



BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155 Assault Helicopter Company - Sortie #7 - Aug 98

FLASHBACK: GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

It was Sunday evening in Vietnam. The sun was still high at 6:00 p.m. as the men of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company at Ban Me Thuot vigorously devoured chicken, steaks and beer. It was a company party. They had momentarily forgotten the tensions of combat assaults and enemy engagements - but they were not unprepared. These combat aviators of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion are well aware of enemy tactics. He hits hard. He hits fast. He hits when he is least expected.

In a daring daylight shelling, the first of a half-dozen 122mm rockets exploded in the compound at 6:05. The party was over. Charlie had come for a visit and he would be well received. "My first reactions were automatic," recalled Warrant Officer Thomas Lee Dickinson, 19, Aberdeen, MD. "I came out of the hootch on the run, grabbed my weapons, and headed for the gunships. Steaks and spareribs were sailing through the air, people were heading for the drainage ditch, and feet were flying for ships."

When the feet of Robert Frearson, 21-year-old Army Captain from Glendale, AZ, reached the Starlight Ship, he found his crew ready to go. Approximately two minutes after the first round they were in the air. Reaction time for the Starlight Ship has been as low as 45 seconds from first impacting round. Captain Frearson described the take-off procedures. "While I was cranking the ship, Specialist Four David Wyatt, Fayette, MO, strapped me in, and Specialist Four Albert Arredondo, Elmonte, CA, rolled down my sleeves. We lifted off and I called 'Gunsight Alpha' for a direction."

Captain Frearson further described the capture of one of the party crashers. He had been spotted by the Starlight Ship, standing by one of the familiar L-shaped trenches from which 122mm rockets are fired. "I decided to pick him up," he said. "The man took off all his clothes and set them on fire, along with the pouch he was carrying. He was one-half the way down a steep slope. We used our .50 caliber to walk him up the hill where we could land. SP4 Wyatt went after him and the two other members covered him from the ground. He approached the suspect half-way down the hill. The suspect pulled a knife and made threatening jabs. Wyatt faked a left hook and kicked him in the chest, making him drop the knife and roll down the hill. Wyatt then picked him up and brought him back to the ship."

American injuries were light, with no aircraft receiving damages. "They definitely knew the party was scheduled for six o'clock, and knew where we were. They were not after the ships," says Public Information Officer WO1 John D. Dowdy, St. Joseph, MO. "We are hit on the average of once a week, but usually between 2300 and 0200. They thought they would catch us off guard, but there is no time that you can be unprepared here."

The enemy positions were silenced within fifteen minutes. It was a typical encounter with the enemy today in Vietnam. They hit hard. They hit fast. But then, they aren't the only ones.

Reprinted from HAWK magazine, June, 1969 - Story by SP4 Millard Adams

I WAS THERE . . .

Jerry Henderson - I remember the infamous ROCKET PARTY of '69 quite well. That was one of my most frightening moments of the whole Vietnam experience. It just so happened that I had guard duty that evening, and I was more than a little peeved because I had to leave the party early. We had just gathered formation for the guard inspection when suddenly there was a tremendous explosion, unlike anything I had previously heard, somewhere near the front gate. For a few seconds we just stood there, not understanding the noise, and I said, "That sounded like a one-deuce-deuce." Actually, I had never heard one before, just stories about them; stories that would chill your bones, stories that were so vivid you felt like you were there. So when that first one hit, I knew it must be a 122.

Well, those words had barely left my mouth when I looked around and realized that I was standing all alone. I began to run for the perimeter bunkers around the flight line. I figured I could get to safety quicker there than trying to make it to the bunkers in the hootch area. Bad mistake! What I didn't think of was that enemy rockets and mortars were usually aimed at the helicopter parking areas. As I ran, I soon caught up with one of my guard duty comrades (I told you, I was scared). Glancing to our left, we could see that another rocket had been launched from "rocket ridge."

I watched it coming all the way in, and it hit about 100 yards or so from our bunker. I could see another rocket on its way, this one seemed to be headed straight for us. I told my companion, "We are in deep shirt!" We ran to the next bunker and, sure enough, the rocket landed near the bunker we had just departed. Looking at the smoke and dust, we saw yet another rocket coming in - so we jumped up and ran to the next bunker. (I think we stirred up more dust this time than the last rocket!) We reached the bunker OK and dove in, and I said, "We're going to get hit with shrapnel out there if we aren't careful, maybe we should just stay in here and take our chances that we won't take a direct hit." So that's what we did, and we were OK.

The next few rounds fell up in the hootch area. I'm sure glad they didn't have any more rounds to drop on us that day. I shudder to think that if the first round had been properly placed in the party area, it probably would have taken out the whole company. We were fortunate that God was with us that day, and that the bad guys were also lousy shots.

Jeff Schrader - I was on standby that day, and ran out to 049 in a bright green shirt, blue jeans, and shower shoes - which I lost the second I hit the hot, melted tar on the way to the revetment. I got all busy strapping in and cranking the ship, when I was ready to pull pitch I looked around and Tom Hunt (Falcon crew chief) was the only guy there. He hopped in the peter pilot's seat, and off we went into the wild blue yonder.

Bob Gardner - I remember kicking the back door of the O-club off the hinges as I was hauling assets to the bunker.

Tom Hunt - On the day of the party, our gun team had gotten back late from a mission. Since my ship was assigned to standby duty that night, some of the guys came out to daily it while the gunner and I had the steaks they had saved for us. We had the last steaks - and the last beers. I walked across the company street to sit down on the bank of the ditch, and had just taken one bite of a tough steak when the first rocket came over my head and exploded somewhere near the weapons test fire pit. I threw the beer one way and the steak another, and ducked into the ditch until I thought it was safe to go to the flight line. By the time I got to my ship, the guys who had been working on it already had it started, and they were leaving. I continued down the line until I found an empty aircraft and untied it. Jeff Schrader ran out in his t-shirt, shorts, and shower shoes, jumped in the right seat, and began the start-up. I watched where the other aircraft had gone and got things ready in back. Apparently most of the other big bad Falcon pilots were hiding somewhere, because when all was ready to go it was still just Jeff and me - so I climbed into the peter pilot seat. Having seen the rocket go over my head, I knew which way they had come from, and that's where we went. We found the launch site and one man was still there. Jeff called the company and got permission to go hot. We were in a chunker bird, and Jeff told me to use the 40mm on him. On the first pass nothing happened, so I thought I had made one of those newbie peter pilot mistakes and not put the circuit breakers in. After checking them and checking the 40mm switches, I knew that I was better than that. On the second pass I watched the rounds in the chute to see if they were moving. They were, so that told me the firing pin was broken. By the time we lined up for the third pass a slick showed up and said they wanted to capture him. We flew cover for them while the crew chief jumped out and knocked the poor little guy on his assets and hauled him in. Then we went back. I found my steak, brushed it off, heated it up and ate it. But the beer was gone.

Les Davison - I was brand new, with something like 340 days left. It might have been my first attack. I remember vividly how loud those explosions were as I ran to the bunker. Then, as I cowered there, I couldn't believe that guys were running out of the bunker because they: a) had forgotten their beers; or b) had to turn their steaks.

Ron Polly - Does anyone remember digging up the 122 that didn't go off on the flight line after the party?

CAN YOU HELP US FIND . . . WO1 **John Dowdy**, Public Information Officer, '69; Captain **Robert Frearson**, 2nd Platoon leader, '69; **Paul Miller** and **Fred Olsen**, 1st Platoon gunners, '69-'70. If you have any idea as to the whereabouts of any of these guys, please contact any 155 AHCA occifer.

MAIL CALL - sharing commo from our friends:

Steve Kelley - Just thought I'd show you how to spell my name, and let you know that I've moved to Fort Worth.

Mary Baldwin - Just wanted to pass along a few thoughts after the Reunion. Saw - and shared - lots of hugs and some tears and a general sense of good times and good people. The 155th was - and still is - an incredible group of people.

Robert Slate - Feb - Oct '68, I'd love to hear from anybody or everybody who was here during that time.

Robert Goolsby - Capt. Fred Williams and I were two of the last members of the company. I was the Motor Pool Officer and Fred was the Property Book Officer, and it was our job to turn in all the property of the 155 after its deactivation. Camp Coryell was a very lonely place during those last days.

Dan Miller - Purple Gang member from '69-'70, I crewed Stagecoach 332. Paul Miller and Fred Olsen were gunners on my ship.

Geoff Jones - I'm still debating whether to head down to the reunion. If I do, I may go to Mineral Wells to look up the farmer at whom I used to launch rocks from my trusty TH-55 as he worked his field near one of the stagefields along the Brazos. If I do find him, I'm not sure whether I'll apologize . . . or chuck another stone at him for old times' sake.

Chuck Markham - Can't tell you how great it was to find the 155 home page. I was the very last Stagecoach 6. The paperwork was a mess when we closed down the company, because we had too many mini-guns and tailbooms, and too few mess trays and paper clips. Does anyone else remember being part of that? I'd love to hear from any 155 guys.

Pam Lauer - I think the *Ban Me Thuot Barb* helps us better halves understand a little bit more about our husbands' lives. Thanks.

Dick Sperling - Hey, everyone, it's true. The editor DID buy coffee. Thanks, Les, I very much enjoyed the coffee and the conversation.

Bobbie Spencer - I was with the company at Fort Riley, went over on the Iwo Jima, and flew a D model ashore on 1 May 65 at Vung Tau. You've done a great job on the web site.

Frank Alonso - I was the door gunner in the story by Jim Koch - except that I seem to remember that when we went back to base, there were new holes in the tail boom.

Ron Polly - You guys have done a fantastic job on the home page. I was a 2nd flight crew chief, June '68 to June '69, my ship was 713. In my heart I need to renew old friendships or even shake a hand or two. Would like to hear from anyone who was part of the 155.

Leander McGriff - Jim Bales and I are definitely going to make the next reunion. Does anyone remember the day Major Goodall took one in the leg? I was crewing that day.

Ed Close - Hey, what a surprise to find this web site, it's great. Can you guys put me in touch with Danny Lauer? I wonder if he remembers when we shaved our heads?



Stagecoach, 1967.

Photo by William Jennart.

ANOTHER OLD GUY REPORT (Or, a quick tour of Laos directed by Army Air)

I've done some international flying in my career since Vietnam, you know, around Europe and into Bosnia, down south of Mexico and from Guatemala over the Gulf of Mexico (talked to Havana Center on that one), and even across the North Atlantic. But I think my first international flight was between Vietnam and Laos in August, 1967.

The 155th operated all over the place from the DMZ to Phan Rang, and in August we were sent to Phu Bai. On the first day there we got a little brief on what we were expected to do (fly to Khe Sanh every day and follow our noses from there, or whatever they told us to do). The second day we pointed toward the 3rd Marine compound and took pictures as the ammo dump blew up. Later we laughed about it when we found it was due to a short round outbound from their own mortars. But later still we cried when Al Fitz brought his gunship back with a badly wounded Johnny Gann. Bad day.

The next day I was sent out to Khe Sanh, along with several others. Our mission was to take a LRRP team across the border into Laos and drop them off. There was no LZ to simply land and takeoff again. We would have to hover down between the trees and eventually hover out of ground effect while the team rappelled down the rest of the way. We loaded up and took off. The team leader came up between us and pointed out the directions to the area we would drop them off. First we went west, then south a little, circled around a hill and finally the team leader said, "There. Right there," pointing to an opening in the trees. We stopped over the hole and looked down, but saw nothing but more trees lower. We hovered down with the crew chief and gunner calling out directions and clearances. Down fifty feet, over left 25, down fifty, over right 50, stop, hover steady, and out they went on four ropes. The guys in the back gathered in the ropes and guided us back up through the trees, but before we got very far we got a call on the Fox Mike saying to come back in to pick up a wounded man.

Turned out this Montagnard ranger had rappelled into a tree and jumped from there into a nice, deep six inch stream below his tree. He broke his leg. Down we went again, over, down, over, steady (sorry, can't remember who the crew was, but they did a great job getting us through those trees . . . I think we only took a few leaves off the branches without dinging the blades). The crew chief threw out a rope and they tied the ranger on below and up we went. Every time we had to go sideways we drug that poor ranger through the tops of the trees, but finally we were clear and the crew chief reported he was okay, waving up at us. He was kind of lying on his back as we flew along, streamlined in the wind with a Swedish K cradled in his arms.

But as we climbed out from the trees to get clear of small arms range, a fifty cal opened up on us from the hill to our left. We heard the rounds going by, but none hit us. Nevertheless, the crew chief fired back with his sixty. As I looked down at our dangling passenger I had to laugh. He, too, was returning fire at the fifty, but every time he fired the recoil caused him to turn in the air. When he streamlined again, he would fire again, and turn from the recoil. As funny as it was, I knew the air down there had to be battering him badly.

As soon as the fifty crew decided we were out of range and quit firing at us, we started looking for a place to set down and get our dangling ranger inside the aircraft. About five miles north we found a clearing on top of a small flat hill. I came to at about a 75 foot hover above this 100 some odd foot hill and tried to keep it steady as we lowered the ranger to the ground. The crew did their best to direct me, but I still ended up dragging the guy quite a bit by the time we got on the ground. Then the crew chief and gunner got him in and we took off.

We didn't get any more fire on the way back, so every thing was cool. A couple of medics were standing by at Khe Sanh and took the ranger off somewhere for treatment. We stayed for a couple of hours more in case the team needed a quick extraction, but we didn't hear any more about them that day. We flew back to Phu Bai for the night, and found out Johnny was on his way back to the States. Our best crew chief, gone. We blamed the Marines.

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

THE 155 CAN STILL THROW ONE HECK OF A PARTY: FORT WORTH, 1998

June 1998, and the 155 AHC Reunion is on at Fort Worth, Texas. My first reunion with the best helicopter company ever. Activities planned for Friday, were a choice of a visit to Bell Helicopter or a trip to Fort Wolters. I chose Fort Wolters since my son and I wanted to visit the first home purchased by the Atkinsons. The old place hadn't changed much, in fact, it looked the same including all the yellow jackets buzzing around the yard. I can't say the same for good old Fort Wolters. Even the main gate is changed; gone are the helicopters on either side as my son reminded me. I don't know how he remembered them since he was six when we arrived there. He got in a discussion with John

Grow about them and John admitted that the kid was right. Maybe that is why the wife wanted him to come with me since I have a serious case of "CRS" (can't remember stuff) as some have often reminded me. The rest of Wolters looked a ghost town with dilapidated buildings every where. There were a couple pluses: one was the prison and the other was "Fort Wolters Helicopters." We saw this sign on one of the hangers and checked it out. This is a private company using Hiller H-23 type helicopters. This brought back memories since this was the helicopter that I flew in flight school in 1958. I thought all of them were gone since I thought Hiller went out of business when Hughes got the contract for the training school helicopters.

The Hospitality Room became the focal point for the whole weekend. This was the place where you met everyone. Most everyone had brought along their pictures, slides and other items to share. "History Bob" Alberts must have rented a trailer to haul the things he brought. Many thanks to John Grow, Orrin Messinger, and all the others who provided commentary with their slides. There was even a video sent over by Charlie Fleming, Stagecoach 6 after me. It would have been nice if Charlie could have been with us, he would have been the fourth company commander present. For those who have seen the section on the WEB page called "Recollections" and have waded through mine, you may recall a paragraph entitled "*THINGS YOU DIDN'T WANT THE 'OLD MAN' TO KNOW.*" Well, I received quite a ribbing from those who had read it when I commented on the fact that I didn't know that anyone went hunting with a gunship while I was there. But there it was in full color with John Grow boasting that they got the animal back to camp and after the Flight Surgeon gave it a clean bill of health, they cooked it. John also showed slides of what may have been the Falcon "R & R Center" in Dalat. He knew an awful lot about the owner of the beautiful villa with all the servants plus a '57 Chevy. Since we didn't have many missions in that area when I was in charge, these events must have occurred in Charlie Fleming's "reign".

The main event of the reunion was the picnic on Saturday at Bob Gardner's home, appropriately named, "HEAVEN'S GATE." If you can get access to the Internet, pull up the 155 AHC home page and look at the pictures in the reunion section and you will understand why this name was chosen. Most of us arrived early afternoon on Saturday and spent a "cool" day in the shade by the pool. Many of the crew voluntarily went swimming while three of us (I'm sure it was just a coincidence that we were all former CO's) were given a choice by the sergeant-at-arms - go in on command or get tossed. Sounds like some ritual or something left over from a time long ago. The picnic was great and the pig was roasted to perfection.

The final item on the schedule came as a complete surprise to most of us. Tamara McDonough (Vince's daughter) presented a television video she had prepared from pictures, movies, and tapes of the 155 in action in Vietnam. The whole group sat in silence as each in his own way related to the pictures and sounds. I closed my eyes to listen to the whirl of the chopper blades as the engines were starting and drifted back, in my mind, to those many times that I had heard those sounds. There were movies of gunships in action and lift ships on short final of an assault. No one moved when the "MAYDAY, MAYDAY" call was heard and we watched the chopper going in.. But there were other scenes of the "good life" that we enjoyed at Camp Coryell and in Ban Me Thuot. I cringed when I saw those enjoying the pool with their boots on but I could tell that everyone was having a great time. All these sights were accompanied with a great selection of background music. What a wonderful way to end a beautiful day with friends.

Tamara describes the video as a "work in progress" but to me it is great as it is. If you ever get a chance to view Tamara's work, you will never regret it. Thanks to all that made this reunion so special and a special thanks to John Grow for all his efforts to keep us entertained with his slides, to Bob Gardner and Leslie for letting us share their "Heaven" for one afternoon, and to Tamara for her wonderful video work. I for one am looking forward to our next reunion.

Bo Atkinson, Stagecoach 6

HISTORY NOTES Hey guys, I am seriously trying to collect all the information on any shoot downs, woundings, awards, or anything you might know about people and aircraft in the company. Please try to be as specific as possible: tail numbers, dates, names, locations, etc. Information will be stored, and shared with others who might ask about a certain incident. PLEASE send me your stuff, or give me a call at 207-564-3946. Thanks.

Bob Alberts, 155 Historian

ANOTHER OHIO PARTY, AT JEFF'S PLACE

Who: Anyone from Camp Coryell, any year, c'mon out for a good time . .

When: Columbus Day weekend . . . **October 9, 10, and 11.**

Where: **6815 Middlebranch N.E., Canton, Ohio 44721 Phone #330-494-0013**

Places to Stay: Harleigh Inn 330-499-9900; 5 units available for that weekend; \$33 for one up to \$48 for three member family; apartment style accommodations. Also, Comfort Inn 330-492-1331; Hampton Inn 330-492-0151; Holiday Inn 330-494-2770; Best Western 330-497-8799.

Menu: Pig Roast (as promised last year) on Saturday the 10th. Majority rule on all other meals, could be steaks or wienies or MRE's or . . .

Festivities and interests in the AO: National Football Hall of Fame; Beer Party; Drive thru Amish country; Beer Party; Volleyball; Beer Party; Horseshoes; Beer Party; Tug-of-war across the creek out back; Beer Party; Golf; Beer Party; Campfire and war stories (TINS only, please); Beer Party.

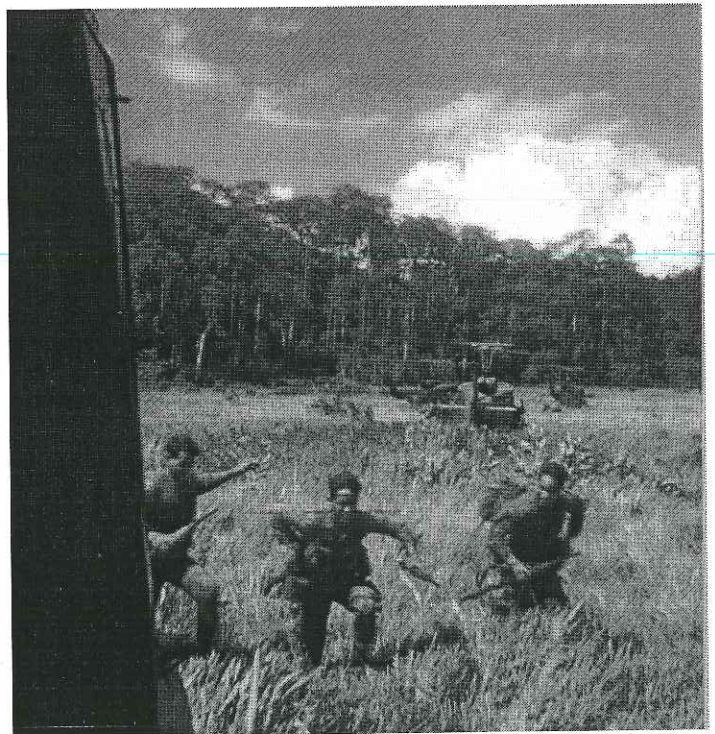
Jeff is going on record as putting the pressure on Bob Alberts who claimed in Texas that he might be able to get some moose meat to bring down from Maine to throw on the barbie. "Bring on the moose, History Bob!" Sounds like a company picnic we had some 30 years ago, and guess who came to dinner then? Please contact Jeff Schrader at 330-494-0013 or on-line at "Falcon7@prodigy.net" so that we can get an ETA and a headcount.

155 AHCA BUSINESS STUFF

At the Reunion, a new slate of officers was selected to lead the 155 AHCA; names are shown on the last page. Some are fresh faces, and some are us same old guys. Dean Owen is a great choice to lead us, as he did in '69 when he was Stagecoach 6. I'd follow Dean anywhere. (Except I might not follow him to LZ Kate, at night, for another emergency resupply mission. But that's another story.) Welcome aboard to Al and Tom L. and Bo. For those of you who don't know them, Bo was an early Stagecoach 6, and Al and Tom both crewed slicks, then guns in '69. And Tamara McDonough, based on her great film work, was accepted as an honorary member - and immediately became the Recreation Officer (other duties, as assigned) for the next reunion.

Dues remain at \$25 per year, send Jeff your checks, make them payable to "155 AHCA." Dues are still voluntary: many pay, but many more don't. We'd sure appreciate your support. As an added incentive, we're going to have a drawing for a Joe Kline Vietnam helicopter print. If you've paid your '98 dues, your name will be thrown in the hat for the drawing, to be held next January. Just think of it, your February newsletter might come in an envelope saying, "YOU'VE ALREADY WON . . ."

The group voted to move the next reunion to Veteran's Day. Mark your calendars now: **November 11, 2000.** As I understand it, the party was WELL underway by the time a site for the reunion came up. Hearing cries of "Muncie, IN," "Barrow, AK," and "Intercourse, PA," outgoing President Orrin quickly established a committee to choose a site for the next get-together and gaveled the business session to a close. Since then our reunion site committee has had some discussions, with Orlando and Las Vegas seemingly the two top candidates. If you'd like to make your wishes known, contact any 155 AHCA officer.



Papa Zulu, somewhere in the Central Highlands, 1968.
Photo by Robert Slate, Stagecoach door gunner.

ASH & TRASH

THANKS, 155TH Mike Sloniker of VHPA was placing the 155 AHC Tribute (see Nov '97 *Barb*) at the base of The Wall early Memorial Day morning when he was approached by a man who identified himself as a CCC guy from Kontum in '68 (CCC was Command & Control - Central; they were the Green Berets who ran cross-border ops out of Kontum.). He asked Mike to pass along this message: "Thanks for coming and getting my team, to all members of the 155th."

PATCHES & CALL SIGNS Hey out there, is anybody listening???? Nobody, as in **zero persons**, passed along any info on the origin of our three patches, or how the 155 came to be "Stagecoach" and "Falcon." What gives? Somebody out there must know. We'd sure like to find out, so we can share the info with everyone.

RUMOR CONTROL It sure beats me how these things get started, but here is the official word. Monica Lewinsky will NOT be giving an oral presentation at Jeff's party in October.

155 ON-LINE NEWS The home page at "www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/1517" has proven a great source for bringing in new members. GREAT!!! Earl continues to load new stuff on there, so be sure to check in once in a while to see what's new. And don't forget to check the message board, to see who's saying what about whom. Chances are pretty good that you'll find an old friend - and you can take it from there.

USS IWO JIMA ARRIVES IN VIETNAM: FILM AT ELEVEN "History Bob" Alberts was snooping around the National Archives some weeks back, and he found a 20-minute color film (silent) of Company A helicopters turning up and departing the Iwo. There's a few faces of pilots and enlisted guys in the film, but not many. Bob says he's going to make some video copies and send them round-robin style to the guys he knew went over on the Iwo. If you'd like to see the video, get in touch with Bob. *Good work History Bob.*

SWEAT & SANDBAGS - FROM THE EDITOR'S BUNKER Muchos apologias for this issue getting out late, I promise to be back on track for November. From all reports, the Fort Worth reunion was an unqualified BASH. I'll add my thanks to Leslie and Bob Gardner and John Grow for all their hard work. As usual, thanks to all who wrote in to share their memories. There's some great stories there . . . but for me the best thing in this newsletter is the tiny little "Thanks, 155th." If that CCC guy still remembers **after 30 years** that it was the Stagecoaches and Falcons who came to get him, then every one of you has reason to be proud. Well done.

COVER PHOTO Unwrapping a UH-1D on board the USS Iwo Jima off the coast of Vung Tau, South Vietnam; May, 1965. There's just enough of the tail boom visible to show that this ship has subdued markings. Most of those in the film (see above) still had the US stars-and-bars insignia and "US ARMY" in huge white letters. Nice targets, what? Art Rizza sent this picture in, along with many others. There's some great shots on his home page at "[HTTP://MEMBERS.AOL.COM/RRIZ/NAM.HTML](http://MEMBERS.AOL.COM/RRIZ/NAM.HTML)". *Thanks for sending the photos, Art.*

155 AHCA officers are:

Dean Owen, Pres. Al Arredondo, VP Jeff Schrader, Treasurer Bob Alberts, Historian Tom Love, Sgt-at-Arms

Earl Baldwin, Net Guy Tom Mullen, Aide-de-camp Bo Atkinson, Newsletter Les Davison, Newsletter

155 AHC Assn.

