



BAN ME THUOT BARB



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

Sortie 91

June 2024

CREW CHIEF MEMORIES

John Bledsaw, 1st Flight Platoon ('69-'70)

I was only 18 when I got to BMT in April, '69. I was assigned to the 1st Flight Platoon, flew as a Door Gunner for a few weeks. Then when I turned 19, I assumed Crew Chief duties - since I'd had the training stateside. A quick memory from one of those first missions as a DG. In the middle of an Ash & Trash day, we received a call from Duc Lap requesting emergency Medevac. The AC knew the PP and CE, but I was an FNG. He asked me, "John, Dustoff could make that pickup, it would take about 30 minutes for them to get here. We could make the pickup in 5 minutes, but we all have to volunteer." I didn't have to think about it. "If you're waiting for me, you're wasting time." We made the pickup and flew the wounded man to BMT. That's what Stagecoaches did.



Another memory from later in my tour. Flying back from somewhere, AC was **Mister Ahearn**, PP was **Marlin Johnson**, I was CE, not sure who was DG. Mr. Johnson called over the Intercom, "Bledsaw, I want to fire your M-60, let's switch seats." I came back with, "Are you going to clean it after you fire it, sir?" After some back and forth banter, it ended up that Mr. Johnson did fire my M-60, and I cleaned it - but, I got some stick time. That's a good trade.



"I'll be standing on a corner in Indianapolis, Indiana, such a fine sight to see, it's a girl my Lord in a flat bed Ford, slowin' down to take a look at me"
(apologies to The Eagles)

REUNION INDY - 26 – 28 September, 2024

WHERE: Holiday Inn Indianapolis Airport Ameriplax (8555 Stansted Road).

RESERVATIONS: (317)-856-6200

Tell them you're with the 155th AHC Association

ROOM RATE: \$139 (tax makes the total \$163 per night)

Free Parking & Free Airport Shuttle

REUNION FEE (includes Saturday Banquet): \$80

155 AHC HOSPITALITY SUITE OPEN:

Thursday	3 pm – 10 pm
Friday	8 am – 10 pm
Saturday	8 am – 10 pm

BANQUET MENU: Choice of Tuscan Chicken or Teriyaki Atlantic Salmon

Please contact Rueben Hunter (below) to reserve your choice:

155 AHC REUNION HONCHO: RUEBEN HUNTER

E-mail: **“Hunterrueb42@gmail.com”**

Phone: **(608) 697-6676** (OK to leave message)

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. To get info for the state of Indiana, call 800-677-9800.

Just FYI, we'll have plenty of company in Indy – because the Colts will play the Pittsburgh Steelers at 1 pm on Sunday the 28th at downtown Lucas Stadium. It might be a good idea to make your reservations early.

Rueben is a member of the American Huey 369 group, based in Peru, IN. You can score a ride on one of their Hueys at Logansport/Cass County Airport, IN on Saturday 27th (rain date Sunday 28th). Cost is \$125. Logansport/Cass County Airport is 80 miles from the Indy Holiday Inn. Contact Rueben if you're interested in going up there for a ride.

END NOTE: Past 155 reunions have been held at venues tailored to conventions and upscale (dare I say “spiffy”) gatherings. Rueben tells me the Holiday Inn will be clean and comfortable and will provide everything we need for a wonderful gathering – but don't expect “spiffy.” I'm just sayin' . . .

TAPS

Jerry Daniels passed away last summer. Jerry was a Stagecoach platoon leader in '67 – '68, and then served as the Operations Officer.

Thomas Blevins died during spring '24.

Hal Parks passed away back in March, '23 at the VA facility in Union Grove, WI. Hal flew with the Falcons during '68.

Norm Gustitus died this past January. Gus was one of the first guys at BMT, he flew with Company A/1/1 in '65 (before it was redesignated 155 AHC). Then he was the Operations Officer later in his tour.

Dean Owen passed away in March. He was Stagecoach 6 during the latter half of '69. More on Page 5.

Charles Markley passed away during October, 2022. He worked at the Avionics shop during his tour in '69-'70.



Proud to have served with you, Gentlemen!

POSSIBLE FRIENDLY FIRE INCIDENT – Follow Up

Barb Sortie 90 (Mar '24) included a story (from a non-155 guy) about a Falcon fire team being fired on by ROK troops and then returning fire to devastating effect, followed soon thereafter by a “locked and loaded” confrontation at Ninh Hoa. We asked Barb readers with knowledge of the incident to provide additional info; none did. Numerous 155 guys were contacted and asked if they had any knowledge of the incident; none did. Our best guess is that **if** this incident happened, it involved gunships from another unit.

So, if you can provide info on this incident, please tell us; better late than never. But all is not lost. The story triggered a memory with confirmed bullet holes; see below.

THE SAFEST GUARD TOWER

Pat Lundquist

I tend to believe that Korean “friendly fire” story in the last Barb. After leaving the 155th, I was assigned to the 243rd ASHC (“Freight Train” Chinooks) in Dong Ba Thin. My friend Joe Roberts was Sergeant of the Guard one night. He found out I was on guard duty for all of Tet, so he assigned me to the safest tower on base. DBT was split by Highway 1. During Tet, they closed the highway gates at each end for the night. Our “tower” was a wood structure with sand-filled barrels and sandbags on top of a Conex container. It was about 500 feet from the north perimeter so any worst-case scenario mass attack would likely bypass our tower. There were Korean Army troops (ROKs) directly across the highway from us. Close to midnight, our tower was hit with automatic weapons fire. My shift was midnight to 0300, so I was asleep at the time it began. Hearing the commotion, I tried to sit up and Cram, a former Americal grunt, shoved me back down. Cooney said, "We've gotta see who's shooting at us."

Lundquist, you're on duty, you need to fire a flare." I grabbed a parachute flare, slid the cap off then onto the other end, and crawled up to the drums. While hunkered down behind, I reached up and popped the flare on the forward edge of a 50 gallon drum. Cram said, "Now, you need to look." I told him, "You look. I popped the *dang* flare." Both Cooney and Cram decided at that moment they were off duty. Before the flare burned out, I peeked up between the sandbags in time to watch the last of a group of drunk Koreans stumble back into their hootch. I'm assuming the flare got their attention. Those Koreans sure got our attention! When we called it in, Sgt Joe did not believe our story - at least not until he saw the bullet holes the next morning. That was when I thanked him for assigning me to the safest guard tower in DBT.



Photo taken before the event. The pagoda-looking building across Highway 1 and the swamp belonged to the Koreans.
Pat Lundquist photo

Nobody was hurt - so no harm, no foul. Just another day in the 'Nam.

SHARING COMMO

Mrs. Marie Parks – This last Saturday marked my husband Hal's passing of one year ago. It has been such a blessing to have contact with people that valued his service.



Karol Franzyszen – Mike 51 here, I was a USAF O-2A FAC for MACVSOG/CCS from April 69 thru February 70. I must say, I have the most admiration for all you unsung heroes. God bless you all.

Pat Lundquist – I really enjoyed the back cover photo on the last Barb. I'm pretty sure that was the inflight Maintenance crew.

John Ruhly – Here's my new address and updated phone number. I always look forward to the Barb, thanks for what you guys do for us.

Mrs. Toni Gustitis - I am Norman's wife and want to inform you that unfortunately Norm passed away on January 8, with his family by his side. While we did not make the reunions, he thought highly of the group.

Johnny Bledsaw – Thanks for the call, it's always good to talk with guys who were at BMT. It's been a LONG time since we were there.

Chuck Markham – I called **Fred Yamagata** the other day to wish him a happy birthday. He said he's looking forward to seeing everyone in Indianapolis.

Mike Butcher – Good to hear from you, hope life's treating you well these days. Stay re-armed and refueled.

Bill Bayer – Thanks for the note, it's been a while since BMT.

Pete Agur – I'm still short, still fat (but getting thinner) – and happy. The older I get, the better we were.

Jim Koch – I hitched a ride on an Honor Flight of vets into DC to tour the memorials, and was lucky enough to meet Les Davison {another 155 AHC pilot} at the Wall.

Gilbert Terry – I never heard about anything close to the “friendly fire” incident in the Barb. I did fly several missions supporting ROK troops, and knew them to be very disciplined. If ROK's had fired on US helicopters, the consequences from their own commander would have been severe.

A FINAL SALUTE



Dean Owen served as Stagecoach 6 from late June through December '69. Dean was on his second tour, having flown as a gun pilot on his earlier visit to Vietnam. Mission came first for him, of course – but he never acted without considering the welfare of his men. Dean was not a desk jockey, he flew as often as he could escape the Head Shed because he wanted to know and experience the missions his 155 guys were flying. He was a tough but fair CO; his door was always open if someone needed a minute.

For many of us who served under Dean, the zero-dark-thirty emergency resupply mission to surrounded Firebase Kate stands out as the time when he “earned his spurs.” Dean didn't have to lead that flight – a lot of CO's would have found reasons to be elsewhere – but when we launched from City Field, Dean led the way. And his slick was the first to descend into the darkness, to find the strobe that marked the tiny drop area for the desperately needed ammo. Well done, sir!

Then later, when the 155th AHC Ass'n started to get together, Dean came to the group not as a former Commanding Officer, but as “just one of the guys.” He and wife Jan attended our reunions regularly, and he quickly became friends with all. Here's what some of the guys had to say.

John Ahearn - Dean was a Man among men. I will miss him.

Ken Donovan – Dean Owen was the finest Commanding Officer I served under during my 30 year career. Later he became a close friend.

Tony Giordano – We have lost a good friend, a great leader, and a wonderful man. We pray for his family. May he rest in peace.

Jeff Schrader – Dean was an outstanding person. We have lost a true friend.

Tom Hunt – Dean was one of the special guys in our group. He will be missed.



Dean Owen (center) at BMT, Nov '69. The new 10th Bn CO is at left, an anonymous Falcon pilot on right.

Photo by Bruce McInnes

THE PAPER TRAIL

Excerpts from “Operational Report – Lessons Learned,” 10th Combat Aviation Battalion, dated 5 May 69

As a result of an attack on 10 Oct 68, the 17th Aviation Combat Group requested that additional security be provided at the 155th AHC in Ban Me Thuot.

I FFORCEV representatives attended a meeting of interested parties in Ban Me Thuot on 17 Jan 69. Recommendations were developed and set forth in DF, AVFA-AT-C, subject: Enemy Artillery Threat to Ban Me Thuot City, dated 3 Feb 69. As a result, I FFORCEV directed the Senior Advisor to curtail the freedom of the enemy to conduct standoff attacks at Ban Me Thuot.

In response, the Senior Advisor, 23rd ARVN DTA, submitted a report, MACTN-BM-SA, subject: Enemy Artillery Standoff Threat to Ban Me Thuot City, dated 24 Feb 69. In this report he reviewed the actions taken and made the observation that the ultimate solution will have to await the availability of a well-trained RF/PF security force in that area.

Ed: I’m just wondering if anyone out there ever encountered a “well trained RF/PF security force” during your time in Vietnam?

-A FRIDGE FOR MAMA-SAN

Terry Westbrook, Falcon 1 (1970)

This is a photo of the Mama-san that took care of my room during my time with the Falcons. One day a fellow Falcon that was going home asked me if I would buy his refrigerator and fan and then sell it to the next guy. I remember I bought them both for \$20



and sold them for \$30 to the next Falcon. During my appliance buying and selling, I somehow ended up with an extra refrigerator – so I asked my Mama-san if she wanted it. With a huge smile, she indicated she was very interested.

Now the process of getting it from my room to her home became the how-the-heck-do-I-do-this delivery issue. I talked to a few people on base and decided that “borrowing” an ambulance on the sly from the Medical Detachment was the best way to transport the fridge to her home. The details are a bit fuzzy after all these years, but I recall loading it in the back of the ambulance and going out the front gate brazenly with lights and sirens on. The plan was for Mama-san to go out the employee gate and I would stop and pick her up there. Seemed a simple plan. I slowed down near her gate as she saw me coming. But before I could stop the ambulance, she hopped on the running board and then jumped in through the window, “ass over tea kettle” is the best way to describe it. It turned out she had never been in a vehicle with a door on it, so she didn’t know how to open the door and get in. With some language issues, we finally found her home. I had to fold the side

Late afternoon outside the Falcon hootch, Mama-san is heading off to her night job.

Terry Westbrook photo

mirrors in a couple of times to get down some of the narrow streets. With delivery complete, my return to base was without issues. I found out later that a refrigerator was a prized possession, even though the village had electricity only 12 hours a day. I did not think about the locals and how they lived before that, and I'm glad I could make her life a little better. For the next month, I did get special treatment – fresh pineapple cut up and delivered to my room for breakfast. I sure hope the statute of limitations on “borrowing” an ambulance has expired.

If you're coming to Indy, suggest you make your reservations early. There's an NFL game downtown on Sunday, and the hotel might have to hang out the "NO VACANCY" sign.

And right after you do that, call Rueben and tell him your meal choice.

EDITOR'S WRAP:

A tip of the hat and a big “THANK YOU” to story contributors **Johnny Bledsaw, Terry Westbrook, and Pat Lundquist.** WELL DONE, GENTLEMEN! Readers are encouraged to thank them, too. And kudos to **Rueben Hunter** for his efforts putting together the Indy reunion; it's shaping up to be a great time. Hope to see y'all at Indy.

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COVER PHOTO: Wall etching of two of our fallen. The names on the Vietnam Wall are listed chronologically by the date they died or went missing. That puts the Crew Chief and Door Gunner of Stagecoach 392 right next to each other on the Wall.



**Wall rubbing for 2nd Platoon DG and CE on Stagecoach 392,
lost in Cambodia 23 May '69.**