



BAN ME THUOT BARB



Remembering the 155 Assault Helicopter Co. & all Ban Me Thuot Guys
January 2015 Sortie 57

DOWNED AF PILOT RESCUED AT NIGHT

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PLEIKU, Vietnam (IO) "I nosed it up and climbed to altitude so I could bail out," recalled fighter pilot MAJ Robert E. Kline. The Air Force major was recounting the 45 wild minutes that followed after his jet was shot down at dusk, 50 miles north of here. He was picked up at night by an Army Huey helicopter piloted by 1st Lt. Richard H. Silva, of Ridgewood, N.J. and WO Stephen B. Birchall of Lachine, Que.

When his aircraft went out of control, Kline was able to parachute safely from 1,500 feet to a spot just a mile from where he had received the heavy enemy ground fire. He immediately made radio contact with the Forward Air Controller who had directed him to the target. With jets circling above and spotter planes scouting the crash site below, three Army choppers from the 52d Combat Aviation Bn.'s 155th Assault Helicopter Co. were called in from nearby Kontum to make the rescue.

Flying gunship cover for Silva's pickup ship were CWO Kenneth E. Duncan of Killeen, Tex., and 1st Lt. Willis J. Heydenberk, Lamar, Mo., in the lead aircraft, with WOs James R. Overstreet, Nederland, Tex., and John Forsting, Milwaukee, Wis., following in a second armed helicopter. The gunships carried four machine guns and 14 rockets each.

Guided by Kline's flares and directions from the circling spotter pilot, Silva dropped his helicopter down close to the 50-foot high trees for two observation passes, just as the sun set behind towering hills. His landing spot would be on a hazardous steep slope. He made the final approach in near darkness.

"I had to hover in the landing zone, with my searchlight on, for what seemed like hours," Silva said. "We had no idea where the pilot was until he crawled up on our skids." The two gunships roared by for a final covering pass as the rescue copter glided up over the shadow-shrouded tree line, and PFCs Donald Hill, of Dayton, Ohio, and Lamoine Olson, of Augusta, Wis., pumped lead from the side door guns. Heavily and continuously strafed by the armed choppers, enemy ground troops in the area apparently never got off a shot during the 45 minute operation.

Warm words of praise were radioed to the rescue pilots from ground control personnel anxiously awaiting their touch down at Kontum. Silva said, "It was great to hear everyone call and tell me, 'good job' and 'great going, man.' I knew I would have appreciated it just as much if someone had just rescued me."

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE: RANDY EVANS

I was attached to the 981st MP company (sentry dogs) at Camp Coryell. During my time there I acquired a painting done by Randy Evans. I believe that he might have been attached to the Dustoff. I was



wondering if you had his address or other contact information? I still have his painting-- done on the back of a plank-- probably part of a rocket box. I wanted to know if he would like to have it returned?

Thanks to all of you guys who have kept the Ban Me Thuot spirit going. I really appreciate the efforts on the website.

Thanks much, *Al German*

(Ed. - Randy was an 8th Med guy in '69; does anyone have contact info? If so, pls contact any occifer.)

ONE DAY IN THE 'NAM

Frank Uhring, Stagecoach 19

We were flying a Sniffer mission, I was the low ship, Falcons were covering. We started up out of a valley and suddenly the hill ahead got 'fuzzy'. I at first thought my eyes were going bad, but as we neared the top of the hill I saw lots of monkeys (not a few, not a hundred, but thousands) swinging through the trees in all directions. The monkeys were in the very tops of the trees, probably trying to warm up in the sun. Well, the guy on the sniffer machine was getting really big readings, and he started yelling out to the Mission Commander in the high ship. I came on and said that we just had monkeys below. Even so, the high ship ordered the guns to fire. The Falcons also told the high ship Mission Commander that there were monkeys all over the hill, and that we should not fire. The Mission Commander said that there could be VC under the monkeys trying to hide and that we had a big positive reading, and ordered the guns to expend everything on the hill. The guns went hot and then we pulled out. Then the high ship called in an arty strike on the hill. Poor monkeys, look what they got just because we scared the you-know-what out of them.

TAPS

Bob Donaldson died Sep 2014

Keith Marchbanks died Oct 2014

John Betz died Jul 2014.

Art Rizza died Nov 2012.

Falcon 6 in '67.

Falcon pilot in '69 & '70

Stagecoach pilot in the early days at BMT.

Falcon crew chief in '65 and '66.

Proud to have served with you. Fly high, friends.

ARTHUR GODFREY AT BAN ME THUOT

Arthur Godfrey visited BMT (late '65 or early '66) and flew with the Falcons – and here's the proof. He's pictured here with Falcon pilot Ken Duncan in front of UH-1B "Devil or Angel II". Can anyone ID the rest of the crew? And we'd love to know more about his visit, and about flying with him – **please!**

(Ed. – Ken Duncan is all over this issue. See "Downed AF Pilot Rescued" on Page 1.)



Photo by Rueben Hunter.

LAS VEGAS REUNION 2014

If you weren't at the reunion, you missed a GREAT gathering. No flashing lights, no wild parties, not even close to over-the-top; just good friends getting together again many years later. We aren't brothers by blood – but let no one doubt that we truly are brothers – **still**. Lots of stories, lots of memories; some brought smiles, some brought laughter - and some brought tears. And I think for each of us, in our own individual way, the reunion was a way to honor the sacrifice of our guys

who didn't make it home. You are not forgotten!

All told there were about 50 BMT guys in Vegas, and about that many wives, sons, daughters, and friends. I never heard anybody say they wished they hadn't come - but I heard a lot of folks say they'll be at the next reunion, too. By popular request, the Coachmen reunited to provide musical entertainment at the banquet. They were one of the very first Super Groups in 1970, and they still ROCK! Despite having to overcome a couple of AWOL tenors, they gave a fine performance. Lew Sain, Phil Watson, Frank Alotta, Frank Uhring, and Larry Ingram had the joint jumpin'. MANY thanks to Fred Yamagata and his lovely wife Joyce, who provided all the libations for the 155 Hospitality Suite - AND worked tirelessly to keep the bar in order. Above and beyond, for sure.

Apologies in advance (because I'm sure to leave someone out), here's the BMT guys who were at the Las Vegas reunion:

John Ahearn	Bob Gardner	Bruce McInnes
Bob Alberts	John Grow	Leo Melonson
Cliff Allen	Joe Harrelson	Dean Owen
Frank Alotta	Dennis Harris	Ray Roalofs
Dave Bennett	Mark Hayes	John Ruhly
Alan Borsella	Steve Herbruck	Lew Sain
Bing Cherry	Brad Hilligoss	Jeff Schrader
Jack Coonce	Tom Hunt	Jim Stallard
Wayne Coward	Rueben Hunter	Bob Stucke
Jim Cunningham	Larry Ingram	Gilbert Terry
Les Davison	Alan Klinker	Fran Tiner
Ray Douglas	Ed Koroshetz	Frank Uhring
Jack Drewiega	Bob Maddox	Rod Waddell
Paul Fadz	Chuck Markham	Phil Watson
Denny Fenlon	Charlie Marvin	Fred Williams
John Finneren	Matt Matthews	Howard Wilson
Emory Fisher	Steve McCartney	Fred Yamagata
Wally Foster	Vince McDonough	

GETTIN' OLDER

If you happen to fall into this category, be sure there's a copy of your DD-214 in the "When I'm Gone" folder you've prepared for your family. I know, I know - YOU are going to be the exception, and live forever. But, just in case

TREASURER'S NOTE

Jeff Schrader, Falcon 7

More than a few members at the reunion asked when dues are to be paid. We normally stated that the end of each year was that date. However, considering the holiday costs at that time of year, we've made a change. July 4th will be the new date that your \$20 will become due. Easy to remember, every time you hear and see fireworks, that will be the time to send a check or money order made out to 155 AHCA, addressed to the 155th AHCA, 6815 Middlebranch, N.E., Canton, OH. 44721. Your dues are important. Without them we would not have an organization. Thank you.

SHARING COMMO

Jim Braimard - Wondering if anybody knows of any books written by BMT guys, or written about our time at Ban Me Thuot. I read Fred Lindsey's Secret Green Beret Commandoes in Cambodia, it's a great read!

Wally Foster - I remember playing football when we were on B-50 stand-by at Duc Co.

Duane Poulin – Being in the hospital sucks!

Bob Maddox - Remember the baby elephant company mascot in '70? Some of us Falcons got a little tipsy one night and tried to stuff him into a Stagecoach hootch. We got his trunk in but the "little" guy didn't like it one bit and began to make that loud noise that elephants make, and was swinging his head left and right. We panicked and abandoned the effort, and he went back to munching on the banana tree leaves that had been brought in that day.

Ken Donovan – I sure hated to miss the reunion, I was really sick! Next time for sure.



The tension is palpable as these 1st Platoon pilots wait for crank time. L to R, Mike Butcher, Marlin Johnson, Jim Hitch, Bob Beaudreault, John Vagnini; kneeling are Phil Watson and Dave Desio (helmeted). *John Houston photo.*

Mike Tindall – I was with the 981st Sentry Dog Company in '68-'69. Proud to have served with fine men.

Dale Gordon - I came to the 155 in July 1969, I was a mech for awhile then I volunteered as a door gunner for a short while. Then I went to Maintenance and become a T.I., I stayed with 155 till the company disbanded. Some of the experinces I or we had seems like it happened yesterday. I've seen a couple of names I recognize, good to know that they are still kicking. So if there is anyone who remembers me I say hello. I'm retired now, I bought a crusier motorcycle, when I ride it feels like flying.

Jeff Dilley – I was MACV, 23rd ARVN Division Advisor, flew many Sniffer missions with the 155th in late '69. Your website has been a great mental help to me.

Tony Giordano – I'd like to go back to Vietnam some day.

Steve McCartney – It sure was great to see everybody at the reunion.

Ray Roalofs – I'll send you a copy of the mortar attack on our BMT compound.

M*A*S*H LIKE?

John Ruhly, Stagecoach 13

In April, 1969, I was a pilot with the 155th Assault Helicopter Company at Ban Me Thuot (Camp Coryell) in the Central Highlands, South Vietnam. It was a beautiful afternoon and an easy mission - but my right knee was sore and stiff. While running to the perimeter last night, I had fallen on a piece of concrete and "banged-up" my knee. It was not even a concern until I woke up sore this morning, and now it was hurting. Even though the FNG Peter Pilot was doing most of the flying, I knew I would be much more comfortable out of this helicopter.

We were only flying "ash-and-trash" sorties within 40 miles of our home base. I had been listening to the radio the whole morning and it appeared that the entire Central Highlands were quiet. I decided to ask a favor of the Officer-of-the-Day and see if there was an off-duty aircraft commander who was bored, or at least would not mind flying in my place for the afternoon. So I called in, explaining that it was *not* an emergency by any means! I explained that within the next couple of hours we were going to be flying real close to the compound and could easily land and switch. Within 30 minutes he called back and said CPT

Joe Harrelson would be glad to fly for me. I gave them an ETA of an hour. We also identified one of the helicopter pads just west of the runway to meet. This way they could take off immediately and no time would be lost.

Approaching the pad an hour later, I was surprised to see an ambulance, a jeep, and about 12 people near where we were going to land. Did they really misunderstand me that badly? The wonderful crew chief, Polly, and the gunner, McCray, thought it was great fun and were having a good laugh. As we touched down, the jeep drove up and came to a halt out of range of our helicopter's main rotor blades. Doc Blair, two medics, probably from the 8th Medical Dispensary, and CPT Joe Harrelson jumped out. They grabbed a stretcher and came running to my side of the aircraft. They quickly opened my door, pulled me out, and laid me on the stretcher.

With everyone enjoying themselves much too much, Joe took off my helmet because he wanted to make sure everyone could tell it was me in the picture. I really had very little contact with our company headquarters, but I noticed that Ops



8TH Med guys spring into action to rescue the "injured" pilot. C/E Ron Polly (helmet) supervises the extraction.

SGT Floyd, our CO MAJ Bobby Moore, and the other 8-9 observers were having a good time.

Hawkeye and Trapper John (M*A*S*H) would have gotten a big laugh as they recalled the day and sipped their martinis from the distillery in the doctors' hootch.



Doc Blair thanks John for interrupting a boring day in Ban Me Thuot – and for being a good sport.

HAMBURGERS IN PLEIKU

Phil Watson, Stagecoach 13

I cannot remember the names of the crews in this account. My apologies. Maybe some of you remember this story and can fill in some of the blanks. It was the spring of 1970. The intense fighting of the fall of 1969, Bu Prang, the Volcano, LZ Kate, Helen, et al was behind us. We returned to our "normal" mission assignments. The most exciting, without question, was our B-50 mission where we transported Special Forces teams across the Cambodian border for their observation and prisoner snatch missions.

The mission was structured such that we put in a team of six to ten SF guys and they were tasked to remain unseen, unheard, and observe traffic moving up and down the Ho Chi Minh trail. After ten days they would request an extraction and we would go get them. Their ground time was planned as ten days. They could not request an extraction until the end of their 10 days unless they were in contact with the enemy. I remember a conversation once with one of the SF guys and he told us that as with most soldiers they didn't really want to stay in the jungle for 10 days. So, sometimes they would pick a fight just so they could come out. I don't remember too many cold extractions on that mission. That being said, USUALLY, they would last at least 5 or 6 days after insertion before they called for an extraction.

For us slick pilots and crews, once we inserted the SF guys we would fly to a small airstrip just inside Vietnam and land, shutdown, and play cards all day. An Air Force FAC in an O-2 would be in radio contact with the SF team all day, in case they got in trouble. At the end of the day, the FAC would release us to fly back to Ban Me Thuot for the night. The next morning we would return to the airstrip and repeat the routine.

The prevailing thought was that for the first 3-4 days after an insertion usually things were pretty quiet. That's where this story begins. We put in a team early one morning and returned to the airstrip to begin our daily waiting routine. As soon as we got the blades tied down, someone suggested that since nothing was going on anyway, why don't we take one of the birds to Pleiku and buy some real hamburgers and bring them back for everybody. Since my ship was Chalk Four (ie, least likely to be needed for an extraction) that day, it was decided that my aircraft should be used for the "Burger Run". Since I did not want to be shot for dereliction of duty, I agreed to let the ship go but I would not go to Pleiku with it. As it turned out there was a crew chief from another crew who wanted some stick time, and my Peter Pilot for the day was also a qualified Aircraft Commander. So, we came up with this "seat swap" plan. The crew chief that wanted the stick time and I swapped positions. He moved all his gear to the cockpit of my aircraft and I moved all my stuff to the left well of his aircraft. The uniquely crewed helicopter then took off and headed for Pleiku. As the dust settled from their takeoff, the remaining crews began preparations for the daily card game. All of this occurred in the first 30 minutes of our landing after the insertion.

Not five minutes after the aircraft left we got the "Scramble" order from the FAC. The SF guys were in contact and needed an immediate extraction. I thought I could still reach the outbound helicopter and bring them back so I flipped the battery and radio on of the aircraft I was sitting in and called them. No joy, they were already out of range. The unthinkable had happened. Not only were we going on a hot extraction with only three helicopters, I was doing it in the left well as a crew chief! We took off as a flight of three for the extraction. The good news was that the ship I was in was Chalk 3, so unless something extraordinary happened, our ship shouldn't actually have to go in on the pickup. The bad news was that if we were needed, I had fired an M-60 once in flight school. My only real knowledge about the weapon was that it seemed to jam frequently on our crews, usually at a most inopportune time.

As we approached the border the FAC held us at a high orbit while he directed the team to a PZ. That gave me some time to get some "dual" on the weapon. Since we had such short mic cords, I had to unplug my helmet and crawl across the cabin to the gunner's side. Without benefit of normal communication, he shouted over the noise of the engine and transmission: a quick lesson on loading, firing, and clearing jams. I returned to my left well, plugged back in and loaded my weapon. Listening to the radio, I soon realized that the SF team was whispering when they spoke to the FAC. I never liked it much when they whispered. It was akin to when they were out of breath from running when they spoke. Neither situation was good. Finally, it was time for Chalk 1 and 2 to go in for the extraction. We stayed a couple of miles away and orbited.

Funny how the mind works. As we orbited, waiting for the call to go in and help, my mind thought . . . "After all the flight school training, checkrides we had to take in-country, and Aircraft Commander upgrade process, I was about to die in a helicopter sitting not at the controls, but in a gunner's seat. How did this happen? Hamburgers?" Then, we got the word. The team had been picked up and everyone was headed back to the airstrip. I don't remember anything significant after that - except on several subsequent ferry flights I took some time to really familiarize myself with the firing of the M-60.

That's my story. I'm hoping some of you will help fill in the blanks. Does anyone remember who was the AC that took the "Burger Run" helicopter and who were the crew that I flew with as their crew chief? And who was the crew chief that got the stick time that day? AND, I don't remember eating any hamburgers. What's with that?

155 AHC Association Occifers are:

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REUNION 2016

It's too early to make flight reservations, but you can mark your calendars **NOW**. The new slate of 155 AHCA officers went right to work in Vegas, and the next reunion site has been picked – Washington, DC. (Hotel will probably be across the river in Arlington, VA.) It will be October 2016, over Columbus Day weekend. Les Davison will handle most of the prep work; if you've got ideas or want to help, give him a call.

“Windy City Maggie,” photo by Rueben Hunter. I think this is a B model. Can anyone tell me more about the ship? And I'd like to know the name of the artist, too.

155 SALUTES RUTH MARCHBANKS

Keith Marchbanks had finally lost his battle with cancer just two weeks before. Even so, his wife Ruth made the decision to come to the Las Vegas reunion to meet guys who had known Keith, and to honor his service, and his memory. What a strong woman! Several of us sat with Ruth after the banquet and shared Keith stories. Some laughter, some tears – and big hugs when we had to break up at the end. If there's anything we can do to help, Ruth, all you need do is ask.

Sortie 57 Wrap

MANY thanks to Phil Watson, Frank Uhring, and John Ruhly for sharing their stories. GREAT stuff, guys. If you enjoyed reading their stories, please let them know. And, please consider sharing your stories for a future Barb. More thanks to Rueben Hunter, who gave me a disc of photos from his time in BMT ('65-'66). Rueben took some great shots; several are included in this Barb. Well done, Rueben!

OK, that's all I've got. Hope y'all enjoy reading this – and let me know what you think.

Les Davison, Editor-this-time



Warren Smith & CPT Phil Grushetsky at nose of ship, others unknown.

Photo by Rueben Hunter.

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