



BAN ME THUOT BARB

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

The Last "Stagecoach" Out of Ban Me Thout

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1972 found me as a Major on my third and last tour in Nha Trang assigned to an Air Force Advisory team as an Air Mobile Advisor to the South Vietnam Air Force. VNAF possessed all of the helicopters and the Air Force had no officers with air mobile experience. I was the only Army guy in the outfit.

At this time, the US Forces were leaving Vietnam at a rapid pace, and there were very few US combat units remaining. I received a phone call one evening from Mr. John Paul Vann (the subject of the book "Bright Shining Lie"). He was a former Army Officer. Mr. Vann was a civilian filling a Major General slot as the Senior Advisor for the II Corps area.

He was concerned because there were intelligence reports that NVA forces were on the move around Ban Me Thout, and he did not have the resources to pick up the three or four American civilians remaining and take them to a safe area. I agreed to attempt to acquire a helicopter from the VNAF to affect the pick up. This took a great deal of effort since they had some large operations going on that day and were not eager to give up an aircraft. I ended up giving a VNAF Squadron Commander a surplus M-151 Jeep that we had in order to get a UH-1H for the mission.

At first light, we departed Nha Trang for Ban Me Thout. The weather was bad and reports were bad all the way but Ban Me Thout with a 500 to 600 foot overcast with rain.

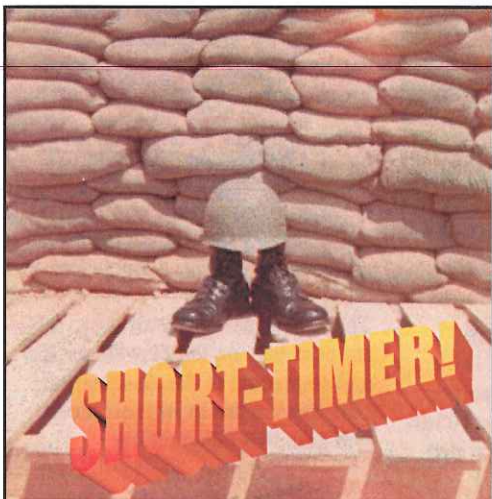


I decided to fly through the weather. At the time, the NVA were using shoulder fired heat seeking missiles, and that made the choice of going through the weather more acceptable. However, the young Vietnamese Lieutenant, who was flying with me was very unhappy about going through the clouds. Every time we would get bumped around, he would comment that this is very dangerous and we should land.

We had a bumpy wet ride high above the mountains and as we neared Ban Me Thout, I got a glimpse of the city airstrip just to the east of our old 155th home plate. The city strip was the agreed pick up site, and we had no trouble locating our passengers. Their number had increased to six by the time we arrived.

There was no jet fuel available, and we needed fuel to make the return flight. The passengers were able to have some people bring some automobile fuel (gasoline of unknown quality). We were not full of fuel, but I decided we had enough for the return flight.

The flight back was very rough; it rained as



The Last "Stagecoach" Out of BMT—Continued

hard as I have ever seen it rain.

Approaching Nha Trang, we had to wait 15 minutes for another aircraft to finish his approach before we could start in on ours. We had a "low fuel" warning light come on about half way the procedure.

The landing was uneventful in spite of the high pucker factor. The passengers were all very happy to be on the ground and away from the expected battle in the Central Highlands. The young Vietnamese pilot was the most relieved of all.

I don't think Ban Me Thout fell until several months later, after I had left Vietnam, but I was told that no Americans were ever based there again.

Post Note: John Paul Vann would die in an OH-58 helicopter crash with his Army pilot a short time after I left Vietnam. The book "Bright Shining Lie" is well worth the trouble to read.

Bob Spencer

Addendum to 'Rescue in Laos'—Sortie 39 story submitted by Johnny (John) McCullough

According to *Vietnam Air Losses, United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Fixed-wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961-1973* by Chris Hobson

27 October 1966 F-105D 600431

421 TFS, 388 TFW, USAF, Korat

Major Robert Earl Kline (survived)

Later in the day a number of the Korat

Wing F-105's flew armed reconnaissance missions over the Steel Tiger area of southern Laos. A flight of aircraft found a North Vietnamese troop concentration near Muang Fangdeng and commenced an attack. Major Kline was just pulling out of his dive at about 2,500 feet when his aircraft was hit by automatic weapons fire. He turned north over the Bolovens Plateau and ejected when he was about 10 miles from his target. He was seen to eject by an O-1 pilot who reported his position. As it was getting dark and the USAF SAR helicopters had no night capability at that time it was decided to send in a Bright Light Team from Dak To. An Army UH-1D from the 155th Aviation Helicopter Company flew the team in to rescue Major Kline and re-fueled on the return from pre-placed fuel drums at a site deep inside enemy territory. Unfortunately, Major Kline was lost on a mission over North Vietnam on 2 Nov.

Hats off to History Bob for this submission. And no Bob, you can't kiss Pat!



More on the 'Rescue in Laos'

John McCullough's description of the 155th's involvement in the "Rescue in Laos" mission in Oct-Nov '66 is accurate to the best of my memory. I was the 165th Maintenance Officer with a crew of 5 that supported this mission at the Special

Forces camp at Kontum. And yes, there is more to the story about this mission that may forever remain classified.

Charles Thibodeau



2nd Notice

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.

Flying Formation with an F-4 at Angels 12

It was a hot, dry day in Vietnam. I was over by Maintenance. They had just worked on one of our ships. It had been red X'd with a bad one-to-one vibration in the head of the rotor. The Maintenance Officer yelled over and got my attention, told me he was a very busy man, and asked if I would take the ship up and test flight it to see if the vibration was gone.

I did a careful preflight on the aircraft. It was naked. All the pods and guns had been stripped to perform the maintenance. Preflight complete, it looked good to fly . . . with half a tank of JP-4. Crank time.

As I yelled "Clear", the engine whirred to life and the blades started rotating. I again noticed how damn hot it was . . . a choking heat that made it hard to breath. At a hover now, I called BMT control to get clearance for takeoff. I remember thinking how nice and cool it might be at a little altitude.

I left the traffic pattern and continued a slow spiraling climb over the compound. Two thousand, three, four . . . man, it was starting to cool off nice, five, six, seven . . . "how high can this ship go up?" I asked myself. Eighty five hundred, nine thousand . . . the air was like being in front of a giant air conditioner now. It was great! I continued climbing, ten, eleven thousand . . . at around twelve thousand feet, I noticed that I was starting to trade off airspeed for power. The air being thinner at that altitude apparently demanded more pitch on the blades. I was pulling more on the collective, but noticing that I was coming back on the cyclic to remain stable at 40 knots airspeed. The air was cold now.

All of a sudden, I caught a dark shape in my right peripheral vision. I turned my head to see what it was. I could not believe my eyes. There, moving forward and passing me by, was an F-4 Phantom. With wheels down, flaps

down, throttled back to try to slow down to my speed (and obviously not able to) the F-4 wobbled in the air slowly by my side. I could actually see the pilot's eyes as he indicated a "thumbs down" gesture to me. I took it as, "Hey yo-yo, get out of my airspace, and down where you belong!"

I immediately lowered the collective and rolled left, in a controlled spiral toward the ground. I watched the Phantom as he powered up, raised his wheels and flaps, and disappeared to a small dot heading west.

Evidently, Air Force radar must have picked me up as a "bogey" over our compound and sent my friend to see what I was all about. I don't know how the Air Force pilot talks of this story, but I like to think of it as "the day that I flew formation with an F-4 Phantom."



Major Owen, it was in my best interest that you never knew about this until now. Oh, one other item, I noted in the "Red Book" that the vibration was gone, however, the heat wasn't.

Jeff Schrader

**Short Update: Dick Sperling
BMT—155th Pilot**

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that The Army Times ran a short article about myself and my Distinguished Service Cross (date, 16 March 1967) award in the 24 SEPT 2007 issue. The article is titled: **DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY, A Five Minute History Lesson** by Fred L Borch and

Robert F. Dorr. Subtitle: "Pilot Braved Fire to Save Downed Helicopter Crew".

The Army Times website places these articles on line several weeks after the newspapers date.

Sadly, the article failed to mention the combined crew efforts. I always stress that it was the combined efforts of Copilot CWO Bill Cristobal, CE PFC Michael Balcom and CWO (then Sp-4) Thomas De Simone that helped make the rescue possible. I am forever indebted to the bravery and teamwork of these fine soldiers!

Ironically I have never heard from nor spoken to the three that we pulled out of a tight spot that day.

Their names: CWO Jerry Johns, CWO Robert Schurr and their CE (name not recorded) but he was shot in the ? right leg.

Since my retirement from United I have become a full time volunteer. Now a Boy Scout ASM, EAA Young Eagles Coordinator, and VA clinic volunteer.

Dick Sperling

Aerial view of Camp Coryell looking from North to South—1968



Poetry Set to the Sound of Rotors . . .

My granddaughter sent this to me. When she was at work a group of folks started talking about the Vietnam War. One of the group was a Marine. She told the Marine what I had done over there. He gave her this. I thought that I would pass it on to you. Enjoy.

Artie . . . Scout's Out

— WORDS FROM THE BUSH —

Choppers

Whenever I hear them it's there in my mind,
Many years ago it's been a long time.

Always around be it day or night,
The choppers were there a part of the fight.

They served many needs for our fighting forces,
And in the Nam war they became our horses.

They did many things during war times of strife,
But most of all choppers could save your life.

Some were firebirds, shooting rockets and guns,
Helping the grunts fighting under the sun.

Some were mercy birds, medivac was their mission,
They'd come when you called just mark your position.

The pilots were brave, the crews were the best,
Doing their duty and passing the test.

To the men on the ground they were a welcome sight,
The choppers were there a part of the fight.

SGT. H.J. Brooks, U.S.M.C. (1990)

"The Wall"

There's a name on "The Wall". It's Gabriault. He was the tank commander of

my tanks during my first tour and came out of our little skirmishes with a Purple Heart and a Silver Star, but was relatively unscathed and actually DEROSSED before I did. He was long and lean. Resembled a

bean pole with a prominent Adam's apple and a ready smile. He and I went through a lot. His good humor and can-do attitude was one of the things that kept me going. He helped a young Second Lieutenant build some confidence and basic "Tanker" know how.

I was on one of my motorcycle tours with a bunch of people. We were doing the tourista thing in DC, Aviation and Space Museum, Museum of Natural History. I remember being deeply impressed by the uniform that George Washington had actually worn.

Then we went to "The Wall". I went to the Book and looked up Sergeant Gabriault. Found which panel he was on and then searched it out. I was not prepared for the emotional shock of seeing the man I remembered as being so vibrant and knowledgeable reduced to some lines on a black marble wall. It was 25 years after my return from RVN, and I guess I held a lot of grief inside for those many years. I never even knew all those tears were there. I was leaning against the wall with tears flowing down my face. All my friends stayed clear, probably out of shock. When I finally regained what I thought was control, a lady walked by and stopped and softly said "Thank You". Well, I broke down again. The guys then gathered around me and when I slowed down to whimpering, one smiled at me and said "Let's Ride". That phrase always cheered members of the group and it brought me back to the present. I felt much better. I had accomplished a long neglected duty, and I had not even known it needed doing.

Chuck Markham

Special Extra Earnings for Military Service

Since 1957, if you had military service earnings for active duty (including active duty for training), you paid Social Security taxes on those earnings. Since 1988, inactive duty service in the Armed Forces reserves (such as weekend drills) has also been covered by Social Security.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for your military service from 1957 through 2001 can be credited to your record for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings credits may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit.

Special extra earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Special extra earnings credits are **not** granted for inactive duty training.

If your active military service occurred:

- **From 1957 through 1967**, we will add the extra credits to your record when you apply for Social Security benefits.
- **From 1968 through 2001**, you do not need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to your record.
- **After 2001**, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service.

How You Get Credit For Special Extra Earnings

The information that follows applies **only** to active duty military service earnings from 1957 through 2001. Here's how the special **extra** earnings are credited on your record:

Service in 1957 Through 1977

You are credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which you received active duty basic pay.

Service in 1978 through 2001

For every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. If you enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or your full tour, you may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details.

Bob Gardner

Reunion 2008?

In the last BARB, we had a small blurb on Branson, Missouri as a possible site location to hold our next reunion.

We have an even smaller one on San Antonio as another site to consider for the reunion. It follows:

San Antonio is the site of the famous Alamo where Davy Crockett and several famous Texans held Santa Anna long enough to give Sam Houston a chance to build and train an Army. It is also the location of Ancient Spanish missions and the famed River Walk. Along the River outdoor dining and shopping opportunities abound. The Texan folk center is located on the grounds of the San Antonio World Symposium and The Mexican Market is a feast for the eye and the palette. There is an International Airport and two major military posts located nearby.

Not to influence the vote, we have found several negatives surrounding the Branson site. These are as follow:

- 1) No Major Airport Nearby
- 2) Overcrowded on Veterans day.
- 3) High prices on rooms.

Anyway, it is now time to vote on a site. Please e-mail your vote to the address Chuck has set up.

... Time to Vote ...

where do you want to go for the 2008 Reunion?—Branson or San Antonio . . . E-mail your vote at:

vote155@erath.com



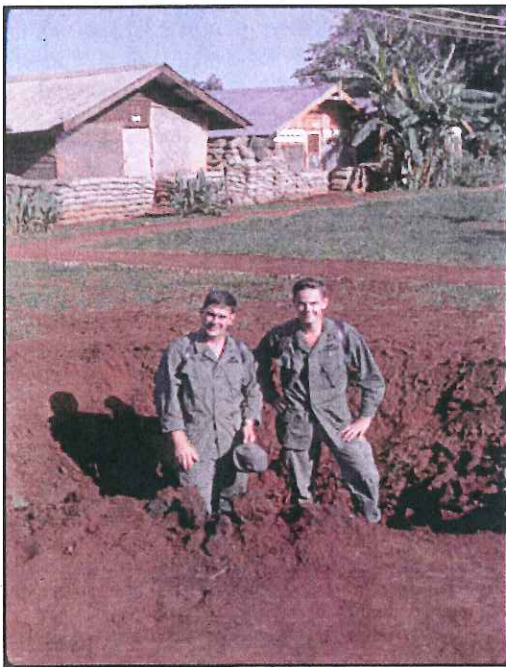
OUCH!

The 92nd AHC flew many missions in support of operations near Ban Me Thout. At times, crews spent the night at Camp Coryell in Ban Me Thuot, which housed the 155th AHC. At 0110 hours on the morning of May 25, 1968, the compound was hit with a 122mm rocket attack. Stallion Pilot Bill Robie took these photos the next morning.

Jim Koch stallion505@92ahc.org;
<http://www.92ahc.org>; Stagecoach 13



Stagecoach Inn after 122mm damage



Standing in a 122mm rocket crater



UH-1H Model after 122mm hit



The Cover Print



The print you noticed on the address page is the new painting "Good Vibrations" by Joe Kline. He sent me a preview copy. I asked him if it would be alright to place it on our newsletter, and he agreed wholeheartedly. (<http://joekline.com/>)

Something else you should know about Joe. He has offered (without us asking) to provide our reunion with two prints, one gun, one slick with 155th markings.

Joe Kline also stated that it may be time to work on another painting of a gunship. How cool is that?!

Joe, we can't say thanks enough to you!

The 155th AHCA



Above: Someone submitted the picture above and titled it, "The Purple Gang Officers headed across the street aka Olympia House."

Right: Rob Moore 1968

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

155th AHCA Officers:

President: Chuck Markham; 1102	d
Vice President: [unclear]	4
Secretary: [unclear]	2
Treasurer: [unclear]	8
Editor: [unclear]	6E
Assistant Editor: [unclear]	1;
Staff: [unclear]	3T

Gentlemen, thanks for your stories. You have made another newsletter possible. We now need more stories to go on. Make a New Year's resolution and sit down and write to me.
The Editor



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.

Happy Holidays



155th Assault Helicopter Company Association



I Want You!

Happy Holidays