of another incident in VC valley. Along a small stream we saw a fishing pole (with a fish on the line) next to a little pile of clothes on the ground - but no VC. We suspected he was in the water with the fish, but couldn't see him. My fire that day found its mark, and the tracers ignited his clothing. We may not have won the war, but by God we ran up their laundry bills!

Mark Cornwall, Door Gunner, Falcon 077 and 232

TREASURER'S REPORT Thanks to the following 1998 dues payers: Preston "Sonny" Hampton, James L. Abbott, James R. Cunningham, Gerald F. Bourquin, David Rutledge, Larry Wyllie, Gary R. Butler, Curt Seiler, James Ferris, Victor Rossi, Edwin H. (Bud) Henry, Jeffrey W. Schrader, Danny T. Lauer, and Les Davison. To all those that have paid their dues, we take our tie-downs off to you and thank you for promoting our growing efforts.

1998 dues are now being accepted. Make checks payable for \$25.00 made out to 155th AHCA. Send them to my address listed below. Dues paid, contributions, and outlays for 1997 and 1998 Y-T-D are:

Total Dues Collected - 61 Paid Members (1997).....	\$2,110.00
Check Supply Cost (Initial opening of checking account).....	(13.50)
1st Quarter Newsletter Costs (97).....	(117.00)
Member Locator Service.....	(111.00)
2nd Quarter Newsletter Costs (97).....	(179.76)
Mini-Reunion in Ohio - Voluntary Contributions by Members present.....	195.00
(Thank you, Mr. & Mrs. Lauer)	
Member Locator Service.....	(60.00)
3rd Quarter Newsletter Costs & Directory Mail-out Costs (97).....	(304.00)
Bank Charge - Member insufficient funds check received (shirt happens)..	(10.00)
4th Quarter Newsletter Costs (97).....	(147.00)
Total Dues Collected to Date - 14 Paid Members (1998).....	350.00
1st Quarter Newsletter Costs (98).....	<u>(178.00)</u>
Positive Balance at 3/31/98.....	\$1,534.74

Jeff Schrader, Treasurer

HISTORY NOTES Special thanks to Bo Atkinson, who sent me 15 pages of memories from his tour. Some of those memories have been in the last two *Barbs*, and others are on the home page. Bo was way before my time, but I've enjoyed the heck out of his stories of the early days. Bo's sent along a bunch of disclaimers (he says his writing skills aren't the best, and his high school English teacher is probably rolling over in her grave, and it ain't no ego thing), but says he wrote what he remembered to save - and bring back - memories for others. Lose the disclaimers, Bo; it's great stuff. Thank you for taking the time to capture it for all of us.

Seeking Information - On 8 March '67, UH-1D 65-09927 lost RPM and crashed on short final to an LZ. The A/C was Lt. R. Weiderho, the PP was WO E. Paulausk, backseaters unknown. The cause may have been a fuel control malfunction; the aircraft was a total loss. If anyone has information on this incident, please contact me.

Bob Alberts, Historian



Falcon B Model in 165th Maintenance Area, Jan '67. Photo sent in by William Jennart. It's interesting to note that there's not a revetment in sight here. In the original photo, the slick in the background appears still to have the "stars & bars" national insignia on the tail boom and "ARMY" in large white letters on the cargo door.

THANKS, MAINTENANCE . . . It was November '69, and the bad guys were trying to play Dien Bien Phu at Duc Lap and Bu Prang. It was HOT! Most every flyable 155 ship, both slicks and guns, had been out there every day for three weeks straight. Our gunships got shot at every day, and we took a lot of hits. The continual strain had begun to take its toll on the flight crews and the helos. One day our ship (Falcon 739?) was damaged by shrapnel from a mortar explosion. We landed to check it out and found the belly peppered with shrapnel, but there was no damage of any significance so we continued the mission. A couple of days later, I again flew that ship. After taking fire on the first sortie of the day, we checked the ship over for new bullet holes - and I found all the shrapnel holes still there. At day's end, without thinking, I wrote in the ship's log, "Patch the #&@!*# holes in the belly!" in large letters. (I did have a reason. It was important for us to know which bullet holes were new, so we could check for internal damage from those. Old holes that had previously been checked were OK - it's not like they cost us extra airspeed or anything - but we had to be able to recognize new holes.) Well, it wasn't very long before Maintenance Officer Jerry Sobel found me out and proceeded to chew my arrogant young self a new you-know-what! He pointed out that his guys had been working round the clock to fix all the birds we had been getting shot up, they were tired as heck, and superficial skin damage just wasn't a priority. At least I had the sense to know he was right and I was wrong, so I didn't say much of anything.

All that is a long introduction to something I should have said to the Maintenance guys right after that: I'm sorry. With lots of years of hindsight and perhaps a glimmer of maturity (though there's a good number of people who say they've seen no such glimmer), I've come to realize how important our Maintenance was - and how good our guys were. Machine shop, avionics, armament, TI's, engine shop, prop & rotor; this is meant for every one of you who helped keep our ships flying. At our lonely outpost, many miles from any support organization, you got the job done. Without you, none of us hotshot young pilots would have been anything but lounge lizards with wings. Maybe the other pilots were better at recognizing your contributions, Maintenance. I hope so. In any case, even though it's way too late, let me say "Thank you" for your outstanding support.

Les Davison, Falcon 2, '69 - '70

ASH & TRASH

BARB BLUNDERS BIG ON BOURQUIN BIT - BABCOCK BOGUS, BAUCOM BISSED Sincere apologies from the entire editorial staff go out to Mike Baucom. Mike is the good-looking crew chief kneeling in the center of Jerry Bourquin's February cover photo; we mistakenly identified him as "Babcock." Unlike other media publications, the *Barb* intends to take full responsibility for its errors. In this case, however, an extensive investigation has uncovered no wrongdoing by *Barb* staff. As best we can figure, the misidentification was caused by El Nino.

P.S. Mike says the door gunner in the picture is Ron Anderson (at left in the photo). Does anyone have a line on where he's at now?

MORE ON JAMES GARNER COVER PHOTO Jerry Bourquin was kind enough to take the time to send us that great shot. Neither Mike Baucom nor Ken Acker had that picture - but now they do. Jerry's time and effort brought large smiles and shared memories for at least 2 others in his crew that day long ago (and if we can find Ron Anderson, we'll have everybody). And even for those of us who aren't in the picture, it's just a great 155 AHC shot. So, the morale of the story is this: **send in your pictures and stories and make other people smile.**

OLD STUFF Historian Bob came across this the other day, from the 1894 edition of The United States Officer Guide: "Enlisted men are stupid but extremely cunning and sly, and bear considerable watching." My recollection from '69-'70 is that they have gotten smarter over the years - but the rest hasn't changed a bit.

155 ON-LINE NEWS The home page at "www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/1517" is getting better every day. New patches, new pictures, a roster listing, a ton of other new stuff; and, best of all, new messages from other 155 guys. Be sure to visit often, and leave your own messages!

FUTURE NEWSLETTERS Especially seeking information on and memories of Tet of '68 and the '69 company party/rocket attack. Please share your recollections with the editor via letter, phone, fax, e-mail, or carrier pigeon. Contributors should be aware that photographic images of questionable moral value will be carefully scrutinized.



GOOD IDEA Two in a row for Falcon C/E Tom Hunt. Tom suggested that we try to include more non-flying stories in the *Barb*, because not everyone in the company was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to beat the skies into submission as we flight crews did. Good idea, Tom. So come on, non-fliers, tell us your stories, please?

And that gives me a good opportunity to emphasize again the 155 AHCA is not just for pilots, and not just for flight crew guys - it's meant to include everyone who was part of the 155 AHC at Ban Me Thuot. Cooks, clerks, motor pool guys (did we have a Sgt. Bilko?), armorers, mechanics - it took all of you to make the 155th a great company. And that goes for attached units, too. If you were stationed at Ban Me Thuot, and if you were blasted by red dirt from a Huey rotorwash there, then you BELONG in the 155 AHCA. Contact any 155 AHCA officer.

SWEAT & SANDBAGS - FROM THE EDITOR'S BUNKER Did you early guys really have "couth tables"? (After our gathering in Fort Worth, us later guys will know whether they worked. Probably not.) As always, beaucoup thanks to everyone who wrote to share their 155 AHCA memories. If this newsletter is any good at all, it's those guys who deserve the credit. Let them know you appreciate their time and efforts. FYI - tentative vacation plans may put the next issue into September. Happy summertime!

COVER PHOTO Falcon 731 parked in the Corral, late '68/early '69. Orrin Messinger took the shot, while Falcons Charlie Marvin, Greg Bundros, and Dan Faieta took a break to pose. 731 was a hog-frog, armed with 2.75" rockets and a 40mm grenade launcher. Does anyone know what happened to her?

155 AHCA officers are:

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Bob Alberts, Historian

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Tom Mullen, Aide-de-camp

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