



# BAN ME THUOT BARB

Remembering the 155th Assault Helicopter Company & all the Ban Me Thuot Guys  
Sortie 80 Sept 2021

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## REUNION CANCELLED

The 155<sup>th</sup> AHC Association Officers have been discussing the present situation with COVID-19 (especially the Delta variant impact) and how it would possibly impact our October reunion in Dayton. While we feel that most of our members have probably had their first and second vaccination shots the best medical view is you can still get the delta variant of COVID-19. At our ages (70+) that could be deadly, especially when someone's health is already compromised. With that as the primary driving point, the Officers have decided it most prudent to **CANCEL** the planned reunion. We have cancelled our agreement with the hotel and they said they would cancel all reservations and contact those people affected.. If you are not contacted please call hotel and check. Call the same number used to make your reservations for this activity: **844-207-7275**.

We plan to have a reunion in 2022 (that would get us back on our regular reunion schedule). Jim Cunningham and H.C. Waters will jointly coordinate a reunion in Phoenix, AZ

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NO SURPRISE TO THE 155<sup>TH</sup>

Rod Waddell 69/70

As it has been a half of a century, I do not recall the month but I believe the year was 1969. Classified printed information was received in the orderly room and reviewed by the first sergeant and the commanding officer. It arrived under a blue colored cover and noted "Classified – Confidential". Therefore, it was handed over to the first sergeant for his action. The first sergeant and the CO spent a fair amount of time in the CO's office and from there things would start to happen. I know that in past classified messages, they would sometimes contain info that the VC would plan to mortar attack the helicopters or even the hooch's (buildings where the troops slept). This time it was worse. Our Intel was informing the 155<sup>th</sup> that there could be a very strong chance that the VC would commence a very heavy attack or possibly over-run our camp. Really?

Stationed at Camp Coryell were the 155<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company, 208<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment, 8<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment, 52<sup>nd</sup> Security Detachment, 212<sup>th</sup> MP Co K-9 Second Section, 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company, and several other detachments. In other words: We were not a small isolated outpost, but rather a very well armed defensive and offensive unit. If things were to not go well, the US Air Force Base (East Field) was about 20 clicks away (about 12-15 miles). I knew, and I am sure that many of the troops did too because the CO ordered the tree and shrub line to be moved back another 10 or so yards. Our defensive fence line would now have a much greater line of open land, resulting in less cover for anyone that may attack from this area. This wooded area is where they would usually fire their mortars, 122 Rockets or even AAA (Anti-Aircraft Artillery). Granted, we also had many layers of barbed wire, anti-personnel land mines and our security guards. However, not to be slack or unprepared, a mini-gun was mounted pointing in the direction of the cleared acreage. The mini-gun would fire about 3-6,000 rounds/minute and would devastate anything it fired upon.

The Falcon gunship crews, highly skilled and ready, were sleeping in or next to their gunship helicopters. They were ready when the warning siren went off or the first mortar rounds were heard. At times, we could actually hear the mortars being fired and coming out of the tube. The medical detachment was informed and, if needed, additional medical supplies were delivered. If “Charlie” were to actually attack, he would be in for a big surprise.

We did not actually know what day or time this assault might occur, other than it could happen soon during a given time period. Naturally, this was to our benefit as we could be well prepared, however, it was like sitting on pins and needles. Our daily responsibilities and assignments went on as expected.

THEN, early one morning, just after midnight, it happened. The VC attacked us (I want to say from the North fence line). This was the area of which the jungle has been moved back 10 yards. It started with numerous 82 mm mortar rounds. The enemy used 82 mm mortars whereas the US Military used 81 mm mortars. In other words, we could not use their mortars in our tubes but the enemy could use our smaller mortars in their larger tubes. This was a smart design on their part. It seemed like the pilots had a sixth sense because the pilots were in their seats, batteries switched to the on position and the turbine engines were starting to whine. The two gunships were airborne with the utmost of urgency. As the mortar rounds continued, troops on the ground were ready and in their trenches. All areas of the compound were now on high alert. The men in the guard towers with machine guns (M-60's) and grenade launchers (M-79's) were ready.

When the gunships were over the target area, they opened up with their mini-guns on each side of the helicopter and the 2.75” rocket pods. As needed, the crew chief and door gunner started firing on the suspected positions. The mini-guns on the choppers were something to watch, because when they fired, it was a solid red line as every 5<sup>th</sup> round was a tracer and this produced a solid line due to the rapid rate of fire. The sounds were indescribable. When the helicopters finished putting down offensive fire, our own mortar crews fired flares to light up the attack area. The flares turn nighttime into daytime – Bright Light. It was at this time that our ground troops opened fire at believed enemy positions. As suppressive fire was continuing, one of the commissioned officers was running from one troop to another to determine if additional ammunition was needed. This defensive action continued until we did not receive fire or mortar rounds from the wooded area. With the early morning sun and daylight, a patrol was sent out to inspect the assault area. I later learned that 3 VC had gotten into our compound but were KIA. The VC, as do our own military, make every attempt to remove the KIA or assist wounded. I do not know if any of our own was injured.

In the past, Camp Coryell had received many mortar attacks, however, according to our info this attack was to be much greater. Our troops and with the knowledgeable superiors, stood our ground and suppressed various levels of enemy fire.

I feel confident to say that all troops in the 155<sup>th</sup> would not have changed units if given the chance. Most of us were young and thrust into positions that cannot be described in words. There was a unique bond between everybody that wore the uniform, whether of yesterday or today

## TAPS

**Mike Andrews**, passed away Tuesday July the 13<sup>th</sup>. He was the crew chief on 66-16832 from May to November 1968.

This was published on John Banks Blog May of 2021. To view the entire story go to <http://john-banks.blogspot.com/2021/05/sweet-baby-short-life-and-times-of-john.html>

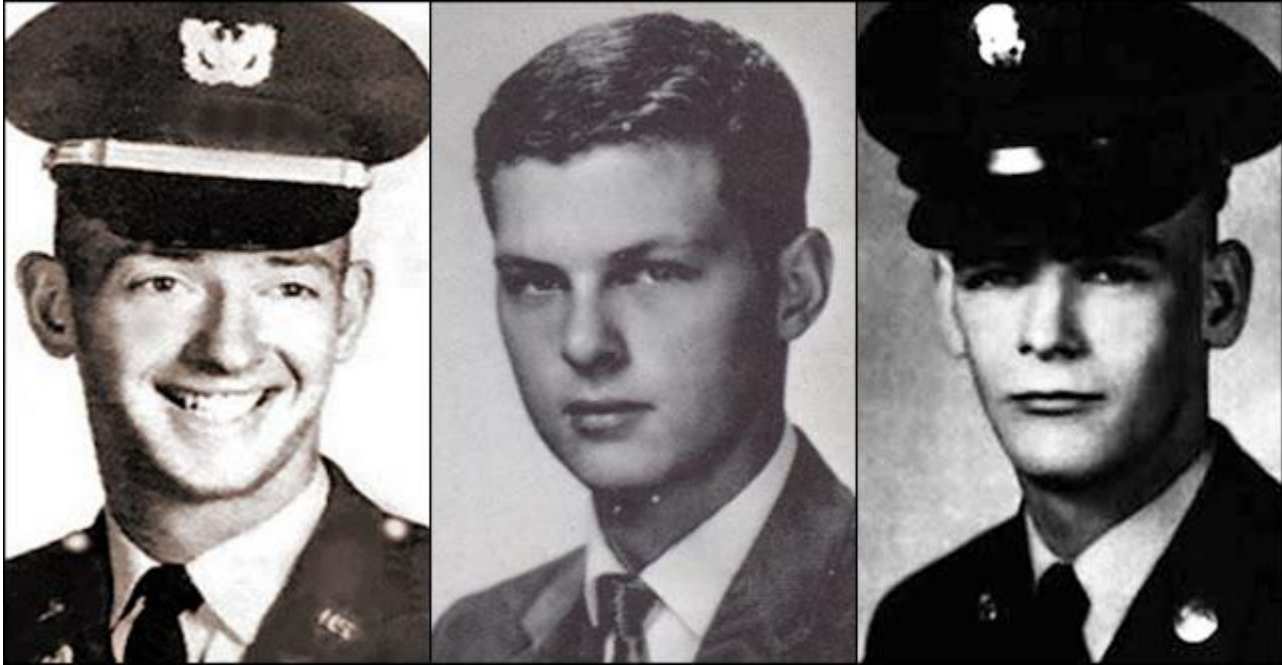
**IN VIETNAM**, Natchez High School's star running back morphed into Specialist 4 John Willie Woods Jr. It was a junior rank -- "Spec 4," they called it in the Army. Woods, who initially served in an infantry regiment, became a door gunner on a UH-1 "Huey" helicopter flown by the 155th Assault Helicopter Company, based at Ban Me Thuot City Field in South Vietnam



**John Willie Woods Jr. in a wartime image.**  
**(John Willie Woods Jr. family)**

In mid-October 1966, two reconnaissance patrols clashed with North Vietnamese forces near Plei Djereng – a camp established in December 1964 by U.S. Special Forces to monitor enemy infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Days later, Americans launched Operation Paul Revere IV, sending two brigades into the jungle of the Central Highlands. In the first 12 days' fighting, 22 U.S. servicemen were killed. Nearly 400 U.S. military personnel would be dead by the conclusion of the operation on Dec. 30. The area near Plei Djereng, where the 155th often operated, was a hot zone. Cambodia – a sanctuary for North Vietnamese troops – was a short helicopter ride west. In late October, two 155th helicopter pilots, escorted by two gunships, rescued an Air Force pilot shot down over the hostile territory. The unit also supported long-range reconnaissance patrols, a classified operation. "This ... turned out to be one of the most interesting and challenging missions for the unit pilots and crew members alike," a 155th pilot recalled.

On Oct. 30, 1966, Woods boarded a Huey, tail number 64-13587, with three crewmates for a mission to re-supply elements of the U.S. 25th Infantry Division involved in Operation Paul Revere IV. A "slick," GIs called the lightly armed (two M60 machine guns) troop/cargo carrier.



**LEFT: Pilot Wilmer Jay Willingham, commander Michael Noble Coryell, and crew chief James Lloyd Walker, They were Woods' crewmates on the ill-fated helicopter flight .**

Like Woods, his crewmates were *so damn young*. The helicopter was commanded by Michael Noble Coryell, a 21-year-old from Santa Barbara, Calif. He had been flying in Vietnam for 11 months and was nearing the end of his tour of duty. “Combat hardened and the best Fort Rucker ever qualified,” recalled a veteran who flew with Coryell in Vietnam, referencing the U.S. Army’s Alabama flight training installation. The pilot was 24-year-old Wilmer Jay Willingham of Monroe, La., the only married man aboard. He had been flying in Vietnam less than a month.

Crew chief James Lloyd Walker, a private first class, was a “fun-loving” soldier from Blackfoot, Idaho, who enjoyed the outdoors. Like Woods, he was only 19. After Walker was caught vandalizing houses with friends, the high school dropout was encouraged to join the military by the juvenile court detention judge who attended his family’s church. Walker manned the other machine gun in the rear of the chopper, near Woods. The group was a melting pot of sorts – John Willie and Willingham were Baptist; Walker, a Mormon; Coryell, a Presbyterian. Woods was the only Black soldier aboard.

At about 10:30 a.m., after the Huey flew below 1,000 feet about 4.5 miles north of Plei Djereng, a burst of small-arms fire knifed through the sturdy helicopter’s engine. The Huey exploded and crashed, killing all aboard. A reconnaissance platoon, backed up by tanks from the 69th Armor Regiment, recovered the bodies in the jungle in Pleiku Province, South Vietnam.

The shutdown unleashed a furious response from the U.S. military – gunships and a U.S. Air Force strike blasted the area where enemy fire was thought to have originated. The next day, an official report noted, “Task Force McDonnell searched for the enemy automatic weapon position without positive results.” In memory of the Huey’s commander, comrades in the 155th Assault Helicopter Company christened their base “Camp Coryell.” Willingham, who, like Woods, displayed a beaming smile in his Army photograph, left behind a widow named Linda. Shortly after Walker’s funeral in Idaho, his best friend joined the military, vowing “to take

the same bastards out who killed Jimmy.” Each soldier was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart. Woods had served barely six months in Vietnam.

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**SHARING COMMO**

**Steve McCartney** – Very sorry to hear that Mike McElveen has passed. He was a good friend and I will miss him. I should have made more of an effort to find him. We take so much for granted. Thank you for your help. We need to stay in touch.

**Denny Fenlon** – It’s been a rough year; two back surgeries – and I’m still having problems. It really sucks getting old and having to pay for all my younger-day sins. Thanks to Jack for the crazy rocket story. I’ve got one of those, too; hope to tell you in person at Dayton.

**Norm Simpson** – Our granddaughter just graduated from Southern Utah University with BA in Aviation Science; she has several ratings and 700+ hours. We couldn’t be more proud!

**Gary Gale** – Here’s some photos from the early days. I was the 2 nd Flight Platoon Sergeant. Lots of good men at BMT, and Joe Parlas was a great CO!

**Grant Wheaton** – Barb is well done as usual, thank you guys for doing a great job!

**Mike “Uncle Monk” Andrews** - I sure wish that you would consider the Lake George Area for a Reunion Site in the future.

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\* **VIP CO-PILOT: CHARLETON HESTON** Bill Goldman, Stagecoach Pilot, '65-66

I was with Company A/1/1, sailed to Vietnam on the USS Iwo Jima a LONG time ago. At BMT, I remember flying the famous actor Charlton Heston around one day. We flew to several outlying camps, where Mr. Heston would talk with soldiers and take messages for their families back home. And here’s the proof! I’m the good-looking guy on the right, Mr. Heston is on the left

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Jim Raymond 1967/68

I arrived in Ban Me Thuot in May of 1967 after being drafted in 1966 into the Army out of a private dental practice in Minnesota and spending the first year of military life in the dental clinic at Fort Ord Calif, on Monterey Bay. After arriving I spent a few days in Cam Rahn Bay and was then assigned to the 934<sup>th</sup> Dental Detachment which was headquartered in Nha Trang. After a few days there I was subsequently assigned as a solo dentist to the Flight Dispensary at Camp Coryell, home of the 155 Assault Helicopter Company and some other support units assigned there, probably 200-250 total personnel in total under the command of Major Charley Fleming (Or was he a LTC??). The dispensary was under the command of a Flight Surgeon along with several enlisted medics one of whom was willing to be my dental assistant.

After getting acquainted with my responsibilities at the Dental Clinic I found a warrant officer who said there was an orphanage and school fairly close to our camp and at the end of “The Corral” ... St Vincents School and Orphanage – both the school and orphanage run by several Catholic sisters. The warrant officer (I wish I could remember his name) asked if I’d be interested in volunteering at the school one day a week along with the Flight Surgeon, Cpt Cartagena, and I said I’d try it. After getting into a weekly routine of going to the school every Thursday morning, and enjoying working with all the kids and the nuns, I found enough confidence to

join some medics from the Special Forces group headquartered at “The Bungalow” in downtown BMT and with a medic or 2 from my Dispensary we went out weekly to some of the surrounding Montagnard Villages and rendered primitive dental care (just about entirely tooth extractions) to the people there. Both the village and the school medical/dental visits were part of the MEDCAP program (Medical Civilian Action Program). At one point in the Fall of 1967 I would meet with a group of 6-8 of the Catholic nuns on Thursdays about 6 PM for dinner and they were very interested in learning to speak better English. After the Tet offensive of 1968 we limited our sojourns to both the school and Montagnard Villages, but from May of 1967 to Feb of 1968 I so enjoyed working with the Vietnamese and Montagnard people!

Also on my list of patients for whom I provided dental care were a group of 6-8 American Missionaries for the Christian and Missionary Alliance, who ran a leprosarium on the outskirts at the other end of Ban Me Thuot and who would frequently conduct Protestant Worship services at Camp Coryell. The missionaries were executed and/or captured by the North Vietnamese troops that overran BMT in Tet Offensive. Sadly I had done some dental work for them the week before they were killed. Ironically, I had left BMT 2 days before the Tet Offensive rolled into the South to meet my wife on my R & R in Honolulu after 9 months of being apart. Flying out of Saigon on my flight to Hawaii I had time before the flight to take a bus and saw the American Embassy in Saigon that was attacked 2 days later – sitting in my hotel room In Hawaii it was riveting to watch TV and see the reports of the destruction especially the attack on BMT.

By the grace of God I returned to my wife and 2 year old son and was discharged from active duty in the US Army ... I was and am a blessed man.

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There is now a 155<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company Facebook page. For those with internet it is active and has many pictures and comments that could be of interest to all of you. It is a private page but just go to the page and request admission and state your connection to the 155. One of the administrators will admit you right away.

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#### INSPECTION

*JOHN AHEARN 69/70*

Soon after Major Dean Owen took over as commanding officer in June 1969 I was asked to meet with him at his hooch. Upon arrival, I was offered a cold can of beer and was asked to sit. There seemed to be a lot of brass present, to include Captains Giordano, Blair and Butler. To cut to the chase, Major Owen explained that the unit had had difficulties passing certain readiness inspections and would I be willing to assume the responsibilities of company property book officer. (He graciously made it sound like I had the option to consider it, but I knew otherwise.) He did express one ground rule: the job was not to interfere with flying time and should be done on non-flying days or at night. He also explained that the unit had the reputation that it could fly and carry out missions very well, but that it could not pass inspections.

I embraced the opportunity and worked at it until my time in the unit ended in December 1969. There were a number of memorable events but two have always stayed with me. First, at some point in the summer, a letter came to me from MACV in Saigon advising that I had been appointed the contract administrator of a certain contract, details to follow. Perhaps ten days later I received a voluminous document with instructions to visit a certain facility, determine the level of compliance with contract terms and report back. It was a

contract let to a local civilian to perform laundry services for the 155 for the then princely sum of \$97,500 per year. Soon thereafter, on a non-flying day, Donald Skeen, my new supply sergeant, commandeered a Jeep and we headed into downtown. We readily found the location and immediately noted there were several Montagnard woman mixing cement at street level and winching it up to a second floor window. They directed us upstairs to find the owner, whom we never found. However, it was quickly apparent they

were trying to build a laundry. Centered in the room was a soon to be large tiled floor level tub. Off to the side were two very old style, round body clothes washers, to include a set of wood rollers on top with a hand crank. I got down on my knees to read the manufacturers' tag and learned they were Maytags built in 1933. We returned to street level and continued further back until we finally found the laundry, where there was a beehive of activity, to include a huge pile of bedsheets on the ground and a number of women working diligently. The laundry consisted of three 55 gallon drums, with two used to wash and one to rinse. All contained reddish water and they explained to us that they used a small very old tanker truck to bring water from the river. We now understood why all the wannabe white bedsheets were brick red and damp. The icing on the cake was to observe the family rooster perch on the edge of the rinse barrel and drop its business in with the sheets. I crafted a report and ran it past the XO. To its credit MACV put a real laundry unit in in short order.

An other memorable event occurred when we learned the readiness inspection team was coming to Ban Me Thuot. I was told to be available for the day and hung out in the Supply room. I admit I had little idea of what to expect. That said, the head of the inspection team, an O-6, arrived in the Supply room, I called everyone to attention and they all listened well. The colonel told us to stand at ease and got right to the point. He told me he had just been with Captain Giordano in Operations and asked if I could show him how many helicopters I had recorded on the unit's Property Book records. I was able to promptly pull out the Property Book and show him the two pages for "C" and "H" models. While I do not recall the exact count, I do recall clearly that the colonel replied, "Congratulations, your records are in agreement with Operations and you have passed inspection." He was my kind of colonel.

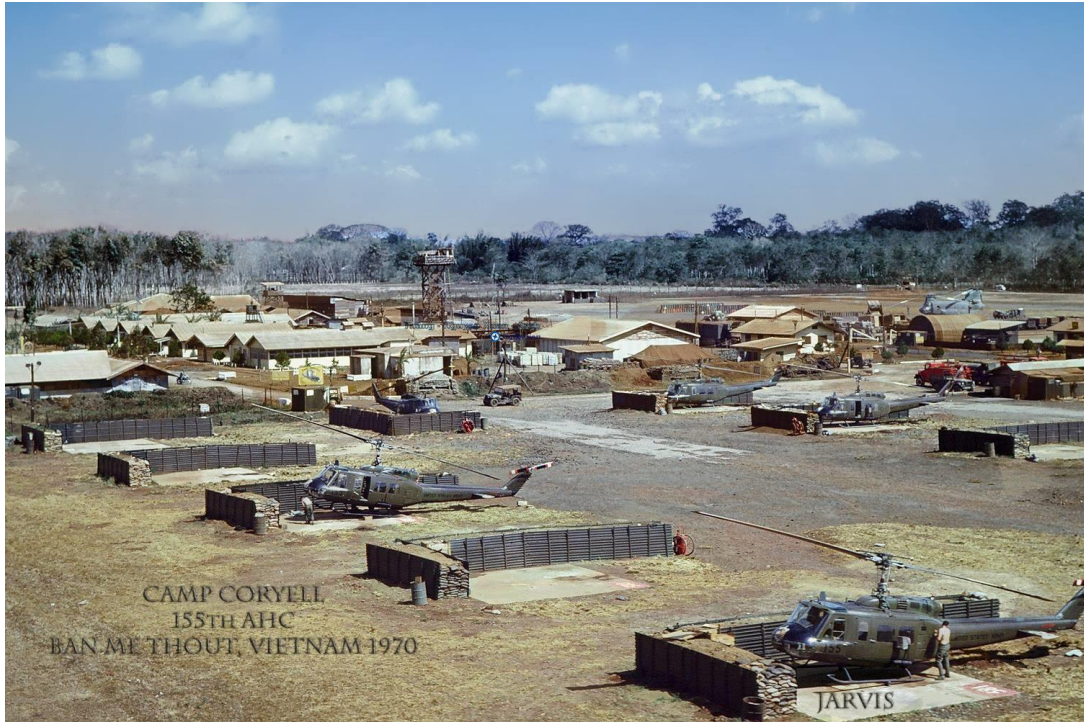
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155<sup>th</sup> AHC Association  
711 Walsenburg DR.  
Durham, NC 27712-1325



CAMP CORYELL  
155TH AHC  
BAN ME THOUT, VIETNAM 1970

JARVIS