

BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155th AHC and all the BMT guys - Sortie __ - Feb 2011

A LETTER FROM JOE

I took command of the 155th on 5 Dec 65 while they were located down south supporting the 1st Inf. Div. I had just completed 18 months of ground duty with the 1st Cav. MAJ Bill DeLoach, the original CO, brought the company from Fort Riley; we were old friends from Europe and he formally requested that I take his place when he moved up to Battalion HQ. Since the company came from Riley, ie, First Division, it was originally A Company of the 1st. When the First Division came to RVN at a later date, they wanted their helo company back. They received the 155th from Korea. So they could have their proper unit designation back in the division, A of the 1st in BMT and the 155th in the 1st Division swapped names. I hope that's not clear as mud!

The call sign "Stagecoach" came about as the unit came from the plains of Kansas. I was Stagecoach 6 from 5 Dec 65 to 15 Aug 66. I had two choppers during my tenure; each one had the diamonds. At this point in time, I can't recall the tail numbers. One was named "Lil Rita."

My Commo Officer, Ray Kervahn, notified me one day that the Air Force had off-loaded a swimming pool at BMT East airfield. It was abandoned and the locals were taking the wood from the crates. I had the pool moved over to our Company, and sent a TWX to MACV (with the local Advisor's concurrence) requesting we keep the pool. Sometime later an Engineering colonel came to conduct a water survey. He used to visit us often. He told me we didn't have enough water – but he was going to tell them we did. Some time later I had to explain to MACV why I stole the swimming pool!

The Patch: the unit patch was developed through a contest that was held with the enlisted men. They wanted to do this. After several submissions, a committee (without me) selected the one we have now.

On 24 Dec 65, we had an operation with a local Special Forces B team. As a result of this gaggle, one aircraft was shot down, reserve was committed. Everything came out OK, and we received a VC flag. All the officers' signatures are on the flag, to include visitors Charlton Heston, Edgar Bergen, and Bobby Rydell. When I left the officers presented me with the flag. The one reunion I attended, I brought the flag.

I'm sorry for rambling on, I hope you can make some sense of this. I'd love to hear from other Stagecoach and Falcon men. I might suggest if you have any influence on reunion choices, the National Infantry Museum near Fort Benning is an ideal location.



Pat Goerig was Joe's co-pilot on "Lil Rita." Thx for sending the photo, Pat.

Joe Parlas, Stagecoach 6
COL, USA (ret)

SHARING COMMO

Welcome **Jerry Daniels**, '67-8 BMT guy. Jerry was a platoon leader and then the Ops Officer.

Richard Smith (SF): I flew the LZ Kate night resupply mission, I was on Ernie Plummer's ship.

Duane Poulin – Finally got to use the sleds, we got good snow now.

Orrin Messenger - Planning on having a house built on the farm by May or June of this year. Yes there are already Mint plants on the property. Also thinking of putting in a vineyard and making my own wine. Plan to name it after our two dogs "Bad Dog Wine".

Bob Maddox – Can you believe I'm almost 70 and have a new grandson? My son is a Maintenance Instructor on CH-47's at Fort Eustis, he just re-upped for 6 more. I'm always thinking of you guys – and still can't believe Stark is gone.

Geoff Jones – I'd been thinking about this for a LONG time. The other day, I finally stopped by to pay my respects at Marlin Johnson's grave site. He and I flew together some and got to be friends, we were both Illinois boys. I remember the day he went down. A good man.

Bob Gardner – Finally pulled the plug – and now I'm enjoying my retirement. Life is good.

Pete Agur – My wife says our memories are so good that the older we get, the better we were.

Bo Atkinson - My wife and I just got back from a trip to Costa Rica. It was great to get away from the cold weather here in Oregon and spend two weeks sailing on a large cruise ship.

John Houston – It is my great pleasure to report that “The Coachmen,” the Purple Gang (1st Plt.) singing group from '69 and '70, are alive and well – and considering a reunion tour! Larry Ingram, Mike Butcher, Lew Sain, Phil Watson, Terry Kirkpatrick, Bob Beaudreault, and I were members then, and hope to get together again. For information on tour dates, contact our manager, Frank Uhring.

Tom Hunt – I just retired again; 43 years service to our country. (*Well done, Mr. Hunt.*)

Robert Nickle - Thanks for asking about 733, that sure stirred up old memories - all good. I left sometime around the middle of May, '69, I think we received three replacement pilots around that time. I remember Dizzy because he always carried about 50 pounds of photo equipment around his neck.

REMEMBERING TERRY NELSON

Laura Bishop's article in a previous *Barb* hit me fairly hard. I was leading the flight, returning from a mission, when WO1 Terry Nelson experienced a short shaft failure on May 23, 1967. We had just gone trail, at about 500', for landing in the Corral, and Terry was the next to last aircraft in a five or six aircraft formation. It was my aircraft that rushed Terry and the other WO pilot to the hospital in Nha Trang that day. The door gunner and crew chief had jumped from the aircraft just before ground impact and were basically unhurt. The crew chief had minor scrapes and the door gunner did not have a scratch, although he was shaken. In my mind, I have revisited the memories of that tragic day every few months for the last almost 43 years. Terry Nelson was a marvelous young man and an outstanding Army aviator. His aviator skills, judgment, and maturity were so outstanding that he was made a company UH-1D Instructor Pilot in less than three months in country.

Bud Henry

“THE ENGINE BLEW UP“

That was a memorable day. I seem to remember the crew taking on extra rounds while we refueled. We had full ammo, full fuel, plus all the junk the crew carried: I know we were overloaded. The engine blew up - which would not have been that bad - except the transmission was bad and without power would not autorotate. I found out on my second tour while down at Depot Maintenance (they still had records on every ship that had ever been in country) that 733 was grounded for run-ups only, because of a bad oil sample. That appears to have been the problem that day, a Red-X aircraft that only the Maintenance shop knew about. It may have flown for hours with a good engine, we will never know. I know that we had rockets and a 40mm because if it had not been for that 40mm, we would have only had one broken skid. The 40mm was in the down position, so when we slid forward it dug into the ground and bent the frame. There was a lot going on at that time and that was the last thing on our minds. As for the mini-guns I am not sure. If it had miniguns, it would have been with the small rocket pods. No one was hurt but we lost a couple M-60's. Dennis Lajoie can probably tell you more.

Robert Nickle, Falcon 1

My logbook shows it was 2 March 1969, I was flying trail ship. Nickle, Tierney, Hunt, and Mooney were the crew. They did an outstanding job of putting it down without hurting anyone. Just prior to touchdown the main rotor was turning so slow you could count the revolutions. As soon as they hit the ground and lowered the collective the transmission seized! The engine lost #3 and #4 bearings. The transmission did have a bad bearing and had been making metal, but it was a brass bushing on a bearing that was failing so it didn't show up as chips. I believe 733 was a triple system ship. I'm not sure why Hunt was crew chief, he normally flew 484. I think Mooney was the normal crew chief. His gunner was the one that wired up the three systems. Can't remember a name. I think we called him Pappy.

Bob Gardner, Falcon 5



Herman Hedrick, Falcon CE, in front of "Ares"

Yes, I was in the aircraft. Let me start about a month earlier. Cliff Allen and I had extended our tours. I'm not sure why he did but I was having girl friend problems and I was going to show her by staying an extra 6 months. Yep, I was the dumb ass but I showed her.

After my Special Leave, I arrived back at BMT the day before the crash and the aircraft needed a 25 hour service/inspection. As we always did, we gathered as many crew members as we could find and shared the work. We had a new gunner in the platoon so I gave him the task of checking/cleaning the engine mag plug and the oil filter. After we had finished I asked if anyone found anything unusual. The new gunner spoke up to say there was metal on the the mag thing and

metal in the filter. When I asked why he didn't say something he said that I had told him to check and clean so that is what he did. I got the Maintenance Officer and he did a run up, then we checked the plug and filter again. They were clean. He put the aircraft on a "circle red X" and released it for 5 hours of flight.

The next morning we covered an insertion somewhere north of BMT and Robert is correct we left overloaded, but we did that all of the time. After the first insertion we went back to refuel. I was watching the time but was not concerned because we were not close to 5 hours yet. About half way back to the LZ I heard a roar from the engine and reached for my mike button when the engine exploded. It spit out so much of itself the the vertical fin and tail rotor were damaged. The trail aircraft said the flame almost reached the vertical fin. I don't think the aircraft had a bad transmission, I think the sprag clutch did not completely disengage. Whatever it was we came out of the sky real fast and hit real hard. The aircraft was armed with the 40mm with 300 rounds and 19 shot pods. The gunner and I each had between 1200 and 1400 rounds of 7.62. I'm sure this and all of the other "fun stuff" we carried is what caused us to fall real fast. Robert did a great job of getting us on the ground - mostly in one piece (I still have back trouble from the crash).

After I got out of the aircraft I opened the co-pilot's door to help him. The sliding armor plate was jammed and with all of the adrenalin flowing I ripped the plate off of the seat (the support had cracked, I just finished it) only to find the co-pilot gone. He had tried to move the plate and when he couldn't he used plan B; he went between the seats and out the other side. I then moved out from the aircraft about 50 meters, thinking I was going to defend us, when I heard a clanking sound. We had gone down next to a road and two ARVN M-48 tanks were moving on the road. When the dust settled I saw a giant of a man in the turret who was the advisor to the ARVN. I remember him saying "Looks

like you boys can use a little help.” I asked him to leave one of the tanks there and put the other one on the other side and point the "big ass guns” out. He did and we later recovered the aircraft.

PS: I remember thinking on the way down that I extended because my girlfriend dumped me for another guy - and now I was going to die the first day back. But I sure as hell showed her!

Tom Hunt, Falcon

STAGECOACH TO THE RESCUE

I can add something to Milo Taylor's story (*Barb*, Feb '10) about his gunship getting shot down. We were on a company size Romeo Foxtrot and I ended up without any ARVN troops in my D model. About halfway to the drop zone I heard a Mayday call, and asked Major Deloach, who was in the lead ship, if I could break off and rescue the downed troops. After receiving permission I went directly to the area of the downed aircraft. From an altitude of about 2000 feet, we entered a zero speed autorotation with a flat spin, aiming for the far end of a field about the size of a football field. We made a power recovery at the bottom and fast hovered up to the downed aircraft, picked up Charlie Gilmer, Rex Hasart, and the other two guys, and took off in the opposite direction I came in from, away from the VC fire, and got them all out safely. About one minute into the rescue Gilmer asked me if I knew I took off down wind. My question was should I have taken off over top of the VC that had just shot them down? DUH! Rex will have to give the actual details of getting shot down, but the remainder of the story is the truth so help me God.

Dave Herbert

REMEMBERING MELVIN DYE

I have a few questions. Melvin C. Dye was a member of the 155th before he got transferred to the 57th. I have an old roster from April 1967 that lists his name in the unit. He ws KIA on 19 Feb 68 in Laos. I'm not sure when he went to the 57th, it might have been May or June of 67. His story is interesting and I've followed it since 1969 when I found out he was MIA. At first he was MIA and then listed as KIA but the body not found. All this mystery and confusion because he went over the border and died and much of this was classified at the time. If you read the famous SOG book (*by John Plaster*) you will see in detail the description of this mission. It starts around page 210.

I was under the understanding that if you were a member of the 155th at one time it would be listed on our Honor Roll with date and unit attached with regard to KIA. Melvin isn't listed on our Honor Roll. Has this issue ever been resolved or spoken about in meetings or e-mail? I was in communication with Mary on this and then her health issues came to light. I dropped the issue. Has this ever come up before or is Melvin the first guy who was a member of our unit and then died in another unit? I'm sure many in our association aren't aware of Melvin C Dye. Maybe there are others who came back for a second tour with another unit who weren't as lucky on the first tour with the 155th. Have there been others who have died with other units after serving with the 155th?



*Paul Meinen (L) & Ken Byrnes in front of "Devil or Angel II"
Ken Byrnes photo*

Jim Ferris

Ed: Jim, THANK YOU for bringing this to our attention. You're right, Melvin was a 155 guy, and should be on our Home Page Honor Roll. Hopefully, that will be done in the near future. FYI, there are several on the Honor Roll who died while serving with other units. Bill Hasselman, Charles Millard, and Al Castro are three who come to mind without looking.

SECOND TOUR: Falcons Return to Vietnam



Mike Stark & Les Davison at BMT; Nov '06

Some of you may know, Mike Stark and I went back to Vietnam four years ago and had a GREAT trip. Boun Ma Thuot (formerly, Ban Me Thuot) is a thriving city, the center of Vietnam's considerable coffee industry. We found an old corner post that might have been the main gate at Camp Coryell, but really, there's nuthin' left of the compound. What used to be the runway is now a wide, busy city street, lined with new car showrooms and modern stores. Quite a change!

In case any of you are thinking about going back, here's how we did it. We hired a guide (thanks to Al Fitzgerald for recommending Hien), van, and driver to drive around most of II Corps, stopping to see the sights,

play some golf, and visit places we'd been long ago. I had been worried about our reception as American tourists, but the people were all friendly and helpful. I saw no signs of the "American War" (as it's called over there), and no signs of bitterness. One incident is worth sharing. When we sat down to have lunch at a restaurant in Tay Ninh, the proprietress talked with our guide and found out we had been helicopter pilots during the war. She brought out an old newspaper article, with photo, showing her as a young girl, receiving a medal for her service with the VC. Later, she came back wearing her medals, and asked to take her picture with us. She told our guide, "We were enemy soldiers then, and now we're friends. Friends is better."

Mike and I had such a wonderful time, we made plans to do it again. He already had his airline reservations - and then he was gone. In '08, I went back with two other buddies from flight school, and we left some of Mike's ashes on the Dalat Cam Ly airstrip. I think he would have liked that.

Amazing scenery, very friendly people, great food, good friends, memories – some good, some not so good. Like I said, GREAT trip. If you want to know more (or be bored by my vacation photos), I'll fill you in on the details.

PS – Hien can be reached at "www.waterbuffalotours.com". He is knowledgeable, dependable, and has a great sense of humor. He was one reason our trips were so good. I HIGHLY recommend him.

Les Davison, Falcon 2

FROM THE 155 AHC HISTORY FILES: EXCERPTS FROM THE 10TH BATTALION DAILY STAFF JOURNAL AND DUTY OFFICER'S LOG

04 Jul 69 – CPT A. Leeman received minor head laceration when an unidentified individual threw a fragmentation grenade into his hootch. Incident occurred at 0235 hours.

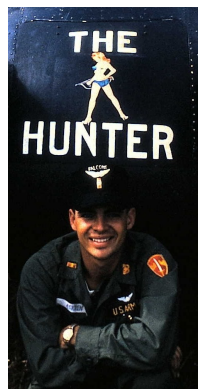
26 Jul 69 – PFC Clyde Holliday dead on arrival at 8th Field Hospital, Nha Trang. Suspect overdose of drugs as cause of death.

06 Aug 69 – One UH-1H from the 155th AVN Co. was downed by hostile fire vicinity YU9372 at 1030 hours. The A/C was destroyed and there were 3 WIA among the crew. A/C was working for 23rd Div (ARVN) on sniffer mission.

12 Aug 69 – MAJ Owen from 155th reported they had taken approx. 20 rounds 82mm mortar. 8 WIA, 4 UH-1H's and 1 UH-1C damaged, 10 vehicles and 7 structures damaged. WIA's were J. Chavarria, D. Poulin, E. Sullivan, J. Martinez-Calderon, S. Cruzan, N. Pate, W. Thoma, and E. Welch.

15 Aug 69 – G. Laplante received fragmentation wounds when he stepped on an M-14 anti-personnel mine while clearing mine field on unit perimeter.

- 19 Aug 69 – SP4 D. Faieta received a shrapnel wound below his right eye when his ship was making a gun run on a suspected enemy location and a piece of shrapnel from one of its own 40mm cannon rounds struck individual.
- 11 Oct 69 – Mr. Douglas of 155th reported pilot of A/C 512 (UH-1C) was wounded when M-60 accidentally swung inside cockpit.
- 14 Oct 69 – SSG Merwin of the 155th gave two reports: A/C 152 took 2 hits with moderate damage and negative injuries; A/C 540 took 9 hits with minor damage, pilot received light wound to right hand. Both incidents took place in classified areas.
- 25 Oct 69 – SP McChesney of 155th reported 155th under mortar attack. 12-15 rounds were taken with 5 WIA (2 evacuated and 3 returned to duty), light damage to two 155th aircraft and one 281st aircraft, 2 vehicles, and 2 PA&E generators. Casualty report from 155th, four individuals received fragmentation wounds during an 82mm mortar attack: SP4 C. Peraza, SP4 D. Miller, PFC E. Leverett, and PVT S. Tverbut.
- 30 Oct 69 – CPT Giordano of 155th reported gunship 232 shot down, negative casualties. Aircraft is secure at Oasis.
- 30 Oct 69 – SP McChesney of 155th called in a hit report on UH-1C's 739, 231, and 504. All aircraft received minor damage but 739 had one casualty; crew chief received minor cuts and abrasions.
- 03 Nov 69 – SP4 McChesney of 155th reported aircraft 232 received 6 or more rounds .30 cal, impact area top left engine compartment. Classified AO. Aircraft caught fire and exploded shortly after touchdown. Negative casualties occurred, aircraft was destroyed.
- 04 Nov 69 – Three 155 personnel MIA on overdue 192nd slick: Medaris, Payne, and Bauer.
- 10 Nov 69 – SP4 McChesney of 155th reported the 155th had just received 30-40 rounds of 82 mm mortar: six buildings hit, five WIA (3 slight, 2 moderate). One enemy KIA, an AK-47 and several satchel charges of C4-type were captured.
- 22 Nov 69 – SSG Fetter of 155th reported UH-1C 504 received combat damage; negative casualties, minor damage.



Jim Askren & "The Hunter"

SSG Fetter of 155th reported UH-1C 739 received combat damage resulting in minor damage and CP received one round in left leg.

25 Nov 69 – SP McChesney of 155th gave report of combat damage to aircraft 328 (UH-1H). Minor damage and 1 casualty, incident occurred 1345 hours.

SP McChesney of 155th reported aircraft 512 (UH-1C) received large number of enemy rounds (exact number unknown at time of report). Negative injuries, damage unknown.

SP McChesney of 155th reported Camp Coryell received 10-12 rounds of 82mm mortar fire outside perimeter. Four injuries occurred to guards on perimeter, 3 were medevaced and 1 returned to duty. Negative damage to A/C, structures, or equipment.

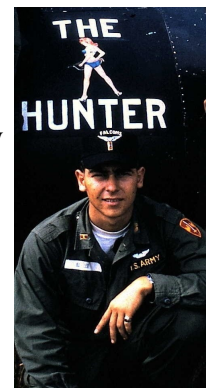
28 Nov 69 – SP4 Karaffa of 155th reported 47th Regt aircraft 620 (UH-1H) received four hits. Minor damage to aircraft, co-pilot wounded in back, evacuated.

01 Dec 69 – SGT Bradley, Vag Fwd, reported that 155th sent 1 slick and 2 gunships in support of Med-Evac for crash of Air Force jet near Bu Prang.

04 Dec 69 – SGT Fetter of 155th reported aircraft 328 (UH-1H) received unknown amount of fire vicinity Duc Lap while working for 45th Regt. A/C damage unknown, co-pilot seriously wounded in leg.

12 Jan 70 – SST Fetter of 155th reported aircraft working for B-23 received enemy fire. A/C 455 received 5 hits with moderate damage to A/C with pilot receiving injury in right leg from shrapnel. A/C 318 received 10 hits with moderate damage and negative casualties.

13 Jan 70 – SP Harris of 155th reported two UH-1C received combat damage near Ben Het. A/C 518



Jack Kottler & "The Hunter"

rec 9 rounds with moderate damage and negative injuries; A/C 512 received 1 round with minor damage and negative injuries.

- 23 Feb 70 – 155th gunship - A/C 518 down near Nha Trang, status of crew unknown. Ship on Recondo mission. There is a recovery ship from the Recondo team there trying to make recovery.
- 06 Mar 70 – CPT Eagle, S3, called to give B-23 mission to 155th and tell them to take whatever pilots they have and pull that mission. Have them tell B-23 that pilots will be inexperienced and to plan the mission accordingly. ACTION TAKEN: 155th notified. MAJ Luisi notified to take B-23 mission and fly whatever pilots he has. MAJ Luisi said that he has no AC or PIC pilots and will have to fly two Peter Pilots together. Says this is against his better judgment and his safety program. Recommends that the COL be informed about this mission.
- 08 Mar 70 – SGT Fetter of 155th reported A/C 540 crashed 2 miles north of Duc Lap along the road. Six pax and crew of four; 9 KIA and 1 passenger WIA.
- 26 Mar 70 – SP4 Harris of 155th reported A/C 568 took 7 hits, crew chief took shrapnel in leg, minor damage to A/C.
- 30 Mar 70 – SP4 Karaffa of 155th reported A/C 512 crashed at Boun Ho, one crew member trapped under the wreckage. A/C destroyed, negative further information at this time.
- 01 Apr 70 – SP Karaffa of 155th, two gunships working for troop move to Gia Nghia received rounds (#231 and #739), crewmember on 231 took 2 rounds in leg. Both A/C are flying back to BMT.
- 11 Apr 70 – SGT Fetter of 155th, two A/C (073 and 064) took hits, no casualties and the extent of damage is not known at this time. Both A/C are secure at Pleiku.
- 20 Apr 70 – SGT Fetter of 155th, Tac-E declared by COL Lindsey of B-50. The 155th has had an aircraft shot down, they don't know the tail number or any other info at this time. 155th pulled the following aircraft: slicks; A/C 332 Darlac Province, 060 8th C&C; guns; 077 and 442 working Sniffer.

SGT Fetter of 155th, A/C 254 had a severe blade strike and went down intact with no further damage at Ban Don. A/C 328 was shot down and the aircraft was destroyed by Air Force guns. The crew has been removed and no one was injured.

SP Edwards of 155th, A/C 254 suffered no damage on blade strike. A/C 328 at 1245 took .30 cal hits and B-40 in tail boom.

A/C 325 from 155th was shot down at ZZ0000 (*classified AO*) with pilot and co-pilot MIA. Other 2 crew members were rescued. 155th thinks A/C burned, but are not sure of the destruction of it.

- 26 May 70 – SGT Fetter of 155th reported A/C 310 working for 8th Cav shot down and totally destroyed. Pilot received head injuries, co-pilot back injuries, crew chief nose, gunner chin injuries.

These are from records found in the National Archives. We'd love to know more about any/all of the above incidents. If you can add ANY details, please contact the 155 AHCA Historian.

OF NOTE: Several of the photos in this Barb show BMT Hueys with names. John Brennan (a Huey crew chief in Vietnam) is putting together a book about helicopters with names in Vietnam, and these are some of the photos we sent him.

COVER PHOTO & SONG: “One Toke Over the Line,” dedicated to the guys in the Sheet Metal Shop. Thanks to Jim Ferris for sending this picture. Can anyone tell us about this slick?

155 AHCA officers are:

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