



# BAN ME THUOT BARB

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



Sortie 81

December 2021

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## MEMORIES OF AN EARLY FALCON DOOR GUNNER

*Rueben Hunter, 25<sup>th</sup> ID "Shotgunner"  
and Falcon Door Gunner*

Living in Peru, Indiana, working with rodeo livestock, I realized I was going nowhere. So I asked my home town (Kingston, Wisconsin) draft board to pick me - and that's how I got drafted. I left home in October, 1964, and went to Fort Knox for Basic Training. Next was AIT, with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Hawaii. Quite a change for this Midwestern country boy.

During that time, I began hearing "Vietnam" in more and more conversations among fellow soldiers, and it was in *Stars and Stripes*, too. It wasn't too long before the 25<sup>th</sup> ID started a new program to train helicopter Door Gunners. (At that time, the personnel rosters of the helicopter units in Vietnam did not include Door Gunners.) After the training, the 25<sup>th</sup> ID Door Gunners (dubbed "Shotgunners") would be sent TDY to Vietnam for 90 days.



Rueben at work. The white T-shirt confirms that it's the early days at BMT.

Although I hadn't been long in the Army, I knew that state-side duty wasn't for me. I figured if I was going to be in the Army, I wanted to do something for my country – other than just shine shoes. So I volunteered for the Door Gunner training program. At first, the CO did not approve my request; it's been so long, I can't even remember the reason. Finally, he said OK.



Falcon CE John Long

There were about sixty of us in the class, which lasted five or six weeks. Some guys dropped out or were booted out every week, it was a lot harder than Basic. On a side note, the highlight I remember most about that time was when Julie Andrews came to visit us. And there was also a party sponsored by a famous/rich?? lady that was visiting Hawaii. I was one of the troops selected to sit down with her for a great meal, and then we saw a water ballet. Lucky guy!

As to my training, I was able to do everything pretty well, and I made it through the program. Vietnam here we come! Our flight made refueling stops at Guam and at Clark AFB in the Philippines, before landing in Saigon (early September '65). What a shock when we stepped off that plane: hot and stinky! I think we spent two nights in Saigon as we got our assignments, and the next day some of us flew to BMT.

I don't know how I got assigned to the gunships; I just kept quiet and did what I was told. That first night – my first mission - we took a ride around the area. I remember the guys in my crew saying they hoped we would get shot at. I did not join that conversation – and wondered what I had gotten myself into!

It wasn't long before I realized that I loved flying with the Falcons. I often flew with CPT Jack Gordon; a great pilot, and a fine person. And I flew with two great Crew Chiefs. First was John Long, we got along really well. He taught me a lot about our B model (980). We got hit SO many times – but 980 always kept on flying. After John went home, I was paired with Carl Jones, another excellent Crew Chief. We made a good team. (We just re-established contact a couple of years ago; I'm hoping to lure him to the reunion.)

Like all the other 25<sup>th</sup> ID Shotgunners on TDY, I expected to be in-country for 90 days. Well, that got extended for 30 days. And then, as my time grew short (again), I was given a choice: I could either return to the 25<sup>th</sup> in Hawaii, or transfer to the 155<sup>th</sup> and stay in BMT. I had heard that the 25<sup>th</sup> was in the process of packing up to deploy to Vietnam, so I opted to stay in BMT. As it turned out, I flew with the Falcons for the entire year of my tour. I left BMT in early October, 1966, just grateful to be alive. Again, a lucky guy!

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## 155 AHC 2022 Reunion Will be at Phoenix

**When:** 19 – 23 October 2022

**Where:** Crowne Plaza Golf Resort - Chandler, AZ (suburb of Phoenix)

**Room Rate:** \$149.00 (With tax \$171.00)

**Reunion Cost:** Estimated to be \$100.00 which includes banquet

**Registration:** Internet and phone registration available early next year

**Hospitality Room:** Available from 1500 on Thursday 20 Oct - 1200 Sun 23 Oct

**Transportation:** 18 miles from PHX, no airport shuttle. UBER estimated at \$55.00

**Questions:** **Jim Cunningham** at [jrcunningham2@yahoo.com](mailto:jrcunningham2@yahoo.com) or 530-400-2443

We can provide our own food and beverages in the hospitality room to include adult beverages! Parking and internet is free.

15% discount on green fees if booked before 19 Sep 2022.

No additional activities have been planned to date. If there is something you think the group might be interested in seeing, contact one of the officers.



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## TAPS

**Ronald Garlick** passed away in September. Ron worked in Maintenance and flew with the Falcons during his tour, '67 and '68.

We have recently been notified that **Ronald Randall** died back in July, 2015. Ron was a Falcon crew chief in '65 and '66.

### *FLY HIGH, FRIENDS!*

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## A YOUNG MAN WITH TOO MUCH TIME ON HIS HANDS

*Pat Lundquist, 155 Sheet Metal Shop*

A while ago, I saw a video showing a special kind of rifle, one where the bullet is inserted and then a threaded cap is screwed in place before the action is closed and the rifle fired. That threaded cap reminded me of . . .



*But before I tell this story, I need to let readers know that no soldiers, helicopters, or elephants were harmed during the performance of this stunt.*

In late 1970, just before we stood down, Andy Anderson (photo at left) ran the 155<sup>th</sup> Sheet Metal shop. For reasons unknown, he designed and built a cannon that would fire a 50 caliber bullet. The cannon was machined out of steel bar stock about four inches thick. Andy threaded the back of the bore hole and screwed in a bolt. He drilled a hole for a fuse and poured powder from the shell into the barrel. Next he jammed the bullet in with a rod and tilted it at a 45 degree angle - and then he cranked the entire thing as tight as he could into the bench vise in our shop. It was time to test fire Andy's cannon. I was one of the guys who came to watch.

In the shop, Andy lit the fuse - and then he ran like hell! We all hid behind sand-filled 50 gallon drums until the thing went **BAMM!!!** When we reentered there was a ton of dust falling down in the shop, so we really couldn't see what happened. After it had cleared some, one of the guys spotted a hole through the wall - and then clean through a 4x4 wood beam! He called out, "Holy *Smokes!* Check this out!" And then another guy muttered, "(censored) me!" We were coming to realize that we hadn't been all that protected by the drums. It's not like Andy had a clue as to how much powder to load in that thing! The bolt threaded into the cannon could have blown out the back, or the whole danged cannon could have exploded like a mortar if he'd packed it too tight.

We kind of figured the trajectory of the shell by the hole in the beam, and realized that it was pointed toward the Corral (where most of our helicopters were parked). So we fanned out to check the ships for a 50 cal hole. Lucky for us, the helicopters and personnel were unscathed. And nobody noticed the loud bang - or, if they did, they had no idea where it came from. I don't know what happened at the terminal end of that 50 cal bullet flight; deep space somewhere?

And there the story ends; Andy never shot his cannon again. I think he was more interested in the loud bang - and not paying all that much attention to what potential damage might occur firing off a 50 caliber cannon from inside the shop in the general direction of the Corral. It's funny how an idea can seem really cool before you do it - and just plain stupid afterwards. The things we'll do when we're bored . . .

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## SHARING COMMO

**Herb Hess** – Thanksgiving was good, we had family come visit from California for a few days. I wonder if any of the guys are into antique cars like I am? My pride and joy is a '53 Merc.

**Bill Brooks** – Salute to you on Veterans' Day.

**Ken Donovan** – Hey Les, happy Thanksgiving. Do you remember, it was 52 years ago today that we flew our butts off at Bu Prang. That was a LONG day!

**Gil Terry** – Good to hear from you. I'm still volunteering at the Mighty 8<sup>th</sup> Museum, really enjoy that. A highlight was a B-17 ride some time back, that was quite an experience. Hope to see lots of guys in Phoenix next year.

**Bill Goldman** – Thanks for putting my photo in the Barb, my family really got a kick out of that.

**Gary Gale** – I sent you some photos. I was in touch with **Joe Parlas** over the years, we called each other a couple times each year; a good man.

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### **CHANGE OF COMMAND: 2 MAR '67 at BMT**

Major **Bo Atkinson** (left) and Major **Charlie Fleming** shake to seal the deal.

It's easy to see who's going home and who just assumed command of the 155<sup>th</sup>. Bo has a HUGE smile, while Charlie looks to be sporting a forced grin - or, perhaps, a barely-concealed grimace.

*Photo by 2<sup>nd</sup> Flight Platoon  
Sergeant **Gary Gale**.*

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## REMEMBERING WAYNE JOHNSON

### **Wes Timmons, Falcon**

It is with sadness that I heard about the passing of Falcon pilot Wayne Johnson. I flew with Wayne quite a bit - but one of the most memorable events was a night mission.

We got a call that a Special Forces camp was under attack and requesting gun support; I think it was Ban Don. Ops launched the standby gunships – Wayne was Falcon Lead, I was his Peter Pilot. When we arrived on site there was fairly thick ground fog; we could not see the ground or any targets. I did not think we would be able to help the ground guys. On the radio Wayne asked the commander what direction the attack was coming from, and he indicated due north. Wayne then used FM homing to fly over the SF camp on a heading of 360 and asked the commander to tell us when it sounded like we were directly overhead. The commander responded a few seconds later that we were directly overhead. Wayne dropped the nose and punched off a pair of rockets and asked how that looked. The commander said it was perfect. We set up our racetrack using FM homing to line up, and each time the ground commander said one of our ships was overhead we dropped the nose and did gun runs to the top of the fog. When we had expended all of our ammo, we started to head back to BMT. The commander called and said the VC had broken off their attack.

And then the commander came to BMT a few days later and looked us up. He thanked us for what we had done. He said he thought they were going to be overrun that night, and the Falcons really saved his camp. It was one of those really feel good moments – and it was all Wayne. One of the real heroes I flew with every day at BMT.

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### COMING ATTRACTIONS

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) has announced *The Wall That Heals* national tour schedule for 2022; 29 communities will be visited. *The Wall That Heals* exhibit includes a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial along with a mobile education center; 29 communities will be visited. The traveling exhibit honors the more than three million Americans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces in the Vietnam War, and it bears the names of the 58,281 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam.

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|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Bay St. Louis, MS (Mar)  | Chisholm, MN (Jun)        | Warrenton, MO (Sep)   |
| Garner, NC (Mar/Apr)     | Franklin, WI (Jun/Jul)    | Middletown, NY (Sep)  |
| Crawfordsville, AR (Apr) | Chicago Heights, IL (Jul) | Bedford, MA (Sep)     |
| Knoxville, TN (Apr)      | Battle Creek, MI (Jul)    | Methuen, MA (Sep)     |
| New Castle, DE (Apr/May) | Eagen, MN (Jul)           | Sayre, PA (Oct)       |
| Findlay, OH (May)        | Winsted, MN (Jul)         | Charlotte, NC (Oct)   |
| Belvidere, IL (May)      | Tama, IA (Aug)            | Anahuac, TX (Oct)     |
| Winchester, IN (May)     | Kearney, NE (Aug)         | San Antonio, TX (Nov) |
| Erie, PA (May)           | Mead, CO (Aug)            | Cabot, AR (Nov)       |
| Norwalk, CT (Jun)        | Payson, AZ (Aug)          |                       |

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### HATS OFF TO CREW CHIEFS AND DOOR GUNNERS

#### *Rein Hofgesang, Falcon 1, '69*

Thanks to Norm Simpson for sharing the story of his night mission. I don't think I was the AC with target fixation, but my memory ain't the best. Good stuff, Norm! What jumped out at me was the crew chief speaking up when the AC was dressing down the Peter Pilot. Yes!

The list of the crew chiefs and door gunners has jogged my memory a bit and I want to thank all of them: Bundros, Nachtigall, Allen, McGee, LaJoie, Mosher, Arrendondo, Hunt, Cornwall, McElveen, Mullen, Alvarez, (apologies to those I've left out). Every mission had two of those guys in the ship with us. I don't know if they ever really knew how safe they made me feel, as they had our backs **all** the time.

I reflect back now and think that two gunships and a flare ship would fly off in the middle of the night to some destination where our fellow soldiers needed help. We flew into the darkness with very little conversation, knowing what our mission was. We arrived on scene, talked to someone on the ground, the Stagecoach guys kicked out some flares, and we rolled in hot. Holy Moly! Who does that? Well - we did - and thank goodness for the reliable back seaters!

The photo says it all. A typical day at BMT; Les and I are walking around with our cameras (that's me standing by the ship), while Falcon crew chiefs **Tom Hunt** (left) and **Cliff Allen** are hard at work. Well done, gentlemen! My best to you all.



## APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING

A US Navy officer offered this observation: “The Army flyboys were laid-back to the point of being ‘undisciplined.’ They were careless in their uniforms, with crushed hats, open collars, and ‘worn-out, scuffed-type shoes.’ They often slept in, skipped breakfast, and turned up late to the morning briefing at 0830. They spent most of their days and nights at the poker table. Whatever their mission, they did not seem terribly concerned.”

Sound familiar? Was he describing Army warrant officers in Vietnam? Nope. It was early 1942, and the Navy officer was part of the crew of the aircraft carrier USS Hornet. The Army flyboys were the Doolittle Raiders.

*from Pacific Crucible by Ian W. Toll*

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**HISTORY LESSON: 10<sup>th</sup> AVIATION BATTALION HISTORY, 1969 (excerpt)**

“On the evening of 4 November, a UH-1H from the 281<sup>st</sup> was reported overdue while on a flight from BMT to Nha Trang and presumed down in the vicinity of Duc My Pass.

On that same day, aircraft number 68-15057 from the 192<sup>nd</sup> was also reported missing somewhere between Ninh Hoa and Ban Me Thuot. The aircraft had been on an administrative flight and contact was lost after it departed the 48<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company. An aerial search was initiated at first light using as many as six aircraft per day from the 48<sup>th</sup>, 92<sup>nd</sup>, 281<sup>st</sup>, and 183<sup>rd</sup> Aviation companies. This search lasted until 9 November with no trace of either aircraft or the crews.”

### **VHPA Website has this info on the 192nd UH-1H**

On 4 November 1969 aircraft departed 48<sup>th</sup> AVN CO pad located at Ninh Hoa, RVN, at 1125 hours enroute to the 155<sup>th</sup> AVN CO located at Ban Me Thuot, RVN. This was the last known contact with the aircraft. At approximately 1800 on the evening of 4 November 1969, and after an extensive ramp check was made at Ninh Hoa, RVN, Ban Me Thuot, RVN, and Phu Hiep, RVN, aircraft 68-16057 was reported to 10<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion (Combat) as missing.

*Ed. – CPT Al Castro, formerly with the 155<sup>th</sup>, was the AC of this 192<sup>nd</sup> aircraft. Three 155 guys were passengers: **Rick Medaris, John Payne, and Richard Bauer.** The crash site, only 38 KM west of Ninh Hoa, was found in July, 1973. The remains of all four crew members and the three 155 pax were brought home.*

### **VHPA Website has this info on the 281st UH-1H**

The aircraft left Nha Trang RVN at approximately 0645 hours 4 November 1969 to work in the Ban Me Thuot RVN area. The time that the aircraft left Ban Me Thuot to return to Nha Trang is unknown. The pilot made contact with Blue Star Control (*Ed. - 48<sup>th</sup> AVN CO at Ninh Hoa*) at approximately 1920 hours. At the time contact was made, the pilot said he was flying in IFR weather and he thought that he was somewhere in the Duc My Pass. He received an FM homing count from Blue Star Control, and said that he thought that Blue Star Control was somewhere to the left rear of his aircraft. Blue Star asked him to say his heading, and he answered that he was flying on a heading of 210. At approximately 1930 hours, Blue Star heard over the radio, “I’ve got it, I’ve got it, let go of it, I’ve got it!” Blue Star Control tried to contact the aircraft and heard, “We’re upside down, what’s happening? Oh my God, what do I do?” Blue Star tried to contact the aircraft 3 or 4 more times, but received no answer.

*Ed. – No trace of this aircraft or crew has ever been found. The VHPA database shows that extensive search efforts have been conducted over the course of several years, to no avail.*



BMT dentist **Jim Raymond** introduces himself to patients. Jim's memories of his time at BMT were in Sortie 80 – but we didn't have room for any of his wonderful photos.

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**ASH and TRASH**

**TREASURER JEFF SEZ:** Just FYI, the 155<sup>th</sup> Ass'n made our annual \$500 donation to help Montagnard orphans in/around Kontum last month. Our check went to Friends of Vinh Son Orphanages; info on the organization is available on-line. If you're so inclined, consider making your own donations; it's a good cause.

And I'll get to work on putting together a Treasurer's Report for the next Barb.

***Jeff Schrader, Treasurer***

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**155<sup>TH</sup> AHC Association Officers**

- Joe Harrelson - President
- Tom Hunt – Vice President
- Chuck Markham - Quartermaster
- Jeff Schrader - Treasurer
- Bob Gardner - Treasurer's Aide
- Larry "Matt" Matthews - Database guy
- Les Davison – Historian
- Bruce McInnes – Member-at-Large
- Jim Cunningham – Member-at-Large
- Elizabeth Coward – Webmaster

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**Cover Photo:** A Shrimboat Chinook (179<sup>th</sup> ASHC) hovers to pick up Stagecoach 927, sometime in '66 or '67. If you look closely, you can see that there's two guys atop the UH-1D rotor blades, to attach the sling to the Chinook's cargo hook.

Another fine photo sent in by 2<sup>nd</sup> Flight Platoon Sergeant **Gary Gale**.



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