



BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155th Assault Helicopter Company
& all the Ban Me Thuot Guys



Sortie 60

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155th SAVES ALLIED LRRP TEAM

Eagle Talons, 1 March 1970

BAN ME THUOT - Aviators of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company, 10th Aviation Battalion, performed a daring rescue under intense enemy fire northwest of the central II Corps city of Ban Me Thuot on the afternoon of Feb. 21. The "Stagecoach" aircraft, sent to rescue a LRRP team which was heavily engaged with the enemy, was confronted with the problem of removing the troops while they were in the midst of a firefight. In addition, there was no nearby landing zone available and visibility was limited due to thick jungle and hazy atmospheric conditions.

Warrant Officers Marlin Johnson of Decatur, Ill., and Daniel Fox of Wichita, Kan., commander and pilot of the Huey slick, learning that the troops couldn't move to a clear area for pickup, lowered their ship more than 100 feet through two layers of jungle canopy in an attempt to reach the troops on the ground. Unable to land, the slick's crew lowered rope ladders and the reconnaissance team was removed safely under the cover of the aircraft's door gunners. Due to poor visibility and their proximity to the rescue ship, covering gunships could not give aerial fire support for fear of hitting the rescue slick. Despite intense enemy fire, the team was extracted safely and the mission was accomplished.

Ed: Eagle Talons was the newsletter of the 17th Combat Aviation Group, Nha Trang.

FOUND INFO ON '67 MISHAP

Randy Northuis, Crew Chief '67-'68

Hey, that was my ship in the last Barb! (H model, tail number 390) That's Mr. Taylor in the photo, he was the AC. I was the Crew Chief, my gunner was Don Corry. As I remember the routine oil samples came back with high metal content, and they were trying to contact us to ground the ship. Obviously the information was a little late getting to us. We had no warning before we lost power. The planetary gears inside the front of the engine went south. We were still pulling pitch leaving the compound when they suddenly let go. The pilots came on the intercom that we were going down. Don and I informed the passengers and got them to open the side



Randy Northuis and his ship.

doors. There were trees below us so the AC had to try and extend our glide path to make a clearing. By the time we cleared the trees we didn't have much control or rotor speed for landing. When we hit the ground we finally came to rest on the right side. Don must have had a real close look at the ground. The funny thing was, he made it out of the ship before I did. After we all exited the ship we were standing there thanking our lucky stars (and Mr. Taylor) when we realized that the NVA prisoner was still strapped inside. He finally made it out after we determined there was no further danger. I hope this helps.

Les Taylor, Stagecoach 11

So here's what I recall:

We were sent to a Special Forces camp near Kontum to transport an NVA prisoner. When we got there, it looked like we only had three pax. Now this part is the only one where my memory was sketchy. . . I had thought there were two guys with no rank or other identifying insignia on their fatigues accompanying the prisoner but after reading Jim Anderson's narrative of the event, my memory came into better focus.

I'm pretty sure it was Jim who said if there was a way to shake the POW up and get him to talk, to give it a try. I said: "OK, what I'll do is a cyclic climb," and I described what that entailed. Jim was game, so we loaded up and took off. Now as most of you know, you do a cyclic climb by gathering speed at a low altitude, pulling back on the cyclic and pulling in power. About the time I initiated the maneuver, something popped in the back, the nose slewed left, and the engine started to scream like a goat in a slaughterhouse. I looked at my tachometers and they showed engine RPM going way past the red and rotor RPM decaying. By that time we had a couple hundred feet or so, not really enough to do much with an autorotation. I looked for a spot as I had been trained to do. I had also been trained to do a circle until I spotted a likely place, but there wasn't enough rotor momentum to do that and we were too low. I told Mr. Steele to call a Mayday and then spotted an area with some snags, stumps etc that had been burned out at some time in the past. I wasn't sure we'd make it but at least we'd try. I did a very slow flare to try and build and keep up rotor RPM since we still had a reasonable amount of airspeed. Now, I had trained in the OH-23D at Wolters, so I was used to popping the pitch to cushion a landing. Another problem was that we had a crosswind. Really there was no choice; it was trees or stumps in less than ideal conditions. I executed a prelanding flare as best I could, popping the pitch to slow us down - and after that it was kinda out of my hands. The nose was about twenty degrees left as we touched down and we had about five or ten knots ground speed. You could count the revolutions of the main rotor, I had siphoned every RPM out of that sucker it was possible to get. I felt the bottom aft portion of the aircraft hit something and we slowly tipped over to the right. I liked flying in the right seat for a couple of reasons; it gave my Peter Pilot a chance to train as AC, and I could see outside better. The central highlands were beautiful and sometimes you could catch a glimpse of a tiger or deer or what have you.

Lots of things go through your head in a moment like that. I was glad the aircraft was going over on the right side, because there was less of a chance of a rotor going through the



Jim Anderson (L) and Les Taylor

cockpit or cargo compartment that way. The rotation was really, really slow so it might not beat the aircraft to shreds when we hit. Finally as we tipped and seemed to go into slow motion, the thought rather stoically went through my head that I had done everything I knew to do and now maybe I would find out what it was like to die. Honestly, there was no fear, just curiosity.

The actual impact was anticlimactic. One blade hit, the other came around and broke, and then there was relative calm. I shut down the engine so we wouldn't burn, asked if everyone was OK, told them to be careful exiting the aircraft, asked Mr. Steele to call again and see if help was near, then looked up at the overhead panel just above my head. It was pristine. Not a crack in it. Next thing I know, I'm standing outside the aircraft and the green plexiglass is gone. You can see from the photo below that the one over the left seat is still there but mine's history.

Not sure when I saw him, but the NVA prisoner had been strapped to the transmission well. He made a pretty pathetic sight hanging sideways. As I recall it, he still had his blindfold in place and had let loose the water works.

Once we all got out of the aircraft, I finally had the presence of mind to tell everyone to form a perimeter of defense. I seem to dimly recall Mr. Steele telling us another aircraft was nearby and had seen us go down and help was on the way. I do remember that we didn't have to wait long. I also vaguely remember wondering if the whole thing was my fault for trying to do that cyclic climb and feeling mighty guilty. I believe Randy then told me about the planetary gears, that he'd gotten some reports of chips in the samples and saying it wasn't my fault. Still, I knew there would be an investigation. I loved Hueys; still do, so it felt really terrible to see an aircraft that I loved in such terrible shape. I thought it would never fly again. Even after the investigation cleared me and I had gotten a "well done," I kept wondering if there was anything I could have done better.

I went up to Pleiku to look at 390 a few days later and thinking she'd never fly again but guess what? Those guys could work miracles. They put her back together and she flew until 1975 when the Army retired her.

REUNION WASHINGTON, DC

13 – 15 October 2016

(Well, technically it's in Arlington, VA.)

Hyatt Regency Crystal City
2799 Jeff Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday
Single & double rooms are \$99 plus tax

Toll free phone reservations: **888-591-1234**

On-line reservations: <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/155AHCreunion>

Free shuttle to/from Reagan National Airport and Metro. (Hotel is ¼ mile from Reagan National.)

Hotel has Valet Parking only: \$32 for all day. (Nearby private lots are less expensive.)

Banquet Saturday evening will be \$60 per person. Coachmen will perform.

We'll likely set up a time to visit The Wall as a group, to honor our fallen brothers.

Some guys are already talking about coming early and/or staying after: great idea.

October in DC area is generally nice weather, and there's **much** to see and do (and many are

free): Smithsonian museums, monuments galore (new/recent ones include WWII Memorial, FDR Memorial, Martin Luther King Memorial), and history everywhere. If you're a Civil War buff, Gettysburg, Antietam, and several other battle sites are within easy driving distance. Same for the Marine Corps Museum (newly refurbished) at Quantico. Make your plans now. We're hoping for the biggest turnout yet. See you there!

Les Davison is the Point Man, contact him with questions/ideas/suggestions.

Note on 155 Merchandise: Mary and I have decided to fly to D.C., so I will not be able to bring all the shirts and stuff to the reunion. I will have patches and coins. If you want shirts or hats please order them prior to the reunion, and I will ship them to you. Contact me if you need information about availability or cost. Sorry, delivery by drone is not yet available.

Chuck Markham "e-mail address deleted"

BAN ME THUOT BOYS

Guys, we bill ourselves as "The 155 AHC Association" – but we're really "The Ban Me Thuot Boys" – and we want to be sure that everybody understands that. 155 was the biggest unit, but there were LOTS of others at BMT: 185th RAC Pterodactyls, 8th Med, 165th Trans, 208th Signal, USAF Pyramid guys, K-9 guys, MP Detachment, 25th ID "Shotgun Riders" – and, of course, Company A/1/1 started it all in '65. (My apologies to those I've missed.) We ALL shared monsoons, mortar attacks, and red dust. Doesn't matter who you were with, detached from, OPCON to – whatever – if you were at BMT, you belong with us. And, of course, you belong at our reunion, too.



And while I'm at it, we're looking for your patches. Please send patches or good quality digital photographs of them, and we'll include those on the Barb masthead. Send to any Association officer, and we'll take it from there.

165th Trans Det patch, sent in by Mike Lach.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE If you're thinking about coming to the October reunion, but you're still undecided, here's an additional incentive. **Money back guarantee!!!!** We're so sure you'll have a good time – or a GREAT time – we'll reimburse \$100 if you don't. No third degree, no questions asked; if you tell us you want some of your money back, we'll only ask where to send the check. So come on, join the party. What have you got to lose?

BACK STORY: EARLY BMT DOOR GUNNERS

SOURCE: 25th Infantry Division History webpage

The history of the many heroic air crewmen of the 25th Aviation Battalion began in Hawaii in 1963 with the "Shotgun" riders. The *Honolulu Advertiser* (September 10, 1964 issue) carried a story that read in part... "Combat troops of the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii," are being sent to Vietnam to serve as machine gunners aboard U.S. helicopters, Army spokesman disclosed here yesterday. "This is the first acknowledgment by a U.S. agency that some American troops are being committed to the Vietnam War in capacities other than advisors."

Today, the story and the name are nearly forgotten. They were called "shotgun riders" from the Wild West days when guards with shotguns accompanied stagecoaches on cross-country runs. COL Sam Kalagian, (Black Sam) the Commander who deployed with the 25th Aviation Battalion to Vietnam recalls, "They took infantry men who had proven they could shoot well and sent them to Hawaii for 90 days temporary duty at the 'Door Gunner School' and then deployed them to Vietnam".

They rode "shotgun" for helicopters in Vietnam from January 1963 to January 1966 when the Division itself deployed to Vietnam. "Shot gunners" - or officially, Aerial Door Gunners - were tough, skilled soldiers who, in the tradition of their counterparts on the stagecoaches of the old West, protected their UH-1 "Sky-coaches" while flying over South Vietnam.

It was fall of 1962 when the U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, asked the Department of the Army for help in protecting the troop-carrying helicopters being used to fight the Viet Cong. By January 1963, the 25th Infantry Division had responded to the call and had sent the first group of 100 volunteer Aerial Door gunners to Southeast Asia.

Three years and 2,200 men later, the "Tropic Lightning" Division's highly regarded "Shotgun" program came to a close. Its members had compiled an enviable record of combat in a modern application of the stagecoach shot gunners of Wild West days. They developed the tactics that became a signature of helicopter missions in Vietnam.

Ed: Art Ryan and Rueben Hunter were two "Shotgunners" who flew with A/1/1 in '65. Anybody else?

FIRST FLIGHT

Tom Hunt, Falcon Crew Chief

I arrived in BMT in February 1968. I had been trained as a Supply Specialist and was placed in the Supply Room. This was far too boring for me so I convinced the 1SG that I needed to be outside more. His solution was to put me in the Motor Pool. It did get me outside, changing oil and fixing flat tires. The time in the Motor Pool was not all bad. I did take the time to get Cliff Allen and myself certified to drive every wheeled vehicle we had - and a few we didn't have. I didn't say we were qualified, just certified. That got us into a bit of a situation later on, but that's another story.

After being there about a month, I was moved to an aircraft maintenance team. Shortly after that I was selected to be the Crew Chief on the Maintenance aircraft. It was not long after that that I took my first flight as a crew member. The Maintenance Officer (sorry I don't remember his name) and I were flying to the



coast to pick up parts. He started the aircraft and took off. After we got to altitude he said, "Let me show you how to fly this thing." I said OK, but inside I was saying "Oh #%*%#!" After a few minutes I had a basic idea of what I was doing - but I was too scared to move very much. He assured me I was doing OK and pointed out a mountain in the distance and told me to fly to it. As I approached the mountain I asked him where to now but did not get a reply. I looked over at him and he was asleep. If you don't know what went through my mind at that time, see above.

After a moment he looked up and said we needed to turn to this heading and start descending. Being a car guy as I was and still am (1966 GTO), I knew that to slow a car down you let off the gas. So I let off of the gas by slowly rolling the throttle off. We did start down - but not the way he wanted. Once he recovered the aircraft, he said that he forgot to show me that part. The rest of the flight was uneventful, but it is hard to believe that those humble beginnings led me to retire after 21 years in the Army as a CW4 Master Aviator. Life has a way of leading you down a path you never thought about.

US Army C Rations: Individual Meals – Complete

- 1 – **Beef w/Spiced Sauce**, Halved Apricots, Peanut Butter, B-1 Unit – crackers, candy
- 2 – **Tuna Fish**, Quartered Pears, Peanut Butter, B-1 Unit – crackers, candy
- 3 – **Ham and Eggs, Chopped**, Quartered Pears, Peanut Butter, B-1 Unit – crackers, candy
- 4 – **Pork, Sliced, Cooked with Juices**, Halved Apricots, Peanut Butter, B-1 Unit – crackers, candy
- 5 – **Beans w/Frankfurter Chunks in Tomato Sauce**, Blackberry Jam, Fruitcake, B-2 Unit – crackers, cocoa beverage powder
- 6 – **Beef Slices and Potatoes w/Gravy**, Pineapple Jam, Orange Nut Roll, B-2 Unit – crackers, cocoa beverage powder
- 7 – **Spaghetti w/Beef Chunks in Sauce**, Peach Jam, Cinnamon Nut Roll, B-2 Unit – crackers, cocoa beverage powder
- 8 – **Beans w/Meat Balls in Tomato Sauce**, Grape Jam, Pound Cake, B-2 Unit – crackers, cocoa beverage powder
- 9 – **Beefsteak**, Sliced Peaches, Cheese Spread, Cheddar Plain, B-3 Unit – crackers, candy
- 10 – **Chicken or Turkey Boned**, Cheese Spread, Cheddar Plain, Fruit Cocktail, B-3 Unit – crackers, candy
- 11 – **Ham Sliced, Cooked with Juices**, Cheese Spread, Cheddar Plain, Fruit Cocktail, B-3 Unit – crackers, candy
- 12 – **Turkey Loaf**, Cheese Spread, Cheddar Plain, Sliced Peaches, B-3 Unit – crackers, candy

Ed: My personal favorite was Ham & Eggs, Chopped. What was yours?



Does anyone have a better photo of
"What Me Worry? Hell yes!!!"

Or know who's ship this was? Or know
who painted the artwork?

COMMO CHECK

Karl Franzysen - Glad to see the Green Hornets receive those long-overdue commendations. I was an Air Force FAC based at East Field, flew O-2's on the CCS mission during '69 and '70. Flew with a lot of 155 guys on those missions. Sorry, I'm not good with names, only one I can remember is Frank Uhring.

Dave Lehman – I was a Pterodactyl, so I'm biased – but I always thought our little Bird Dogs were more fun than your helos.

Art Ryan – I was the 1LT in charge of the last group of 25th ID “Shotgunners” at BMT. I volunteered to leave Hawaii - and go to Vietnam - and fly combat missions. *What was I thinking?*

Mike Wilcox – Thanks for sending the Barb. I was a 2nd platoon crew chief in '68 and '69, flew with Ken Donovan a lot. I owe him a call.

Joe Thompson – I was in Maintenance in '69 and '70, ended up making a career of the Army.

Pat Lundquist – Enjoyed the photo of Falcons on cover of latest Barb. They must have just got there. Everything looks shiny and new. I see one replacement part, the intake shroud or whatever that is in front of the tranny. Hey, I was Sheet Metal, not a mechanic. Other than that the gunner's wind baffle on the forward edge of the sliding door opening must be new because it has fresh zinc chromate on it. The plex is clear, the uniforms aren't faded and the boots are all black. The perimeter fence isn't rusty and the revetments are just sandbags.

Dean Owen - Just reading the latest BARB. As always great job of putting it together.

Emery Fisher – Just got the Barb, it reminded me I owe Paul Fadz a call – but I lost his number. Please send me a roster.

Dennis LaJoie – Wanted to let you know, there's a picture of my ship, Falcon 049 “Grim Reaper,” in John Brennan's latest book.

Geoff Jones – Thanks for sending the Barb. I'm hoping to make the next reunion.

ASH & TRASH

155 AHC is on Facebook – Lots of photos, lots of chatter - and Les Taylor recently posted Gold Book historical info/stats on BMT helicopters. Good stuff! Check it out.

Elected to office. 155 AHCA salutes **Emery Fisher**, recently elected to a leadership position with the North Dakota VFW. Thank you for your service, Emery – again.

Falcon WIA - John Grow, 155 AHCA President, recently took a spill. As John described it, “I was low level, low airspeed – and out of options.” The resultant hard landing broke a bone or three. He's rehabbing at home now, and he's as crotchety as ever – so he's obviously on the mend.

Les Davison, *Editor-This-Time*

e-mail address deleted

Phone: xxxxxxxxxx

155AHC Association Officers

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Wayne Coward, *Mem-at-Large*



BMT City Field, on short final for landing 06 to the Corral. Center L-shaped revetments are for Falcon gunships, mostly 2nd Platoon slicks are in open-ended revetments on either side. The runway is 50 meters or so off to the right. Circa 1969.

Photo from 155 Facebook page.

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