



BAN ME THUOT BARB



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

Sortie 90

March 2024

REUNION: SEPTEMBER 26th thru 28th 2024



Gentlemen: START YOUR ENGINES!

Because we're going to Indy!!! Nope, not for the race; it's the next 155 AHC & BMT guys reunion. Rueben Hunter finally got everything settled with the hotel for our next reunion. It will be held at the Holiday Inn Indianapolis Airport Ameriplex (8555 Stansted Road). If that doesn't give you a clue then this year's reunion will be in Indianapolis, IN on 26, 27, and 28 September. Reunion cost this year will be reduced to \$80 per person which includes the banquet. Contact the hotel as soon as possible at (317) 856-6200 to reserve a room. Room rates are \$139 with 17% tax, or 162.63 per night. There is FREE parking and FREE Shuttle. Be sure to tell them that you are with the 155th AHC Association reunion. More information to follow. Many thanks to Rueben for his hard work. There is a lot to do in Indy. More information to come in the next BARB.

A big attraction in Indy is the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Museum, it's about 13 miles from the motel. The Museum is undergoing renovations, it will be closed all year, but Brickyard track tours (starting at \$15) are available. A nice area for walking outdoors is the Central Canal and White River State Park; those are downtown, about 14 miles from the motel. And there are several museums downtown, too. You can get travel/tourism info for Indianapolis at 800-323-4639. Info for the state of Indiana can be requested at 800-677-9800.

POSSIBLE FRIENDLY FIRE INCIDENT

A gentleman by the name of Vern Elder recently wrote this up in the 155th website. We are trying to verify this. Does anyone remember this? Dates; Who was involved; etc.???

I was working Flight Following at 48th AHC in Ninh Hoa. I heard a broadcast from a Falcon light fire team. "Lead you're taking fire, break right I'll cover". The light fire team gave the hill location to me asking permission to engage some troops. I ran coordinates through 9th ROK Div Headquarters and was told no friendlies in that area and received permission for the team to engage. 90% casualties of supposed enemy. The team said they had expended ammo and low on fuel with intent to continue to my location to rearm and fuel up. The Koreans discovered it was their own troops who had fired on the Falcon flight. ROK APCs rolled up outside our base ops and were determined to engage the gunships. We delayed the approach but had to quickly let them continue in. Commotion ensued with us grabbing our weapons and 48th AHC gunships were scrambled, total of 6 Joker guns took off ready to engage the ROKs. Figured we were going to start the Korean war all over again. ROK and US brass showed up and truce declared to stop possible battle. Ended well but bad feelings were serious for a while. While the 155th guns rearmed and fueled, 48th Jokers continued to cover their departure.

Some kind of wild day it was. ROK high command from HQ oversaw the ROK troop of APCs withdrawal. Never thought I would see something like that.

Turned out it was a company of ROK troops who thought they would just put a scare in that fire team. That company was not supposed to be on that hill and had gotten disoriented in the field. Stupid, but those Koreans thought the 155th team was only 2 slicks and figured no danger. Well, they learned the hard way. The 155th wasn't playing around. 90% KIA of that ROK unit.

A SENSE OF LOSS

Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28 ('68 & '69)

Something I think about often, but rarely talk about. is a story I believe that in one form or another many of us share. I think the thing that made us different when we came home was at a very young age, we experienced the loss of a friend that in some cases was closer to us than our brother back

home. Most people do not experience this until much later in life when an older family member dies.

If you would indulge an old soldier, this is my story. It starts during the first week in December 1968, when in two nights of the best mortar shooting I have ever seen, the bad guys destroyed our aircraft. My assigned slick took three rounds inside the revetment. On the morning after the second night, we could only launch three slicks and two gunships. Sometime later in December I got a brand-new H model, #540; the logbook indicated a total of only 25 hours. Talk about a late Christmas present! More important was I got a great crew.

My assigned Crew Chief was Mike Wilcox, and my Door Gunner was Dave Clements; we would fly together for the next 11 months. In the beginning they were very kind to this inexperienced Aircraft Commander. Mike was a bit older and provided a measure of adult supervision, so things did not get out of hand. He was very knowledgeable of the aircraft: if he said don't fly it, we did not. Mike said fly it, we did; if he was with me when we flew the night mission into LZ Kate.



months. In the beginning inexperienced Aircraft and provided a measure of get out of hand. He was very he said fly it, we did; if he was with me when we flew

Door Gunner Dave was a different "spirit" of the crew. For some always be late getting to the several times, one day he was late front of my open door, I said, of these days I will really chew He just looked up at me and said sir." I shook my head, told him, and put on my helmet. Dave was May 23, 1969, mission into Cambodia, and the LZ Kate mission.

story, he was the "free reason he would almost aircraft. I had talked to him again. As he was standing in "You know Clements, one your ass out for being late." with a smile, "It will be OK, "Just get your ass on board," my Door Gunner on the

Because of my extension, Mike and Dave were scheduled to go home about eight weeks before me. Three days before they were scheduled to leave, they both came over to my hootch. "Sir, we are concerned about you, just say the word and we will extend so we can all go home together." My reaction was something like this. "Are you guys' nuts? Besides, I am tired of being responsible for you two. I want you to go home – NOW - and grow up." (Of all the awards I have ever received, this is the highest.) Little did I know that my personal sense of loss would extend 40 plus years into the future.

You see, Dave died at age 49 due to an Agent Orange heart condition. I had a call from his two sons a few years ago, asking about their dad. They indicated Dave had told them he worked in Maintenance, but then became a door gunner. They wondered if he had been exaggerating. I started to laugh. I asked if they knew that their dad was in a history book by name. I then told them to get a pen and paper and gave them the name of the book (Secret Green Beret Commandos in Cambodia). I was more than happy to set the record straight and tell them their dad had been a fine soldier – and a warrior.

A few years back I got a call from Mike, we would talk three or four times a year. Mike had shared with me that he had Agent Orange-related cancer, and by this time he had been dealing with it for several years. The call was about two months before the next reunion, I asked if he was going? “No, I don’t get out of the house much anymore. I just wanted to say hello and see how you were doing.” We talked for a few more minutes and ended the call. It took me about 30 seconds after we had hung up to realize he was saying goodbye for the last time. Mike passed away a month later.

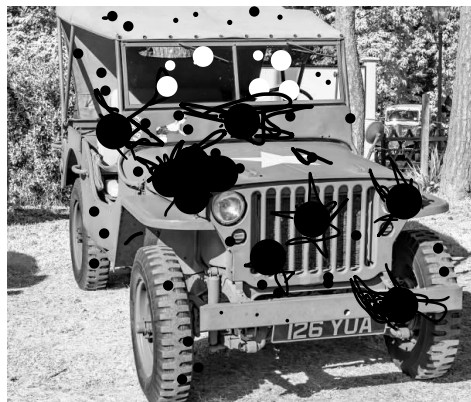
As a crew we had won all our battles during our time in Vietnam, but the sense of loss was greater I believe because we were no longer at war - but it seemed as if the war had reached out from 40 years in the past to claim two more deaths, deaths of two of the finest men I have ever known. Guys, I will soon see you in the next life, where the sky is always blue, we never worry about fuel, and nobody shoots at us. Rest in peace.

STOLEN JEEP AND BOB DONALDSON

Jim Haga, Stagecoach17/Falcon 10

Nov ‘66 – Jul ‘68

It was in late April of ‘68 that I transitioned into the 155th gun platoon. Bob Donaldson was Falcon 6 at the time. Bob and I reconnected back in 2011-2012 or thereabouts. He had a relative living in the Northeast, and my wife and I were living in the Philly suburbs. Bob was riding his motorcycle all around the country, and when he visited his relative in my neck of the woods, he would stay with us for a few days. He really enjoyed my wife’s cooking. We even got to fly together again in a little R22 helicopter, and we discovered that he hadn’t lost any of his flying skills for sure. Of course, we had many long conversations about our time together with the 155th. I learned a few things, for sure. He reminded me that I was the first AC he flew with when he arrived in BMT – something I surely had forgotten. I had the chance to rib him a bit about an incident that happened after I made AC in guns, so I’m guessing seems some guy, maybe from the MACV had decided he’d had enough, so he had was heading west out of BMT towards heard that the guy had made it far before or maybe the jeep had a mechanical guy started walking, and thinking he had into Cambodia, turned himself in to the outpost he came across. Well, of course it Special Forces camps on the Vietnam side so end of story for that dude.



May of ‘68. It group downtown, stolen a jeep and Cambodia. Bob had running out of gas, problem. So, the crossed the border first military was one of our of the border, and

For some reason, no effort was made to recover the jeep, and the 155th was asked to send out a gun team to destroy it. Bob was in the lead ship with me following and it wasn’t too long before we found the jeep. We set up a daisy chain and began making passes at the jeep. I’m proud to say that my aircraft, when we got back to BMT, had not expended a single round of ammunition or a single rocket, so we didn’t need to re-arm and were absolutely ready to go for our next mission. Why?

Because Bob unleashed a firestorm of bullets and rockets at the jeep, sitting on a dusty road, and the amount of dust and smoke in the air made it impossible to even guess where the jeep was after his first pass. Of course, that didn't stop him from doing the exact same thing on his second and third pass. I guess we (my aircraft and crew) were just there to make sure the jeep didn't shoot back at him.

We had a good laugh about it, and another beer. Sadly, we lost Bob in 2014. We'd become good friends, and I wish we'd had more time together.

MEAL FOR MONTAGNARDS

Keith Lane, Stagecoach 21 & Falcon 5, May '67 – '68



The story about “War Souvenirs” in the recent Barb reminded me of when my crew provided a huge deer (or maybe it was elk) to a Montagnard village. We'd been on a mission and towards the end of it we spotted a deer (or elk) several clicks from a village (sorry, I don't remember who was on the crew that day). Both CE and DG wanted a shot at it, so we made several passes and I think it was the DG that finally brought it down. After a quick recon for the enemy (it was a relatively open area), we landed - and it took all four of us to get it inside the aircraft. Once everyone was back in the helicopter, we flew over to the village and through a lot of sign language let the chief know he could have the animal. It took about ten of those guys to get the dead animal from the helo over to a large fire already in progress. They threw it on whole without skinning or dressing, but that was undoubtedly their way. I'm sure it fed most of the village, though we didn't wait to find out.

I CAN'T KEEP DOING THIS...

Geoff Jones, Falcon 0

I suspect many of us experienced that one moment of “OH MY GOODNESS!” (or something like that) when we came to realize with absolute clarity that what we were doing was real – and finally had to set aside the feelings of safety by mental detachment and thinking that bad things only happened to “the other guy.” This is a recounting of when it first hit me.

In early 1970 I had spent a month or two as a newbie in First Platoon, transferred to the Falcons, and was now a Peter Pilot learning the gun platoon ropes by OJT. I had the privilege of learning the very different styles of the likes of Bob Maddox, Keith Marchbanks, Les Davison, Diz Dickinson, and, as on this occasion, Ken Shriver. Doing what we did as Falcons, I was already baptized into the world of real “engagement” with people who want to drop you out of the sky, but the tale to

follow sets out what I remember from the day the lightbulb of reality went on in my still newbie head.

Ken Shriver was the Falcon team lead, I was his Peter Pilot, and our ship included Crew Chief James Lawrence and DG Mark Cornwall. Lost in the fog of my memory are names for the trail ship crew, except I do remember clearly that Jay Manning was the Peter Pilot. The mission that day was to meet up with a Special Forces ground commander at Ben Het and support a Montagnard troop operation up toward Dak Seang. I had no idea what was going on in that area and had never heard of Ben Het nor Dak Seang. Basically, I was along to support Ken in the cockpit, learn about gunship tactics and teamwork, and shoot when it was time to shoot.

It took quite some time to reach Ben Het. We flew north past Pleiku and Kontum, then topped off from some fuel bladders at Dak To - now just a vacant landing strip. I noticed the older team members had become serious and seemed preoccupied, no BS or chatter as we departed Dak To and flew west toward the border. Ben Het turned out to be a heavily fortified, elevated Special Forces camp with a very large Montagnard contingent. It looked like the families of the Yards lived there too. We landed on a small, short strip on the south side of the camp and shut down. Waiting along the strip were three or four groups of very organized (formed up) Yard soldiers, obviously anticipating the arrival of slicks. As the blade wound down, Ken said, "wait here" and strolled over to an American who was with the Yards. I remained strapped in and the crew didn't get out. Shriver and the SF guy were squatting and pointing to a map spread out on the ground. At that point in time the day changed - and as the day continued, so changed my understanding of the realities of life in the 155.

At that moment, after watching Ken meet and talk with the American, I turned my vision back into the cockpit and immediately was startled by an extremely loud BOOM - followed by BOOM . . . BOOM . . . BOOM in quick succession. I looked up to see that mortar rounds were landing near the troops and were walking toward our ships - all way too close!! In an instant I looked for Ken, he was running flat out toward us, whirling his arm in a frantic crank-up motion. The entire Yard infantry contingent had disappeared, apparently into a ditch paralleling the strip.

Adrenalin flowing, I hurriedly ran through the Quick Start procedure and pulled the trigger, in great anticipation of hearing firing clicks and the turbine whine - but instead there was only dead silence. Oh shirt!!! I began running through start-up again, and found I had two additional heads in the cockpit. Lawrence and Cornwall were both leaning in from the back, making sure this Peter Pilot didn't miss a step in this start-up procedure again! Three heads were better than one for sure, we began to crank. This all happened in less time than it takes to tell it. By now Ken was getting close. We were not quite up to RPM when he scrambled into his seat, grabbed the controls, and immediately pulled pitch. We were loaded with plenty of fuel and hadn't expended rockets or anything else, but somehow, with the low RPM warning blaring, we gained enough speed and altitude to skim over the trees and dip down a little valley - and only then let the power catch a breath. Over the intercom, Lawrence said that he had spotted the mortar tube on the way out. Shriver radioed someone and then told us we were not to engage the mortar crew but continue to some location north up a valley, which we did.

That beginning of the operational day started me thinking about mortality on a very personal basis! As the day continued, Ken was in contact with people on the ground. I don't think anyone realized the scope of what we were heading out to support - at least I didn't. We were treetop low and pushing the old Charlie model for all it was worth. A rolling hill with tall grass, but no trees, rose on our left. We were still low and were paralleling the hill for a short while. That is when, for the first time, I not only heard but actually saw the bright white flashes of a machine gun muzzle firing directly at us. I felt like they were shooting at me personally, and declared the obvious, "Taking fire, 9 o'clock!" The team did a 360, gained some altitude, and fired a couple of minigun bursts where the fire had come from. The bad guys didn't engage us in return, so we flew on. We couldn't see them, but we felt better. They probably had gone back underground.

Very shortly after that we heard a large volume of groundfire under us, and it was continuous. We called "taking fire" and the trail ship put minigun fire under us. We were then told we were over ground units (ours and theirs) engaged in a big fight, and they were too closely engaged for us to shoot. I could tell Shriver was tense, he had not been informed of the scope or location of our units or the NVA units. We were still very low, above trees now, and everywhere we turned heavy



groundfire was very audible - but not directed at us. We finally got past that area. Somewhere near Dak Seang, we expended our ordinance per the ground link's instructions and headed back to rearm and re-fuel via another route, low over heavily wooded terrain. Suddenly, out of the blue, our ship made a violent horizontal shift to the left, very little tilt, just a huge push to the left. A quick 90-degree turn revealed a huge and nearly pure white ball of smoke roiling up out of the jungle where we had just passed.

Immediately we thought we had flown through an artillery strike - and I had that sinking feeling of "how do we get out of

this?" And then someone saw the flash of an old VNAF straight-winged jet high above, looping for another run. He had nearly knocked us out of the sky! He obviously knew nothing of our presence, nor did we know of anything of his. We quickly turned away and went on our way to re-arm and refuel as he continued on his target.

The rest of the day evolved into a blur of doing what a gunship team does, all in that Dak Seang area. I thought to myself, "I can't keep doing this!" That first foray of the day opened my eyes to how vulnerable and insignificant we all were, and that anything could happen to you in a half second. It wasn't just something that happened to "the other guy", we were all "the other guy". In the course of accepting what was real as 155 life went on, I realized that, yes, I could "keep doing that" . . . and I did. Calm days were interspersed with the "hair standing on end" days for all the 155 crews, Stagecoaches and Falcons. I eventually became one of the "old guys" watching the following waves of newbies come to their own realization of "I can't keep doing this" - then realizing, "well . . . yes they could!" And they did!

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TAPS:

Carroll “Frank” Clay passed away in Virginia late last fall. He was in-country in '67, he worked in 155 Maintenance.

Earl Baldwin passed away in January. Earl worked in Maintenance during the first part of his '67-'68 tour, then later flew as a Falcon Door Gunner. Earl was one of the founders of the 155th AHC Ass'n back in the '90's. **R.I.P., my friend.**



Excerpt from “High Flight”

High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there, I've
chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the windswept heights with easy
grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew.
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space.
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

SHARING COMMO



Mike Bengé – I'm just back from having coffee with Les, catching up. Always enjoy sharing BMT stories. All the best to all the 155th guys in '24!

Terry Westbrook – Here's a little bit of a story about how Mama-san ended up with my fridge when the 155th closed down, maybe you can use it for the Barb when you run out of war stories.

THANK YOU FROM MONTAGNARD ORPHANS

Dear 155 men,

Thanks so much for your continued support of the Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanages. Army aviation guys are a big part of our donor base. I am so proud to be a member because of what we have done - but also because of what we do now.

Best wishes for 2024!

Pat Leary, President

Friends of Vinh Son Montagnard Orphanages

Ed: Pat was Avenger 3 when he flew guns for the 189th AHC at Pleiku in '67 and '68. The 155th AHC Ass'n has been donating to the Montagnard orphanages for several years.

Send us your stories, share them with others!

<u>155 Association Officers</u>				
Ref_Name	Email	HomePh	CellPh	155_Officer
Hunt, Tom "Tommy"				President
Markham, Charles E. "Chuck"				Vice-President; Roster Guy & Merchandise
Schrader, Jeffery W. "Jeff"				Treasurer
Gardner, Robert "Bob"				Treasurer's Aide
Davison, Les				Historian/Roster Guy
Harrelson, Joe				Member-At-Large
McInnes, Bruce L.				Member-At-Large
Cunningham, Jim				Member-At-Large
Bob Alberts		-		Member-At-Large
Hunter, Rueben				Member-At-Large

Officers' contact info is shown above. PLEASE contact Chuck or Les if your address, phone number, or e-mail address change. If you have any questions or matters of concern relating to the Association or BMT, calls and/or messages are welcomed by all the occifers.

And if you just want to call to say "hi," we'll take those calls, too – gladly!

*155th 1st or 2nd Platoon (fully loaded) Slick at low level, 120 Knot
airspeed, insertion somewhere around Duc Lap*



Notice the Nomex flight suit on the pilot.

155 AHC Association
11028, C.R. 209
Hico, TX 76457