



- BAN ME THUOT BARB -



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

Sortie 72

SEPTEMBER 2019

MY VERY BEST DAYS IN VIETNAM

Tom Love, Falcon Crew Chief

It was late spring or early Summer of 1969. I hadn't been flying for a few days because my aircraft was in maintenance getting some engine work done because of a hot-start. To kill some time I took a short stroll down to Ops to see what was going on that didn't include me. I was checking out the board and visiting with Captain Giordano. (Strange things do happen.)

The door opened and in walked a Captain from the Chinook outfit out of Pleiku (180th ASHC). He addressed Captain Giordano and said he was in need of a crew chief because his chief had an appendicitis attack and had been placed in our hospital. Captain Giordano, without hardly looking up, said, "Take Love, he won't be flying with us for a while". Had he looked he may have noticed that we both had on uniforms that said "Love" on the name tag - and we looked a lot alike. Without hesitation, I was out the door and gathering my gear. And that's how I was able to crew for my older brother for two weeks. I didn't know anything about a Chinook, but was able to figure most of it out. (It would be interesting to know if it is in my records that I also crewed a Chinook helicopter.) And, I got to see a new part of Vietnam, because we were sent to the Delta. I was so blessed to be able to spend that time with my brother, Clyde.

I had about eight months of active duty after I came back to the States, and was lucky enough to be in the same company with my brother at Ft. Lewis. Sadly, he later returned to Vietnam and lost his life on May 18, 1972 in one of the same LZs that he and I had visited.

Love ya Brother!

SURRENDER FOR CHOCOLATE MILK

Jim Askren, Falcon 4

I was there the last half of 65 and first half of 66. Our mission then was to support the foreign troops for the most part. S. Vietnamese, Aussies, New Zealanders, S. Koreans as well as Special Forces and Sneaky Pete MI guys (at least I think that is who they were - we were never clear on who the black pajama clothed Americans were) and, later on, some Marine units and then some American Army units. We saw NVA and VC almost daily but the strangest sighting was right at the border west of BMT. Couldn't (probably wouldn't if I could I am guessing) tell you the exact coordinates because I was too busy trying to assess the "white flag" being waved in an area of sparse trees but not sparse enough to land. It was a NVA and he certainly appeared to want to surrender but my "trap" antenna was fully raised. We (gunship wingman and I) circled around and checked for ANY signs of other NVA inhabitation but could not find any. There was a clearing not too far away so we decided to try to lead him to it and he followed. When he got to the clearing, my wingman landed and the gunner or crew chief put his gun on the guy and motioned him over (still hands in the air and waving his t-shirt). They got him on-board and we brought him back for John (our interpreter at the time) to interrogate him. He had gotten sick and his unit told him to stay behind to join up with another unit coming down. He got sicker and hungrier as time went by but no other units showed up so he decided to surrender. Even though he was starved, he would not eat anything we offered because he had been told we would poison him if we caught him. One of the guys popped a top on a can of chocolate milk and drank it down. His eyes lit up like a neon sign. We offered him a can but he was still reluctant until a guy drank another one. I don't recall how many cans of chocolate milk he drank that day but he was not lacking fluid after that.

TWO 155 AVIATORS SAVE AIRCRAFT IN DARING ACTION

Reprinted from Vagabond Voice, 15 March 1970

WO1 Walter Sain and CPT Curtis Seiler were recently involved in an unusual situation. While flying on one of the 155's local missions they were instructed to shut down their Stagecoach aircraft on one of those "top of the pinnacle" firebases east of BMT. After locking up the aircraft, the pilots and crew were invited into the control room for coffee and conversation. While enjoying their coffee, they were told by a Vietnamese soldier, "You move helicopter now, OK?" Mr. Sain and CPT Seiler went out to move the aircraft and saw that a tank was in flames less than 50 feet away. Jumping in a jeep, they made tracks to the aircraft and prepared to move it out of the area. With no time to waste, CPT Seiler untied the blade while Mr. Sain climbed in the window, all this going on with .50 cal ammo cooking off fifty feet away. While Mr. Sain started cranking, CPT Seiler climbed in the same window. Taking off just as the tank exploded (sic). Circling the area, they set down well away from the exploding tank.

From Mr. Sain . . . "I never thought a fat guy like me could get through such a little window in such a big hurry." As a result of their quick action, both pilots have been recommended to receive the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device.

Ed: "Vagabond Voice" was the newsletter of the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion, based at Dong Ba Thin.

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG

Geoff Jones, Falcon 0

There was a single focus to our daily missions, and that was to locate and engage the enemy. Low and slow Charlie model tactics gave us a unique method of doing this in comparison to the more powerful Cobra gunships. Our door gunners and crew chiefs made all the difference in our survival and effectiveness. In addition to being seasoned eyes and ears for what lurked below and around us, they were indispensable and extremely effective in "reaching out" to those who meant us harm. Leaning out over firing rockets and mini-guns with only a strap while long-burst firing a jumping M-60 saved our bacon over and over.

Knowing that the crew chiefs and door gunners had our backs, we pilots were able to focus and do the rocket and mini-gun (occasional 40mm) work from up front. The act of flying became background, it happened without conscious thought - while we concentrated on tactics, maneuver, and shooting.

Most missions involved either joining some ground unit's fight to help them survive and move on; providing cover for insertions/extractions; providing prep and cover for assaults - or standing by somewhere for calls to do the same when situations arose. Sniffer ship cover was another "interesting" mission... most often done with a Stagecoach ship doing the low-down "sniffing". Hats off to all the Stagecoach guys; they were the best.

And yes, when we were young - sometimes we just went looking for trouble.

MY JOURNEY TO THE 155th AHC

Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28

I arrived on 23 Oct 1968. I remember standing in the doorway of the aircraft and being slammed with the heat and smell of Vietnam - and so started my journey to the 155th AHC. I spent two days at the 90th Replacement before being told I would be flying up north. We left early in the morning. Before leaving, I shook hands with Kurt Hamilton, my roommate in flight school. Kurt was killed in February 1969 flying scouts with the 1/9 cav.

I reported to the airfield to catch a ride on an Air Force C-123. We were packed in, when all of a sudden a guy went crazy, yelling and screaming. I guess it hit him he really was in Vietnam. He was removed by the MPs and we took off.

I reported to the 10th Aviation Battalion at Dong Ba Thin with Hog Wieler, another flight school classmate. The next day we reported to the Battalion S1 (Personnel Officer) for our unit assignments. The Major proceeded to pull out a board with a large circle on it. The circle had a pointer that would spin, and had pie slices with unit numbers. He stated, "Well gentlemen, we call this the fickle finger of fate. Who would like to spin first?" Hog spoke up and gave it a spin; he would go to the 48th Blue Stars.

As he was spinning, I noticed there were more slices marked "155." Before my turn came, I asked him why there were more 155 slices. "That's because they lose more people." Talk about the fickle finger of fate - of course I landed on the 155th. Stand by, things would only get better.

The next day I was in the back of a Dodge $\frac{3}{4}$ ton with another 155th pilot, we were driving to catch the 155th Admin bird. He was a CW2 coming back from R&R, I don't remember his name. I introduced myself, told him I was going to the 155th, and asked what was it like. His only response was, "You're *****!" Not what I really wanted to hear. Stand by, things only get better.

Russ Kogut was flying the Admin bird that day, Royal Sander was in back with me, what I did not know is the crew chief who had been drinking was flying. As we were low leveling through the pass toward BMT, we were doing over 100K about six feet off the road. I yelled over to Royal, "Does he always fly this crazy?" Royal responded, "Sometimes he is crazier." Remember, I am just out of flight school. Stand by, it gets better.

We had survived the flight and were on our approach to the aircraft revetment area at BMT. I was looking out at my new home for the next 14 months when - on short final - the drunken crew chief all of a sudden threw his hands up and let go of all the controls. Russ was frantically grabbing to recover the controls - so that is how I got to BMT (also known as Rocket City) and the 155th.

About two weeks after I got to the unit, I experienced my first mortar attack. We were working on the new bunker for 2nd platoon pilots. If you remember, the officers' hootches were very close to the aircraft revetment area. A recoilless rifle round went over my head and exploded about 40 yards away. All the old guys had already jumped in the hole, and were now yelling at me to "Get my cherry ass in the hole!" Welcome to Rocket City and the 155th. My stay and journey with the 155th ended on 5 Dec 1969 when I returned to the United States.



Rotor Rainbow

“Crystal
Blue
Persuasion”
by
Tommy James
& the Shondells

AFVN

2020 REUNION – Indianapolis

The next reunion of the BMT boys will be in Indy. Rueben Hunter has changed the date at our request to make it as close to Veterans Day as practicable. Due to a Future Farmers of America and a High School Band conference just prior and just after 11/11/20, the dates of 11/19/10 to 11/22/10 are the best available. This will be the Sheridan Indianapolis City Centre Hotel. The rates (room rates per night @ \$137 per night) and guarantees are very similar to those last year at the Reno Reunion. Reuben coordinated with Jim Cunningham, last reunion host, so far as number of room reservations and meeting rooms are concerned. There a number of dates that we will need to transmit to members later as well as financial penalties should certain minimum guarantees not be met. Look for more details in the next newsletter.

WORST DAY + 50 YEARS

Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28

A while back there was an e-mail string with several guys talking about their worst day in Vietnam. To be honest I had to think about this for a while due to the difficult nature of "worst days." I also wondered why after 50 years or more they remain so significant today.

First they are both a collective and individual memory. Collective in the sense that most of us have a "worst day" and we share this burden together. Our "worst day" is very personal. There are several reasons for this; the day we were wounded, the loss of a crew or unit member, the loss of a flight school classmate who was a close friend.

These experiences are so deeply personal the memory of that day is burned into us. I suspect for most of us it will be carried with us to our graves. When I opened the current issue of the *Barb* I noticed the passing of Gary Butler, the 155th Maintenance Officer during most of '69. I did not know him well, but it caused me to stop and reflect on the guys that have gone before us, and the sad fact we have lost another one of the good guys.

I responded to the email string; "We are better men today for having known them, for their friendship and example." I believe we are impacted so deeply because of the level of friendship we shared, a friendship that can only be understood by another combat veteran, forged in the fire of combat.

It is my wish that we continue to honor their names and their memories. I saw a toast in a movie that I thought was cool:

' TO THOSE THAT HAVE GONE BEFORE US, TO THOSE WHO ARE PRESENT, AND TO THOSE WE WILL MEET AGAIN.'

155th GOES STRONG ON CIVIC ACTION

Reprinted from Vagabond Voice, 15 Sep 1969

Civic action is the password at the 155 these days. As the work involving donations and personal assistance to the Vinh-Son Orphanage and School in Ban Me Thuot City goes on, plans are being made to provide English instruction to the more than 1200 students enrolled at the school on a regular fixed-schedule basis.

Members of the 155 have taught English at the school in the past, but it's been more or less a go as you can service, making it difficult for both the student and teacher, who must adjust to a different set of lessons each session. We hope the new system provides a better service to the students.

Also in the planning stage is a new clinic for the Leprosarium located in downtown Ban Me Thuot. The facility, supervised by an American Missionary with 20 years experience in Vietnam, was the site of much destruction wrought by the Viet Cong during the last Tet Offensive. At that time, the offices and clinic were occupied by VC. Three buildings were used as quarters and were destroyed, as was the clinic itself. Several missionaries and nurses were killed, others taken prisoner.

Since then, those in the Ban Me Thuot area suffering from Leprosy have not been able to be treated in town. We hope to build a clinic of sufficient size to care to the needs of the local population.

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REFLECTIONS ON MEMORIAL DAY

Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28

My oldest daughter, Camey was on the phone with her mother, and I stopped to say hello, she wished me a happy Memorial Day. I thanked her, but indicated it is not a happy day for veterans like myself who have lost friends in combat fighting America's wars. Today has been a quiet day, a day of reflection and mixed emotions as I remember the names of friends lost almost fifty years ago when my war started in Vietnam. You see I believe they were the best of America, for they were willing to serve America when it counted the most, and in the end they gave everything they had. No man can give more for his country or fellow soldiers. During my reflections I was sad, but then I discovered something else, I missed them. It seems crazy that even in my sadness, I laugh out loud: they were the best I have ever known. First, they were really smart. Smart enough to master one of the greatest aircraft in the world, known to all in Vietnam as simply the "Huey." They were also brave beyond words - and more than a little crazy. As crazy as we were, we all had the greatest respect for two groups; the Infantry and Dust Off crews. We had great respect for Infantry, simply because they bore the greatest burden of any of our fellow soldiers. In my experience, there was no risk too great to help them out of a jam, and the Dust Off crews were the bravest of us. No matter how bad the weather, no matter how many bad guys, if you called they would come. Many times during the rainy season, I would hear one of the Dust Off birds cranking up in the middle of the night, and think to myself, "glad that's not me going out." Joe Galloway, the famous Vietnam reporter, once called helicopter pilots "God's own lunatics." You need not look any further than the Dust Off crews.

Why do I laugh out loud in my sadness? Because they were some of the funniest guys I have ever been around. About midway through my tour, our swimming pool got fixed and we could actually go for a swim. Then some guys started to complain there were never any girls around. So two of the gun pilots ordered blow-up dolls and brought them to the pool as their dates.

This sense of brotherhood I believe is something not fully understood by my fellow citizens.

I also miss the sense of brotherhood we shared. The one thing they pounded into us in flight school was "you will die as individuals, you will survive as a team." No risk was too great to save a fellow brother. If you allow this writer a small indulgence, I would be remiss if I did not say a few words about my crew chief Mike Wilcox and my door gunner Dave Clements, both gone before their time due to Agent Orange. As I have stated before, I could not have had a better crew. They were very kind and patient to a twenty-year-old inexperienced aircraft commander. In the end, they helped make me a better leader and soldier. You are with me always, and know that as long as I live, you are not forgotten. Well done guys, rest in peace. Know that your brothers who fought beside you so many years ago fully understand and know in their hearts the true meaning of Memorial Day.

SHARING COMMO:

Matt Mathews: Frank Mil, Sr. (he wasn't a senior then) was my gunner at the 155th that was shot Sept. 3, 1970 while on a combat assault mission out near VC Mountain.

Frank's wound never healed properly and he died Dec. 3, 1981 from a related stroke. The following e-mail from Frank, Jr. states that Saturday, June 20, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ("The Wall") in Washington, DC., Francis Nicholas Mil's (Frank, Sr.) name will be added "In Memory". I will be there if I am still alive and able. I ask that all old BMT personnel attend this ceremony and meet Frank's family to remind his them of our brotherhood.

Editor: C'mon guys, we need stories, your stories for future newsletters. If you have a keyboard, sit down and tap out an e-mail and send your story to Les Davison, our historian (e-mail address below).

If you don't have a keyboard, write up your story by long hand, call an officer below, and get a snail mail address to send it. You need to do this today. **Don't be shy!**

TAPS:

Darrow "Gene" Powless	04Feb2013
Frank S. Lengyel	17May2018
Joe Pagan	29Nov2018
Gary R. Butler	22Jan2019
William R. Farnum	18Apr2019
Joseph L. "Joe" Parlas	04May2019

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"I sure wish one of these sampans would run up a VC flag!"



"You want me to put some holes in one of them anyway, Sir?"



Sunrise over the swimming pool. Talk about a tropical vacation!

155 AHC Association
711 Walsenburg Drive
Durham, NC 27712-1325