



BAN ME THUOT BARB



Remembering the 155th AHC and all the BMT guys - Feb 2012

23 May 69 was a bad day west of Ban Me Thuot. This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of five brave young men who answered the call to duty, and made the ultimate sacrifice.

Howard S. Hill, 5th Special Forces Group, CCS, RT Saw

Rudolph G. Machata, 5th Special Forces Group, CCS, RT Saw

Santiago V. E. Quintana, 155th AHC, Stagecoach 392

Armando Ramirez, 155th AHC, Stagecoach 392

Philip W. Strout, 5th Special Forces Group, CCS, RT Saw



Duty Officer's Log, 10th Combat Aviation Battalion

23 May 1969, Dong Ba Thin, RVN (*excerpt*)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Incidents, Messages, Orders, etc.</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>
1540 hours	CPT Giordano 155 reported 2 slicks 392 & 332 badly shot up. One believed at Duc Lap and one down in restricted area. No word on crew.	Authorized guns from L-19 for use.
1605 hours	CPT Timmerman of Group MCC said to take 0/2 off L-19 (BMT) and commit for C&C South.	Notified 155 Opns
1800 hours	Received casualty report from the 155 th AHC. The following two individuals of the 155 th AHC were killed while on a classified mission: SP5 Armando Ramirez, RA##### and PFC Santiago Quintana, RA#####. WO1 Jerome Green, W#####, received a deep laceration under his chin in the same crash. Incident occurred at 1500 hours.	Notified 17 th CAG.
2145 hours	Received casualty report from the 155 th AHC. SP4 Daniel G. Weidner, RA##### received a lacerated left upper arm and dislocated shoulder while on a classified recovery mission. Incident occurred at 1500 hours.	Notified 17 th CAG.

20th Special Operations Squadron (*USAF Green Hornets*)

Historical Report: 1 April - 30 June 1969 (*excerpt*)

23 May 1969: A reconnaissance team well into enemy territory reported they had captured a POW (it later turned out they had captured two) and desired to be brought back to their FOL. Upon arrival at the pick-up area there was no ground fire, but the clearing was not satisfactory for a landing. Rope ladders were

deployed, and the team came aboard. As the slick, an Army UH-1H, attempted to leave the clearing it either received ground fire or had inadequate power to climb with its 13-man load. It struck trees and crashed on its side, pinning and killing three under the wreckage - one American, one indigenous team member, and one of the POW's. Slick 2 dropped off its medic and was forced to depart the area due to ground fire and numerous hits on the aircraft. Gun 3 hovered near the crash site and lowered a PRC-25 radio on a gunner's belt. Slick 3 attempted to rescue some of those on the ground but was driven away when one of their gunners was wounded. After refueling and re-arming, Guns 3 and 4 returned and saturated hostile positions with rockets. Army slicks evacuated some of the downed people under Army gunbird coverage, and the 20th SOS gunbirds provided cover for a med-evac helicopter which was receiving ground fire while hoisting out a wounded man. Eventually all living personnel were evacuated, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to destroy the aircraft. Needless to say, this is a much abbreviated account of the action.



NOTE: Slick helicopters referred to in 21 through 23 May were Army UH-1H's filling in for our own slicks which were being utilized for much-needed training flights in the Nha Trang area.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: Richmond Stephens, Stagecoach Pilot

I had been in-country almost 2 months, flying Peter Pilot with the 2nd Flight Platoon. On 23 May 69, I was flying with Alan MacGinnity; we were one of four Stagecoach slicks assigned to the B-50 (CCS) mission that day.

A team was in contact, and we flew west from Duc Lap to extract them. When we arrived over their location, they had broken contact, but advised that the bad guys weren't far behind. There was no PZ nearby, so we would pull them at a high hover while they climbed the ladders installed in each slick. I've forgotten how many were in the team, but the plan was for the team to be pulled out on two ships. Jerry Green and Rick Menzel, flying Stagecoach 392, went in first. 392 was the strongest ship we had, and Green thought he could take the whole team . . . so they climbed the ladders into the ship. When all were aboard, 392 started to lift up and forward. As soon as it moved forward, it began settling back into the trees. I could see the fuselage sliding among the trees while the rotor was still above the treetops – then the horizontal stabilizer hit a tree and pulled the tail boom off. The ship immediately started spinning, and I could see people flying out as it spun. Then it went into the trees and crashed.

As the second pick-up ship, we immediately descended to hover over the crash site. Unfortunately, we could see very little under the trees. We hovered around, and found a nearby spot that allowed us to hover down in the trees, but still couldn't see anything. Our Crew Chief, Ernie Plummer, volunteered to go down to look for the crash site, and Mac said OK. Ernie unhooked his M-60, draped a couple ammo belts over his shoulder, and climbed down the ladder. We had no comms with him; that's the last we saw of him.

After that, we just hovered in place, waiting. We had been hovering for five to ten minutes when we suddenly took heavy fire from about 4 or 5 o'clock. Rounds flew through the cockpit and into the instrument panel. We immediately pulled pitch and departed. As we did so, the transmission oil pressure zeroed. Leaving the area, it took us a while to figure out why no one could talk to or hear Mac; a round had hit and severed his mike cord right at his helmet. Communication was difficult; I had to handle the radio communications, and relay info to and from him by shouting.

With no trans oil pressure, we wanted to land as soon as possible. We soon spotted an open area, and set up an approach . . . but on short final we saw bunkers, so decided to move on. I remember punching the time clock at that point. Our approach to the next open area was greeted with ground fire, so we decided to fly some more. In the next open area we saw concrete bunkers! And that's how it went, all the way to Duc Lap. We desperately wanted to land, but several potential landing sites showed bunkers or we actually drew fire. When we touched down on the ramp at Duc Lap, we had been flying without transmission oil for twenty-two minutes.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: Jeff Schrader, Falcon Pilot

I have a mental block on most of the happenings that day. I do remember getting shot at heavily and taking rounds. I remember flying low level down a tree-lined road with hootches on a sharp right at the end of this road and that is where we were drawing most of the fire. The best approach to fire on these hootches was directly down this road. The trees were too high to form a daisy chain, climb to altitude, and dive into this target. We were so low and in tight that we could actually see the muzzle flashes as we turned to go around. I remember thinking, "Thank God for Crew Chiefs and Door Gunners!" as they suppressed fire from the enemy as we turned out and were most vulnerable.

I do remember talking to Ken Donovan on the radio that day, the FAC, and feeling the loss of our fellow Stagecoachers. I know everyone did what they could that day to get every man out. It was sad when we realized that we didn't get all of our guys out.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: Ken Donovan, Stagecoach Pilot

We had just inserted a team and had returned to Duc Lap to refuel. Jerry Green and Alan "Mac" McGinnity were already topped off when we got the call from the FAC that another team had captured a POW and needed to be extracted. Since I was still refueling, they said they would make the pick-up and I should stay with the backup set of Air Force gunships.

A short time later we received word that an aircraft was down and we scrambled. As we were climbing out and heading toward the border, we could hear Richmond Stephen's (Mac's Peter Pilot) on the radio. Mac's helmet cord had been shot off, so he couldn't communicate. Stephens indicated that their aircraft had been hit in the transmission and they were losing trans oil pressure. At one point the oil pressure dropped to zero! They were trying to make it out of the area before they went down. I also heard that their C/E, Ernie Plummer, had gone down a rope ladder to help get any survivors out. (I still believe that Plummer should have gotten the CMH for his actions that day.)

We arrived in the area of Green's aircraft. I approached and had to hover over the crash site due to 75 - 100 foot tall trees. I could see some movement on the ground. As I brought the aircraft to a hover we started to take really heavy automatic weapons fire. The bad guys really lit the place up, and the aircraft took a large number of hits. It was at this time that my Crew Chief, SP4 Dan Weidner, was hit bad in the left arm. We immediately pulled out of the area and headed back toward Duc Lap. The Door Gunner, SP4 Dave Clements, did a great job of first aid on Weidner, he pretty much stopped the bleeding.

Continued Below

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: Dan Weidner, Stagecoach Crew Chief

When I first got to Ban Me Thuot, I was assigned to the Maintenance Platoon. We had a good bunch of guys, and the job was important - but it just wasn't for me. I wanted some excitement - so I was reassigned as a 2nd Platoon Door Gunner. With my maintenance training, I soon became a Crew Chief.

My last mission I know there was some secrecy involved. Mr. Donovan was the A/C that day and, if I remember right, we were doing something in Cambodia - and we were really not supposed to be there. So be it. Anyway, I remember we received a call that one of our ships was just shot down. I believe we were the closest ship to where it happened, so we changed course and headed to where the trouble was, hoping that we could rescue the survivors. I believe we were still in Cambodia, but I'm not sure. I started to get a little nervous/scared. If one ship was already down, what would stop Charlie from shooting down another?

Anyway, when we got to the scene it was pretty thick with jungle foliage; thick stuff, with tall trees. I remember seeing part of the downed helicopter, but it was difficult to spot anybody. The thickness of the brush prevented us from landing anyplace. All we could do was hover at treetop level and look down for signs of survivors. Finally one of the downed pilots was spotted, I think it was Mr. Green. Mr. Donovan told me to drop a rope down to him. I did that, but the rope got caught in a tree. I pulled it up, told the

pilot to move just a bit, then threw the rope down again. Next thing I knew we were receiving ground fire. It happened so quick - my left arm near the elbow was hit and it knocked me on my back. It really hurt, felt like it was on fire - similar to bumping your crazy bone really hard against something. As I fell back, I saw blood spraying around because of the wind from the rotors. I yelled out that I had been hit, the pilots turned and saw me on my back, and they took off out of the area. Dave Clements (Door Gunner) gave me first aid, to stop the bleeding and treat me for shock. He did a great job bandaging me up. It seemed like a long ride, but eventually I was brought to some kind of medical facility. After a while I was transported to another facility, not sure where, might have been Cam Ranh Bay.

The next part was tough. I don't remember too much (I must have passed out for a while), but I remember laying on a gurney. I raised my head to look around and I saw at least a half dozen body bags also on gurney's. They were lined up along a wall inside the room I was in. I thought, "Oh my God!" I didn't know if all those bodies were from the crash site I was at, but I assumed they were. "Oh my God!" I consider myself lucky that my arm was in the position that it was, or the bullet that hit me would have traveled right into some part of my torso. Either that, or Charlie was a bad shot. I could just as easily been in one of those body bags.

I think I had preliminary surgery at Cam Ranh Bay. My pilots visited me there, I remember that, and a good buddy, Specialist Hobbs I think his name was. I got a couple letters from Ken Donovan, he also sent me a picture of him sitting in a helicopter - a picture that I will keep forever. He was a good pilot and I'm sure saved all of our lives by getting us to safety. From Cam Ranh I went to Japan for one more surgery, then to Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Colorado for a year of physical therapy. The doctors did a good job putting me back together. I remember seeing an x-ray of the elbow, there were a few bone fragments scattered about. To date, the arm will not straighten out (maybe 140 degrees out of 180), loss of some muscle and strength - but I'm so grateful to be alive.

I will never forget that day. The specifics are fading away with time, but the memory for most of it is still there. At least I am alive to remember it.

Oh, and one more thing. That part about "needing excitement," be careful what you wish for.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: Ken Donovan, Stagecoach Pilot *(continued)*

We dropped Weidner off at Duc Lap to be medevaced. While we were there, I had Dave Clements look over the aircraft as we refueled. He told me, "Sir, there are bullet holes all over the place, but I don't see anything leaking." During that time I also called for additional support from the 155th. A Falcon team responded, I think the lead was CPT Jim Meadows and the trail ship may have been Jeff Schrader. They would arrive in the AO later.

All my instruments were in the green, so we put an SF guy, SP4 Vernon Winters, behind the C/E's gun and headed back to the downed aircraft. While we had been gone, the Air Force gunships had been working the area over. A word about the Air Force Green Hornets – they did a really good job of covering me that day. I remember one had taken hits to the weapons electrical system to the point that their miniguns would not fire and they were out of rockets. As I remember, they started making passes with their M-16's.

We went in a second time, and again received very heavy automatic weapons fire – and more hits. I pulled out and asked the guns to work the area again. The fire was heavy enough that I believe if I had tried to stay, I would have been shot down. At that time I was the only slick in the area, so getting shot down would not have helped anyone. I pulled off to the west to wait for the guns to work out some more. I could hear the Falcons talking to the FAC and we could see them making runs on some bad guys that had been spotted. It was about that time we spotted the guy on a farm tractor heading for the crash site. We shot up the tractor pretty good.

On our third try for a pickup, the survivors had moved to a small clearing about 50 – 100 meters from the downed aircraft. As I remember, my approach was from east to west and I was being covered by the Falcons. People were still shooting at us. We touched down, and the good guys approached us from about the 4 o'clock position, I remember looking over my shoulder a couple of times to see them putting

people on the A/C. Vernon Winters, the SF guy on the CE gun, was shooting the whole time we were on the ground. I called coming out, and then, as they say, "I got the hell out of Dodge". I was pulling the guts out of the A/C all the way back to BMT. We hit some weather on the way back. I called the tower and indicated I had WIA on board, and got a straight-in, down wind approach.

As they were taking everyone off the ship, I shut it down - and all of a sudden I was very tired. I ended up behind the counter in 155 Operations, and they were asking me what happened. SGT Floyd asked if I would like a Coke, I said yes. When I tried to put the can down, my hands started shaking so bad that he was kind enough to take it from my hand and put it down for me. I remember Doc Blair grounded all of us that had been on the mission for 3 days.

I just realized that I haven't mentioned my Peter Pilot. It was Larry Gardner, a new guy, and he stayed calm and did a good job that day.

Looking back on the whole thing thirty years later, my feelings are mixed. I feel bad that we didn't bring Ramirez home. I received a DFC for my actions that day, but don't really consider myself a hero. For me, there was never a choice not to do what we did that day. To leave before we did everything possible to get our guys out was never an option for me, nor do I believe for anyone else who was there that day. I think the big thing that let us do what we did on a daily basis was, no matter what happened, we always knew our buddies would never leave us. It's what let us do great things in really crazy situations. It's also a feeling I have not experienced since my days in the 155th.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: Rick Menzel, Stagecoach Pilot

Why after all these years I was drawn to the 155th website I cannot say. What I found there, as well as at other sites I subsequently searched, was an incomplete record of this incident that affected so many families and loved ones of those that were there that day. For their sake as well as my own need for resolution, I share the following:

THE MISSION: The 5th Special Forces (B50) was stationed at Ban Me Thuot East Field and was initially totally supported in their primary mission of operating secret long range reconnaissance patrols (LRRPs) inside Cambodia by a special squadron of USAF helicopters (UH-1Fs - the Green Hornets) and fixed wing Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft.

The Air Force sustained such heavy helicopter losses that they could no longer support the mission. The 155th was recruited to provide only "slicks" (troop carriers) for the mission and the few remaining Air Force slicks were converted to gunships. In addition to two conventionally mounted seven rocket pods, their gunships were unique in that they had the miniguns mounted on swivels in the doorways and were operated by the crew chief and gunner.

The slicks were rigged with rope ladders and four 75 to 100 foot ropes. The LRRP team wore special web harnesses so they could clip on to the ropes if needed. We had no winches, so when these were used we hovered straight up until the team was above the tree tops before moving forward. Then we had to shoot our approach to an imaginary spot the length of the ropes above the ground when bringing them in. We had several days training using these extraction methods during which they wanted all the air crew members to be on the opposite (LRRP end) of the ladders and ropes. I remember telling them where they could stick it! My job was to fly the damn things, not hang underneath them.

There were some security measures as we did not have the authorization of the Cambodian government to operate within their borders. As I recall we wore unmarked uniforms and were not allowed to carry our dog tags. Apparently it didn't matter that our aircraft were clearly marked!

A typical operation involved the FAC surveying for a landing zone (LZ) from high altitude the day prior to the insertion in the area selected for recon. On the day of the mission, the FAC would brief the aircrews (the insertion slick, a backup slick and two gunships) and the LRRP team comprised of 5 to 7 members. The backup slick and gunships proceeded to a designated staging point near the border as the insertion slick dropped onto the deck to cross into Cambodia where it was directed to the LZ by the FAC. Insertions were not without hazard as we were often overloaded and had only a few seconds as we popped

over the trees to decide whether we could land or needed to abort and proceed to an alternate LZ. On several occasions we had to abort due to enemy fire before the team was inserted. Once the LRRP team was on the ground, the insertion slick joined up with the other aircraft at the staging area. We remained at the staging area from dawn to dusk awaiting a call for extraction while a FAC remained in the air on station near the border. It became readily apparent why the Air Force had lost so many aircraft soon after we took on the mission. Most extractions I was involved with the LRRP team was compromised and under fire.

THE INCIDENT: SP5 Armando Ramirez was the assigned Crew Chief of AC#68-15392. The other usual crew members were CW2 Jerome Green, Aircraft Commander, and PFC Santiago Quintana, Door Gunner. For this mission that began with our insertion of the LRRP team on 05/21/69, I was assigned as co-pilot with less than two months in-country.

I did not know any of the LRRP team members: Philip Strout, Howard Hill, Arthur Dolph and Mark Schneider are listed in the records I viewed. What are missing however are the names of the two or three Vietnamese or Laotian members of the team. I believe there were thirteen on board when we went down but there may have only been twelve.

Mid-afternoon on 05/23/69, while we were on call at the staging area, the LRRP team called in and reported they had captured two POWs and were requesting immediate extraction. They believed they had been compromised and that there was a heavy concentration of enemy near their position. As all aircraft at the staging area scrambled, the FAC proceeded to the LRRP team's position and began attempting to direct them to an LZ. The LRRP team leader determined that they could not make it to a large open area approximately 100 yards from their position and requested a rope ladder extraction. Mr. Green radioed the FAC that for a ladder extraction with the additional weight of the POWs, two aircraft would be required, greatly increasing our vulnerability as only one aircraft could come in at a time. The LRRP team leader seemed to tentatively agree, then called back a few minutes later and reported he had released one POW, could hear enemy movement, and they needed to get out of there now and could not wait for two aircraft. Mr. Green reluctantly agreed to attempt the extraction with one aircraft.

The LZ was a small opening in the 150 foot canopy populated by 20 to 30 foot scrub trees. We maneuvered toward the left tree line where we could drop the rope ladders to the ground. At the point the LRRP team was half way up; we began to take heavy small arms fire from the left and rear. Ramirez began returning fire with his M60 as the gunships repeatedly came in low and slow, peppering the tree line with their miniguns. In the turmoil I remember hearing on the radio that the remaining POW had escaped. Amazingly we were able to get the team on board and the ladders pulled up. I was continuously reading off the gauges for Mr. Green. When we reached canopy height and began inching forward, we had lost 300 rpm with all other indicators good. We continued to take light fire. Mr. Green did a masterful job not abruptly tilting the rotor to spill any lift as we slowly gained forward airspeed and for a moment it looked like we would reach transition. Suddenly, we lost all oil pressure and began rapidly losing RPM. I reached over and locked our shoulder harnesses just before we began spinning rapidly through the trees. The last thing I remember is Mr. Green yelling "Oh my God!"

The next thing I remember, I was standing with my breast protector and shirt off next to the aircraft, which was upside down and smoking. Except for Mr. Green who was still strapped in his seat hanging upside down, everyone else had been thrown from the aircraft and none that I could see were moving. Fearing fire, I was able to lower Mr. Green and drag him clear of the aircraft. His shoulder had either been broken or dislocated, he was unable to walk, and was pretty well out of it with pain. I made sure he had a weapon and ammo. There was a Vietnamese or Laotian team member near the aircraft whose femur was sticking out his thigh. He was remarkably cognizant and ultimately became the only one I had any confidence could return fire if we were advanced on. I moved him a short distance and offered him a shot of morphine from the medical kit I managed to find but he refused. I set him up with an M60 and a carbine.

I found Quintana about 20 feet away at the base of a tree. He was barely conscious, and I could tell he was very badly broken up and in a lot of pain. I was afraid to move him so I gave him a shot of morphine and left him where he was. An American member of the team was 10 to 15 feet to the rear of the aircraft. His ankle was severely broken with the foot 90 degrees to its normal position. He was in great

agony. I gave him a shot of morphine and made sure he had a weapon and ammo although he was barely cognizant. There were two other Americans and a Vietnamese or Laotian lying near by. I checked their pulses and they were all dead. I located Ramirez pinned under the aircraft on the opposite side. I checked his pulse and he was dead. I don't remember the injuries of the other two surviving team members, a Vietnamese or Laotian and an American. They were unable to move so I helped them over to where we were able to set up somewhat of a defensive position with the helicopter, which had stop smoking, at our backs for some protection.

During this whole time, I could hear the enemy talking and moving in the tree line, although I never saw them. I think they could have taken our position at anytime but were after more aircraft. Every time one flew overhead, heavy fire erupted, even after repeated runs by the gunships to put down a circle of fire around our position. I had no communication as the LRRP team radio was smashed and I wasn't able to locate our emergency radio, so the backup slick came over slow and dropped one. The gunships reported they could see the enemy on each of their runs, so the FAC recommended we try to reach an LZ approximately 75 yards from our position opposite the heaviest enemy concentrations. It was agreed an aircraft would fly over in the direction they wanted us to move as I didn't have a compass.

As I was the only one who could walk, I began carrying the survivors to the LZ, starting with Mr. Green. The thing I remember most was my pants kept falling down, probably because I had a pistol in each pocket and all the grenades I could find hanging on my belt, so I had to stop every so often to pull them up. Given his injuries, there was no way to carry Mr. Green that didn't cause a lot of pain, which wasn't helped by the brush being so thick in spots that it was impossible to avoid smashing him into it. I left him just inside the tree line at the LZ which was a very large cultivated field with heavy jungle on two sides. To lighten my load, I left Mr. Green with one pistol and half my grenades. I returned and carried out the Vietnamese or Laotian with the broken femur next as I thought he could provide the best protection at our new position. This guy was incredible! As painful as moving him must have been, he never even murmured.

I was going to carry Quintana out next, but he was dead. I attempted to carryout the American with the broken ankle next, but he started yelling and screaming so bad that after a short time I returned to the aircraft. I gave him another shot of morphine and started carrying out the other American figuring the morphine would take effect by the time I got back. When I returned and began carrying him out the second time, he was screaming and yelling even louder than before. We had hardly made it into the jungle where there was just no way to avoid occasionally banging his ankle against the brush when he begged me to put him down and just leave him, so I took him back to the aircraft, made sure he had plenty of ammunition and grenades, picked up the last survivor, and got the hell out of there. This is a decision I will regret until my dying day, even though he was subsequently rescued a short time later.

I think we had been on the ground for 3 to 4 hours but I'm not sure. I remember at one point worrying whether they would be able to get us out because it was getting late and the weather was starting to close in. By the time I reached the LZ with the fourth survivor, the adrenaline had worn off and I was near exhaustion. I radioed for pickup and a short time later when the aircraft came in they started taking fire from both tree lines. They came to a low hover and I starting getting everyone on board. When I struggled to get on myself, the door gunner grabbed me by the back of the pants and yanked me on board. We could see tracers coming at us from the front as we took off.

As soon as we were out of danger, I borrowed the co-pilots helmet and radioed the FAC to report there was still one survivor on the ground. He said a rescue team had been dispatched with an ETA of 5 to 10 minutes.

We landed in heavy rain back at 155th near the hospital. I vaguely remember being in there but I think I just walked out before anyone looked at me. For some reason I recall walking naked in the rain down the middle of the company street back to my quarters - but I don't know if this really happened.

PROLOG: The next day my whole body turned shades of black and blue that I have never seen before or since. I don't think I even got out of bed that day. At some point I remember visiting Mr. Green at the Nha Trang hospital before he was sent stateside. I also saw the LRRP team member with the broken ankle,

but I could not look him in the eye and I said nothing.

All kinds of rumors started to fly about the incident. I heard that when they went to recover the aircraft, it was gone. A crude roadway had been hacked out and had tracks leading out to the LZ we were extracted from. It was reported that there were newspaper photos of the aircraft on a hay wagon in the Cambodian capital. Supposedly there was an official protest on the floor of the U.N. by the Cambodian government over American activity within their borders, citing the pictures as evidence. Best of all, I was told I might have to be sent home as a "spy"! I always carried my wallet in my shirt pocket so it was lost and apparently recovered with the aircraft. Well, I was never sent home so I don't know what happen with that. Strangely, my wallet was return several months later through "unknown channels". It contained only my official documents with all personal items, photos, etc., missing.

It's amazing how much I have forgotten about Vietnam, including most of the names and faces. So I apologize that I am unable to give individual credit to the many brave aircrews that put themselves in harms way to recover us. I know many of you sustained heavy damage and casualties. I wish I could forget this incident as well, but some of it hangs on like it was yesterday. I guess that is the price one pays for leaving a fallen comrade behind.

"A GUY WE COULD DEPEND ON"

At that time I was a 2nd Platoon Peter Pilot, but I was not involved in the mission on May 23. To the best of my recollection, Jerry Green had been shot up or shot down a few days earlier, so I went out to his ship and was taking pictures of it. There were fluids everywhere, and Door Gunner Santiago Quintana was working to clean up the ship. We'd flown together, I knew him as a quiet guy - and a crew member we could depend on. When I talked to him that day, he told me that he didn't really want to fly anymore as he felt "his number was coming up". I have a picture of him standing in front of the ship.



PFC Santiago Quintana (Counce photo)

Jack Counce, Falcon 9

RECAP Clearly, uncommon valor was a common virtue that day; everybody went above and beyond. Having said that, I want to be sure a couple of guys mentioned here don't get overlooked. **Ernie Plummer** was a helicopter Crew Chief – but he volunteered to climb down into the firestorm, to try to help his buddies. Ernie was awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day. He died some years back, I'm going to try to get this newsletter to his family. And **Vernon Winters** was a Special Forces guy back at Duc Lap – but he flew into the battle as a replacement Door Gunner on Ken Donovan's ship. He had no aerial gunner training, but the guys needed help, and he stepped up. Well done, Gentlemen!

COMMO CHECK

Terry Kirkpatrick - Our Coachman intro started,

"I worked my way from Saigon down to Cam Ranh Bay,
Baby what I was looking for I didn't find along the way."

I don't remember any more because that's where Larry Ingram (is that right?) came in with his voiceover, "LIVE, from Ban Me Thuot, Republic of Vietnam, it's the **slightly fabulous COACHMEN!**"

John Houston - Thanks, Falcons, for having our back.

Ben Garlic - I'm a musician studying at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. My father, Ronnie Garlic, served in the 155th AHC in Vietnam, he was a crew chief for Falcon 580. I have been

commissioned to compose a piece of music and I've decided to write a piece about Vietnam. Can you offer me any help/advice?

Dean Owen - Happy New Year, hope your holidays were good.

Jerry Bourquin - I hope you and yours had a wonderful Christmas and will have a Happy New Year. I have been up to my ears with the proverbial alligators, promise I will get info to you soon. The Golden Knights Reunion went well and no, I did not get a jump in - much to my regret.

Larry Pluhar - All of you guys are in that part of my life even my wife of over forty years cannot understand.

Michael Smith - "Fire Base Mike Smith, near Duc Lap, fall of '69." Yep, that's me. I was wounded at LZ Kate and evacuated, LT Ross replaced me and was killed. Then I returned to Kate on the last day. I never really knew why the fire base was named for me. I think someone got confused that I was the KIA, and by the time it was sorted out, it just wasn't undone.

Tony Giordano - We're in Panama full-time, living the good life.

Gilbert Terry - Thanks for stopping by for breakfast.

Bruce McInnes - To all who have been fortunate enough to watch the sun set over the Corral: best wishes for a Merry Christmas, happy Hannukah, terrific everything. Looking forward to all your smiling faces at the reunion. Anybody gets near NYC, give me a call.

Rans Potter - Sure do appreciate the support you helicopter guys gave us over there.

Gene Powless - Hope you are doing well. Best wishes for the holiday season.

Jack Coonce - I'm retired in Tucson, living on a golf course. Life is good - and I promise to keep in better touch.

Al Fitzgerald - I finally talked the wife into making a trip over to Vietnam with me. It will be relatively short and only hit the high spots :4 nights Saigon, 2 nights Dalat, and 2 nights Nha Trang.

ASH & TRASH

NEW 155th AHC ASSOCIATION WEBSITE The 155th AHC Association has a new website — <http://www.155-th-ahc.org/>. **Elizabeth Coward** (Wayne's wife) volunteered to be the new webmaster, and she's done an OUTSTANDING job. She is working hard to copy content over from the old website, but it will take some time, so please be patient. New content for the website or corrections can be addressed to Elizabeth at webmaster@155-th-ahc.org. Check it out! **Matt Matthews**

NEXT BMT REUNION WILL BE IN NOVEMBER The next reunion of the 155 AHC and any/all units from BMT will be in Atlanta, Georgia, over Veterans Day weekend; November 8-11, 2012. Bring family, friends, acquaintances, BFF's, classmates, cellmates, co-workers, former boyfriends and/or girlfriends, in-laws. Well, you get the drift; any and all are welcome. Mark your calendars to clear the weekend, we'll pass along details as soon as we know 'em.

EDITOR'S NOTES I just can't thank Rick, Dan, Jeff, Jack, and Ken enough for sharing their memories. (Sadly, Richmond passed away a few years ago.) Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU! We owe you all, BIG TIME!

PS - I'd love to hear from others who were there that day; CCS, Green Hornets, FAC, Dust-off, Stagecoach, Falcon. PLEASE drop a line.

And for the rest of you; is it YOUR turn to send in your BMT story? That's it for now. Falcon 2, out.

Les Davison, 155 AHC Historian
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Stagecoach Wrecker crew (Warren Smith photo)

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