



BAN ME THUOT BARB

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

Sortie #68

June 2018

Mishap in the Corral: 4 Mar '68

Dave Skoog

A couple of us were in the Corral working on a ship and it was pretty normal ships cranking up, hovering, etc. All of a sudden a tremendous noise erupted. I don't know how to describe the noise, like an explosion. We knew in microseconds it involved rotors. The slapping sounds still are in my mind. We were right behind the two ships involved, with parts and pieces flying and hitting everything. We hit the ground and tried to imagine what just happened.

We got up and ran over to the two ships initially involved and knew there was a major issue. We could see other ships were involved too, with fuel spraying out of two ships where rotor pieces had flown into them. The worst scenario involved a transmission that had been ripped loose and was laying on a pilot in the cockpit. We couldn't get him out and it looked fatal to me. We got a wrecker over there and got the trans off of him. The pilot was pulled out slowly and taken away, somehow still alive but badly injured. I don't recall anything else about injuries to other people. It was chaos, with Vietnamese firefighters trying to do their thing with American rubber boots way too large for their bodies (the things that stick with you)! The last thing I remember is that they airlifted the injured pilot and I never heard what happened to him.

I had photos of the accident but lost them in a domestic dispute (if you know what I mean). I found Jim Haga had photos and he sent a couple to me. At the Atlanta reunion of the 92nd AHC, a number of us were talking, and I met a man (Neill McDonald) who I didn't know, and we found out we were in BMT at the same time and he said he wasn't there very long. There was a rotor meshing incident and he was injured and taken away with severe injuries. I looked at him, realizing that this was the pilot we pulled out of the wreckage 40 some years before and I gave him a big hug and said loudly, "You lived!" It was pretty emotional, and I couldn't believe he made it through that terrible accident (there was a **lot** of wreckage, with damage to multiple ships). Well, we met and became good friends and have had a good time knowing each other ever since. I blew up the two Jim Haga photos and sent them to Neill and he called me when he got them and said he cried when he saw them. He'd never seen the accident scene before. Very emotional for all. Just one of the things that happened at BMT during TET and mini-Tet. I always thought if you could survive that time at that place, everything would get easier after that.

Neill McDonald

About ten years ago, Fae and I attended a reunion of the 92nd AHC in Atlanta - my first unit reunion. On arrival at the reunion site, we followed the signs and entered a large somewhat typical suburban motel conference room where, seeing no one I recognized, I wondered if we were in the wrong place.

I did see intense conversations within perhaps a dozen casual groups. Somewhat hesitatingly, I walked up to one group where an earlier-comer, a stranger to me, was recounting stories left and right, including some of his time in Ban Me Thuot as a member of the 155th. I remember waiting at

least 10 minutes before I could get a word in edgewise, and when I could, I asked if he had been in Ban Me Thuot when a rotor-meshing had occurred in the Corral?

“Yes,” he said, and without seeming to take a breath, began recounting vivid details of that incident, including his having to dodge parts flying from the colliding aircraft, that six aircraft had been damaged or destroyed in the event, some by fire, and on and on. When I again could get a word in, I simply commented that I had been in the front seat. His eyes grew large, he hesitated a micro-second and Dave Skoog, with tears in his eyes, threw his arms around me, yelling, “You lived!!!”

You see, the transmission of the aircraft I was in (I was the Peter Pilot) had landed on top of me. The unit wrecker was required for my extrication, and the last Dave had seen of me was my unconscious form being carried to the doctor’s office by the 2LT A/C. Fortunately, I have a retroactive memory loss, so know nothing of the event other than what folks like Dave, Clarence Ebbinga, and Jim Haga have told me, including their sharing of pictures.

Dave Skoog and I have been great friends ever since, and we most-recently spent a wonderful time with Dave and his wife in Colorado Springs at the 2017 92nd reunion. Dave is truly a special guy.

Ed: Dave and Neill were both 155 guys and, also 92nd guys during their time in-country.

Dustoff Hoist Mission

Joseph “Doc” Redman, Medic

Date of Mission: October 1968

Location: Near Duc Lap

Unit: 254th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance) - DUSTOFF

My purpose for sharing this story is to thank and honor those who, bravely and without hesitation, gave of themselves so that our crews could accomplish this mission. I do not remember all the small details of the mission, but I suppose that is to be expected after so many years. The green of the jungle in between Duc Lap and the Cambodian border seemed darker from the rain the night before, but the temperature was no different - sauna hot. Captain Michael Herndon was the aircraft commander. "Straight Arrow" was the nickname the enlisted crewmen gave him. He was strictly regular Army and did everything by the book - which I and other enlisted crewmen appreciated when his discipline brought us out of difficult situations. Flying as the Peter Pilot was Lieutenant Tom Parker, the "Phoenix Flash". The crew chief, one of my closest friends, was SP5 Ron Scroggins, affectionately known as "Bloody Eddie". He was one of the best chiefs in the unit, and I always enjoyed working with him. Our helicopter, an "H" model Huey, had been dubbed "Lord of the Flies". In spite of the many holes put in her by the enemy, she flew like a dream, and seemed to get better with age.

When the mission was first called in on the radio we were taking a break in the underground aid station at Duc Lap. Captain Herndon copied the coordinates on a small piece of yellow paper and yelled for the rest of us to get moving, that we had a hot, (meaning the unit on the ground was still under enemy fire) urgent mission. While in route to the LZ, Captain Herndon talked to the LT on the ground to verify there were wounded to be evacuated. There were. Lots of them. He asked the unit on the ground to throw smoke, so we could identify their LZ. I spotted a thin red column of smoke at our nine o'clock position, and we headed to that location. The jungle opened into a small clearing about thirty feet in diameter. Traces of red smoke were present, but we could not identify anything looking like troops on the ground. Radioing the unit, we discovered they had not used red smoke!

We immediately took evasive action, flying away from the area, assuming the VC or NVA had attempted to lure us into a landing. As we pulled away from the hole in the jungle we radioed for cover from the Falcons, our favorite gunship unit. They were almost as crazy as us and were on

location within only a few minutes. Dull thumps and staccato-like cracks made their way through my flight helmet to my ears as the rockets and mini-guns worked over the area. Whether or not they did any damage or not was the last thing with which I was concerned at the time. I just enjoyed watching them work, and took comfort knowing they were around to help.

Another call on the radio produced yellow smoke on our right side. We located the correct LZ, and the wounded. This was going to be a hoist mission. The Medic on the ground asked if we had a Stokes litter on board, because he had wounded with head injuries. We did not, so took a very quick trip back to the aid station to pick one up. During the flight back to the LZ, Eddie and I rigged a strapping system from tie-down straps and seatbelts to make the litter usable. Upon return to the LZ, Captain Herndon lowered us into the trees to our hoist position. The lower we were the less time would be required to operate the hoist down and then back up. We were in a relatively stable, completely unsecured hovering position about seventy feet off the ground – and we were a perfect target! Our protection was the Falcons.

I had originally anticipated four or five wounded from the first message we received, but the radio came to life and we learned the unit was still in light contact with the enemy - and the total number wounded was now twenty-four! Almost the entire platoon! Looking at my two aid bags crammed with medical supplies, I hoped I had enough to do a good job treating the wounded. In the chest pocket on my “chicken plate” armor, I always carried a copy of the New Testament my father carried during World War II. Scriptures were easy to read but difficult to remember, and at that instant I did not have the time to read. I patted my pocket and quickly asked God to help me. It was good that I asked then, because for the next five hours I did not have time to even think, much less say a prayer.

I do not remember all the injuries. I do remember the first loaded were very serious head wounds. As the litter reached the skids, I would help Ron bring it on board and unload. He would return the empty litter to the ground while I tried to find the best place for my patients inside the cramped ship.

After asking the condition of the patients already on board, Captain Herndon decided to return to the aid station, drop our patients, refuel, and return. The Gunnies also flew back to refuel and rearm, so they could return with us. Nice! Fortunately, fuel and the aid station with a doctor were only a few minutes away at Duc Lap, and we could return quickly.

Time dragged on as the wounded were hoisted up and pulled into the helicopter. I can remember some of the wounds very clearly. A hole as big as my hand through the upper thigh, with the bone shattered; tourniquet and ABD dressing; small hole in the front and a large hole in back; big dressings and IV's; another head wound; plastic airways; large field dressings; splints; vaseline gauze for sucking chest wounds. We raced against time, wanting to finish the mission before the sun dropped behind the mountains. We dropped off patients at the aid station, picked up fuel, and returned to our hovering spot in the jungle. The Falcons flew in, out, and all around making noise louder than Niagara Falls as they fired into the jungle surrounding the unit on the ground, protecting them and us. We made 5 or 6 trips to and from the Duc Lap aid station, and toward the end of the mission the enemy had faded into the jungle. The Falcons had done their job, were low on fuel, so returned back to BMT.

And then it was over. We had hoisted twenty-four wounded and six who had been more fortunate - no wounds at all. The Medic on the ground, tired, told me he used everything he carried in his aid bag. Of the twenty-four men on whom Eddie and I worked, only one died that I know of, and that was several hours later at the aid station from shock because of the amount of blood lost. Things slowed down enough during the late dusk flight back to Ban Me Thuot for me to say a prayer, but I could only say, "Thanks."

Holding a helicopter motionless in the air while two crewmen are moving around in back hoisting wounded up and into the ship is a challenge. Doing this while the unit on the ground is under fire is something else. But to do this in the calm, professional manner Captain Herndon was

truly amazing. I thank him again for allowing Ron and me to treat the wounded without incident. Lieutenant Parker did a good job, helping where he could.

And then there was “Bloody Eddie,” a crew chief who knew helicopters inside out, and then some. Just another brave man with a mind that never stopped working. If he had not been present in the back with me, no more than half the men we treated would have lived. With his limited medical knowledge and a few on the spot instructions, he saved the lives of several men that day. I will always appreciate his courage. Finally, I will always thank the brave and determined crews of the Falcons. What a team we made!

I learned later that our crew was put in for an Air Medal with a “V for Valor” device. The commanding officer of the 8th Field Hospital in Nha Trang turned down the request, saying “They were just doing their job.” Ah, to this day I wonder about “desk jockeys!”

The Dustoff acronym stands for: “**D**edicated **U**nhesitating **S**ervice to **O**ur **F**ighting **F**orces.” Of course, that also included civilian men, women, and children, our allies, the enemy, and even a few injured dogs. My crewmates and those who flew with the Falcons are my heroes. I thank you from my heart.

B-50 Extraction – “Strings”

Bob Maddox, Falcon 1

Looking thru my photos the other day, I found several shots of B-50 (CCS) teams being pulled out on McGuire rigs (“strings”). From one very memorable day in late ’69 or early ’70, I’ve got shots of one slick bringing in four guys, a second slick had two, and the last slick had three. The main story here is what happened as the last slick came back to the stage field. During an extraction, once the B-50 team was pulled clear of the jungle, the helicopter would climb to an altitude above the range of small arms fire and head for home. However, due to the nature of the external cargo, their airspeed was drastically reduced. In fact, they were so slow that our gunships often landed and shut down, and then our crews helped land the team - and that’s what happened on this particular day.

The last three team members to come in that day (lower right photo) were all Americans. They were on extremely long lines but were grouped relatively tight as if holding on to one another, with one a bit lower than the other two. As you can see from the pictures, there was a ridge line covered in trees that had to be crossed on final approach. The first two slicks had been high enough to allow the SF guys below to clear the ridge. However, everyone had been left or right of a very large, tall and half dead tree which can be seen sticking up above the ridge line in three of the photos. By the time anyone saw or knew what was about to happen, it was too late. The three team members hit the upper branches of the tree. The team member hanging just below the others took the brunt of the impact, knocking him unconscious. The other two were beat up and bruised but conscious. I took a couple more pictures and then ran over to help. We could see that the lower team member was unconscious. You can see that in the last photo. I had no idea what might be broken. His rifle was hanging by its shoulder strap - in two pieces. It looked bad. We caught him and put him down as gently as possible. Once on the ground we could see that he was alive, so I backed off to try and take care of another problem brewing.

The other two team members were locked and loaded - and looking for someone to kill! They were soooooo pissed off and kept asking, “Where is the pilot?” Now I have never been one to be able to talk anyone out of anything, but I could see that their emotions were overriding their rationality, and something had to be done.

I cannot remember everything I said, but it was something like this, spoken loudly. “**It was an accident!** If you want to shoot the pilot, you may as well shoot the copilot, the crew chief, and the gunner, too, because they all work as a team - just like you do. They work as a team putting you in the jungle, and then getting you out of the jungle. **We all work as a team, so you may as well shoot us all!**”

I do not know to this day what got through to them. Maybe it was all the nasty words (left out here), but something worked. They calmed down, we tended to the badly injured SF guy, and everyone went home (such as it was). I remember hearing later on that the unconscious team member had a bad concussion and ended up with a plate in his skull.

I've got a lot of memories from my time in Vietnam. One I will never forget is catching that limp soldier as he was gently lowered down to us on that long line.

Whistle While You Work

John Ahearn

I was an FNG Peter Pilot, on one of my very first combat assaults with the 155 in early '69. I was assigned to fly with Mike Tierney, who is no longer with us. His aircraft was #259, which was painted about 20 shades of OD green. We were on final approach on this CA when the Falcons and the H-model gunners all started disturbing the neighborhood. Mike was at the controls, and I was sucking myself into the inner sanctum of my armored seat. I looked over at Mike, and he was whistling. I was dumbfounded - but I later found he could always whistle while he worked.

Coming Home Late

Frank Alotta, Stagecoach 13

It was a normal (ie., long and *mostly* boring day) Ash & Trash mission in the An Khe/Qui Nhon area. This wasn't our normal AO, so we did not have good Intel of the areas supported (if there ever was good Intel). Of course, that meant we took good fire at times during the day (as normal) – but no damage, except for the blood pressure spikes! LOL, not funny. (My apologies to the crew, can't remember anyone.)

By the time we were released, night was falling. I decided to take a direct route at altitude, well above the highest hills – and above small arms range, too. The last leg was mine (left seat, I was the A/C). I think we were about 4000 feet or so, since the flight was to be VFR. Well that did not work out too well, everything was extremely dark/black with NO LIGHTS on the ground, as all my brothers know this. The next thing I saw was the glow around the navigation lights, which also NOT a good sign. We were in the clouds! My Tac Ticket from flight school (we had very little instrument time, if any) would be put to the test this night.

So, I got on the horn with Pyramid Control, looking for help. They were helpful - except they were not seeing the weather on their scopes. As we followed Pyramid's vectors, we were seeing lightning thru the clouds. I felt like it was a lifetime flying on that little ADI, and my adrenaline was at a high level - besides the sweat pouring out of me! As Pyramid brought us close to home base, I started to lose control. We broke out over BMT in a nose down attitude, in a 30 degree bank to the left. When I saw the city lights, I was able to right the ship. Whew, that was close! I should have kissed the ground when we landed - but being so young my ego didn't let me. That flight stayed with me for a long time and through many flight courses. Looking back, there were many other times that I asked for help throughout my aviation career.

Firebase *Reno*

October 3rd thru the 8th 2018

Jim Cunningham

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

Room type	Wed 10/3	Thur 10/4	Fri 10/5	Sat 10/6	Sun 10/7	Mon 10/8
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
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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.

For everyone planning to stay at the "ATLANTIS" the cutoff date for our special room rate is September 5, 2018.

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. Price per head at registration will be approximately \$100. This price covers the cost per plate of \$55, plus \$45 for gratuities, taxes, liquor, etc.

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 hours). 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>

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If you're planning to attend the Reunion, I would appreciate you contacting me concerning your interest in any of the possible sightseeing options: jrcuo.com or phone (530xxxxx). Questions and/or suggestions are encouraged. Hope to hear from lots of you – SOON!

Sharing Commo

Foundation Recognizes Pete Agur - Flight Safety Foundation on Friday presented its Business Aviation Meritorious Service Award to Peter v. "Pete" Agur Jr., founder and chairman of VanAllen, a management consultancy based in Atlanta. Agur was cited for his extensive and prolonged efforts to improve business aviation growth, performance and safety, for his contributions to the industry, and for making business aviation safety a central theme of his career.

Cliff Allen – I was a Falcon CE in '68 and '69. **Tom Hunt, Dennis LaJoie, Cecil McGee, and Craig Mosher** were good friends.

Michael Horst – Here’s my contact info for the Roster update. Thanks for including us Pterodactyl guys.

Ken Donovan – Really enjoyed “Shot Down in Cambodia” in the last *Barb*. Thanks to Denny and Norm for sharing their memories with all of us.

Pete Barthman – Thanks for calling. Sure want to thank you guys for the *Barbs*, always enjoy reading about what we did so long ago.

Kevin Campbell – Glad to be able to update my contact info. I was a Wobbly One in Maintenance at the end of '70. **Rex Burton** was the Maintenance platoon leader.

Richard Clark – Thanks for sending the Barb, I always enjoy reading through it.

Geoff Jones - Visited Marlin Johnson's grave site on Memorial Day.

TAPS:

Frank Lengyel, Frank 71, of Port Richey, FL, died May 17, 2018. Survived by wife, Deborah; sons, Oren, Frank and Wayne; nine grandchildren; siblings, Alice and Roy.

David Smith died in March, 2017. David worked in Maintenance in '69-'70.

CW2 Lawrence Gardner ("Stagecoach 2-4") passed away due to cancer on Sept. 24th, 2016.

- 155th AHC Association Officers -

Rod Waddell, *President*

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Tom Hunt, *Member-at-Large*

Les Davison, *Historian*

Elizabeth Coward, *Webmaster*

Sortie 68 compiled by Les Davison and edited by Jeff Schrader. Thanks to those who have shared their stories here. Please think of adding a personal story of your own in the near future. Each quarter we send 526 newsletter copies to the guys that were there and interested families of loved ones lost.



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