



BAN ME THUOT BARB

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



Sortie 66

December 2017

POW RESCUE AT DUC LAP

Dave Bennett, Dustoff 61

Background, excerpt from 155 AHC 1969 Unit History

On 2 November while on a "Hunter-Killer" reconnaissance mission north of LZ Helen, two LOH's and one Cobra of the 7/17th Cavalry had been shot down within minutes of each other. All aircraft in the area responded. Cavalry ground troops were inserted and one pilot was extracted. One pilot died in the crash, and two pilots and two observers were captured by the enemy

The Rescue: I was Dustoff 61, it was early December '69, and we were airborne somewhere west of Ban Me Thuot. BMT Dustoff received a mission for an URGENT pick-up. They passed it on to us something like this (as I recall after 48 years).

BMT Dustoff: "Dustoff 61, this is BMT Dustoff."

Dustoff 61: "61, go."

BMT Dustoff: "We have an Urgent, ready to copy?"

Dustoff 61: "Go."

BMT Dustoff: "Pick up two just-released US POW's. Coordinates _____, between Duc Lap and the Volcano. Negative radio freq or call sign. Will throw smoke."

Dustoff 61: "BMT, who called it in?"

BMT Dustoff: "We don't know, but we guess the bad guys."

Dustoff 61: "Thanks."

After that, silence in our H model. Did they **really** say that? The best response came over the intercom from John Edwards, CE and fellow Texan – but I can't repeat it in a family newsletter. It was something like, "You gotta be *kidding* me!"

The pick-up site was the western edge of that very large clearing on the way to the Volcano coming out of Duc Lap, right next to the western tree line. While circling high over the site, being careful to stay away from the .50 cal. southwest of the Volcano, I thought, "This is stupid. If this is an ambush, we're dead." So, using my best high school math, I came to the conclusion that two dead is a little better than four dead. But, not much - if one of the dead is me.

I informed Danny Greenlaw, our medic, that he would accompany me to the pick-up site, and we would drop Wayne Johnson (Peter Pilot) and John (CE) off at the airstrip. To their credit, that was met with howls of protest. Not from Dan, who should have howled at being included in something so stupid, but from Wayne and John, who felt obligated to accomplish the mission. Despite their protests, the decision was made. It was time to call for guns.

Dustoff 61: "Any gunships, any gunships, vicinity Duc Lap, this is Dustoff 61."

Falcon: "Dustoff 61, this is Falcon Lead. What can we do for you today?" (Sorry, I don't remember the call sign, but memory leads me to Charlie Marvin and Jack Coonce.)

After explaining the mission, I told them we would drop off Wayne and John at the Duc Lap airstrip and proceed with the pick-up, and that if we took one round to waste the area because if it was an ambush, it would be over pretty quick. Just then we got another call from BMT Dustoff, instructing us to drop off the patients at Duc Lap. Definitely not SOP; just another thing that sounded fishy.

We dropped Wayne and John off at the strip (Wayne informed me he was exiting under protest), then proceeded to the pick-up where Falcon guns met us and we made a pass over the site. Smoke (I forget the color) came drifting out of the tree line as we circled around for the approach. With Falcons covering us as only they did, up close and personal (Charlie had this neat trick to make his rockets curve around us and go off in front), we turned on final to the tree line. We landed close to the tree line and waited for what seemed like hours but was only a few seconds. Danny calmly stepped out of the aircraft and waited out in the open for our patients.

Finally, two US came walking quickly out of the bush. They dove on board with Danny's help, smiles on their faces, and him calling "GO! GO! GO!" The thought I had right then was if they were ready to execute their prisoners, with a two-bladed, two crew bonus, now was the time.

Dustoff 61: "Coming out left."

Charley or Jack: "We've got you Dustoff."

The thought of that phrase, that I heard so many times from the Falcons, still gives me a warm fuzzy feeling. We came up and out to the left, swung over to the end of the strip, picked up our waiting crewmembers, and hovered over to the SF Camp next to the strip. The POW's got out and were escorted inside. Mission complete, piece of cake!

Postscript: A couple of years ago while attending a reception for Bill Albracht (the SF CPT who led his guys out when they abandoned LZ Kate) at the VHPA reunion in Reno, we were visiting with Mike Law, Historian for the organization. He does a really terrific job of maintaining a history of all the things we did. We were talking about a lot of the things happening at that time: Kate, Martha, Bu Prang, the Volcano and so forth. I told him what happened to us that day between the Volcano and Duc Lap. He then informed me of things that did not happen. It seems the people who called in our mission were Special Forces folks who had escorted the POW crew from their release point from the NVA to the clearing and did not want to blow their cover.

So much for a wonderful war story. I think facts can be overblown.

155 GUY NEEDS YOUR HELP

Earl Leverett

I was Maintenance guy at BMT when I was wounded in a mortar attack. Now I am trying to verify that for the VA. I can't remember any names of those I worked with, I'm hoping this will trigger someone's memory.

I got to the 155th in September of '69, started out on the PE crew. Then so many people left at the same time, I ended up as head man on the PE crew. And later, I went to the Engine Shop. The mortar attack the night of 25 October 1969 wounded two of us badly enough that we were evacuated to the hospital at Pleiku.

If anyone can help, I'd sure appreciate hearing from you. Thank you.

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Ed: From the 155 AHC Annual History for 1969:

"On 25 October in the early morning hours, 15 rounds of 82mm mortars, fired from unknown locations, struck the compound. The result was 2 UH-1H's and 1 UH-1C gunship, 2 buildings, and 2 vehicles damaged. Five personnel were injured, two of whom required medical evacuation."



Figure 1 Falcon Xmas card from 1969.

I HATED THE RATS

Jack Drewiega, POL guy

I got to BMT in July, '66. I hadn't even gotten settled in when the 155th was tasked to support Operation Paul Revere. This was a major offensive near the Duc Co and Plei Djereng Special Forces camps along the Cambodian border. I was sent to one of the SF camps to help open and operate a refueling and rearmament point for helicopters supporting the Op. Hard work and long hours, we were definitely earning our pay. Living conditions were, shall we say, "spartan." We lived in tents, red dust was everywhere, and showers were a luxury. But the thing I hated most was the rats – especially in the bunker we had dug. I remember a guy named Judge who used to beat a stick at night at the bunker entrance, trying to keep the rats out. Well, he had to sleep sometime – and the rats always came in.

We'd been out there for some time, and I had been feeling bad; finally I went to see the Doc. Found out I had malaria. He sent me to the hospital in Nha Trang; clean sheets, good food – and no rats! After a few days there, I was transferred to the Cam Ranh Hospital Recovery Center. Instructions: take it easy. No problem! And that's what I did for two months. What a skate! My only memory was a visit by GEN Westmorland, closest I ever came to a 4-star. Malaria was no fun – but I sure was glad to escape the tent, the bunker – and most of all, the rats!



FALCONS CAPTURE THE FLAG
 CE David Kadel (L) and pilot Tom “Dizzy” Dickenson show off their trophy sometime in 1970.

(Sideline whisper: “It’s upside down, Diz.”)

HELPING CENTRAL HIGHLANDS ORPHANS

At the reunion in DC, your Association officers voted to provide an annual donation to the Friends of Vinh Son Orphanage. They are a non-profit group that supports several orphanages for hill tribe children in the Kontum area. Last week, I sent a check for \$525. If you want to know more about the organization – or maybe make your own donation - go to “www.FriendsofVSO.org.”

Jeff Schrader, Treasurer

REUNION RENO:

October 3-8, 2018

We’ll be at the Atlantis Casino Resort and Spa in Reno, Nevada. (<https://www.atlantiscasino.com/>) Our Memorabilia/Hospitality Room will be open 1000 hours until 2200 hours on 4-7 October. Banquet will be at 1800 hours on Saturday, 6 October. Room rates start at \$79 (plus taxes and fees) for non-weekend nights, \$129 (plus taxes and fees) for weekends.

Reservations: online <https://reservations.travelclick.com/98418?groupID=2057939>

telephone: 800-723-6500 or 755-825-4700.

Use code **S155AHC** to receive our special room rate.

Details are on the Home Page, and we’ll have them in the next Barb, too. Any questions or suggestions, please contact me via e-mail at jrcunningham2@yahoo.com or phone (530) 400-2443.

Jim Cunningham, Falcon

COMMO CHECK

Norm Simpson – I was a Falcon pilot in ’69; flew the night mission to LZ Kate, got shot down with Denny Fenlon and Craig Mosher in Cambodia in October, wounded with Les Davison at Bu Prang a month later. Planning to join up with everyone at Reno, it will be my first reunion.

Wally Foster – Had a very nice surprise, opened my mail to find a photo of me at BMT, courtesy of Denny Fenlon. To return the favor – sort of – I will be sending Rein Hofgesang and Charlie Marvin photos I took of them.

Bob Beaudreault – Life is good, I'm heading off for a short English theater tour in Warsaw, Poland. Alas, my Romeo days are behind me, I am playing Ebenezer Scrooge in "Christmas Carol" - and a Bah Humbug to you!

Bob Alberts – Hope you guys are doing well.

TAPS

Clarence Woodell passed away in June, 2017. Clarence was with the 155th in 1970.

REMEMBERING MR. JOHNSON

Michael Forbes, CE, 1st Platoon



Michael Forbes (L) and Marlin Johnson.

Here's the best photos I have. Looking at them - and remembering - is not easy; he was one of my favorite pilots. I always liked seeing his name with me first thing in Flight Ops. He was always ready to give me a hand with no prob, wash rack or whatever. My best memories are trying to get him to laugh.

Ed: Marlin Johnson and Darek Richardson died on 20 April '70, when their Stagecoach slick was shot down in Cambodia. Earlier that very same day, Marlin and Darek and their crew had gone "above and beyond," hanging it out to rescue the crew of another downed Stagecoach slick. An eventful day, to say the least! We'd like to dedicate a future Barb to the memory of Marlin and Darek, by telling the stories of those of you who were involved in the actions that day. PLEASE consider sharing your stories and memories – for them, for yourself - and especially for their families. Thank you.

RABBIT STEW

Joe Harrelson, Stagecoach 26

In 1968 there were around nine Alpha-Team Special Forces camps in and around Darlac Sector (BMT) with the missions of reconnaissance, ambush, and combat operations against Viet Cong and NVA. The camps we supported most during my time were at Duc Lap, Lac Thien, Gia Nghia, Bu Prang, and Buon Ho. A standard A-Team was made up of two officers and ten NCO's, augmented by local Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) personnel. The CIDG around BMT were mostly Montagnard tribesmen. Montagnards could loosely be analogous to Native Americans in the US. The Montagnard diet was mostly rice, corn, squash, cucumbers, eggplants and bananas. Fresh meats were nonexistent among the CIDG and rare at an A-Team table. Because of the remote locations of the A-Teams, unorthodox requisitioning and procurement procedures were common.

In July 1968, I flew a group of SF Team senior officers to the Buon Ho camp. While waiting to transport them back to BMT, I was given a nice tour of the camp. Of special interest was the mine field surrounding the camp - which I got too intimately familiar with on a subsequent visit - and which I will describe in a future Barb, stay tuned. Eventually we went to the Operations shack, and to a series of cages out back containing scores of rabbits. The resourceful A-Team had solved their shortage of fresh meat with the farming of a flock of juicy rabbits! Also in back of the Operations shack were two Montagnard women operating foot-pedal sewing machines - and they were sewing Viet Cong/ NVA flags! Our host noted to us that after the application of a bit of rabbit blood, the flags were great trading materials to the rear echelons for the other supplies that made the A-Team's life a bit easier and could not be provided by the fractured Army supply system. By the way, I brought back home a **real** NVA flag. Right! Sure!

ONE LONG DAY, AND ONE CLOSE CALL

Frank Uhring, Stagecoach 19, 69-70

It was a single ship mission in support of the 4th Infantry Division units around Kontum, up northwest of Pleiku. We started the day before sunrise in order to get to Kontum (long flight both ways!) on time. The mission was long but uneventful, and luckily we were released before sundown. Heading back to BMT, we got up to altitude at plus 2000 feet AGL so we didn't worry about random small arms fire, and just followed the road south. Well, by the time we got into Pleiku air space everyone was asleep except me - and I was "just" awake enough to follow the 'road' and keep us at altitude.

Now flight control around Vietnam was not that good, what with all the helicopters popping up and down in the middle of nowhere, so I didn't call in to Pleiku Control (my mistake) that we were flying along the road west of Pleiku. I thought we were low enough to be out of the Pleiku approach pattern and not have to worry about any other aircraft. So there I was, half asleep (Remember when we could sleep anywhere, any time, and in any position? I'd love to do that now!), homeward bound. I heard it first, and then I saw it - and then I felt wake turbulence rock the ship as a US Air Force C-123 flew just above us. (The C-123 had two loud piston engines; you could also feel them when you were close enough.) It had come up from our 4 o'clock and flew over at our 10-11 o'clock position - passing directly over our Huey - with less than fifty feet of separation! Close - very close!

All I could do was stare at the big cargo aircraft flying away from me. I right away thought of calling Pleiku tower and telling them about this near mid-air - but then I was the one not in contact with Flight Control. Next I thought of 'telling off' the crew for not watching out for other aircraft - but we were all so tired, and I the AC had let them sleep because we all needed it. I never did tell the crew what had happened (all three of them slept right through the whole thing). All I could think of was how lucky we were because a mid-air would have taken us both down. Our rotor blades would have cut the C-123 in half the long way, and we all would have been just a pile of wreckage west of Pleiku. Too tired to fly right - but we were so lucky at times.

ASH & TRASH

155 AHCA ROSTER OF BMT GUYS

Sometime over the next several weeks, we plan to send copies of the current 155 AHCA roster to all of you. Personal contact information (name, address, phone, and e-mail address) will be sent out, and we'll ask that recipients not share the information with others outside of our group. **If you do not want your contact information sent out, get in touch with any 155 AHCA officer.**

LIVER FLUKES FROM VIETNAM SPOTLIGHTED IN VA STUDY

The VA recently released the results from a small pilot study that suggests that some Vietnam veterans may be infected with a liver parasite that can induce cholangiocarcinoma (also known as bile duct cancer). The parasite may have been acquired by eating raw or undercooked fish. You can find additional information on-line.

Thanks to **Bob Alberts** for spotlighting this. Bob tells us that bile duct cancer is what took Mike Stark from us - way too soon.

COMMO ALTERNATIVES ABOUND

There's several different ways that BMT guys can be in contact. **Al Owen** set up a Facebook page that has several regular contributors – and there's some great photos there, too. **Lew Sain, Keith Marchbanks, Rick Erickson, and Roland "Bud" Jarvis** are just a few of the smiling faces you can find there. And on Yahoo, **Neill McDonald** has set up a 155 Yahoo Group, to encourage and facilitate commo over there. Take a look, you might find a long-lost buddy.

MISSION WRAP

MANY thanks to all the guys who have shared their memories here. That takes time, it takes effort – and sometimes, it might hurt some, too. But all of us are the better for it. Again, **THANK YOU**, gentlemen!

“Operations, this is Falcon 2. Ban Me Thuot Barb, Sortie 66, down in the Corral, mission complete.”

Les Davison , *Editor-This-Time*

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Overleaf Patches: Pterodactyls lived at Camp Coryell and flew out of BMT City Field. Starting in mid-1969, 283rd Dustoff (home-based at Pleiku) stationed one ship (“BMT Standby” mission) at Camp Coryell. They're “BMT Boys” just as much as the 155 guys.

We'd love to have any and all Pterodactyls and Dustoff guys – and 8th Med guys and BMT K-9 guys and USAF weather and Pyramid guys and BMT MACV guys and Green Hornets and CCS guys - (my sincere apologies to any I've left out) join up with us in Reno. Any and all are invited, and will be welcomed!

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