

# BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155th Assault Helicopter Company & all the Ban Me Thuot Guys  
Sortie 35 - Apr '06

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## HEADING TO IRAQ

Just got my orders for Iraq. I told my CO that I thought that this game was for the kids, because I'd probably lost a step or two. He said to suck it up because I can still keep up and out-do a lot of the kids. Made me feel pretty good.

I'm in a Combat Sustainment and Support Battalion, so we should be supporting elements under us. I'm in the Support Operations Section, under Maintenance. We are going to Fort Bliss in June for training. That's pretty funny, that's where I took Basic. It will be a long year and a half, but I spent a year and a half in another country a few years ago. I'm taking a 155 Challenge Coin for luck.

*Roger Elliott*

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## HEAD SHED MEMORIES

I don't have the war stories to tell like most of you guys, but I do have some good memories while I was stationed with the 155<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company, located in Ban Me Thuot during 1970. Some of these memories are painful. I didn't know WO Marlin Johnson or WO Darek Richardson personally because I hadn't been in the company long enough. But I do feel a certain bond between us because I will never forget having to type up the "Notification Of Next of Kin," something to this day that I still remember. I can remember CPT Mike Stark, on the mornings that he would come to the orderly room, standing at the door with a cup of coffee, in the brown army mug, and CPT Markham standing beside me with a grin from ear to ear. You could tell the special friendship that these two officers had for each other just by the

way they acted toward each other. I remember a lot of the officers in our unit, but by name only. Except for CPT Jarvis, the Operations Officer, is one that I will remember a lot about. I don't remember very much about our First Sergeant, because they didn't last too long. Then came the change of command where MAJ Luisi departed and turned the company over to MAJ Rowland Steele. I feel that both MAJ Steele and CPT Markham and myself had a certain bond. I knew that both of them respected me. But there were times in the Orderly Room that were hectic. Especially when I had typed a letter 3 times misspelling a word. WOW! One time MAJ Steele asked if I knew how to read a dictionary. From that day on, CPT Markham told me to let him proof read anything before being sent to MAJ Steele. You can bet that was a pleasure for me to do. We got through that pretty good, because we



MAJ Gene Steele (L) and CPT Chuck Markham at BMT, '70.

three became a team again.

I remember going to an orphanage on Sundays, this was one pleasure that I cherish then and still do. Then came the movies at night, hard to watch some because the film would be broken, guess we were on list last to get the movie. I will never forget the time that we had to exchange our money, where we turned in the old to get the new. It was after dark, and a tall lanky specialist named Guthrie came in off a mission. Major Steele had left to go get a bite to eat. I knew he had been out all day, so I just filled out the papers for him, took his money, gave him the new money, and about when I was signing Major Steele's name, he walked in and saw me. You talk about getting caught, I just knew my time was up. The only thing MAJ Steele said, just be careful on who you change for. I think this was a relief not just for me, Guthrie also.

I can't forget about all the roast beef we had. The time that MAJ Steele sent a crew out to swap food with other companies, and yes they got different food, if you like radishes. I am sure there are other stories I could tell, but my memory is not that good anymore. I'd like to finish by saying, "out of all my two and a half tours in Vietnam, the most pleasure was with the 155<sup>th</sup>. It had the finest officers that I ever met and some of the finest enlisted men stationed there." I for one can say that I am very proud to have served with you all in the finest helicopter unit, the 155<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company.

*Tommy Rutherford*

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**GREEN HORNET MEMORIES**

After our late night launch and some extremely serious air-to-ground rocketry and minigun hosing (including my first experience of a "hammerhead" vertical dive 14 rocket salvo; yes we went backwards, up hill) . . . my A/C had been playing "beer horseshoes" . . . **DON'T EVER GET IN A SHOOTING CONTEST WITH A MAD, DRUNK CHEROKEE!!!** We attempted to land, refuel, and re-arm on our own strip at BMT East/CCS. We called for the light cart on short 30 second final . . . the NVA hit that light cart bulls-eye with an RPG about 1 second later. **MAX COLLECTIVE BLACKOUT ON AN IFR CLIMB FOR 4 GUNSHIPS!!!** With only fumes left, we groped to City Field and landed blackout at your 155 AHC fuel pits (later discovering that our final approach from the north side of your mid-field had taken us through your antennae field, **WITHOUT A SINGLE HIT!!!**). As we were shutting down, a really quiet, whispering voice came over the radio. "You Air Force guys need to know that we're under attack. If you need fuel, you can turn the pumps on about 10 yards to your two o'clock." We did note that the prosperous "entertainment" facility just outside your fence and across the highway was apparently not doing any business that night. By the time we got back to CCS, "All Clear" had sounded, so we could re-arm more calmly than we had attempted earlier. Several distinct impressions: (1) The NVA sure knew how to aim and fire those RPGs in a hurry; (2) God guided us through those antennas; and (3) your fuel pit operator had a lot more brains than we did, but again God was holding us in his hands . . . I think that had we not landed, we didn't have enough fuel to do another go around!!!

*Maurice A. "Maury" Lange, Maj, USAFRes (Ret)*

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**MORE CHOCOLATE MILK**

Do you remember the milk? In the days before the recombining plant was built in Saigon, it was canned and undrinkable unless it was the chocolate milk. But it made great ice cream in #10 cans. It was my custom to have a Black Cow every afternoon at 1500, if I was in camp. Well, we received a new XO, a Point graduate, who decided to clean up our act. One of his more popular orders was to ration out the Cs. The AC had to report to him before each mission and he was given one meal per crew member. (My crew chief, Gene S?, went into town and bought cases on the local economy.) My favorite order of his was the one that scheduled days when you could eat ice cream. One day I was just starting to enjoy my Black Cow when I heard, "Lt. Davies, YOU are eating ice cream on a non-ice cream eating day!" Well, I guess you had to be there.

*Ben Davies, 66-16*

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**TAPS** Just received a letter from **David Nelson's** wife. He died of a massive stroke and heart attack January 14th. He was the company armorer from May 65 to May 66. We live in the same state and had been meaning to get together but never did. Life is a really fleeting thing. Just thought I'd let you know so you can update the list. Thanks.

*Frank Miceli, Company Clerk 65-66*

**Mark Cowles**, age 57, passed away in Madison, WI, Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2006. Mark was a Falcon pilot during the last half of '70. When the 155 stood down, he went north to finish his tour with the 282<sup>nd</sup>.

*Fly high, friends.*

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**MAIL CALL: Sharing Commo**

**Steve (Lifer) Flock** – (155 Maintenance, 67-68) Received the *Ban Me Thuot Barb* today, and was very pleased to see the story from Craig Mosher. He and I went on R&R to Australia in the spring of 1968. I need to contact him.

**Jim Smith** - Great job - keep up the good work!!!!

**Chuck Markham** - I have just started a group on the 155 discussion board especially for 155 motorcyclists. If you want to join in, come on; it might get interesting. And just to let everyone know, 155 people passing near Hico, Texas are always welcome to drop in and spend an evening in the log house in the cedar brake.

**Jim Kohler** – Just finished the latest edition of the *Barb*, and it fired me up to do some shoebox opening. Here are a few photos I had printed from some of my slides showing the early days: '65 – '66.

**Herman Hedrick** - I remember lots of trips to Happy Valley where everything was ours (i.e., no friendlies). And lots of trips to Duc Lap , Bu Prang , and Cambodia. I flew many missions with Charlie Marvin, CPT Gardner, and Les Davison. There also was a W3 with a big mustache. And there was a pilot that we called "Mush Mouth" because you couldn't understand him on the radio. He turned out to be okay in a couple of weeks. I had 1400+ hours over there. YOU GUYS WHERE THE BEST!

**Maurice A. "Maury" Lange** (Green Hornet) - Hello to all the Falcons and Stagecoaches. You were (1) good neighbors, and (2) good "Sticks."

**Dan Fox** – Sure brings back memories.

**Joe Kinder** - Looking for Mike Borer, does anyone know where he is located? Mike was a Gunner, 1st Plt and then Falcon. Years were either 66-67 or 67-68, could even be 66-67-68; darn can't remember. Any help would be great, thanks.

**Ray Douglas** – The wife and I are making plans to attend the Savannah reunion.

**Tom Love** - Hi. It's been a while since I stopped by. Hope all are well.

**Duane Poulin** - Haven't heard much from our brothers lately, just a few jokes and a few lines.

**Wayne Cranford** - Why don't we all get together and get a real good picture of a Falcon, instead of that black thing that is in the middle of our patch??? PS - Great work on the site, over and out.

**John Ahearn** - One vivid memory I have of BMT is of attending the visiting USO shows, with mostly Korean and Vietnamese performers who could put on a quite good show; afterwards, you could talk to them, only to find out that they couldn't speak a word of English. I also remember, in the tenure of MAJ Bobbie L. Moore, we had a U.S. group visit, where the leader singer was a very good clone of Momma Cass - many of us sat with her after the show just to be able to speak with a Western woman.

**Larry Pluhar** - I'm really going to try to make it to the reunion. Would love to see everyone again.

**Fred Faria** - Thanks again for the great web site. Still looking for someone with pics of Frank Freedle alone, with me or with others.

**Brad Hillgoss** - I served in the 155th from December '69 till December '70. I was the clerk that did all of the record keeping on the Huey's, which included the paper work for turning in all of the downed helicopters that you see in some of the pictures. I tended bar part time in the EM club also. Nice site, brings back a lot of memories.

**Mark Hayes** – I just checked one of my old patches, the one with half a wagon wheel, and it confirmed my call sign was Stagecoach 11.

**Bill Zierdt** – Great job on the newsletter.

**Mike Butcher** - Mary (and staff): what you guys have put together and done with it is truly outstanding!!!! Attaguys! Keep on keepin' on! I'll drop back in later on.

**Donald Pearsall** - Great site brings back memories.

**Royal Sander** - Would you believe it, I'm back to flying again in Corinth, MS as a medevac pilot no less.

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## FAMILY & FRIENDS CONTACTS

**JOE ERICKSON** I am seeking information on a high school friend of mine that was KIA on 23 Feb 1970. Joe Erickson died when Falcon 66-00518 went down that day. Any information will be greatly appreciated. Thanks.  
*Dale Patton US Army 1967-1971*

**FRED PRATT** I am the nephew of Fred O. Pratt, who was killed in Vietnam. Your Home Page is a magnificent tribute to the brave flight crews of the 155<sup>th</sup>. Through your Site, I have been able to contact people who flew with my uncle. I cannot tell you how thankful I am to have met you all.

*CPT Rob Pratt, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Div, Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran*

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS, 10<sup>TH</sup> COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION  
OFFICE OF THE S-3  
APO 96377

16 May 1969

SUBJECT: Report of Significant Activities During Period 10-13 May 1969.

10 May 69 A 155<sup>th</sup> aircraft flying north of Bu Prang, approximately 3 to 5 miles south of the Cambodian border was buzzed by an unidentified aircraft. The aircraft circled the 155 aircraft several times, then returned to Cambodia. The unidentified aircraft had a tail assembly similar to an OV-1, twin fuselage, straight blunt nose and wings, twin engine (jet), interceptor type with crew of two in tandem. This information was reported to 17<sup>th</sup> CAG S-2 for action.

*Ed: This is from an official report of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, found recently in the National Archives. If you know anything about this, please tell us more. Does anyone know what kind of aircraft this might have been?*

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### MY THOMPSON SWIMS WITH THE FISHES

In April of '64 I had a Special Forces SGT riding in my UTT gunship down around Soc Trang. We were a platoon on TDY to the 121<sup>st</sup> Helicopter Company, to transition them from H-21s to UH-1Bs. The SF guys at Vinh Long loved to come over and ask us to take them on a recon. I seemed to be the one that always went and became pretty good friends with him. One day we landed to try to catch a prisoner from a rice paddy, and he and I went out to get the guy while the chopper took off and circled. I had my M-14 and had one 20 round magazine in the weapon and a couple magazines in my pockets. We got him, but the gun was always in my way. The next day he was back with a Thompson and 4 magazines, and pouch for 3 of them. He told me the virtues of a Thompson, showed it to me, and then we went out back of the compound and fired probably four or five hundred rounds. He made sure I fired it right: cocked a little to the right and let it spray, don't spray it. I carried it the rest of my tour ('til July) and gave it to a guy when I left.

In '65, for my second tour at Pleiku, after being there for a couple of weeks my chopper and I were assigned to the SF camp at An Khe (where the 1<sup>st</sup> CAV went, but this was before they arrived). We were there for I think 2 weeks TDY. The first night there I conned them out of a Thompson and magazines, and carried it with me always. I used it once when I got shot down near Nha Trang; don't know if I hit anything but I tried. When I got transferred to Ban Me Thuot, they thought I was nuts (I was), and I had a lot of questions about the gun - which I always had with me or real close by. It's funny, no one in authority ever gave me a problem with the gun - but I got all kinds of crap about my bush hat!

After a while most of the pilots and crewmembers had their own personal weapons, and it finally hit the fan. All the weapons were confiscated and loaded into "my" Wrecker ship, and we flew out to a big lake and threw them out. Somehow my Thompson did not fall out, and MAJ Hobbs (the pilot) flew off. As we were leaving the lake, he said to me that when we got back to base he was going to look under my seat to see if he had to court martial me or not, and should maybe he go back and make one more pass over the lake. Well, he did - and I almost cried as I watched my Thompson splash into the lake. I was mad about it the rest of my tour. Come to think about it, all I ever had the rest of the tour was my M-60.

*Warren Smith, Stagecoach Wrecker*

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### A VERY BAD DAY

I arrived in Vietnam in March '67 and left in June '68. I was with the 155<sup>th</sup> from about early Feb '68 to mid June '68. We were in the air one day and all of a sudden some choppers went missing. We continued along a route we were all following and saw smoke. At the same time we had also lost radio contact with a couple of our birds. We went over and down to what looked like a crash site, going to the smoke. From what I remember, it was out in the middle of nowhere; a rounded hilltop with trees, weeds, grass, and sort of open. We identified two of our 155 ships down there in two sort of big heaps. Just a couple piles of burning metal, close together, only a few yards apart. As it happened, our (my) helicopter was the one picked to land and try to ascertain what the hell happened and what was going on. I was the guy

(maybe there were more?) that went over, on foot, and viewed what was left of two helicopters and about 20 men: 8 Americans and 14 or so Vietnamese. I'll never forget what I saw. Our guys, all the guys for that matter, did not look very good. Fires, at the crash site, etc., and ammo going off in all directions at the crash site due to the fires, made the crash site very unsafe. Didn't seem to be any NVA around. After going around the crash site from one side, to the backside, and back to the front side, I then went from the crash site back to my chopper, standing by maybe only 20-30 yards from the crash site, and we took off. Medevac and LRRPs were called and on the way. Nobody was moving, no twitch, no nothing; no survivors. Frank was one of them. He had just returned from R&R.

We concluded, on our own, that they collided in the air. Someone in the air, maybe, might have seen the rotors touch, but no one on the ground. I knew (James) Miculus more or less on a day-to-day basis. I think we shared our hootch bunker together several times during various rocket and mortar attacks. I remember several guys crying at the loss of Miculus. Many guys were VERY close to him. *Fred Faria*

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### **FALL REUNION AT SAVANNAH, GEORGIA**

November 9-12, 2006 at the Ocean

Plaza Beach Resort Hotel, Oceanfront at 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Tybee Island, GA 31328; phone 1-800-215-6370. Double rooms are \$79, suites are \$99; mention 155 AHC to get this discounted rate. Must reserve by 28 October to get the discounted rate. Hotel Web Site is <http://www.oceanplaza.com/>.

Gilbert Terry will be hosting this shindig, contact him at [gnterry@comcast.net](mailto:gnterry@comcast.net) if you've got ideas or can help out. There's a bunch more info on the 155 AHC Home Page, check it out. FYI, Bobbi and Joe Kinder have already done a preliminary recon, and they give the site four thumbs up!

Just to be absolutely clear, this is not a party just for 155 guys. If you have any connection to BMT, you're welcome. And - equally important - so are families and friends of anyone with a BMT connection. PLEASE consider joining us.

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### **FIRST COMPANY A HELO LOST IN COMBAT**

It was CPT Charles Gilmer in those days, Platoon Leader of the armed helicopter platoon. I was the Platoon Sergeant. Flying left seat was WO Hassart (or something close to that), can't remember the gunners name. I would let the Crew Chiefs have a day off and fly in their place. During early July, 1965, we were on a CA out kind of NE of BMT if I remember right. The ship tail number was either a 63 or 64-001 the best I remember. (We had 001, 002, 003.) Inserting ARVNs and the Special Forces were making a sweep up to meet them. Flying a B Model with a M6 quad machine guns on it and seven shot rocket pods. We had made several passes in a right hand Daisy Chain and were really low on fuel. Gilmer was having a conversation on the radio with CPT Bob Spencer, his hooch mate and a Slick Platoon Leader. The choppers had been taking fire from a .51 cal in a church. Gilmer told Spencer, "Watch me get that SOB!" We were going to make this last pass before going back to refuel and re-arm. Since he was going to "Show Him", we went a lot lower and closer to the target. As we were making the right break we took a round thru the left fuel cell that came out just above the seat and 12 inches inboard of my butt. The cockpit filled with smoke immediately and the instrument panel lit up like a Christmas tree. There was some kind of explosion, because the gas filler cap blew thru the window of the open R/H cargo door; I've got pictures to prove it. It doesn't take long for a loaded B model to hit the ground and all around were tall trees. Gilmer was a fantastic pilot and spotted a clearing, kicked it around and we hit the ground, rocked up in the skids and fell back. We grabbed our stuff and made for the bushes because that fellow still had that .51 cal - and he wasn't far away. We looked back and the flames were over the Main Rotor and back past the engine; Gilmer had a camera and took some pictures. We joined up with the Montagnards and made the assault on thru the village. Gilmer had refused to be picked up until all of the wounded had been extracted. About the next day, maybe the day after, we had a company formation and the Viet 2-star from BMT shook our hands, spoke great words, and then pinned medals on us. I don't know what the others got, but I got the Viet Cross of Gallantry and the Commendation Ribbon with V Device. We were the first combat loss of A/1/1. I have been unable to find any record of this action in the Company Records. It seems the unit didn't exist till after it became the 155th.

*Milo Tayler, Falcon '65 - '66*

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## ANOTHER DAY IN THE NAM

During the last four months of my tour, someone found out I'd also attended Clerical Procedures School at Fort Hood, so they moved me into Flight Operations. One day the CO wanted to try a ground liaison with the ARVN during a mission. So I strapped a PRC 10 on my back and flew out to the PZ. I jumped out and found the ARVN CO, my job was to try and communicate how many soldiers were to be in each ship for each lift. Needless to say, it sounded better than it worked out.

The funny thing is, after the last lift, the ARVN staff jumped in trucks and drove off – and there I stood, all alone in this big field. Well, about ten minutes into standing around all alone, I was looking over my shoulder at every tree line. Fortunately, it wasn't long before I could see the big freight train in the sky heading back. Nothing ever sounded better than 155<sup>th</sup> chopper clap as a slick peeled off to pick me up.

*Jim Kohler, Early Guy ('65-'66)*

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## HIT THE SILK!

WO Larry Pluhar and I were picked to fly two aircraft with the B50 SF volunteers down to the Saigon area for several days of training. How the hell I was chosen I don't remember, but I am certain I didn't volunteer as I hated flying at night. Other than being totally crazy, the mission was quite simple. A solo blacked-out helicopter, carrying a team of six, would take off from BMT in the middle of a moonless night, climb to 1000 feet, and then fly time, distance and heading to the drop zone in Cambodia. The next morning, the usual contingent of slicks and guns would proceed to the staging area and standby for extraction.

I can only speculate that the selection of only a 1000 foot altitude was to decrease vulnerability and ensure the team landed close to each other. When jumping out of a fixed wing, you go out in a nice parabolic arc and have some time to react if your main chute doesn't open. Jumping out of a helicopter at 1000 feet you go down like a brick with the main opening between 700 and 500 feet. There is no time to maneuver and you are going to land hard.

Once in Saigon, we were briefed on the mission and the training drop site, which was at a Special Forces firebase just south of the Bien Hoa airbase. The practice drops were to be as close to the real thing as possible including radio silence. We found out later this also meant the firebase was not notified that we were coming. In the middle of the night, the teams were loaded on both aircraft and we took off separately, climbing to 1000 feet and flying time, distance and heading to the drop zone. Now if you have ever flown around the Saigon area at night you know it is a relative piece of cake compared to the BMT area; there are lots of lights to provide a horizon, features that can be recognized, and no mountains to reach out and grab you. This is not to say it was without hazard, however. Flying a blacked-out helicopter at 1000 feet while maintaining radio silence as you pass through the airspace of a major airbase, even in the middle of the night, is not recommended. And it certainly wasn't appreciated by the F4 pilot that screamed across our flight path at the same altitude only several hundred yards in front of us.

By cheating (i.e., using some visual navigation), each helicopter found the drop zone on the west side of the firebase, the teams jumped, and we returned to Saigon. During the debriefing the next day we learned one team member broke his arm, several had severe cuts and sprains, one landed in a cesspool and almost drowned, and several set off trip flares on the firebase perimeter and drew friendly fire - until they were finally able to make radio contact to explain who they were and what the hell they were doing there. Luckily, no one was killed!

Given the condition of the teams, the second practice drop was scrapped and we returned to BMT. After the fiasco of the training drop, Mr. Pluhar and I thought that the mission might be abandoned. So we were somewhat surprised that on the first clear moonless night he and his crew were called on to fly a team into Cambodia. I can't say I was disappointed that I wasn't picked.

Now we all know that the accuracy of time, distance, and heading navigation is strongly influenced by wind speed and direction aloft, which were unknown. And of course there was no way to cheat, as we had on the practice drop, using visual references. All of which Mr. Pluhar and I tried to explain during the practice debriefing, but apparently it fell on deaf ears. So when the team jumped into a heavily forested area rather than the one of light vegetation as planned, the results were predictable: multiple fractures, sprains and lacerations to all team members. At first light the next morning, the parachute drop mission into Cambodia ended when the team was pulled out.

Rick Menzel  
Stagecoach pilot





155<sup>th</sup> AHC Association  
c/o Larry Matthews

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