



BAN ME THUOT BARB

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



Sortie 85

December 2022

155TH FLEW PRIME MINISTER

Excerpt from 155 AHC History for 1966:

“On 4 February South Viet Nam Premier Nguyen Cao Ky and his party were transported with eight airlift helicopters and four armed escorts on an aerial inspection of the Bong Son area.”



Stagecoach pilot **Bill Goldman** took this photo of Ky and his wife, surrounded by a considerable entourage. Another of Bill’s photos shows Ky and his wife in the back of a Huey – so it seems very likely that Bill was one of the pilots who flew the pair that day.

I can’t ask him because, sadly, Bill passed away a few months ago. Kudos to Bill’s wife **Eileen**, who was kind enough to send Bill’s Vietnam photos to the Ass’n Historian – so they can be shared with other 155 guys. Thank you, Ms. Goldman!

And a tip of the hat, too, to you guys who were part of the 155th back then. Run-of-the-mill assault helicopter companies do **NOT** get tasked to fly the Prime Minister. Obviously, the 155th was considered a top-tier unit. Well done, gentlemen!

SNIFFER MISSION IN HAPPY VALLEY

Geoff Jones, Falcon 0

One summer day in 1970, the main mission of the day for a 1st platoon Stagecoach slick and our team of Falcon gunships was to run a sniffer recon in the “Happy Valley” area southeast (if I remember right) of Ban Me Thuot. That area seemed to always have some kind of bad guy activity going on, and someone decided running a sniffer operation might locate some of their units.

Frank Alotta was A/C on the sniffer ship. I never knew who the whole crew was, although I believe Frank told me **Chuck Markham** was his Peter Pilot. I flew Falcon Lead with **Fred Solis** as Crew Chief and **John Tasker** as gunner - a great crew. I believe **Mark Cowles** was Peter Pilot, but I’m not sure now. **Terry Westbrook** was A/C of the Trail ship. (Terry and I were alternating Lead/Trail at that time, as we were both just beginning to hone our lead ship skills. It was my turn that day.) Sadly, I don’t remember who else was with him.

We rendezvoused with Frank and crew near the Valley, and he expertly (as usual) began working the sniffer recon up the Valley at treetop level. The terrain and ground cover was somewhat mixed; canopied jungle, large fields of tallgrass, and clearings which showed past cultivation. When sniffer machines detected significant ammonia amounts (I think that’s what it was), “Mark” would be radioed, and our gunships would often fire rockets and miniguns onto

the “Mark” location. I don’t recall any “Marks” that day.

What DID happen though was, as Frank’s ship flew past/over a clearing and kept going (without a Mark), we saw a squad-sized group of people running flat out across the clearing. Huh? Who does that? They evidently heard Frank’s ship pass and didn’t hear or recognize our gunship sounds coming along behind. We were almost on top of them as I banked hard left, but even that wasn’t going to put us into firing position before we overflowed them. However, it did put Tasker into position to do what gunners do - and he did. At the same time we radioed Frank that we were engaging and to come up off the Valley floor. He then climbed out and came back to “high ship” our actions, as we put rockets and minigun fire onto where they came from and where the group had run. We took no fire, so then we “loached” low and slow over the area, trying to draw fire - and didn’t.

Well, at that point, having expended considerable ammo and fuel, we all just moved on with the Sniffer mission for a while and then returned to BMT. Just another day in 155 World.

REMEMBERING JOHNNY GANN

Judy Cherry

Just a note to let you know that **Johnny Gann** recently passed away. I’m the wife of **Bing Cherry**, a gunner in the Falcon platoon with Johnny. I first met Johnny here in Arizona, and was so impressed with him. We all listened to Johnny telling us about his job hunt and his long, relentless struggle (as a disabled Veteran) to get a job with Arizona Fish and Game. He did it, had a successful career, and retired after many years.



Johnny, Vince, & Al; together is good.

Paul Fadz wrote, “He was a great friend. One memory I have is a video of Johnny riding on a water buffalo in Vietnam. We did some crazy stuff!” Johnny credited Paul for getting him to play the guitar, and Johnny’s sons were also into music. Paul went to see Johnny in Arizona right after one of his sons passed away. Paul and Johnny jammed together. Paul said it helped Johnny take his mind off of the death of his son, if only for a while. Johnny was a huge car enthusiast, he often called Paul (a mechanic) for advice and help with his cars.

A few years back, several of Bing’s Falcon buddies came here for a visit: Johnny, Paul, **Vince McDonough**, **Fran Tiner**, the late **John Grow**, and **Al Fitzgerald**. It was the first time that Johnny, Vince, and Al had been

together since 1967 when, flying a Falcon gunship west of Khe Sanh, Johnny (CE) had been critically wounded and Vince (DG) had applied a tourniquet to save his life. (Al was the AC.) We will always remember and cherish that get-together – a very special time.

Al wrote that he had a hard time finding the right words to express Johnny’s courage through so much adversity. Al cherishes his conversations with Johnny over the years, and added, “I hate that he had to leave us!”

Johnny loved being a Falcon crew chief, and was very proud of his service. He always signed off on any notes or correspondence with, “Falcons Forever!” Bing got Johnny to come down here for another visit, and they went to the Music Museum and had a really enjoyable day. That was the last time he saw Johnny. Shortly before Johnny passed away, he called each and every one of us - even me. None of us knew that his call was Johnny saying goodbye.

Johnny, we will never forget you! Falcons Forever!

PHOENIX REUNION RECAP

If you weren't there, you missed one heck of a party! MANY thanks to organizers **Jim Cunningham** and **Nook Watters**, their hard work made the reunion a success. Kudos to **Joyce** and **Fred Yamagata** for AGAIN providing libations and snacks: we owe you! BMT guys who attended were Jim Abbott, John Ahearn, Bob Alberts, Mike Arthur, Dave Bennett, Gene Breslin, Jerry Burton, Bing Cherry, Jack Coonce, Jim Cunningham, Les Davison, Wiley Diamond, Ken Donovan, Jack Drewiega, Paul Fadz, Denny Fenlon, Wally Foster, Bob Gardner, Joe Harrelson, Rein Hofgesang, Tom Hunt, Rueben Hunter, Russ Kogut, Keith Lane, Chuck Markham, Bud Martin, Charlie Marvin, Matt Matthews, Bruce McInnes, Frank Morrison, Dean Owen, Kerry "Doc" Pardue, Bill Richardson, Lew Sain, Royal Sander, Jeff Schrader, Norm Simpson, Jim Stallard, Dave Talbot, Gil Terry, Fran Tiner, Rod Waddell, Phil Watson, Nook Watters, and Fred Yamagata. (Apologies to any left out.) And while I'm at it, a big THANK YOU to all the wives, family members, and close friends who came along to share the reunion festivities with their loved ones.

REUNION 2023, NEXT YEAR!!!!!!

Two years is too long – so the next reunion will be during fall of 2023 in Charlotte, NC. Our goal is to have it set up by late March, to give y'all plenty of time to make reservations and plan your trips. Any questions, contact Prez Tom Hunt at 334-333-8998.

SHARING COMMO

Bob Maddox – We had hoped to make the reunion, but it just didn't work out.

Mary & Frank Morrison – This was our first reunion, and we really enjoyed ourselves. We look forward to the next one.

Pete Cosmos – I had a call from **Jack Coonce** the other day, it was great to catch up after all these years. Here's my contact info, I'd love to hear from other guys I flew with at BMT.

Norm Simpson – It was my very first reunion, and it FAR exceeded my expectations. My only regret is that I wish now that I had attended earlier ones.

Jerry Burton – Judy and I had a really good time at the reunion. Thanks to all involved in putting it on. Here's a story for the Barb.

Wiley Diamond – My wife and I had a good time, this was our first reunion. It was most interesting talking to others and hearing what direction their lives took after Vietnam. A lot of ground has been covered since we were 18, 19 and 20 years old!

WE CRASHED AND ROLLED DOWN THE HILL

*Jerry Burton
Stagecoach 12/Falcon 12*

The happenings I am about to recall are true, but some of the names and places have slipped the gray matter.

One day during spring '67, I had been assigned a lift mission in support of the ARVN forces. I had been in-country only a couple of months. I was pilot with an Aircraft Commander assigned, our aircraft would be Chalk 4 in the formation. We departed BMT and proceeded to the pickup point, we were only about 35 K's southwest of BMT. Loading went a little slow, as usual, but with preplanning by Flight Lead **Don Pullum** (Stagecoach 16 Bravo) we made the departure window.

We took off in trail formation and proceeded to the LZ, which was not too far to the west. We had used this same LZ before, and knew it was a small ridgeline. The wind was favoring a westerly approach, about 250 degrees if I remember correctly. Lead maneuvered us around for a long final approach, and had everyone call "Ready" on FM: Chalk One, Two, Three – and I got

to call Chalk 4.

The AC called for the Before Landing check, which I most gracefully repeated over the intercom (remember, I'm the FNG, just in-country). All four of us were in trail formation and looking good, I called out to the AC that we were getting a little far away from Chalk 3. As we continued our approach, we were on short final when we fell into Three's rotor wash. It's sort of a blur after that, but we landed short of the LZ on a fairly steep slope. I remember the chin bubble impacting the ground, then the rotor blades chewed into the hillside. There is a little void space after that (head space and timing), the aircraft rolled several times down the slope, throwing the ARVN soldiers out as we were rolling. All four of our crew made it out, but we lost several of the soldiers as they were not belted in.

After the rolling stopped, I had only the greenhouse window to escape out of, so that's what I did. I remember turning the Main Fuel switch OFF, as the engine was still running. I was about halfway out of the greenhouse window when I heard the AC holler, "Everybody get out!" over the intercom. He didn't need to tell me to do that; I knew what to do when the rolling stopped.

After egressing the crunched-up slick, we took count of everyone – and saw several ARVN bodies up the slope. I understand that 16 Bravo kept calling for Chalk Four to call, "Up and ready" – but he got no response. He came around and spotted us, but it was too rough to land, so he called in for help. It did not take long for Big Windy (CH-47 Chinook) to arrive. Our crew had bumps and bruises, but nothing serious. We returned to BMT and went through the hoops for the accident, and were back to flying again in a couple of days.

Not long after that I made AC, and then platoon IP. I remained in the slicks for the first six months, and then transferred to the guns. Falcon 6 assigned me as Falcon 12, so I took Jerry Bourquin's old call sign.

PLEASE – IF YOU MOVE OR CHANGE YOUR PHONE NUMBER OR E-MAIL ADDRESS, SEND THE NEW INFO TO CHUCK OR LES, OR ANY 155 AHCA OCCIFER. THANK YOU.

WALL TURNS 40

In case you missed it, Veterans Day last month marked the 40th anniversary of the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Were any of you there, back in 1982? A rainy day kept some people at home this year, but there were still a lot of visitors. The photo (taken on a nice day last spring) shows Volunteer Huong doing a rubbing.



Davison photo.

TAPS

We just found out that **Charlie Gilmer** passed away about 18 months ago. Charlie was the first Falcon 6, he led the gun platoon in '65.

Dick Sperling passed away in early October. Dick was a Stagecoach pilot in '68, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions to rescue a downed Stagecoach crew on his very first mission as an Aircraft Commander. (Thanks to Dick's good friend and fellow Stagecoach pilot **Bob Schurr** for letting us know. Bob was one of the guys that Dick rescued.)

We've recently been informed that **Jerry Bourquin** passed away early last year. Jerry was a Stagecoach and Falcon pilot during '66 and '67.



Roger Thompson died this past summer as a result of medical issues related to Agent Orange exposure. Roger was a "Purple Gang" First Platoon slick pilot in 1970. After the war, he had a long flying career. (Thanks to Roger's good friend and fellow Stagecoach pilot **Gene Breslin** for informing us of Roger's passing.)

Ron "Jesse" James passed away last April.

Jesse was a Tech Inspector working with the 165th back in '67.

We've just found out that **Lloyd Bentley** passed away back in '07.

Dennis Harris passed away in Alabama a few months ago. Dennis was a Stagecoach pilot during 1968.

Bill Staubach, one of the Company A/1/1 guys who went to Vietnam on the USS Iwo Jima, passed away last year. Bill was a pilot, he was DEROS-shuffled to one of the Pleiku units when A/1/1 came into country during summer, '65.

Johnny Gann passed away earlier this year. He was a Falcon CE in '67.

DEATH, TAXES . . . and DUES

Three things in life are certain – and there they are. The first two are handled at a higher level than this newsletter. As to Dues, we need money to copy and snail-mail hard copy Barbs, make an annual donation to the Kontum Montagnard orphanages, and cover other expenses that may arise. **So we're asking for \$30 per year from everyone whose last name starts with N through Z.** (In about six months we'll ask A through M to send the same amount.) The plan is to put reminders in every other Barb, using these two groups – so every guy will see one request per year.



As has always been the case, our dues are voluntary. We'll not banish anyone for non-payment – but we would greatly appreciate \$\$\$ from those that are able. Please send cheques payable to **155 AHC Association** to Treasurer Jeff at the address below:

Jeff Schrader
_____,
N _____

Thanks guys.

ONE GUN RUN . . . AND DONE

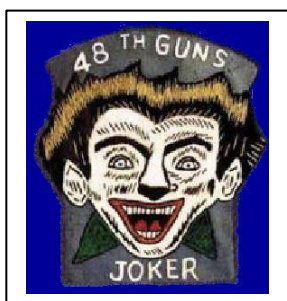
Frank Uhring, Stagecoach 19

I was a slick pilot the whole time I was with the 155th, except for one day!! Here's what I remember. It was early November, '69. I had had "Officer of the Guard" duty the night before and was quite soundly asleep (after the guard duty you could sleep in the whole next day because you were not assigned to fly). But then, about 1000 hours, an Operations sergeant came to my

room, woke me, and told me to get over to Ops ASAP – because I had to fly NOW!! So I got up, dressed, and headed to the Operations office.

This was during the action around Duc Lap and Bu Prang, so I wondered what ship and crew were around that I was to fly with? When I got to Ops, I saw a pilot that I had never seen before, and he was giving me a big smile!!!! Then Captain G (**Ops Officer Tony Giordano**) told me that I would be ‘flying guns’ with the 48th AHC! He explained that the 48th had flown four gunships from their home base at Ninh Hoa to support the action just south of Duc Lap. Enroute from the coast, one of the “Joker” pilots got a bad case of food poisoning, so a ‘spare’ pilot was needed to replace him.

When I heard that, I reminded Captain G that I was a slick pilot and had never flown guns. He said that he had explained that, but the lead Joker pilot said that I would fly with a second tour gun Instructor Pilot who would instruct me going out to Duc Lap. Captain G also said that he told the 48th that he was ‘loaning’ them one of the best 155th pilots, and that I would ‘do good’ as a gun pilot – and then he told me to go make the 155 proud!! So I went to my room, got my combat gear, and headed to the Corral.



All four gun ships were cranked up and waiting for me. I barely got buckled in before we were on the runway taking off. The IP was a nice guy and told me that he had been a gun IP for a long time and had taught a lot of pilots how to fly guns. So, on the way to Duc Lap (not a long flight), he gave me a crash course on the differences between an H and a C model Huey. He told me that he would handle all the radio calls. Since I knew the Duc Lap area, he asked that I keep him informed of where we were and any other places like fire bases in the area, so he could pass that info it to the Air Mission Commander. I was flying left seat, which had the controls to the miniguns, so while the IP flew, he turned me over to the

ship’s CE to teach me how to operate the miniguns. The CE was not happy that he was going into combat with a pilot that had never operated/fired miniguns. He was worried that I would jam/ruin his ship’s miniguns in combat - particularly since three 7/17th Cav helicopters had just a few days before had been shot down in the same area we were going to. The CE explained how to “Safe” and “Arm” the system, how to aim the guns, and then he had me activate the minigun controls and flex the guns to get the feel of the system. One thing that he really emphasized not to do was to hold the trigger down for more than three seconds, because the system/guns would likely jam. He told me to pull the trigger, count to three, and release the trigger – then count to two, pull the trigger again for a three count - and to use this ‘rhythm’ during the whole gun run.

Our flight of four Joker gunships got to the AO and contacted the Forward Air Controller (FAC) working the area. He instructed us to orbit south of Duc Lap and north of VC Mountain until Air Force fast movers were done bombing the area. While we orbited, I got more instructions from the IP and the CE. The IP said that when we made a gun run that he would fire the rockets and I would fire the miniguns. He told me to aim for any tree line - not open areas. We orbited for a long time until finally Joker Lead told the FAC to use us or lose us because we were low on fuel. The FAC responded that we would make one gun run into the hot area; he told us to expend most of our ammo. Show time!

Over the radio, I heard Chalk One saying something like this; “Chalk One rolling in.....receiving fire, receiving fire**we’re hit, we’re hit....breaking off!**” We were Chalk Two, next up. We rolled in to make our gun run, and I fired the miniguns and aimed at any tree line I saw. The IP went really slow (only about 40-50 knots) so we would have more time to expend our ammo, and I didn’t jam the guns. As we broke off our run and Chalk Three started his run, I again heard, “Receiving fire,” and then, “We’re hit!” from that ship. Chalk Four rolled in and didn’t receive any fire, just like us. We quickly departed the AO.

All four of our Joker gunships landed at Duc Lap and shut down. Everyone began inspecting the ships for damage. Most of the crews really inspected the ships that were hit, I and our door gunner inspected our ship, we could not find any damage. Why our ship was not hit I can't say - but I think it might have been my 'good shooting' . . . right!! It was determined that all ships were flyable, so the flight returned to BMT to refuel. The IP had me fly the ship all the way back to BMT so he could chalk up 'combat IP time'. When we shut down at BMT, the IP handed me the ship log book and told me to fill in my info and he would do the flight time entries. I filled in the logbook, dumped all my gear in my room, and then went looking for the 48th crews to talk about the mission - but they were already taking off to get back to the coast before dark. Well, I never really got credit for that four hour gunship mission because the logbook flew away with the 48th. Just another day in the 'Nam . . .

LEARNED AT THE REUNION

You might not know that **Joyce Yamagata** – lovely wife of former Stagecoach 6 **Fred Yamagata** – is a Vietnam vet. She was an Army nurse in Saigon back in '66. Slow hand salute to you, Ma'am!

OVERHEARD DURING THE REUNION

“I was always in awe during my time at BMT. You guys were so young, and I watched you face danger day in and day out – and the next day you were right back at it. Hats off to all of you!”

155 AHC ASS'N LEADERSHIP CHANGES

At the reunion, Joe Harrelson finally got to retire - as the longest-serving Prez in association history; four years at the helm. Database Guy Matt also rode into the sunset after many years of yeoman service. Tom Hunt is the new President, and Chuck Markham and Les Davison will be sharing “Roster Guy” duties. The complete line-up of occifers is shown below.



EDITOR'S WRAP It's an absolute joy to put together the Barb when folks have sent in great pieces for sharing – and this is one of those times. Many thanks to the authors: **Judy Cherry, Geoff Jones, Jerry Burton, and Frank Uhring.**

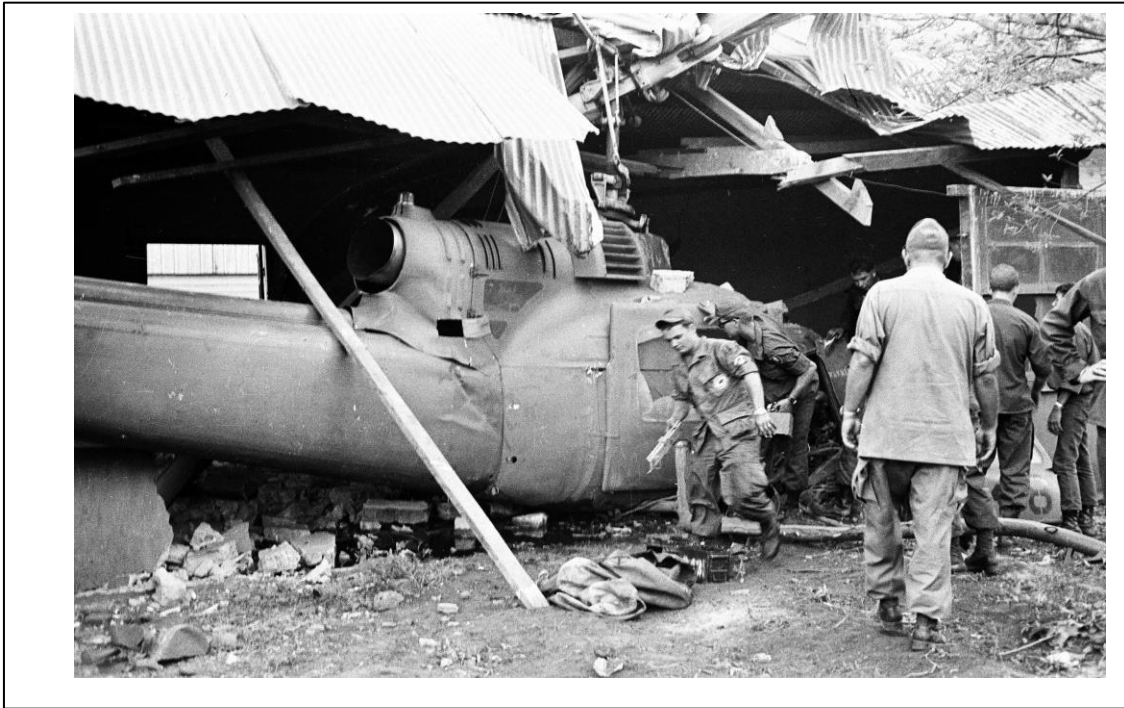
Les Davison, Editor-This-Time

155TH AHC Association Officers

- Tom Hunt – President
- Chuck Markham - VP, Merch & Roster
- Jeff Schrader - Treasurer
- Bob Gardner - Treasurer's Aide
- Les Davison – Historian & Roster

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Cover Photo: 48th AHC Joker gunship crash into the school off the end of BMT City Field Runway 24, Apr/May '69. Schoolkids had gone home for the day, so none were hurt, and the crew all walked away with minor injuries. Photo shows Falcon Crew Chiefs **Cliff Allen** (center) and **Tom Hunt** (behind Cliff) ~~seavenging useful items~~ – oops - I mean, helping police up the area.
Photo by Denny Fenlon.



155 AHC Association