

BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155th Assault Helicopter Company - Sortie 25 - Oct 2003

A BIT OF HISTORY

On 30 October 66, a UH-1D commanded by WO **Michael N. Coryell** and piloted by WO **Wilmer J. Willingham** was shot down while on a resupply mission for an element of the 25th Infantry near Plei Djereng. Crashing to the ground in flames, the aircraft had no survivors. Also perishing in the aircraft were the crew chief, PFC **James Walker** and the gunner, SP4 **John W. Weed**. *Our camp at Ban Me Thuot was named in honor of WO Michael N. Coryell.*

On 10 October 65, the company was alerted for movement to Tuy Hoa to support a rice harvest operation. At 1130 hours the next day a "MAYDAY" call was received from an A-1E that had been flying air cover for the operation. The A-1E had suffered elevator control failure on a strafing run and the pilot was forced to bail out at sea. A **Stagecoach** UH-1D, crewed by Captain **Leonard L. Boswell** and CWO **Charles Gibson** rescued the pilot from an extremely rough sea. About mid-morning on the 22nd of October, four UH-1B's (armed) of **Company A** were dispatched to escort a VNAF CH-34 in a rescue attempt for a downed A-1E pilot. The CH-34 did not attempt the pilot pickup, because of the ground fire in the area. 1LT **Edward T. Pledger** of **Company A** salvoed the rockets from the armed helicopter he was flying and accomplished the pick-up. Later in the day a second rescue attempt was made for another downed Air Force pilot in the vicinity of Plei Me. This rescue attempt had to be aborted due to heavy automatic weapons ground fire and darkness. The rescue was accomplished the next morning when four UH-1Bs (armed) of **Company A** escorted an Air Force CH-34 into the crash site.

While in support of operations near Kontum in late October 66, the 155th was involved in a rescue of another Air Force pilot shot down by intense enemy ground fire in hostile territory. 1LT **Richard Silva** and WO **Stephen B. Birchall** were dispatched in a UH-1D with two gunships in escort to make the dangerous pickup of the uninjured pilot in near darkness. The rescue story made the Pacific Stars and Stripes, and all participants were awarded distinguished combat aerial decorations (Added info- On 27 October 1966 Major Robert Earl Kline with the 421TFS, 388 TFW flying out of Korat in an F-105 THUD flew an armed recon mission in southern Laos and located a North Vietnamese troop concentration. Major Kline's aircraft was hit by automatic weapons fire while recovering from a dive. He parachuted over the Bolevens Plateau. An O-1 reported his position and since it was getting dark and the USAF SAR aircraft did not have night capability at that time. A "Bright Light" team was sent in a 155th UH-1D to rescue the pilot. After pickup, the 155th aircraft refueled at a Lima site "deep inside enemy territory". Unfortunately Major Kline was lost on a mission over North Vietnam on 2 November.)

Weather:

For period 6 Oct 67 thru 12 Oct 67: Early morning ground fog in valleys, lifting by 1000 hours local. Sky condition 4500-5000 variable scattered to broken, with heavy rain showers after 1600 hours local. Visibility 3-7 miles, winds NW 3-10 knots. Max DA +4804, Min +3565. Temp: Hi 80, Lo 63.

For period 20 Oct 67 thru 26 Oct 67: Morning fog no longer a problem. Sky conditions 3000 - 4000 scattered, visibility 15 miles. Winds light and variable at 2-5 knots. Max CA +4580, Min +3000. Temp: Hi 85 Lo 63.

Update On the Pool

With October 70, came a project to re-do the floor of our pool. It had been closed for several months due to a ripped liner. With aching backs and blistering hands, the officers and men of the 155th cemented the bottom of the pool.

LUFE STORY#1!

Here's the story. The first evening in BMT (covered in "Rocket City" in BMT stories on the homepage), I went to the showers for my first shower. When I entered the showers, they were empty, so I naturally stopped at the

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first showerhead. It was the one nearest the door and I never was one to walk any further than was absolutely necessary. I turned on the water and started to lather up when I felt something "snakelike" slithering around my ankle. I damned near killed myself trying to get away from whatever monster had "attacked" me. When I recovered some composure and got my heart rate down to a drum roll I found that LUFÉ had opened the screen door with her trunk and wrapped it around my leg. From that time on I never used the showerhead nearest the door.

Chuck Markham

LUFÉ STORY#2!

On a very dark night, as I was headed to the shower, I tripped on LUFÉ, who was lying on the sidewalk. I stumbled in to the 55 gallon water trough; LUFÉ had knocked down, and ran my big toe (otherwise known as SGT Hulka) into the edge of the drum. When I got in the shower, I looked down and the whole place was covered with blood.....mine. I started to shower and clean my newly acquired wound when I realized that the standby toilet paper wasn't going to stop the bleeding. I hip hopped over to Doc's office where the medic decided that I would require stitches and that would require a doctor. After a few minutes the medic confided in me that they couldn't find the doctor. I told him where Doc was (slick bunker playing poker) and he took off for the bunker. When Doc arrived and heard my story he didn't stop laughing the entire time he was stitching me up - *so much for care and compassion*. After he was done, stitching not laughing, he filled out a Purple Heart tag and said he was going to turn it in. I don't know if he ever did but thank God I never got the Purple Heart. I never really wanted to know if Major Steele had a sense of humor. As it was he tolerated my getting sun burnt and I didn't want to push the envelope. **But that's another story for another day!**

Mike Stark

EMERGENCY RESUPPLY MISSION

October 1969. I fought it; I fought it hard. We had flown all day, and had taken a lot of fire and some hits. When we finally recovered at Ban Me Thuot well after nightfall, the whole team was exhausted. It took me a while to wind down from the tensions of the day's combat; once I did, I was out. But the intruder finally roused me into consciousness. "Emergency re-supply mission". The CO is briefing in Operations in ten minutes." In the darkness outside, several other Falcon and Stagecoach pilots were making their way to the 155 Assault Helicopter Company Operations hootch. As we entered, the clock showed 0010 hours; the CO and platoon leaders were pouring over tactical maps, the Ops officer was on the field phone. All had obviously been busy since the mission alert first came down. The eyes of the pilots in the audience were mostly bloodshot - and a little scared. We had an idea what was coming. After all were present, Major Owen himself led the briefing. LZ Kate, one of the artillery firebases recently established to support the Special Forces border camp at Bu Prang, had itself come under heavy attack from NVA forces during the preceding two days. All of us had flown into or near Kate during the fighting, so were already familiar with the tactical situation. Just a few hours earlier, I had led a Falcon team to escort two Freight Train Chinooks into Kate. When we arrived, two Undertaker Cobras happened to be on station, and together we covered the first CH-47 in and out without incident. But that expended the Snakes, and our two Charles just couldn't put out enough firepower to cover the second Hook as well. He made it out OK - but not without taking several hits. The area was definitely HOT!

The firebase was holding out, but the defenders were low on ammunition and weren't sure they could wait until first light for resupply. We were tasked to deliver four slick loads of M-16, carbine, and M-60 ammo. Mission planning called for five slicks and four guns. If we weren't alert before, we certainly were now. I'd never been on a mission where we took an empty rescue ship. GULP! The best, most experienced pilots, had been picked to fly this one; two senior aircraft commanders in each slick. And credit to Major Owen, he knew it was a tough mission, but he didn't just send others out to accomplish it. He would be copilot in the lead ship - right where a good CO should be (but where many COs weren't). Our briefing covered the weather, enemy situation, frequencies, and formations. Than Major Owen looked to me (gunship lead) and asked, "Are the

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Falcons going to go in hot?" **Pete Cosmos**, a brand new AC but never at a loss for words, responded immediately. "Damn straight we will!" he exclaimed. But the Major still looked to me. I've often wondered whether Pete's outburst affected my response - and I just don't know the answer. In any case, my reply was a different one. "I'd rather wait to see if Charlie will let us do it without shooting. We'll be on both sides of you, ready to bring smoke - and if they do start up, we can pinpoint the source and be right on it. But you slick guys are the ones hanging out, we'll do whatever you want." Major Owen didn't hesitate. "Okay, we'll go in cold unless Chuck starts something. They're still loading the birds. Start time will be 0110, crank on me. Good luck." Everybody got their gear and headed to the ships, to find the crews already there. After making sure everything was set, most of us wandered back to the platoon hootches for coffee, smokes, a few quick hands of poker, and probably a letter or two home. Even the pilots who weren't flying joined in and the Dust-off guys, too. As they say, you could have cut the tension with a knife. Even though it was still too early, the Falcon card game broke up and we headed slowly toward the revetments. The slick pilots were doing the same. Though there were quite a few flight crew and others around, it was unusually quiet. We all knew this one was different. We rechecked the ships, again - and then waited. There was little of the usual happy-go-lucky banter between and among the crews; instead, lots of nervous chatter and forced laughter. Time dragged. Finally it was 0110. We had been strapped in for a good five minutes listening for the telltale whine of the CO's ship starting up, but only heard silence. 0115; more nervous chatter, but no crank. What's the problem? Nobody knows. I send the door gunner over to the Major's ship to find out. 0118, still quiet. Then, the blare of the public address system covered the compound. "Will Mr. Abbott please report to his aircraft immediately?" The gunner came back, telling us what we already knew; "Can't find Mr. Abbott." That's not like Jim, one of the coolest heads around. That's why he's the lead AC. The PA blared again, repeating, "Will Mr. Abbott please report to his aircraft IMMEDIATELY!" It was nearly 0130 when we finally cranked. We all got off OK, and the flight out to Kate was uneventful - except for the damn lump in my throat. One of our pete pilots made a tape recording of the mission, and during the flight out Falcon 4 (**Denny Fenlon**) quite clearly tells me he is moving his team to the slicks' right side - but I had to ask him to repeat it 3 times before I could understand. Even my ears were scared!

And then, as we neared the LZ, any hope for surprise (like a flight of 9 Hueys at altitude on a quiet, clear night can surprise anybody?) was lost when we couldn't pick up Kate's strobe light and had to make a 360-degree orbit over the area. "**Hey Chuck, are you awake down there! Are we giving you enough time to get set up?**" The lump in my throat just kept getting bigger and bigger. When Stagecoach 6 turned inbound, our two Falcon gun teams were in position to follow him in, one team on each side. High above, Chalk 5 vectored the lead slick to the strobe that marked LZ Kate. Down into the darkness we went; all eyes were on Stagecoach Lead. At 500 meters, Jim began to slow the helicopter. Over the firebase, he came to a hover for a few seconds - just long enough for the ammo boxes to be pushed out - then we heard, "6 is coming out." OK! But were the bad guys just setting up for Chalk 2? 2 was in right behind Lead, and he made it OK, and 3 was in. And 4 was in closely behind, and then out again. To everyone's relief, the drop went off without a hitch. I'd never admit it to them, but those Stagecoach guys had big kahunas! The ammo was delivered, and not a round was fired. **THANK YOU CHUCK!** The slicks climbed out and joined up as they headed east to Ban Me Thuot. Our Falcon teams followed, somewhat more slowly. The ground guys poured out their thanks to Stagecoach 6. The group commander, Eagle 6, pronounced, "Well done" from approximately 50,000+ feet. The radio chatter was noticeably livelier as we headed back. Naturally, medals were passed about afterwards. The citation says something about "...withering enemy fire," of course (don't they all?). One night in the club when Major Owen was short, **Ken Donovan** (Chalk 4) and I talked to him about that, saying that we were a bit uncomfortable about the medals. He said he had the same thought, but knew that every one of us had accomplished tough but unrecognized missions that rightfully deserved a medal, so it all worked out and he was OK with it and we should be, too. Sounded good to us. **Postscript:** Despite the successful resupply, LZ Kate became untenable and

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was abandoned the very next night. The only artillery piece still operational was spiked, and the defenders walked into the jungle darkness. Surprisingly, nearly all of them were able to link up with a Mike Strike Force that had been inserted nearby and make it out OK. (See Green Berets at War by Shelby Stanton.) I will never, ever figure out why, but the NVA just passed on this one. To a man, the Stagecoach and Falcon crews who flew that night remember it as their scariest mission - even though no one got shot at. **Postscript 2:** Oh, and I almost forgot. Where was **Jim Abbott** and why was he late for the critical mission? Scared out of his wits somewhere? Nervously pacing, and lost track of time? Not a chance! They found him in his bunk, sound asleep. Nervous - I don't think so.

Les Davison, Falcon 2

IT WASN'T ALL TEAMWORK AND BROTHERHOOD IN THE 155!

We'd been working around the clock for days on birds that had seen a lot of action both in a mortar attack on the corral and some serious CAs. The mess hall sergeant had been serving midnight chow but got tired and decided to call it quits and lock the place up. When the Maintenance Sergeant heard about it he stormed over to the mess hall, kicked the door in, fired up the stove and cooked fried potatoes, bacon and eggs to order for all of us. The next time we worked an all-nighter the mess hall remained open. At one time it seemed like everything in the mess hall tasted like roast beef (or water buffalo). This bugged us because we were able to buy sandwiches made with US Grade A stamped ham and cheese off the Vietnamese carts downtown, not that I'm accusing anyone of anything. We complained so much that the mess Sergeant yelled at us that if we didn't shut up it would be C-rations. We all cheered. The next day it was C-rations for dinner. We cheered again. This lasted for two days before the CO stepped in to smooth things over.

During the latter part of 1970 someone fired a M79 Willie Pete at our First Sergeant, Sgt. Pineapple. Luckily they missed. As a result of this all weapons were taken into the Arms Room only to be handed out for guard duty and red alerts. This made for a major cluster f--- when we were hit. No one got his own weapons. As a result we all started to accumulate our own weapons downtown. Mine was an M2 with the stock sawed into a pistol grip. My roommate, **Larry Tabbert**, got a Thompson 45. When we were standing down we had to pull the walls and ceilings out of the hootches before turning them over to the Vietnamese. A lot of weapons were found during a snap inspection at that time. What was really funny was the huge cache of weapons that was found in the Warrant Officers hootch when they tore out the ceiling.

Here's a story that involves the CO, Major Steele, and a young, ignorant Spec. 4 **Pat Lundquist** (me). Tension had been building between the Puerto Ricans and the Blacks in the 155th. One of the brothers told me that the Puerto Ricans had raised a flag next to the US flag and they were going after the Puerto Ricans that night to get even. I walked over by the showers and looked across the street and sure enough the Puerto Rican flag was flying.

Thinking I could solve the problem I looked around to make sure no one was looking, I opened my Buck knife, walked past the flagpole and as I did I sliced the chord letting the flag drift to the ground. Evidently I wasn't quite careful enough. I don't remember him having one but the next thing you know I've been called on the carpet in front of Major Steele, the XO and Sgt. Pineapple. It turns out it was Flag Day for the State of Texas and that was the Major's Texas flag. I managed to stutter out an explanation for what happened and he let me off with a warning about taking matters into my own hands. There was no riot that night so either the brothers worked it out with the Puerto Ricans or the flag removal had its desired affect. I'm going with the latter.

Pat Lundquist

CONVOY CRISIS

This occurred on 6 October 1966... The only way to get large items delivered was by road and only when the ARVN wanted to open the road. It seems that the 155th had supplies in Nha Trang that could only be delivered by truck and we didn't have a truck large enough to haul palettes. The supplies were critical, beer and soft

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drinks! I turned to the NCOs and as usual they came up with a solution. I don't know how or where the trucks came from but we were able to get our supplies delivered. Four trailers, flat beds, loaded with beer and coke were off-loaded outside the small hooch which was called the "EM CLUB" (prior to construction of the Cross Bow Inn". I was concerned about security for the drinks but it seems that everyone preferred to wait until the beer was iced down and pay 25 cents. In addition, we received numerous items such as wood and building materials needed for a number of projects on-going at the time. One side bar to this delivery was the MP escorts. When I landed in the corral, I could see jeeps and trucks all over the compound. Each was loaded with grenades, weapons and who knows what else. I directed the MP Lieutenant in charge to park all those vehicles in the motor pool where our vehicles were parked. This was done, however, some MPs didn't get the word that we had dogs on patrol at night. We got a chuckle when two dedicated drivers, who had remained in the motor pool to repair a flat tire, could be heard later yelling "help, let us in". This also happened on another occasion when one of our men missed 10 o'clock curfew and tried to sneak in the back way. One did not want to test the dogs.

Bo Atkinson

License Plate Frames

We received the following that may be something that would be of interest to all. Anyone interested in special license plate frames with "155TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY" on the top and a choice of other titles such as "Combat Door Gunners, Combat Helicopter Pilots, Combat Aircrew, Veteran Aircrew, Combat Crew Chief, Combat Veterans, Combat Helicopter Pilot, Veteran Combat Pilot, "Support Our Troops", and more choices available. The Custom Frames are normally 1 for \$12, 2 for \$20, or 4 for \$30. A variety of other mass produced frames go for 1 for \$8 & 2 for \$15.

Contact Dave Heffernan at <http://www.usaircombat.com> or Dave Heffernan, P.O. Box 361, Windermere, FL 34786-0361. (Veteran USAF Pilot, Son of Bob "Heff" Heffernan, F-4 Pilot, Da Nang, 69')

MAIL CALL: Sharing commo among friends in the 155 Guestbook

Ben Davies- I'm impressed with the web site. Guess I'll have to get my dues in finally. Dover, ME is about a 15-hour drive each way or else I'd do it to say hi. A special hello to everyone. Stagecoach 26/3 ('66-'67)

Cary Arney- Was Falcon gunner all of 68 usually with Falcon 484. Thanks for the great site. Will visit often.

Frank LoBosco- Trying again to locate a Capt or Maj Jack J. Gordon, or his family. I have a few hundred of his 35mm slides, all of him in service and of his civvie time. I have viewed them a number of times and the 155th ones do show some of his buddies and their names. One response was "he was my exec" officer. Let's try to get his history back to him or his family??

Tom Maxwell- I was the gunner for "26" Lt. Davies in 1967. Want to say hello to all.

George Goetz- Was assigned to the avionics unit in 67 - 68. A lot of water under the bridge since then!!

Wayne Murray- Hello. I served with the 155 and was wounded in Jan. of 67 I don't remember any names maybe someone remembers mine; I was a crew chief on a "c" model.

Lou Lupo- I was with the 243rd Radar Detachment part of the 8/26 Artillery. We had a Conex/Bunker at the entrance to the airship corral so a lot of you pilots jumped in our bunker during alerts. I was "in-country" from '67-'69.

Jim Brainerd- (sheet metal shop BMT) Stopping by to pay respect to all 155ers. Is there any ground crew (maintenance) crew from early 68 to early 70 around?

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Frank Hood- hi guys, just sticking' my head in to say "hi." refueled at your place many times. Frank Hood -rat-pack d.g. -281st AHC 69-70

Thomas E. Cook- Gentlemen, today is my 33rd year after being shot down on one (1) of your slicks. That Sunday afternoon another Slick went down with AC Marlin Johnson and his pilot both KIA. I just want to thank you for being there. You are all some of the bravest men I ever met. You always kept the faith and came and got us out. De Oppresso Liber

Bill Bayer-My wife & I will be moving to Punta Gordo, Fl. next month. I will retire after 34 years as chief pilot for Penske Corp (Roger Penske). It has been fun but I still enjoyed being Falcon 5 during the summer of 67.

Leon E. Curry-hello again from Metter, Georgia, my home. The Barb is wonderful...sending a check. Leon

David Bittman- I am looking for John Houston he was my roommate in flight school. I was a Bikini Pilot (170AHC) out of Pleiku

Harry Bud Martin-Hey Guys, just got the last Barb. Keep up the good work. In response to Wayne Crawford's comments, couldn't agree more, you guys in the back kept us guys in the front alive, and deserve the medals just as much as us in the front.... To Sam Schwartz, Pterodactyl, who was the pilot who had the BIGGG snake in the hootch next to the movie bunker, era Oct 1968-1969. Great guy he took me up in that thing you called a starch wing and did the up and down weightless thing with me ...Did get back at him with an auto tho

John Ahearn, I've been trying to find out where Sandy, i.e.; Royal Sanders has been hiding. We use to room together in Fort Worth, until he decided that he wanted to be married and then I ended up rooming with Jim Daily. Sandy do you remember the night we had a Tequila Party at our apt. and you said you would drink a shot with everyone who walked thru the door. As I recall you held your own for quite awhile, then you stood up in the living room and spread your arms to reveal some insightful thoughts and then proceeded to pass out, as Jimbo's date puked on his sweater. Oh well, time marches on, if you get this give me a holler, I'm in Reno, NV. Now a realtor with Prudential. Take care guys and keep the dirty side down...Budman

LTC (Ret) Lewis L. Cox-I was Senior Advisor Team 33 to the ARVN Regt. stationed in Ban Me Thuot from fall of '68 to Feb. '69. We had 3 other Bns. spread out down to the South.

Mike Fields-looking for info on the next reunion. also members of 165th 66-68. Delgado, haven't heard from you in a while, hope things are good. Mary thanks for all the good work and dedication.

Ken Blankenship- Was in the 165th , went over spring 1965 with 1st Division A Co. A Co. 82nd and A Co. 101st. Name was changed in route to the 155th & 165th. We opened the base at Bam Me Thuot. Flew a lot with the 165th recovery ship spent a lot of time in Pleiku. Was involved in the Plei Me battle that led up to the I Drang battle that the movie "we were soldiers" was based on. Would like to hear from anyone that was there at the time.

Sandy Reed-I am seeing names I have only thought a lot about for 33 years. Jay Bowman...I think I have a photo of you passed out on your bed. Capt. Markham, you couldn't ask for a better XO (I loved taking your money at Booray). Capt Stark...you should have been a WO. And of course Les Davison... One of the finest gun pilots I ever knew. Also a very patient teacher. (I did not love giving you my money at Booray). Has anyone ever heard from Mark Cowles. I got a call from him about 20 years ago and have never heard anything since. I hope to make it to the next reunion...I need it.

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News Paper Item - Oregon 1967

A former Sandy high school student has been cited for gallantry in action in Viet-Nam. He is SP5 **Wayne F. Murray, JR.** son of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Murray, Boring, Oregon. Here is the way the action was described by the unit newspaper: "The Dragon News staff is proud to bring you the story of the men of the 52nd during the early morning hours of 7 January, 1967. The men's names that will appear are heroes. As a direct result of their valiant actions, lives and untold dollars worth of valuable equipment were saved. When the first enemy mortar rounds started falling on the Holloway complex, flare and gunship crews were in the air immediately and within minutes the area was illuminated. With their sight aimed at the blazing enemy mortar muzzle flashes, the gunships started their firing runs. Three tubes had been silenced and 16 VC were dead, when the smoke had cleared." SP5 Murray was one of those then listed. (It turned out that the first ship up was awarded the bronze star and the second, my aircraft, received the air medal with the "V" device.)

Wayne Murray (currently in Thailand)

NEXT 155th AHC/BAN ME THUOT REUNION

When we started getting together some years back the group voted to have a reunion every other year. The next 155th AHC/Ban Me Thuot reunion is tentatively planned for November 2004 (Veterans Day weekend) in the Fort Worth, TX area. If you've got ideas, suggestions, or comments, please contact any 155th AHCA "occifer". More info will be available as the time draws nearer.

The 155th AHC Home Page is located at: www.geocities.com/pentagon/quarters/1517 - check it out!

155th AHCA officers and support are:

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155th AHC Association
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