

BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155th Assault Helicopter Company & all the Ban Me Thuot Guys
Sortie 34 - Jan '06

ADVENTURE ACROSS THE FENCE

To the best of my recollection, the Cambodia crash happened in December of 1969. I should remember the pilots' names, but I just don't. The gunner I thought was either Moony or Bales. We were 12 K's or so inside Cambodia, just minding our own business like all fully-loaded gunships should do. (And we were probably listening to the Doors, or maybe Hendrix.) I think we were trying to draw fire - which was really smart.

I remember hearing sounds from the floorboards and feeling stinging on my face. Pieces were flying all over as rounds were coming through the floor, and I heard the A/C say we were losing engine oil pressure and he was having a hard time controlling the cyclic. At the same time smoke was starting to fill the cabin. These are not good signs, as one would guess. The A/C said something like, "Were going down" or words to that effect. I remember the trees getting closer and I thought we were going to hit them. At the last second he pulled up over the trees and there was a small clearing. I don't know how he did it but he put down in this clearing and I remember the ship rocking back and forth. The Peter Pilot told me, "Grab the log book" for whatever reason. I grabbed my 60 and jumped out of the ship with the idea of protecting my crew. Everyone else bailed out as well. It was at this time that I saw that I only had about 5 or 6 rounds in the feed tray. I won't say what I said; it's not for print. The ship was billowing smoke as we ran for a slick that was touching down a few yards from our location. I'm not sure if it was Dustoff - and didn't care at this point. As we lifted off I could see the rockets firing toward the tree line, as if my 232 was telling whoever did this to her that he was going to pay. I hope she collected. She was on fire as well. I guess the electrical system had shorted out or something but would rather believe the latter. The way the A/C brought her to the ground had to be expected from a pilot from "The Flying Fighting Falcons of the U.S. Army Air Corps." HOORAH! I loved that ship!

I also loved the guys I had the honor of serving with from 1965 to 1969. People ask me why I went back to the same company over and over. It's like asking why I ride a Harley-Davidson Soft Tail Custom with loud pipes; if you have to explain it to them, they will never ever understand. I guess ya just had to have been there. In retrospect, I miss some of those times. Sounds a bit crazy, I guess - but 155 guys will know what I mean.

Craig Mosher, Crewchief, Falcon 232

TAPS: HARVEY STONE

I wanted to inform you that Harvey went home to be with the Lord on January 11, 2004, due to his illness and a surgery. (Septic poisoning was the reason for his death). He told me he was in a win-win situation during his 47-day stay in the hospital for his illness. He would come home with me or he would go and be with Our Lord. He was recovering from the surgery and coming home with me in 2 weeks. We never gave up hope that he would return home with me, but due to the septic poisoning, he was gone in a few short hours. He always said he wanted to attend the reunions, but due to his medical condition we were unable to do that. He talked about seeing his "buddies" from the service and longed to do that. One of our good friends also served in Vietnam (Marines), and they would talk about their tours during his long stay in the hospital. Of course Harvey would have us laughing loud and hard; he had that special gift.

He was given a full military burial, during which Fort Hood flew 2 Hueys over. In the small town where he was laid to rest (Cameron, TX) the courthouse has a small Statue of Liberty at the top which plays music and at exactly 4 p.m. on the day of his service, Fort Hood arranged for the city to play the Star Spangled Banner while the Hueys flew overhead paying tribute to his service in the Army and Vietnam.

I know many people never thank any of the soldiers for their service in Vietnam. I am thankful for everyone who gave their lives or fought and returned home. Harvey was proud to have served his country and I am proud of him for serving his country. May God Bless each of you.

Jan Stone (Mrs. Harvey Stone)

TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY

They say that there is nothing worse than an eyewitness to wreck a good war story. The way I remember Dick Sperling's story (*Barb* Sortie 33, October '05) is that after picking up the boat crew, he then landed on the fantail of a larger ship and spent the night enjoying the food in the officers' mess while we ate more simple fare at BMT. HOWEVER, I don't think his RON message ever reached us. As a result, lots of people lost sleep trying to find out where he had gone down. In any case, I'll have to attend the next event to buy him a beer and maybe Barney and maybe everybody.

Ben Davies

MAIL CALL: Sharing Commo

Ken Lombardi - 155 AHCA website, Numba One site! We love you too much: FIVE DOLLAR!!

Dale Davis - The *Barb* is very well done. It is great to read about others things that happened in the 155th. Thanks for all your hard work.

Mark Cornwall - Best wishes to all.

Ken Donovan - The new 155 AHC Challenge Coins are OUTSTANDING!

Karol Franzysen - As always, the *BMT Barb* brings back some really good memories of some really fine folks. As a USAF FAC and the ALO at BMTE, Apr 69-70, I had to call on you guys from time to time when the 20th SOS was down for maintenance. Seems that red dirt ate up our engines like flies in a Nam pay jug. When you guys flew SOG missions across the line into Cambodia, your unit's professionalism, "Can Do" attitude, and bravery did not go unnoticed. However, given the nature of the mission, I was not in a position to publicly acknowledge your participation. Sadly, like we BMTE USAF FACs, the 155th is not acknowledged in the SOG Presidential Unit Citation. Appears we did our clandestine job too well - but that is one grave oversight that needs to be corrected. I and some 20th SOS guys are looking into how that award can be amended. I have been told that is not going to be easy. Will keep you advised.

As an addendum to your 20th SOS article, I am attaching a photo of one of our Green Hornet Hueys. No doubt it will bring back some good memories for your slick guys, as one of these babies could turn the jungle into lettuce. And so we did on many hot exfils. Many 155th guys owe their lives to a Green Hornet gunship. Proud to have served with you guys, and can't thank you enough for keeping the BMT story alive.

Larry Ingram (Stagecoach 15) - The new *Barb* is spectacular!! Keep up the great work!!

Steve McCartney - Looking forward to skiing this winter as we have already received some good snow here in Montana. Planning an ice fishing trip in January to Fort Peck Lake with my son and his wife, should be fun.

Tom Love - The weather is great. Karen and I try to enjoy it as much as possible but work gets in the way. Hope everyone is well. Mary, you deserve a medal of the highest honor.

Phil Watson (Stagecoach 13) - Interesting article on the Green Hornets. I remember them well as they covered us slick drivers many a time on the SOG missions. I clearly remember a day we flew back to BMT after a mission and were very close to BMT East when one of them had an engine failure and crashed. We saw it go down and we turned our flight back to assist. It was burning and the armament on board was cooking off sending rockets flying and creating several small explosions. We ended up picking up the crew and flying them to BMT East. I believe this would have been the early spring of 70.

Herman "Hed" Hedrick (Falcon 739) - Hi to everyone out there. I have been a voyeur for long enough. I have been to the website a few times, I have missed all of you guys for so many years, it was just hard for me to crawl out of the box I built for myself after Nach, Pineapple, Mr. Erickson, and Mr. Dolik died. Tom Love gave me the report at Ft. Lewis, and since then I haven't played in any of the reindeer games. If anyone remembers me and would like to talk, drop me a note. Well the best to you all.

Mark Stuart (Stagecoach 10) - I just received the latest newsletter and enjoyed it. I noticed a call for pictures, so I enclosed a couple. I don't know who took them but as the story goes I was having my going-away party in 1969 and one of the crew chiefs handed me a package, it included five 8x10 pictures of aircraft in flight. He said I was in the Huey picture. I put them in my brief case and off I went. Well 36 years later I was cleaning out the closet in the spare bedroom and found this old, faded, dusty brief case and wondered what was in it. Upon opening I found this manila envelope, there were the pictures, good as new since they haven't seen sunlight in 4 decades.

Bob Akers - What a treat to find this website. I came to the 155th at BMT in Sep '69, two weeks after returning from RR in Hawaii. I was assigned as the Battalion Command Post Forward as the Commander. What a great bunch of guys you are/were. Never made me feel like an outsider but as one of the group. That was the time the NVA were pushing out of Bu Prang. It was a hot time for all, and you did your duty well. God bless.

Tom Maxwell - I just e-mailed Ben Davies, my AC on Stagecoach 26 for the majority of the time I flew as gunner. Hope to hear from him. My best to all.

Dave Frederick - I called the 155th home from 68 thru Aug69. I can't remember all the names, but I do remember all the faces, the camp, etc. I think of you every day and will until I pass on. We'll all meet again someday.

Tommy Rutherford - I would like to wish all the men not only of the 155th Assault Co., but to the rest of the Veterans, of this great Country, that we so proudly fought for and for all the brave men that were with us in Vietnam a VERY HAPPY MERRY CHRISTMAS.

Duane Poulin - I pulled my snowmobile out and got it ready. Now all I need is snow.

Bo Atkinson - The month of October is one that we all should remember, especially those of us who were there in 1966. Michael Coryell and his crew: William Willingham, James Walker and John Weed, died while on a resupply mission in support of the 25th Inf Div. I will always remember that day and am pleased that our camp became known as Camp Coryell.

Thanks to all Stagecoaches and Falcons that served so well during those days.

Joe Kinder - Thank you once again Mary for such a great job you are doing, keeping the people from the BMT units together with the web-site. You can share my JP4 in the field anytime.

Vince Giarratano - Would like to hear from any 155's.

Jerry Burton - Great work on the web. Hope to see all at the next reunion.

Chuck Markham - I want to thank all the wonderful people who flooded my hospital room with flowers and phone calls during my recent slight mishap. This bunch just cannot be beat.

Pat Avery - We are all brothers in the 155th. My son Taw Avery is a pro cowboy in the PRCA. He is a steer wrestler in the southeast circuit, he leads the circuit this year. I sure am proud of him, and proud to have been in the 155th. I wear my 155th tee shirt all over the US when we go rodeoing.

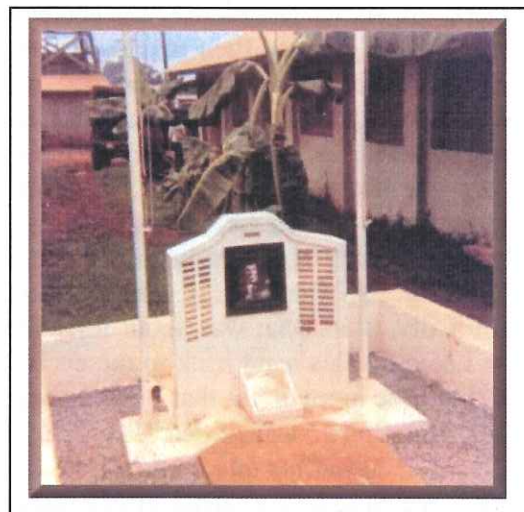
Earl McKee II - I was in Ban Me Thuot from July 69 to July 70, I broke my ankle over there, had to be flown to Nha Trang to be casted. I'm trying to locate medical records or flight manifests that could prove this. Also any one that might remember me from there in that time period.

Calvin Hilton (Stagecoach 25) - Hi to everyone. I was hoping that someone could give me some information concerning the death of Francis (Ken) Henson. I think he was around the Fort Rucker area. Ken was with me in the 155th from Aug 67 till Aug 68. We never saw each other after leaving BMT. Also I have lost the e-mail address for Norman Swafford. I hope that our brothers in the hurricane area are doing OK.

Randy Neagle - Just checking in. Been a while. Was in BMT from 3/69-3/70 in 185th Avn Co. Looking for a couple of people: CPT Rooney, who was a Birddog pilot from Mass. He was transferred to HHC, 17th Avn Grp as the adjutant. Also looking for a SP4 Bengry, may have been in 183rd at Dong Ba Thin. Can't remember for sure. Would like to hear from anyone. Am still in touch with Tim Hipsher and found Robert Hull off of website. Doing a great job for us vets, thank you.

HE HAD A DEATH GRIP ON THE CONTROLS

It was Zero-dark-thirty in the Corral, and we were pre-fighting our H model. Lee Brown was my co-pilot; my apologies, but I don't remember the names of the CE and gunner. It was late fall of '69, monsoon season, and we had about a one thousand (maybe fifteen hundred) foot ceiling, maybe not even that high. I don't remember, but it was enough



Mike Coryell monument at BMT.
(Markham photo)

for us to depart VFR. Our mission was single ship for MACV (I think), some distance south-southeast of BMT. When we contacted the unit we were to work for, they advised us they had a patrol in contact with a large NVA or VC unit and needed to be extracted.

The fog and/or clouds were on the ground around the whole area, as far as we could see. I contacted the patrol "Six" and requested a short count for Fox Mike homing. I homed to his FM at least twice, and could not see anything below except clouds and/or fog. There was no way to get to them. And, as it turned out, we couldn't get into the unit location (Gia Nghia, I think) either. So I checked out with them and went back to BMT for fuel.

When I contacted Stagecoach Ops, they advised me that if I could get out to Bu Prang, the Special Forces guys there needed Med-Evacs – and any other kind of help they could get. We refueled and headed out to Bu Prang. As we proceeded, the ceiling got progressively lower; we were soon flying on the deck. Flying atop the jungle canopy, we suddenly came over one of those large open fields of elephant grass and other such vegetation. As we passed over the center of this opening, the sky all around us turned into green reverse rain. I think they all emptied their magazines straight up. Porcelain chips flew around the cockpit like snow – and the nose was rapidly coming up towards vertical. By now, about one half second had elapsed, and I was on the controls bringing the aircraft back to level controlled flight. Lee had been flying, and when he got hit, he straightened up in his seat and pulled the cyclic back into his crotch.

He had a death grip on the controls, and he was a pretty strong guy; I pretty much had to slam the controls out of his hands. We were at about one and one half seconds now, and I had realized that Lee was hit. My first thought was that he was dead or dying, and I began yelling on the intercom for him to please say something. My water works were on because I really liked Lee. I was not boo-hooing, but was letting the tears go. Finally, after what was about forty-five seconds to one minute – which seemed more like five minutes – I saw Lee move his hand back to the cyclic and key his intercom. I gotta tell you, folks, it was at that point – for the first time in my life – that I experienced what the weight of the world coming off my shoulders felt like. Oh, thank dear God he wasn't dead!!!

Lee keyed his intercom and, in a very strained voice I could barely hear, said, "The SOBs got me in the back." We were now at about ninety seconds, and all the gauges said normal ops and the controls were working properly. Now I gotta get help for my buddy Lee. Immediately I remembered that there was an ARVN doctor at the firebase where we staged for "The Volcano" near Duc Lap. I looked up the frequency and advised them we were inbound to their location with a wounded crew member and needed the Doc. When we touched down, the Doc and a medic were waiting. The CE and gunner laid Lee's seat back and helped move him onto the cargo deck. I waited while they got his helmet off, to see his face. He was alive, and probably in shock, but conscious. His face was white as a sheet and showing pain – but by God he was alive! Thank you our Father in heaven, I thought.

While they were checking Lee out, the CE and I went about looking over the aircraft. We counted (as best I remember) 26 hits in the tail boom and fuselage – one of which had penetrated the bleed band or air jacket, I'm not sure exactly, but the engine never even coughed. My seat had 3 hits, Lee's seat had one. The round that hit him had entered his lower back, nicked his kidney, and traveled up the muscle and tissue outside his ribcage and lodged near his shoulder blade. We very shortly realized that the round that hit him came through the space between the bottom of the sliding plate armor and the top edge of the seat side armor - about a 7.62 wide space. As I remember, it did not even touch either edge of the armor plates as it passed through the space.

The Doc stabilized Lee, and said he needed to get to the hospital at BMT – quickly. We left the fire base with the CE in Lee's seat; my mind was on the aircraft. Everything read "normal" and the controls responded properly, but I knew she was full of holes and I didn't know what all the rounds had hit on the way in. Suddenly I realized I was thinking and talking to myself, pleading with the Huey to please stay together and keep flying. I have probably never, ever talked so sweet and gentle to a woman as I did to that bird on the way back. In younger years I had heard and seen war movies where a pilot talked so sweet and gentle to a shot-up aircraft, to make it home. I always thought it was just Hollywood or a joke. How wrong I was. I guess I said the right words, because we made it back without a hitch. (The CE was a big help with changing radio frequencies and keeping a close eye on the gauges.) Back at City Field, the tower cleared us direct to the hospital bunker. Medics met us and rushed Lee to the hospital. Finally, I was breathing easier. I wondered if I would ever see

Lee again. Then I noticed his cigarettes and lighter were still in the ashtray. Being a smoker back then, my automatic reaction was that I had to take them to him, although they were probably not even on his mind at the time. Also, I wanted just one more visual assurance that Lee was still alive – and a chance to say goodbye.

Maintenance told me to shut down and leave the Huey where it was. I grabbed all my gear and headed toward the hootch. As I crossed the company street, on the way to drop off my gear, I heard someone calling me from the Operations area. I looked over to see a CPT (sorry, I can't remember his name) telling me to come on over to Ops. I just waved and said, "I'm going to the O Club, I'll catch you later." The next thing he said was, "Mr. Giarratano, stop where you are and come to attention." Of course, I did; but I was thinking, "Why is he bothering me? I just brought a shot-up bird and wounded co-pilot home." The CPT came up to me, gave me "At ease," and handed me a piece of paper. On it was my new mission, aircraft, and crew. The rest of that day is foggy to my memory, but rest assured, I made up for it that night at the O Club.

Postscript: When I find out who the CPT was, I would like to personally thank him for his actions because in my many years of flying after BMT I realized that is what he had to do. Not only in the interest of the mission, but for me psychologically. In fact, I had to do the same thing for two other pilots, years later.

Postscript 2: My apologies to the CE and DG, I don't remember their names. I'd love to hear from both, so I can thank them for doing a great job that day.

Vince Giarratano, Stagecoach 30

ON THE HOME (PAGE) FRONT

The 155 AHCA Home Page is at www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/1517/. New items are a Veteran's Day photo display at the Traverse City, Michigan, library that includes 155 AHC materials; and info on the new 155 AHC Challenge Coins. The 155 Photo Page at <http://www.155photos.homestead.com> shows new pictures sent in by Herb Bundage (165th-66/67), Joe Kinder (Falcon/Stagecoach-66/69), and Ron Fisher (Falcon-69/71). Very soon I'll be adding an '06 Reunion Information page that will include hotel and reservation info. Thanks, as always, to all the contributors.

Mary Baldwin, 155 Volunteer Webmaster



BACK TO THE WORLD

Here is a pic of a 155 Huey that is really special to me because it was the one that sent me on the first leg of my trip home. It was my first ride in a Huey and for a minute (but just a minute) made me wish my MOS had been rotor wing instead of fixed wing. It was quite a different "ride" than an O-1... sort of like being on a roller coaster. I don't remember much about the flight, but I do remember some details. The guy leaning against the revetment was a

sergeant on TDY. He and I both arrived a little early and I stepped back to get the pic while the crew chief was still doing a pre-flight. I had to get the original photo under a magnifier to get the aircraft number, and I believe it is listed on your site as #67-17712. At this late date I would still like to thank the whole crew for a great flight, and if anybody knows who the AC was or any member of the crew, please pass on my thanks. It was a nice way to start the long trip back home.

Richard Clark, Pterodactyl

VIETNAM HELOS & AIRPLANES - The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, based in Hampton, GA, is a non-profit group that takes its Vietnam-era helos and aircraft to airshows around the country. I saw their Vietnam re-enactment demonstration last fall in Peoria, and I was impressed. Three Huey slicks, 1 Snake, 1 Loach, a Bird Dog, and a Mohawk all flew, and they gave a great show. Even better, before and after the show, a donation of \$45 put you on a slick sortie. (They wouldn't let me sit in front, so I passed – but my sister enjoyed her first-ever helicopter flight.) For more info, go to "www.ArmyAv.org". *Les Davison*

A DAY IN THE NAM *November '69. Ban Me Thuot East Field.* At the end of a long day, I was half asleep on my cot at BMT East. I heard the rustle of the tent flap as somebody came in. Then, a loud voice announced, "Here it is, Pond." I opened my eyes to see a heavy metal object sailing through the air – coming at me. The Jesus nut bounced next to my leg. "That's all that's left of my gunship!"

It had been a reunion of sorts, of several members of our flight school class. A few months ago we had been kids learning to fly Army helicopters; we'd graduated the day after Joe Namath won the Super Bowl. Now we were all AC's from several different units, flying combat missions to defend against the second annual NVA assault on Duc Lap and Bu Prang. We'd all heard each other on the radio over the last several days. Vince Giarratano, Dave Desio, and Les Davison were based here at Ban Me Thuot, over at City Field. Ken Miller (Wolfpack, 281st AHC) and I (Stallion, 92nd AHC) had drawn short straws back at our units; we were among several crews temporarily assigned to East Field. We flew at Duc Lap and Bu Prang every day. To say it was exciting is a considerable understatement. Flying into the Volcano near Duc Lap put my pucker factor WAY off the scale, but I'd come out of it relatively unscathed. Ken hadn't been so lucky.

He was Wolfpack lead, his team of Charlie models were escorting a slick into the Volcano when the bad guys shot out his engine. He made a good autorotation, and everybody got out OK. The crew was under fire on the ground, but the trail ship swooped in to pull everyone out safely. Well done, Wolfpack!

It had been way too hot to try to recover the downed ship. After Ken and his crew were safely out, the Air Force used it for target practice. When the action had finally cooled several days later, Ken had set down near the torn wreckage of what had been his gunship. Among the ruins, he found the Jesus nut. What a great souvenir!

Don Pond, Stallion pilot, '69 – '70

PHOTOS FOUND AND RETURNED A few years ago I was contacted by a man named Frank Lobosco, who was looking for a MAJ Jack Gordon. I knew the 155th AHC had a CPT Jack Gordon as a former member, but we had not located him. I did a search and located the probable Jack Gordon in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I sent Frank another e-mail to try and figure out why he wanted to get in touch with Jack Gordon. Well e-mail being what it isn't, we ended up speaking on the phone and Frank explained he had come across Jack's slides at a flea market and he wanted to return them to Jack. I gave him the address and Frank explained that Jack didn't live there anymore. Frank lives in Colorado Springs and had looked there first. I told Frank I would try and locate Jack so I placed a Guestbook message on the 155th Home Page. 155th members who are also members of the 92nd AHC association wrote me and stated that Jack was their XO in '68, so I placed a message on their web site as well. During the next few years Frank and I and Mary Baldwin corresponded by e-mail concerning the slides, and eventually Frank sent Mary the slides and she placed them on the 155 Home Page with an appeal for help. About a month ago I received an e-mail from Fred Harms who flew as a pilot with the 92nd and knew Jack Gordon. Fred had located Jack and found that Jack does not have a computer. Fred remembered that I was trying to locate Jack, so we spoke and I explained to Fred why we were trying to locate Jack. Fred gave me Jack's address and I gave it to Frank. Finally, Frank was able to talk with Jack, and Jack now has his missing slides - all because of the generosity of a stranger. MANY thanks go to Fred Harms and Frank Lobosco.

Bob Alberts, 155 Historian

A NIGHT IN THE NAM I was sound asleep when the siren wailed. Bunker time! Throwing off my poncho liner, I heard the first mortar round impact. As I burst into the narrow hallway, I hit somebody hard – and then somebody else crashed into the two of us. We all three went down in a tangle of elbows and arses. It's funny, I have this very clear memory of another pilot hurdling our pile-up, yelling, "OUTTA MY WAY, SOMEBODY'S TRYING TO KILL ME!"

Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28



155 AHC CHALLENGE COIN

In today's military, if you don't have your unit coin, you'll likely have to buy drinks at the Club. Thanks to Mike Stark and Jim Ferris, we've now got our own. Coins are antique brass with enamel color inserts. \$15 each (includes shipping), send checks to Treasurer Jeff. Complete ordering info on the Home Page, or contact a 155 AHCA officer.

ASH & TRASH

HOLIDAY PHOTOS ON THE HOME PAGE

155 Webmaster Mary says she will post holiday photos of BMT guys – and their families - on the Home Page thru the end of this month. If you took a holiday photo, send it along to her. And be sure to check out the page, to see how many of us are still thin, muscular, and have hair.

NEXT REUNION WILL BE IN SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

The next reunion of the Ban Me Thuot bunch will be in Savannah, GA, over Veteran's Day weekend, Nov. '06. Details coming soon on the 155 Home Page at <http://155photos.homestead.com/savannahreunion.html>.

SWEAT AND SANDBAGS: FROM THE EDITOR'S BUNKER

OK, we managed to scrape together enough to fill another Sortie. MANY thanks to the guys who took the time to write about their memories of BMT. I hope others of you will do the same.

In case you haven't noticed, the 155 has the Best Dang Vietnam Unit Home Page - Period. If you haven't visited lately, take a look. There's enough info there to fill a Conex, and there's enough photos to fill two. (And you might even find a photo of YOU.) Don't forget to leave a message on the Guestbook for your BMT buddies. If you're reading a snail-mail copy of this Sortie, here's a hot tip. Go to the local library, get on the Internet there, and check out the 155 Home Page. It wouldn't surprise me at all to hear that the library staff had to call the authorities to pry you away from the terminal.

That's all; hopefully y'all found something worth reading in here. "155 Operations, this is Falcon 2. Sortie 34, mission accomplished."

Les Davison, Editor

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Yet another great Joe Kinder photo: a Falcon gunship “covers” a US Navy R5D.

155th AHC Association
c/o Larry Matthews
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