



The Ban Me Thuot Barb

Newsletter of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company and All Units Serving at Camp Coryell; Central Highlands, II Corps, South Vietnam 1965—1971

START PLANNING— Next year, in November, we'll have our reunion in the Atlanta area . I hope to see each and everyone of you there. If you have an idea for a great place in the area for our reunion, send me an eMail with the information and I'll pass it on to Bob Goolsby, the reunion point man.

Matt (ceilmatt@frontier.com)

9/11 — WE REMEMBER

We remember those killed 9/11/2001 in the Twin Towers in New York, in the crash of Flight 93 in Pennsylvania, and at the Pentagon; military and civilian. We remember all those men and women who have died in the service of their country in Iraq and Afghanistan. **We'll never forget.**

Subject: Huey

(This is the speech given at Ft. Rucker when they retired the last Huey: CW4 Lawrence Castagneto, 17 May 2011)

As a Vietnam Veteran Army Aviator, I would like to thank everyone for coming to this special occasion, on this, to be honest, very sad day, the end of an era - an era that has spanned over 50 years; the retirement of this grand old lady, "OUR MOTHER" the Huey.

I would like to thank, Major General Crutchfield for allowing me to speak at this event and try to convey in my own inadequate, meager way what this aircraft means to me and so many other Vietnam veterans.

First a few facts:

It was 48 years ago this month that the first Huey arrived in Vietnam with units that were to become part of the 145th and the 13th Combat Aviation Battalions; both units assigned here at Ft. Rucker today. While in Vietnam, the Huey flew approximately 7,457,000 combat assault sorties; 3,952,000 attack or gunship sorties and 3,548,000 cargo supply sorties. That comes to over 15 million sorties flown over the paddies and jungles of 'Nam, not to include the millions of sorties flown all over the world and other combat zones since then what an amazing journey. I am honored and humbled to have been a small part of that journey.

To those in the crowd that have had the honor to fly, crew, or ride this magnificent machine in combat, we are the

chosen few, the lucky ones. They understand what this aircraft means and how hard it is for me to describe my feelings about her as a Vietnam combat pilot for she is alive, has a life of her own, and has been a life-long friend.

How do I break down in a few minutes a 42 year love affair, she is as much a part of me and to so many others, as the blood that flows through our veins. Try to imagine all those touched over the years by the shadow of her blades.

Other aircraft can fly overhead and some will look up and some may not even recognize what they see but, when a Huey flies over everyone looks up and everyone knows who she is - young or old all over the world - she connects with all.

To those that rode her into combat, the sound of those blades causes our heart beat to rise and breaths to quicken in anticipation of seeing that beautiful machine fly overhead and the feeling of comfort she brings. No other aircraft in the history of aviation evokes the emotional response the Huey does; combat veteran or not, she is recognized all around the world by young and old, she is the ICON of the Vietnam war, U.S. Army Aviation, and the U.S. Army. Over 5 decades of service, she carried Army Aviation on her back, from bird dogs and piston powered helicopters with a secondary support mission, to the force multiplier combat arm that Army Aviation is today.

Even the young aviators of today that are mainly Apache pilots, Blackhawk pilots, etc., that have had a chance to fly

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her will tell you there is no greater feeling, honor, or thrill than to be blessed with the opportunity to ride her through the sky - they may love their Apaches and Blackhawks but they will say there is no aircraft like flying the Huey - "it is special".

There are two kinds of helicopter pilots: those that have flown the Huey and those that wish they could have.

The intense feelings generated for this aircraft are not just from the flight crews but, also from those who rode in back into and out of the "devils caldron". As paraphrased here from "Gods own lunatics", Joe Galloway's tribute to the Huey and her flight crews and other Infantry veterans' comments:

Is there anyone here today who does not thrill to the sound of those Huey blades?? That familiar whop-whop-whop is the soundtrack of our war, the lullaby of our younger days; it is burned into our brains and our hearts. To those who spent their time in 'Nam as a grunt know that noise was always a great comfort. Even today when I hear it, I stop, catch my breath, and search the sky for a glimpse of the mighty eagle.

To the pilots and crews of that wonderful machine, we loved you, we loved that machine. No matter how bad things were, if we called you came - down through the hail of green tracers and other visible signs of a real

bad day off to a bad start. I can still hear the sound of those blades churning the fiery sky. To us you seemed beyond brave and fearless. Down you would come to us in the middle of battle in those flimsy thin-skin chariots into the storm of fire and hell; we feared for you, we were awed by you. We thought of you and that beautiful bird as "God's own lunatics" and wondered ... who are these men and this machine and where do they come from. Have to be "Gods Angels".

So with that I say to her, that beautiful lady sitting out there, from me and all my lucky brothers that were given the honor to serve their country, and the privilege of flying this great lady in skies of Vietnam - thank you for the memories. Thank you for always being there. Thank you for always bringing us home regardless of how beat up and shot up you were, Thank You!!!!

You will never be forgotten, we loved you then, we love you now and will love you till our last breath.

And as the sun sets today, if you listen quietly and closely you will hear that faint whop-whop-whop of our mother speaking to all her children past and present who rode her into history in a blaze of glory she will be saying to them: I am here, I will always be here with you.

I am at peace and so should you be ... and so should you be.

VINH SON ORPHANAGE

My name is Pat Leary. I served with the 189th AHC at Camp Holloway (Pleiku) in 1968, Avenger III. Since 2008 I have become associated with a group of guys who also served in the Central Highlands, various units, various times. We have an organization called Friends of Vinh Son Orphanage. We are a tax exempt 501(c)3 organization. We support 750 Montagnard orphans in Kontum and Pleiku. Please see our WEB site www.FriendsofVSO.org

I would like to make all the members of the 155th aware of who we are and what we are doing. If you or any of your members would like to know more about what we are doing we would be more than happy to share more. I am fortunate that I have the opportunity to visit Pleiku and Kontum 1-2 times a year. The kids are delightful and the work is most rewarding. Your support would be most appreciated. Thanks guys.

Pat Leary
189th AHC
Avenger III (1968)



CHRISTMAS DINNER 1966

Got this from Mike Borer. He didn't remember much of anything. Would love to hear from anyone who can add details.

HEADQUARTERS
1ST AVIATION BRIGADE
APO San Francisco 96307

GENERAL ORDERS
NUMBER 3182

"NGUY HIEM"

6 July 1967

AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL FOR HEROISM

1. TC 320. The following AWARDS are announced.

Awarded: Air Medal (First Oak Leaf Cluster) with "V" Device..... Section I
Air Medal (Seventh Oak Leaf Cluster) with "V" Device.... Section II
Air Medal (Thirteenth Oak Leaf Cluster) with "V" Device. Section III

Date action: 21 March 1967

Theater: Republic of Vietnam

Reason: For heroism while engaged in aerial flight in connection with military operations against a hostile force: These men distinguished themselves by heroic actions on 21 March 1967, in the Republic of Vietnam, during the recovery of a downed aircraft and crew. An armed helicopter assigned to their unit had gone down as a result of enemy ground fire and was located in a landing zone in a classified area which was under attack by a superior enemy force and an immediate extraction was necessary. Fully cognizant of the dangers involved, they volunteered to assist in the extraction of the downed aircraft and crew. Information as to location and the existing situation was very limited because of the classified nature of the mission. During the extraction of the downed aircraft, they assisted in the location of enemy positions from which they were receiving automatic weapons fire. As soon as the disabled aircraft was removed from the landing zone, it became apparent that due to weight limitations, two more aircraft would be needed to extract six American personnel and the armament from the downed aircraft. Although the original mission of the aircraft was command and control, they volunteered to enter the landing zone to extract the men and equipment. Their actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon themselves, their unit and the United States Army.

Authority: By direction of the President under the provisions of Executive Order 9158, 11 May 1942, as amended by Executive Order 9242-A, 11 September 1942 and United States Army Vietnam Message 16695 dated 1 July 1966.

Section I

AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL WITH "V" DEVICE (FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

BAUCOM, MICHAEL R. PRIVATE FIRST CLASS E3 USA
155th Aslt Hel Co, APO 96297
McDOUGHL, VINCENT M. SPECIALIST FOUR E4 USA
155th Aslt Hel Co, APO 96297

Section II

AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL WITH "V" DEVICE (SEVENTH OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

BORER, MICHAEL A. PRIVATE FIRST CLASS E3 USA
155th Aslt Hel Co, APO 96297

If you can provide Mike Borer information on this, his contact information is:
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Temecula, CA 92591
Home Phone: 951-695-3630 Cell Phone: 919-519-1707

Medal Of Honor Nomination Proceedings

Les Davison

Some time back a *Barb* had the story of LZ Kate, a fire base near Bu Prang that was besieged in the fall of '69. When they could hold out no longer, a few US and a couple hundred Yards went into the jungle – and most all of them made it to Bu Prang. The guy who led them out was CPT William Albracht.

Apparently Albracht never got recognition (i.e., a medal). Now there's a move to nominate him for the **MOH**. Dean Owen, Ken Donovan, and I all wrote statements regarding our participation.

Statement concerning the night resupply mission to LZ Kate on 31 October 1969.

This statement is written at the request of Mr. Ken Moffett, Veterans Affairs Representative for Congressman Bobby Schilling, in support of the ongoing awards review for then CPT William Albracht relating to his action at LZ Kate.

During the period June 1969 to December 1969 I was assigned as the Commanding Officer of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC), which was stationed at Ban Me Thuot, Republic of Vietnam.

In the fall of 1969 the NVA/VC mounted a large offensive in the Duc Lap/Bu Prang area. During the months of September and October the 155th had flown several missions in support of the Bu Prang Special Forces camp and the ARVN forces in the area. On the evening of 31 October I was called to the District Headquarters in Ban Me Thuot, and was briefed on the dire tactical situation at LZ Kate, which was an artillery fire base supporting the Bu Prang camp. The LZ was surrounded by enemy forces and plans were being made to evacuate it. It was clear that the situation in LZ Kate was very grave as the 155th AHC was tasked to conduct an emergency night resupply mission for the purpose of providing small arms ammunition to the occupants. Night operations were very unusual and hazardous because all of the night vision aids now in the military inventory were not yet available to helicopter crews.

The helicopter assets used for the mission were five UH-1H helicopters and four UH-1C gunships. I was flight lead for the resupply aircraft with WO James Abbott as the pilot. WO Les Davison was the flight lead for the armed aircraft. Because of the difficulty in making an unassisted night landing our plan was to approach to a hover then have two Special Forces soldiers in the rear quickly unload the cases of ammunition.

When we established radio contact with the friendly forces in the LZ it appeared that the leadership on the ground was organized and professional and we were given the most recent information available concerning the position of enemy troops and gun emplacements. The gunships provided suppressive covering fire to the resupply ships and we completed the mission without losing an aircraft or sustaining injury to any of the crewmembers.

It is my understanding that under the leadership of Captain Albracht the evacuation of LZ Kate was successfully accomplished

Dean M. Owen

Colonel (Retired) USA

Statement Concerning LZ Kate

Submitted by: Les Davison

I am writing this statement at the request of Mr. Ken Moffett, Veterans Affairs Representative for Congressman Bobby Schilling, in support of the ongoing Awards review for then-CPT William Albracht relating to his actions at LZ Kate.

In Oct/Nov 1969, I was a US Army helicopter gunship pilot (WO1) assigned to the 155th Assault Helicopter Company, based at Ban Me Thuot, Republic of Vietnam. I participated in several flights in the area of LZ Kate (FSB Kate) near the Bu Prang Special Forces camp in the II Corps Military Region. I do remember two specific flights, described below.

On 30 Oct 69, I led a team of two UH-1C gunships escorting two CH-47 Chinooks into LZ Kate. The first Hook got in and out OK, but the second took several hits on its approach. My gunship also was hit by enemy fire during the

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action.

On the night of 31 Oct/1 Nov, I led a flight of four UH-1C gunships escorting five 155th AHC slicks on an emergency night resupply mission into LZ Kate.

I have no direct knowledge of events on the ground at or near LZ Kate, but the following may be pertinent. A night mission, as flown by the 155th to resupply LZ Kate, was very unusual. In fact, it was the only company-sized operation conducted during total darkness during my tour. We had no night vision equipment, no GPS, no radar altimeters, nor were Nav aids available. We used FM radio homing to fly to the area, located the LZ by sighting a strobe light, and approached and hovered to the strobe to drop the ammo. In plain English, the helicopters and crews were at considerable risk in conducting this mission - but the risks were considered acceptable because the situation at LZ Kate was so desperate.

Les Davison
21 Jun 2011

Ken Donovan
4185 Baudelaire Ct
Brooksville Fl. 34604
352 345 4778

To: United States Army Awards Review Board
From: LTC Ken Donovan, US Army Retired

Reference: Actions of Capt. William Albracht at LZ Kate, Republic of Viet Nam 1969.

I am writing this statement at the request of Mr. Ken Moffett Veterans Affairs Representative, Congressman Bobby Schilling, in support of the ongoing Awards review for then Capt William Albracht for his actions at LZ Kate.

I served as a Warrant Officer pilot with the 155 Assault Helicopter Company, Ban Me Thuot South Viet Nam from October 1968 until December 1969. As the closest helicopter unit to the Bu Prang/LZ Kate area I and my unit were heavily involved in sustained combat operations from September-December 1969 in and around the entire LZ Kate area. I would rate the 155 AHC as a very experienced combat unit when the battle started based on the direct mission support we provided to MACSOG/Command and Control South flying Special Forces recon teams across the border into Cambodia starting in January 1969.

By the end of my combat tour in December 1969 I would look back on the battle in and around LZ Kate as the most significant battle of my tour. I base this on the amount of daily combat I experienced flying in the LZ Kate tactical area, the number of aircraft lost, and the number of aircraft hit by enemy ground fire on a daily basis.

The battle of Bu Prang/LZ Kate started with the buildup of a large number of NVA forces that moved across the border starting in Aug/Sep of 1969. In addition to a large number of infantry units, the NVA also deployed heavy artillery, and a large number of anti-aircraft positions to include 12.7MM and 37mm guns. The sheer number of enemy troops resulted in a number of losses of personnel and aircraft. It was not uncommon to come under fire from everything from small arms to heavy artillery on a daily basis. Information contained in the 155th unit history clearly shows that the area in and around LZ Kate was a very lethal combat environment which required a high level of tactical discipline and leadership if you were to survive.

My direct personal involvement with LZ Kate came on the night of Oct 30-31st 1969 when the 155th AHC was tasked to resupply LZ Kate with badly needed ammunition due to the fact that aircraft had not been able to resupply LZ Kate during daylight. The mission package included five (5) slicks and four (4) gunships. Four (4) slick would make the resupply at night escorted by Falcon gunships with the remaining slick as command/control and recovery if required.

Ammunition was loaded at Ban Me Thuot East Airfield and two (2) Special Forces personnel would "kick out" the ammo during the aircraft's approach to LZ Kate. I was chalk 4 - the last aircraft in the formation of resupply aircraft. We approached LZ Kate in a loose trail formation, and made our approaches to a strobe light buried in the ground. We were

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able to successfully complete the resupply mission and returned to Ban Me Thuot. I left for R&R the next day. I would later learn the 155th would conduct another night Combat Air Assault carrying a Mike Force Company to assist in the escape and evasion of LZ Kate personnel.

When I was informed of this upon my return to the unit I was amazed that Capt Albracht was able to evade just due to the number of NVA troops in and around LZ Kate. The fact he was successful with as few losses that occurred is clearly a testament to his tactical skills and leadership. I would continue to fly combat mission in the LZ Kate/Bu Prang area for another month until the end of my combat tour in December of 1969.

I was to learn a number of years later that due to some type of administrative error that Capt Albracht had received no formal recognition for his actions and leadership during the battle of LZ Kate. I strongly believe that based on the level, intensity and length of combat at LZ Kate this is clearly an injustice that should be corrected by the Army at its earliest opportunity.

LTC Ken Donovan US Army Retired
155 Assault Helicopter Company

Christmas, 1966

by Bill Atkinson

In December 1966, I was commander of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company Viet Nam. The 155th had its own base camp located outside Ban Me Thout, we actually were living and working about eighty miles from our Battalion HQ which was located at Pleiku.

Also located close to our base camp was a Missionary organization that had been working in Viet Nam for 57 years. I became aware, and was introduced to them while I was in the Advisory group also located in Ban Me Thout. My friend and his family had been in Vietnam for 7 years with one year off to visit the States. Members of his organization were given PX privileges by the Advisory Group and most of their purchases were canned foods and perhaps hair spray. They also performed Church services for the advisory Group and the 155th almost every week. Their homes were typical "American Style", two stories with large yards, located on the south west approach to the city and easily recognizable from the air.

In August, 1966, I was invited to a dinner at one of their homes, given in Major Joe Parlas's honor upon his departure from his assignment as Commander of 155th. My notes say on that day there were four men with wives, several nurses (all missionaries) and a total of fifteen children at the gathering. There were a couple more men of the missionary group who were on trips somewhere. I don't remember any of the names, but the Missionaries names were mentioned in the book on Special Operations in Viet Nam, "SOG", written by John L. Plaster, must have been in the group that day.

Earlier in the year, we had installed a swimming pool in the 155th compound and the Missionaries were given a blanket invitation to come by for a swim. They took us up on the offer during the Christmas holidays when their college age children returned home from school. The group included several young ladies and were always chaperoned by one

of the mothers. In one of my conversations with the mothers, they expressed their gratitude and complemented me on the behavior of our men who acted like gentlemen on every occasion. But what would you expect from 155 Team. I was invited to their homes often and was also given a farewell dinner in late February, 1967.

On the Thursday night before Christmas, 1966, the Missionaries presented a pageant with the Montagnard children depicting the Christmas theme and the birth of Christ. All the words were in RADE, the Montagnard language to include the carols and hymns. The age of the children was 7 to 12 years and everything was done from memory. Each child received a bag of candy plus cokes and donuts. After we installed the swimming pool, the Missionaries were given a blanket invitation to come by for a swim. They took us up on the offer during the Christmas holidays when their college age children returned. The group included several young ladies and were always chaperoned by one of the mothers. In one of my conversations with the mothers, they expressed their gratitude and complemented me on the behavior of our men who acted like gentlemen on every occasion. But what would you expect from one of the 155 Team.

SATURDAY, CHRISTMAS EVE. I gave a Troop Information class at 0745, officers call at 0830 and at 0900 the Province Chief and his party arrived. In addition to the Chief, there were 25 men and 25 young college age girls. The Province Chief presented the company a beautiful plaque and the young ladies handed out souvenir handkerchiefs to everyone present. There were speeches which we heard explained by an interpreter and I made a short acceptance speech. We adjourned to the Mess Hall for cake and coffee. This group left at 1015 and a group from the orphanage arrived at 1100. Santa Claus arrived by helicopter and we moved to the theater where the children performed a dance. The children received their gifts and the children were taken on a tour of the Corral (our Helicopter

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parking area) where they were allowed into the helicopters. Each child had one of our men with them. At 1230 we gave the visitors, Nuns and children, some lunch, and this group left the compound at 1330. I had a short one hour break and at 1430 the Bn. CO, LTC Smithy, arrived for the official opening of the EM/NCO Club. The ribbon was cut at 1500 hours while standing in a rain shower. A short time later a Montagnard group presented the Club with an enormous crossbow as a symbol of the Central Highlands. Hence the new name for the EM/NCO Club was the Cross Bow Inn. After more speeches, we had free drinks and food. The Senior Army Advisor arrived and spoke a few words to the crowd. The Montagnards gave me a gift which was a cloth used by the women as a skirt, just like the one I had received at the initiation. The dignitaries and guests left while the band played on at the Cross Bow Inn. The men danced with some local women that had been invited. The ladies left at 1800 and my comment was that I was pleased with the way our troops behaved. They had let their "hair down", treated the female guests like gentlemen and only had a few arguments. The joint EM/NCO Club seemed to be working fine.

The officers had a party after the Cross Bow Inn ceremony and cooked steak over charcoal accompanied by punch, shrimp and sauce. Our friend from USAID was invited along with two American ladies who were from a voluntary organization teaching the Montagnards. There was much singing and music until the curfew hour of 2230 when all the guests had to leave. The singing continued all over the compound and a few brave souls crashed the pool. They swam around in the dark and I decided to let them have light. After the lights came on they apparently sobered up, or they didn't want to be identified, and they left the pool. It was a cold night and the wind was up a bit when they decided on a swim. We had no problems except probably headaches and sore throats; however, the Advisory Group had one man go berserk and they called upon the good old 155 for help. They wanted us to keep him in our "hospital" so he could sleep it off under the security of an MP who they provided. This was done and at 0300 hours all was quiet and I went to bed. Later I found out that Camp Holloway had to use tear gas to break up the Christmas party at

the Enlisted Club which made me even more pleased about our behavior.

Christmas Day 1966. Christmas day schedule was light compared to the day before Christmas. We had a few flight missions and after they departed, we had lunch by the pool with a big dinner at 1630. Colonel Marr, the Advisory Commander, came by to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and joined us for lunch by the pool. LTC Smithy joined us for our great Christmas dinner. We had a number of guests for dinner. In addition to the Missionaries, we had four ladies from the Red Cross at Camp Holloway. The Red Cross ladies joined in the fun by the pool, volleyball and helped in the serving line for dinner. Since the events of the day lasted longer than the ladies had planned, the Medic's "Hotel" was offered to them for the night. They agreed and the evening passed with no problems, except their clothing. They were not prepared for the cool evening but several of us offered clean flight suits and jackets to keep them warm. As usual when I was in camp, I decided to tour the guard posts and walk the grounds. The lady that had my clothes asked if she could accompany me and I agreed. I knew this would cause some stir and once the first guard post was "inspected by a lady", all would be alerted immediately, so we chose the bunker nearest the Officers area. The guards did their thing, "HALT WHO GOES THERE" when they heard footsteps approaching. I had coached the lady on how to respond and she did with a truly feminine voice, "IT'S ME." There was a definite pause in the response as if the guards were totally caught "off guard." Then the response in a strong voice, "Advance and be recognized." I am sure they got ribbed by their friends afterwards when they went off duty. We toured all the guard posts and the guard towers which took some time because each post wanted to talk with an American lady. I wonder if this story is repeated over and over to children and grandchildren, the "RED CROSS INSPECTION OF THE GUARD".

And so ends this 1966 Christmas episode of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam.

Bill Atkinson

E-Mail: stagecoach6@msn.com

Updates:

Check out the web page (<http://www.155thahc.com/>) Guest Book to keep up with what is going on with our buds. Several of our guys have serious health issues—please remember our Ban Me Thuot brothers in your prayers.

Elizabeth Coward (Wayne Coward's better half) is working on recreating the web page—a whole lot of pictures and stories means a whole lot of hard work by Elizabeth—many thanks Elizabeth. Guys if you have more pictures and stories please send them to me (ESPECIALLY the stories for future **Barb** content) and I'll pass them on to Elizabeth.



Pool dedication ceremony — 1966

155th AHC Association
c/o L. Matthews
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Durham, NC 27712