



3rd Quarter 2007; Sortie 39

BAN ME THUOT BARB

155th Assault Helicopter Company & All Units serving at Camp Coryell; Central Highlands; II Corp; South Vietnam; 1965-1970

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The Story of DAI UY BAC SI Y KHOA (Captain Doctor)

I was the first flight surgeon for the 155 AHC. In 1965, I had been comfortably nested as Post Flight Surgeon at Ft. Bragg, with my clinic at Simmons Army Airfield. I worked with XVIII Corps, Womack Army Hospital, the HALO team, and at arms length with 82nd Airborne. I "had it made"; no one knew what I was supposed to do but me. Little oversight, no reporting, etc. My own boss.

I went home to Georgia on leave looking for a place to practice medicine when I finished my Army commitment the next year. The phone rang and the Exec Officer at the hospital said, "You have orders to an expedited undisclosed destination, unaccompanied tour."

I laughed and said, "You can't do that. I'm on leave." He said, "Your leave is cancelled. You will report back here in 24 hours."

Bill Fields—
 July, 1965—
 with bunk-mate.

A deadly
 Blue Krait.

Flight Surgeon Doc
 Curry identified it.



Stephen, and caught a jet to Ft. Riley. Seven days used up already.

Gentlemen, thanks for your stories. You have made another newsletter possible.
The Editor



In the time frame of some 8 days I had to return from Georgia to Fort Bragg, clear quarters, store furniture, and settle my wife and 15 month old son with Helen's parents, undergo an overseas physical, and report to Ft. Riley. During the physical my EKG showed acutely inverted T-waves (like seen in a heart attack... I did have some chest pain while en route back to Ft. Bragg) and I spent three days in the hospital evaluating those changes. By that time, I was glad they turned me loose; back on Flight Status.

The Mayflower van with hold baggage and medical crate broke down a hundred miles from Ft. Riley, consequently my stuff did not get delivered. I met the men of my new command and immediately signed for all the Eighth Medical Detachment supplies and equipment, but I could not inventory it because it had already been "shipped out", but nobody knew where to. That left me a little anxious.



Not knowing where I was being sent, I went to the hospital pharmacy and built myself a big crate of medical supplies to go with my hold baggage to Ft. Riley. Whatever was in store for me, I wanted to be prepared. I went back to Georgia to say goodbye to Helen and baby

Suddenly, we were awakened at midnight to get on an airliner. We got off in San Diego in the dark next morning. By sun-up we had boarded the Iwo Jima and were leaving the San Diego harbor. There were some 80 new D-model Hueys tied down on the flight deck without rotors, and some 800 Army personnel representing three airmobile companies with supporting medical, maintenance, and signal detachments. We still did not know our destina-

The Story of *DAI UY BAC SI Y KHOA*—Continued

tion. Scuttlebutt was we were going to Korea to replace a unit being deployed somewhere else, and troops had packed winter gear.

Three days out at sea the news was released: we were headed to Viet Nam. That is when it was discovered that our 800 troops on board had not been medically readied for duty in that region. This was one of the Army's famous "hurry up" missions.

The three of us flight surgeons on board realized we needed gamma globulin, tuberculin skin tests, and other immunizations, etc. to qualify these troops medically. Major DeLoach who was senior Army commander aboard, quizzed us. I had interned at Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, and I knew Major General Don Graham, Tripler CG, personally, thru our mutual interest in ham radio at Tripler. So an encrypted message was sent requesting supplies to him. He responded "can do and meet me at the gangplank when you dock at Pearl Harbor." General Graham, the ranking medical officer in the Pacific Command, took us three flight surgeons out to dinner that evening at Tripler O-Club and briefed us on the situation in Viet Nam. He said we really did not know whether the problem was going to blow over or blow up, but go prepared to stay, and to keep him informed of our situation.

We gave shots, etc. during the rest of the trip to Vung Tau and with our captured population on board ship, they all got qualified before landing in Viet Nam.

The three airmobile companies split three ways after leaving Iwo Jima. Most of the A/1/1 boarded C-123 aircraft in Vung Tau and landed at Ban Me Thuot to an unprepared site amidst 6 inches of red dust. A few hours later, the rainy season began and we had 6 inches of red mud.

I had a 25 cent metal box of Bayer aspirin

in my pocket as my ONLY medical supplies when we landed at BMT. Hold baggage left in Kansas, Eighth Med Det equipment on a Japanese freighter held up in a dock strike in Japan. The third day at BMT we had about 60 cases of bloody diarrhea, discovering the water was over chlorinated. I had to scrounge from the Grand Bungalow and from Eighth Field Hospital in Nha Trang supplies to get by on until our stuff arrived several weeks later. I think my hold baggage made it 91 days later!

So we survived using a packing crate for an exam/operating table under a tent flap. Eventually buildings were built, our vehicles and equipment arrived, and we were able to do lab and x-ray tests. We networked with the Vietnamese doctors and helped them operate in their hospital. Dr. David Jones at the Bungalow and I supervised the physician assistant treating patients in the Montagnard ward at the hospital. We saw leprosy patients (from the Leprosarium supported by the missionaries) in the barn behind the missionaries' home. (They sneaked in patients from the Leprosarium at night thru VC territory). We saw patients with tetanus, plague, cholera, giant intestinal parasites, dengue fever, tuberculosis, etc.....some of that we would never see in the U.S. So it was quite an educational experience for me and the Eighth Medical Detachment personnel.

The Eighth Med medics and I flew many missions with the slicks (and the gun ships occasionally). Captain Charlie Gilmer, the gun platoon commander and my "roommate" allowed me to be door gunner one evening while we went out and shot up a mountain in a free fire zone. My ears still ring from that racket.

Captain Bob Spencer, my other "roommate" and the commander of the slick platoon, asked me to fly a night mission with him. We took a slick down to near Dalat one night to pick up a Special Forces MSgt with appendicitis. During that mission, we re-

Important Notice

Next year in January, 2008, we plan to release members names and contact information in a Roster.

The Officers position on this is to promote more communication among members.

If you **do not** want anyone to have your contact information, please contact Matt Matthews at the following e-mail address:

ceilmatt@verizon.net

If we don't hear to the contrary, we will release your contact information to others in the Association.

The Roster will go to all those that are currently on the Newsletter list and connected to the Association. No other parties or organizations will gain this information.



The Story of *DAI UY BAC SI Y KHOA*—Continued

ceived tracer fire from two mountains as we descended between them. We were flying with doors open, so I lay down flat as I could on the floor. It seemed to me like the tracers were crossing above me in the Huey cabin!! We landed to flashlights and took the gurney off the back of a jeep and transported him to Eighth Field Hospital in Nha Trang for surgery.

I have previously written about fixing the “crossed and locked eyes” of Kim Din, the local BMT girl who worked in the mess hall. I am sending a picture of her that I got from Bob Maddox.

At the reunion at Tybee Island, I was proud to see that the survivors of BMT have retained a good sense of humor, most remain healthy, and lots of supportive wives were also present. Wish you all well and continued health and prosperity.

Leon E. Curry, *BAC SI Y KHOA*

DAI UY, MC, FS

One of the many Good Things that we did over there . . .

In 65/66, an orphanage in BMT needed to be built but the materials were in very short supply. Such things as cement were quite scarce. My father was in the business of building roads and streets as well as the ready mixed concrete business. I mentioned this to him in a letter and the next thing I knew, he had contacted the Miami Cement Company (in Ohio where we lived) and they donated quite a large number of bags of cement for the building. The next project was to get it to BMT. The Air Force flew it to Saigon but would not move it further and our choppers just would not do the job because of the bulk and weight. I wrote my father to thank him and to make sure the Miami Cement Company got their due appreciation and mentioned that we had a logistical problem between Saigon



and BMT. Well, Congressman Clarence Brown of Ohio came to the rescue, and the Air Force relented; delivering the cement to our airfield, and the orphanage was built.
Jim Askren



Rescue in Laos

In response to the article in the Barb's last newsletter and the article "seeking information on the rescue in Laos", I will provide you some details, and I am amazed that this has even appeared as I have been trying to get information regarding the 155th participation in the Laos operation for a number of years, so the 155th can get credit for it. I have even talked with Bo Atkinson about this operation.

Here is the information: I, Johnny L McCullough, Cpt, was the OIC in charge of the flight section operating from Dak To into Laos in the fall of '66, October and November to be exact. The incident you are asking about goes something like this. Late one afternoon, we received a mission order to search for a downed pilot in Laos, and I launched my aircraft, a UH-1H, with Lt. Silva launching as my wingman. We also took two gun ships along with us. We split up in an effort to cover more area before nightfall. Silva located the downed pilot, and was able to rescue him. However, by this time it was getting dark, and we were low on fuel. Silva made it back to Dak To, but I had to land in a field and have them ferry me some JP4 from Dak To to have enough fuel to get back to the base. I had a gun ship with me, and I believe the gun ship section leader was a WO Duncan.

Silva is correct in that we were suppose to get the DFC for this action, but like everything else, SNAFU took over. I have searched all the Army and SF web sites in the hopes of finding any information of the 155th's role in operations in Laos with the SF in 1966, but the only official records I can find is when the 170th began flying the missions in 1969.

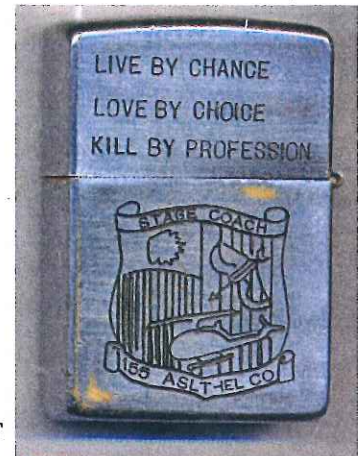
Here is some more background on this:

1. If you have read any of W.E.B. Griffin's books, especially the one titled "Aviators", you will find a portion of

the story which duplicates my and the 155th involvement in the story. I contacted his PR person to try to find out where he received his background information, but as of this date, no response has been received.

2. I came over with the 170th and the 119th in Nov of 65, and landed at Qui Nhon and later went to Pleiku where we received our orientation and baptism of fire. Later on my platoon, led by Don Chabot, was sent TDY to BMT to try out a three lift platoon organization for an assault helicopter company. We were later assigned to the 155th.
3. The background on how the 155th became involved in this operation is as follows: I was assigned a mission to report to S-3, 52d CAB at Pleiku for an undisclosed mission. I flew up and received my orders to go to Kontum and report to the SF commander, name of which I cannot remember. I did so, and when I received the mission, I told the SF commander I had to check this out with my S-3. I flew back to Pleiku, briefed the S-3, and he was shocked, and they contacted the 1st Avn. Bde. to get clarification, which was approved. I told them that a one ship mission as described into Laos would not be feasible. They told me to get what I needed, and the result was I had two "slicks", two gun ships, and enough support, maintenance and spare aircraft to accomplish the mission. We flew numerous insertions of SF into Laos and almost each one of them had to be emergency extracted. We used the "Mcquire" rig to pull these guys out of the jungle. What is more interesting is this. When I received this mission I had about 45 days left in country before my DEROS date. I was later replaced by a new Major, name forgotten, and I went home to Rucker.

I have a number of slides of the operation out of Dak To and use them in a presentation I give to a local History High School,



"Late one afternoon, we received a mission order to search for a downed pilot in Laos, and I launched my aircraft..."



Rescue in Laos — Continued

twice a year, when the teacher gets to the Vietnam era. (Teacher is my cousin).

If you need any information, let me know.

Johnny (John) McCullough

Major, USA-Ret, Inf/Avn

From the Pres: Reunion 2008

At the reunion in Savannah we voted to have the next reunion over the Veterans Day weekend of 2008. The proposed sites were Branson, MO. and San Antonio, TX. John Grow has included a short blurb on Branson in this issue, and a similar blurb on San Antonio will be placed in the next issue. I have made preliminary moves to establish a separate email address on my server to conduct the vote for the venue. Please be thinking about where you would like to spend a weekend cavorting with old friends and their families.

Chuck

Reunion 2008?

We have just returned from our second visit to Branson. The first was two years ago and we thoroughly enjoyed both visits. On our recent visit it poured on us while we were at Silver Dollar City which lessened our enjoyment of the day. The Branson Veterans Memorial is a good although sobering place to spend an afternoon.

Silver Dollar City is an amusement park and also has over 100 craftsmen who put on demonstrations. There were not many craftsmen working when we were there as in summer the emphasis is on kids fun. In the fall craftsmen are featured and then there may be 100 as Silver Dollar City claims. This number must include the total number of craftsmen and not the number of crafts that are displayed as we saw four people at the glass blowing demonstration.

As many as 100,000 veterans attend the Veteran's Tribute November 5-11 every

year. Veterans are recognized and honored at most of the shows. There are more than 100 live shows in Branson. Some of the theaters are as small as 50 people and as large as 4,000. Country music (easy listening even for non-country music fans) prevails as does comedy. There are shows of every type however.

There are some downsides but not insurmountable. Traffic is heavy around show times and if you are flying your best bet is to fly into Springfield, MO., which is 43 miles to the north. Branson will have a larger airport by 2009. November and December are the biggest tourist months and finding rooms at cheaper rates may be difficult. I will be asking for bids this week.

We may want to consider changing the dates of our reunion. How about some input from the members?

You can get a free vacation guide by going to www.explorebranson.com and they will be glad to send you one. The web site also has most of the information on shows and other activities.

John Grow

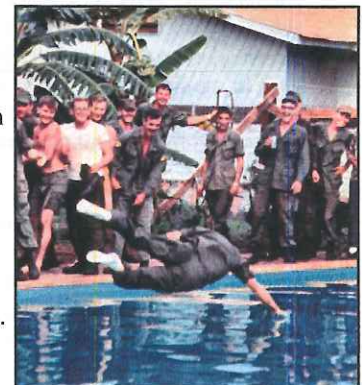
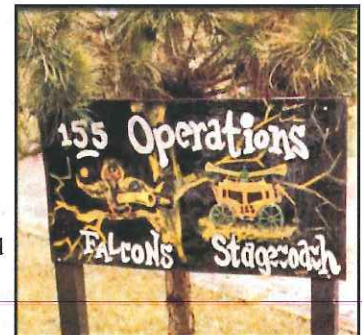
Search Committee

I mentioned at the Tybee Island Reunion that there must be several thousand of us who served in Ban Me Thuot. and that we should make a concerted effort to try to find them and hopefully get them to attend the next reunion.

I am willing to try to coordinate this effort but would like some help from some of you, preferably two in the northeast, two in the southeast, two in the upper mid-west, one in the lower mid-west, two in the northwest and two in the southwest. This is the ideal but we could do it with less. You should have good computer access and if possible unlimited long distance access. You can contact me direct at jwgrow@charter.net or by phone at 817-834-3975. Let's find our missing comrades.



"... Be thinking about where you want to go for the 2008 Reunion— Branson or San Antonio ..."



First Recovery

The nice thing about getting old is there are few around to dispute your view of the story and you realize it really doesn't matter enough for anyone to remember anyway.

During Prop and Rotor repair school at Ft. Eustis, VA an instructor told me the best duty in Vietnam was to fly on a Wrecker Team. I arrived at Camp Coryell in January 1967 and in about five months, I managed to wrangle a position as door gunner on the 165th Maintenance Detachment's Wrecker Ship. A vacationing SP/5 Joe De La Torre soon replaced SP/5 Frank Cox, the Crew Chief. Since I had been trained as a rotor repairman and had never seen an M-60 except for the crew chief and door gunner of the Wrecker Ship carrying it over their shoulder going to the ship or hooch, I asked SFC Robinson how to shoot it and he replied "hell McRee don't worry about it, you will never have to use it". I didn't want to act stupid and screw up my new job, so I didn't worry about it, besides I was a civilian fixed-wing commercial pilot with 3,000 hours and riding in a helicopter all day and carrying an m-60 over my shoulder to and from the hooch sure beat sitting in a hot trailer balancing tail rotors and picking up cigarette butts every morning.

Missions had been fairly simple and uneventful until early in August 1967, Camp Coryell was mortared by the VC's and a lucky mortar landed under the engine of the Wrecker Ship and 66-16385 was taken out of commission. The morning was spent with Cox and I setting up a new Wrecker Ship (66-16441 as I recall), then kicked back for the day. Mid-day the loudspeaker sounded for "Wrecker Crew to get to their ship". I grabbed my M-60 and was off to the wrecker pad. Major Stephens and Mr. Holt lit the fire and off the Wrecker Team went to Duc Lap where a 155 slick had gone down from hostile ground fire during an insertion.

Major Stephens found the downed helicopter and circled once to access the situation and Crew Chief Cox said "gunner upon landing get out and secure the area", I had no idea what that meant but assumed I must leave the safety of the helicopter, and I as-

sumed it was a phrase they taught him to say at Crew Chief School. (That instructor at Ft. Eustis didn't say anything about this.) The grass appeared to be only about a foot tall, but as Major Stephens began settling into a hover I saw the grass was sticking out of water, which didn't appear to very deep. I was a little concerned since I didn't swim, like I could have stayed afloat with an armor vest on and carrying an M-60. I was relieved that the water didn't appear to be very deep. I jumped off the skid and landed into water up to my chest and grass that was head high, "holy crap - hope I don't drown". Never crossed my mind that since we were recovering a helicopter that had been shot down, there might be some bad guys around, just, "I hope I don't drown, how in the hell do I get to shallow water".

SP/6 Delgado and SP/5 Fields made their way over to the downed ship and began applying their trade. Meanwhile in the distance I saw several heads pop up, and noticed a Special Forces Captain coming my way and he was only in hip deep water and shorter grass. I Made my way to Captain Green, he seemed about as nervous as I was, not a good sign. He asked for a cigarette, I gave him a new pack, as I would soon be leaving. After exchanging pleasantries, he then explained where he had troops set up surrounding the downed helicopter and the area was secured. Hey, this securing the area isn't so tough after all. He then suggested I go over to the downed helicopter as the water wasn't so deep, sounded like an excellent idea and I headed that direction as Fields waved me over.

When I got to the downed helicopter the water was only ankle deep. I then saw the single bullet hole at the bottom of the oil tank. Quickly, Fields asked for my leather flight glove then Delgado stuffed it into the bullet hole and wrapped safety wire around the oil tank securing my flight glove in the hole and filled the tank with a new supply of oil and closed the cowl. As confirmation of the bad guy close-by theory, a couple of wounded ARVN Soldiers were loaded into the downed helicopter as Major Stephens arrived. Delgado told me to get aboard the



First Recovery — *Continued*

downed helicopter and except for Major Stephens, Delgado and myself everybody returned to the Wrecker Ship. Major Stephens cranked the engine and as he pulled pitch Delgado said "McRee, man the ships M-60 and as we lift up, fire out in front of our guys to suppress any enemy fire". As we lifted off Major Stephens banked hard to the right and as I pulled the trigger to fire into the tree line, the entire trigger mechanism fell off of the gun and onto the floor. By the time I set up my M-60, as if I would have known how to shoot it, we were out of the area headed for Duc Lap airfield. Still I was amazed I hadn't drowned.

Delgado kept a close watch on the oil pressure as we made the short trip to Duc Lap airfield. On the ground Major Stephens was shocked when he saw the "field repair" that Delgado and Fields had made. At that point a new oil tank was installed and we returned to Camp Coryell before dark.

Major Stephens received a Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions that day, and I recently discovered that this was also Captain Green's first combat experience as he had been in country only a couple of weeks. Captain Martin L. Green, a West Point Graduate, was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Silver Star medals for his services while in Vietnam. Unfortunately he was killed at Kontum in May 1969.

I flew on the Wrecker Ship for the remainder of my tour participating in repairing and recovering Stagecoaches and Falcons from Bao Loc to Khe Sanh. Each story of a downed helicopter ends with an untold recovery. SSG Robinson was correct, I almost didn't need to know how to shoot the M-60. And since SP/5 De la Torre continued to say it, I still believe a wrecker ship's Crew Chief's favorite saying was "gunner secure the area". And lastly, my instructor at Ft. Eustis was right, being on the wrecker team was the best duty in Vietnam.

Burris McRee

165th Maintenance Detachment
January 1967 – January 1968

**We are on the web at
155thAHC.COM**

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This is a war zone? Check the shine on the jeep and the boots. This is Chuck Markham at his finest. **ATTENTION!!**

This quarterly newsletter is dedicated to the men of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company and the many other units that served alongside us in and around Ban Me Thuot, Central Highlands, II CORP, Republic of Viet Nam. These are stories submitted by those that were there. The horrors, sadness, esprit de corps, camaraderie, humor, fears, loneliness, heroics, bravado—false or real, the confusion and bullshit of war, are all expressed in this quarterly. We hope that some find solace in its content, others find lost friendships, and still others find themselves once again within the pages of this publication and our organization.

This is our mission today, and we endeavor to meet this mission with all the compassion and commitment that we to gave those other missions so many years ago.

The 155th AHCA was founded in Washington, D.C. in November, 1995. Annual membership dues of \$30 are appreciated but not required. The dues help defray the costs of this publication's mailings, inventory such as hats, t-shirts, etc. and reunions. Payment by check or money order addressed to the 155th AHCA and mailed to the Treasurer is preferred.



155th Assault Helicopter Company Association

