



BAN ME THUOT BARB

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



Sortie 67

MARCH 2018

SHOT DOWN IN CAMBODIA

*Denny Fenlon, Falcon 4
Norm Simpson, Peter Pilot*

This day in October, 1969, two Falcon gun teams and four Stagecoach slicks were assigned the B-50 mission, supporting the Special Forces guys who ran LRRP ops across the border in Cambodia. We staged out of the Duc Co SF camp. Denny Fenlon (AC), PP Norm Simpson, and Crew Chief Craig Mosher (sorry, don't know who the DG was) were flying Falcon 232 that day. Craig told what he remembered of the action that day in Barb Sortie 34. Now Denny and Norm will add their recollections of a VERY exciting day.

Sidelight from Denny: Our aircraft had recently been equipped with a Top Secret FM Scrambler device to prevent the bad guys from listening in on our communications. The Scrambler was an avionics box mounted in the nose radio compartment. I remember a Company meeting in which we were told about the Scramblers. Our instructions were, "NO MATTER WHAT, DO NOT LET THIS SCRAMBLER GET CAPTURED!"

Denny: We were scrambled mid-day, I was Team Lead; two slicks scrambled with us. Enroute we were in contact with the USAF FAC, who informed us the team had been compromised and was running for their lives and in heavy contact. There wasn't a lot of prep time and we had to get to them ASAP. As we approached the area, the FAC told us the team was in a field east of the river and the bad guys were chasing them. The FAC called us in hot and told me to stay away from the river and to hit the tree line west of the field. We rolled in and were lighting up the tree line.

Norm: The last few days had been quiet, and we were doing what Falcons did a lot; standing by. And then the SF guy monitoring radio traffic came running, yelling, "Scramble! Two guns and two slicks, SCRAMBLE!" We were quickly airborne and in contact with the FAC. He told us a team had been compromised, they were being pursued by a number of NVA, and were receiving heavy small arms fire. (Pretty much a "normal day at the office" for the B-50 mission; those SF guys were something else!)

We were soon over the area of the contact. The area was heavily forested, with a large "L" shaped open grassy area. The FAC told us there were bad guys at the base of the "L", and instructed us to shoot up the area. We started down the long arm of the "L", and Denny was firing rockets into the trees there. As we made our gun run, there were muzzle flashes coming from all along the tree line to our left.

Denny: At the bottom of the gun run (maybe 100 feet above the trees), we took a LOT of fire from the left side and the engine spooled down. I called, "Falcon 4 going down!" We were in trouble, because all I could see were trees. Immediately, the FAC called, "BREAK RIGHT!" and I slammed the cyclic over. As we were about to hit the trees, I popped the collective and ballooned over the tree line to an open field. What a sight! RPM was dropping pretty quick, so I flared hard, and as we settled into the grass I pulled the remaining pitch. I didn't know the grass was 8 feet tall! We hit level and a little harder than I planned, but everything stayed together and no one was hurt.

Norm: We were taking a lot of fire - and then, the engine sound changed! It was spooling down, and the engine RPM was decelerating rapidly. We'd been hit - bad! Denny had his hands full; talking on the radio to the other aircraft, the FAC, and our crew, while fighting to maneuver the crippled Charlie

model into a landing spot free of trees. I must admit that my “pucker factor” increased as we approached some high trees. I didn’t think we were going to be able to get over them. But Denny popped the collective to clear the trees, and then neutralized pitch and set up for a landing in what appeared to be grass no higher than 24 inches. In fact, it turned out to be elephant grass, about eight feet tall. As we neared touchdown, he pulled the nose up to stop our forward airspeed. The rear of the skids hit hard and we rocked up a little on the front of the skids - and settled softly back down. A large ovation erupted from the entire crew and those observing from above. We were safely down, without injury. Well done, Denny!

Denny: Things had really happened fast, and most of it was instinct and training - but that FAC really saved our butts. When I had a chance to look at the instruments, I realized the engine was still running at idle. (Craig said the whole left side was covered in oil.) I shut the aircraft down and told Norm to get the Top Secret radio scrambler from the nose compartment. Craig and the DG jumped out with their 60’s and the rescue slick was already on the way in. Funny, I grabbed my camera, M16, and the aircraft logbook. Norm came running and did NOT have the scrambler as we jumped on the slick. I signaled to the slick Door Gunner that he should shoot the nose of 232 with his M60, it was the only way I knew to “NO MATTER WHAT” get the scrambler. Almost before we got airborne, 232 was starting to burn and rockets were cooking off. I don’t know whether that was from enemy or friendly fire. Soon after, the other slick went in and got the SF team and we all hauled butt back to BMT East.

Norm: After the cheering, the cockpit became a flurry of activity and barked orders as we prepared to exit the ship and hunt for cover. We were receiving some small arms fire from the NVA, but it appeared that they did not have a clear shot at us and were still some distance away. As I unbuckled and jumped out I realized that my 45 cal. pistol was unloaded; the clips were stored in the front pocket of my chicken plate. While I fumbled around trying to load it, Craig slammed an M-16 into my hands and repeated Denny’s order for me to quickly retrieve the FM Scrambler from the radio compartment. To add to the noise and confusion – in a good way - a Stagecoach slick was already on short final. Another Well Done, this time for the Stagecoach guys! I ran and opened the nose compartment, but was confused as to which of the several radios was the new “FM Scrambler.” Finally choosing the one I thought was it, I commenced unhooking it. It was a bayonet style mount and all I had to do was untwist two thumb screws and jerk the radio free. As luck would have it, the thumb screws were corroded and difficult to turn. Where were the vise-grips when I needed them? While I worked feverishly on the stubborn radio, the small arms fire seemed to increase in intensity, and my crew mates were shouting for me to hurry. To say the least I was stressed!!! Finally I was able to free the Scrambler and run for the slick, with the radio and M-16 banging together on my chest. There was a lot of encouragement coming from the ship for me to hurry the Hell Up! I threw the radio to waiting hands, did an unceremonious belly-flop between numerous legs, and then relaxed slightly as the ship lifted off. I’d made it!

As soon as I was aboard (clear field of fire), the door gunner and several others began firing up our loyal Charlie model. It wasn’t going to be recovered, so we tried our best to put bullets into critical components. As air speed and altitude increased and Stagecoach headed for home, an air of giddiness fell upon us. We’d just been shot down in Cambodia! How blessed we were to all be alive, uninjured, and headed back to Ban Me Thuot! The one exception was Crew Chief Craig Mosher, who was visibly distressed. I asked him what the problem could be since all involved in the incident were out safely. He impolitely informed me that UH-1C # 232 was HIS helicopter, and had been for almost three consecutive tours. He was having trouble leaving her behind and losing a major part of his life. I could easily understand his distress, and could only hope he would soon crew a similar HOG gunship.

Denny: During the debrief I informed MAJ Owen (CO) and the XO what had happened, and that the aircraft was not going to be recovered. They were not happy, and I was later told that the Army might

try to make me pay for the aircraft! I made \$700 a month with combat pay, and a Bell UH-1C cost \$250,000. HAH!

Some time later, I also talked to our FAC savior pilot to thank him. He told me he saw the guy that shot us down, he was in the top of a tree in the tree line and had a great shot at us. I guess my rockets went a little too long to get him.

As it turned out, we were about to get VERY busy in places called Bu Prang and LZ Kate, so I never got a bill from the U.S. Treasury for one UH-1C helicopter.

Norm: Upon our return to Ban Me Thuot, Denny and I reported to the CO, MAJ Dean Owen. After learning that everyone was out safely, his first question was: "Well Lieutenant, where in the Hell is my Gunship?" I told him that unfortunately we had to leave it in Cambodia - and there was no chance of recovery. "At least you all came out safely! Go get some chow and a good night's rest."

The food was good, but sleep eluded me after one of the most memorable days of my life.

Postscript: It's been 48 years, a LONG time ago. I wonder if we'll ever know whether Norm got the Scrambler out of the ship.

CHANCE MEETING

TOM HUNT

I had an interesting meeting one Saturday last April. Becky and I were driving through Port St. Joe, FL, with members of our car club when we saw three old cars in a drive way and they were also having a yard sale. After we finished lunch we decided to stop and look. As we walked up the drive way a gentleman introduced himself. I noticed a faded Special Forces hat and SOG tee shirt. When I asked about the hat and shirt he said he had been with SF in 1969 at a place called Kontum. I asked him if he worked with CCC and he got a strange look on his face. He then wanted to know how I knew about CCC. When I told him I had flown out of BMT, he said, oh, you worked with CCS. We started comparing notes and there is a very good possibility that I was on one of the gunships that helped his team out of a bad situation close to the tri-borders area. Almost 50 years later two guys who didn't know each other had a good chat about our roles in VN. How about that?

RENO, RENO, RENO!

October 3-8, 2018

Atlantis Casino Resort and Spa in Reno, Nevada: <https://www.atlantiscasino.com/>

Room type	Wed 10/03	Thu 10/04	Fri 10/05	Sat 10/06	Sun 10/07	Mon 10/08
Atlantis Tower	\$79	\$79	\$129	\$129	\$79	\$79
Luxury Tower	\$ 99	\$99	\$149	\$149	\$99	\$99
Atlantis Concierge Tower	\$159	\$159	\$209	\$209	\$159	\$159

Note: Local occupancy tax is 13% and there is a \$2.00 per room, per night, tourism surcharge, both of which are subject to change.

Reserve at: <https://reservations.travelclick.com/98418?groupID=2057939>

or telephone: 800-723-6500 or 755-825-4700. Use code **S155AHC** to receive our special room rate. **Free airport shuttle!** 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.

Possible group excursions are: Friday, Oct 5: **Tour the Nevada Army Air Guard Helicopter Facility**, located at the Reno Stead Airport (and perhaps a same-day tour of the private Harrah's Military Museum). Approximate costs for transportation are \$11.00 per person for 60 participants.

Sunday, Oct 7: **Lake Tahoe sightseeing luncheon cruise** on the M.S. Dixie II paddle-wheel boat (leave hotel at 0930, return at 1500 hrs). This would consist of a narrated coach ride to Lake Tahoe through the summit of the Sierras, a 2-hour cruise on the Lake and return. Estimated price per person is \$125 with a minimum of 45 guests. My wife and I have done the cruise and everyone on board enjoyed it. Another possibility, not necessarily on Sunday, would be a bus tour to historical Virginia City. Depending on tour options, this would be \$72.00 with lunch (6 hrs.) or \$46.00 without lunch (4 hrs.), with at least 18 guests.

Golf anyone? If there's interest, we'll set you up.

For more information and previews, visit:

<https://www.atlantiscasino.com/>
<http://www.zephyrcove.com/cruises/daytimesceniccruises/>
<http://www.visitvirginiacitynv.com/>

If you're planning to attend the Reunion, **I would appreciate you contacting me concerning your interest in any of the possible sightseeing options:**

***jrcunningham2@yahoo.com* or phone (530) 400-2443.** Questions and/or suggestions are encouraged. Hope to hear from lots of you – SOON!

Jim Cunningham, Falcon

2nd ANNUAL LUFU AWARDS - A chance to strut your (old) stuff! Call it the BMT Fashion Show.

Some of you will remember Lufe, the little elephant who lived on the compound outside the latrine. To honor her, we've named our Fashion Show after her.

Here's your chance to model something you wore in BMT, in the army or in the style of the day. Some of us have old uniform parts, accessories, caps, Stagecoach shirts, etc. Very few can button all the buttons or zip up the pants. The difference in sizes between then and now will make for some hilarious moments.

After dinner, each contestant will have their moment to strut, walk or wiggle or vamp down the runway to the music 'The Stripper' while the audience roars their approval, accompanied by the MC's announcement and running commentary. (Will the now world-famous Bob Beaudreault do the honors again this year?)

At the end of the 'runway' will be a 'red carpet' area which will allow for a spin, a curtsy, a bump, a flirtatious turn, etc.

The audience will decide, at the end of the show, the winners. Categories might be: best saved souvenir, most enlarged, worst fitting, best strut, etc.

There will be awards for 1st, 2nd, 3rd and Booby prizes. Winners will get award certificates.

Bring your old stuff to put on (in secret) after dinner. Wives, girlfriends, boyfriends, etc. are welcome to enter and wear something from that period in the 60's or 70's!

Last reunion we had 8 contestants and a huge amount of fun. Let's make the 2nd LUFU AWARD another raucous and rowdy memory.

Any questions, call Bruce McInnes:

RESCUE IN CAMBODIA

Doc Redman, 254th Dustoff

In reference to the Green Hornets, we were called out to rescue one of their downed crews in Cambodia (when, according to Nixon, we weren't officially there). The Air Force radar was

monitoring flights close to the border, and when they noticed we were flying toward Cambodia, they called and asked if we knew we were flying into the "pepper box." Our pilots did not reply. We flew into Cambodia, rescued the crew, and flew back to Duc Lap. Our Huey was parked and locked while we settled down for a rest at the aid station there. The next morning we found our ship still locked - but on the back of each seat a Green Hornet was stenciled on. We never did figure out how they bypassed the locks, but appreciated the newly-decorated seats!

COMMO CHECK

Al Meadows – I got to BMT in Jul '70. My second day of flying, I was DG when the pilot tried to take off under high tension power lines – not a good idea. We crashed, but everyone walked away, more or less. I painted a few guys' helmets, and a few helo noses, too. Hoping to make it to Reno, it will be my first reunion.

Doc Redman - I flew out of BMT City Field in '68 when I was a Medic with 254th Dustoff. We were based at Nha Trang, but pulled standby duty at your place. Thanks to the Falcon crews who covered us.

Dean Owen - Many times over the years, I have thought about how little recognition and/or appreciation the 155th "crews" received. Not only did they have little to no input about the mission, or who they were riding with, after they took care of their aircraft before and after the mission, they also pulled guard, etc. Not many 18 to 25 year old kids today have any idea about working that hard and hanging their butts out day after day. Well done, gentlemen! **Stagecoach 6**

Ernie Bryant – Glad to finally hear from the Association. I went over on the USS Iwo Jima. I've got a short story. On one mission (don't remember the crew) the crew chief had a pet rock to rest his foot on - and the CO threw it out. After we returned to base, they went back alone and got his rock. Guess that leans to a lot of stupid things we did.

Jon Beckenhauer - I was a Freight Train pilot, flew into LZ Kate in October '69. That was exciting! I was in 155 Ops that night when you guys got called out for the night mission. I remember thinking there was no way any of you were going to come back alive. Couldn't believe when all of you flew back in a couple hours later. Amazing, probably miraculous.

Shawn Kelley - Many memories are foggy; this one isn't. One night there was a Sapper Attack, I was in the guard tower in the motor pool area. I got wounded a little bit, Dustoff flew me to Pleiku, I was patched up and returned to BMT. Surprised to find an unexploded rocket stuck in the sand bags in the front side of tower. Every day is a blessing!

155TH AHC Association Officers

Rod Waddell - President
Joe Harrelson - Vice President
Chuck Markham - Quartermaster
Jeff Schrader - Treasurer
Matt Matthews - Database guy
Les Davison - Historian
Wayne Coward - Member at large
Jim Cunningham - Member at large
Bruce McInnes - Member at large
Bob Gardner - Member at large
rag_ftw-155@yahoo.com
Tom Hunt - Member at large
Elizabeth Coward - Webmaster

*Just a note. When I called for my Reno reservation and asked for the 155 rate they never asked about a category of room. They asked what size bed. I asked if we would all be located close to each other they responded in the affirmative. ****chuck*****

NIGHT FLIGHT

Phil Watson, Stagecoach 13, 69-70

We left BMT one morning to help out with an After Action detail just east of Pleiku. While surveying enemy bunkers about midday we burst an oil line and started losing engine oil pressure. We flew a short distance and landed at an SF camp. There we contacted the Company and they said to sit tight and they would get us the replacement oil line. By the time we got the line and the mechanics repaired it, the sun had set and it was dark. I told Operations by radio/phone we would return to BMT in the morning at first light but they said the aircraft was needed first thing in the morning and to come back now. So, although I felt it was an unnecessary risk I conceded and we took off.

In my whole year in Viet Nam I don't think I flew at night ten times so it was pretty rare. Have I mentioned it was DARK? There was a solid overcast and of course no ground lights whatsoever. Our plan was to just head 180 degrees for about an hour and pick up the lights of BMT. How's that for preflight planning? But, we had no GPS, no VORs, etc. Just Dead Reckoning.

I was the flying pilot, in the left seat, and soon on instruments, not because we were in the clouds but because there was simply nothing to see. I chose an altitude that would afford me about 1500' ground clearance, but from time to time we could tell by the reflection of the nav lights that there were some clouds, so I would descend a couple hundred feet. Have I mentioned that it was BLACK DARK? After descending about three times for clouds I asked the Peter Pilot to get out the chart and see what the terrain elevation was in our area. I clearly remember him saying, "About 1000 meters." I did the math real quick and looked at the altimeter; I was at 3300' MSL. Hmmm.

Since I was in the left seat and the landing light switch was on the collective of the right seat pilot, I asked that he turn on the landing light. And so he did. Remember the left seat, how there was nothing in front of you but plexiglass? No radios or glareshield or anything? When that bright landing light came on in the inky darkness, there was in my chin bubble a blur of the tops of trees rushing under my boots, our speed accentuating the visual effect. I carefully initiated a shallow climb. Without exaggeration, if I had lost another 50 feet we would have been one of those flights that just disappeared and never came home.

Looking back on it I think the terrain rose a bit from where we started and that was a factor. But more than that I realize now as an older, more seasoned aviator that we were part of a very new military aviation undertaking. Vietnam - the Helicopter War. The thought was out there that we could do anything, including VFR night operations in aircraft that at the time were state of the art. Contrast our Vietnam era equipment to the Army Aviator's equipment today. Army helicopters today come with Radar Altimeters, Terrain Alert systems, stabilization/autopilot, GPS navigation, and the best of all, Night Vision Goggles. No night mission would launch today without NVGs, at a bare minimum. I remember in my year we lost several crews in our Battalion to night cross country flights. I believe that our Operations folks were lulled a bit by our Flight School night experience. But, flying night VFR over the jungles of Vietnam is not the same as night VFR over central Texas or southern Alabama with lights everywhere.

End of story. Glad I'm here to tell it.....

DRIVERS' TRAINING AT CAMP CORYELL

Joe Harrelson, Stagecoach 3

I've got a Tony Giordano story. He was at the 2016 Reunion by the way. Tony was from New York City, the Bronx as I recall, and had never driven an automobile. Growing up in the big city, his family did not need nor did they own a car.

I was the Operations Officer. We had an assigned Jeep in Operations and there was a dirt road around the camp. In early '69, when I was leaving Ops to be the XO, Tony was to be the new

Operations Officer. I gave him an orientation of the Jeep - including the use of the clutch - and sent him off to teach himself how to drive, a straight shift at that. After three days of starts and stops, he became a Jeep operator. How cool was that!

The Muddy Check Ride

Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28

It was time for my quarterly check ride with the 2nd platoon IP Billy Richardson. No big deal, I had been in country for about 7-8 months and knew how to handle a Huey, viewed it more as a chance to fly and have some fun with Billy and maybe learn something. The start of the check ride was rather straight forward, we sat down and talked about a few things, Billy asked most of the normal questions and then it was time to go out and show my stuff. Billy being ever the professional IP explained how he wanted the check ride to go, again all normal stuff, one of the things he indicated was if he gave me a simulated engine failure, he would call the "power recovery", and we would terminate at a hover. We did a lot of the normal maneuvers at the airfield, and then departed the traffic pattern to go do a confined area.

I figured it was about time for Billy to give me a simulated engine failure, as we were low level doing 90K over a nice flat rice patty. Sure enough, off went the throttle and the low RPM audio warning came on. At that point I lowered the collective, started to flare, checked the RPM and trim, everything was cool; I just knew Billy was going to be impressed. I was in the flare, and still nothing from Billy. I was now pulling initial pitch just prior to touch down, still nothing. I pulled cushioning pitch and made the nicest zero airspeed touchdown you ever saw in the middle of the rice patty.

Two things happened at this point. Billy came on over the intercom with "What the heck!" (that's not exactly what he said, but you get the idea) - and the aircraft sank down until it was setting on its belly in really thick red gooey mud. We then looked at each other for a few seconds and Billy inquired as to why I did not do a power recovery. My short answer was, "Because you never called for it." Billy said, "Get out and check to see if there is any damage to the aircraft." I got out and was immediately in mud almost over the top of my boots. I ran around the aircraft, everything was OK, so I got back in and indicated we were good to go. Billy flew us back to BMT.

There were only three issues when we put the aircraft back in the revetment:

1) The entire belly and skids of the aircraft were covered in red mud. 2) I was an A/C at the time, so the left side pilot station on the floor was covered in mud from my boots. 3) Ron Porter, the Company SIP from the Falcons, was scheduled to use our aircraft to take his check ride with the Battalion SIP.

We did post flight on the aircraft and started walking toward Operations. We met Ron and the Battalion SIP as they walked to the aircraft. Ron asked Billy if the aircraft was OK, somehow Billy was able to inform Ron with a straight face that everything was good to go, somehow how I was able to control myself until we got to Operations, where I am sure everyone there could not understand why Billy and I were laughing so hard.

So that gentleman is how I passed the muddiest check ride I ever took.

Post Script: Billy and I would both be assigned to Ft Wolters as Instructor Pilots, Billy got out of the Army a few months before I left. When I asked him what he was going to do, Billy replied, "I am going back to California to sit on the beach and eat seaweed." I hope it worked out for him.

THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS

Jim Askren, Falcon 4, 65-66

We got a call one day, shortly after my arrival, asking that someone come to the Lac Thien SF camp and talk to the local Montagnard villagers. We asked what it was about. It turned out that, every once in a while, the "Yards" would get their dander up and want to exercise "some authority" - so they would lock the SF guys in the Communications Room. Then the SF guys would call for someone to come discuss the situation with the locals. We would fly down with some MACV officer, he would talk to them for a few minutes, they would let the SF guys out, we would fly the MACV guy home, and all would be well - until they decided they needed to "up their status" again. It was never hostile and always friendly. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, they never even asked for anything. They just wanted attention or something like that.



155 AHC Association
711
Durham, NC 27712-1325