



# BAN ME THUOT BARB

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



Sortie 93

March 2025

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## FLY HIGH, STAGECOACH 5/6

Sadly, as this issue of the Barb is being drafted, we received word that Chuck Markham had passed away. Chuck had been struggling with myriad health issues over the last couple of years. He faced every issue, asked “What do I have to do to beat this?”, and charged on. Chuck was a fighter to the very end – but Mother Time eventually won out.

Chuck was the 155<sup>th</sup> XO at BMT during mid-1970, then took over as Stagecoach 6 to close down the company in late 1970. Chuck served two tours in Vietnam, and recently wrote a brief story about how he came in-country the first time; that story leads off this issue. He had been very active in the 155 Ass’n, serving as an officer several times, most recently as President. He was a fine officer and a good man – and a close friend. He will be missed.



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## MY LONG-AGO LANDING IN A HOSTILE LAND

*Chuck Markham, Stagecoach 5 and 6*

B Company, 1/69 Armor, 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, was approaching the coast of south Vietnam at Cam Rahn Bay. It was before dawn and the CO had assembled the company officers in the briefing room of the landing ship tank (LST) on which we had embarked from Okinawa.

“Here’s the situation men.” he said as he slapped a pointer on the military map of Nha Trang and the immediate area. There were blue arrows going this way and red arrows going that way and routes marked with friendly roadblocks. He pointed to the beach where we to disembark and said, “I don’t know the situation on the beach, so we are going ashore prepared. That means all weapons locked and loaded.”

The Company had loaded on the LST with 3d Platoon first, Company HQ tanks, then 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, and 2nd Platoon was last to load. Since I was in command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, that made me the second tank off the boat - behind my fire team leader in tank 11. When the “Old Man” wrapped up the briefing he sent everyone below deck. The men were all down there doing final maintenance checks and milling around. I called all my guys together and basically repeated what the CO had said. The last thing I said was, “We are going ashore in a combat area that we do not know. We WILL be prepared. All weapons locked and loaded. 11 and 16 (my tank) will have canister in the main gun, 12 HEAT (high explosive anti-tank), 14 HE and 15 canister rounds. Any questions?” There were none, so we proceeded to our vehicles.

I mounted my tank and entered my battle station, the cupola which had the .50 Cal machine gun, range finder, and remote turret controls. The gunner had the main turret controls. I checked the head space and timing on the .50, then loaded a belt of ammo. After that, I closed the breech and put the safety on: LOCKED and LOADED! The Loader slammed a shell in the 90 (main gun) and said over the intercom, "Canister up!" Things were getting a bit tense.

The radio came to life as the Old Man came on the Company Command net. "Pearly Shells, this is Pearly Shells 6, two minutes to landing. Crank 'em up." Eighteen tanks came to life, and the ship was filled with the smell of diesel smoke and the roar of large horsepower engines. As soon as the ramp fell on the white sand beach, 11 roared off and drove for the twelve o'clock position on the beachhead. I charged off right behind him, looking for the elusive Asian enemy that was determined to kill me and mine.

"HOLY SHIRT!" Once outside the confines of the LST hull, I looked around and saw guys laying on beach towels sunning and funning with Asian ladies. Others were waterskiing behind engineer boats in the bay. Off to one side was a volleyball court, and a vendor in a little thatched hut was selling something. I wilted behind my gun. WHAT A LET DOWN FOR A COMBAT SOLDIER!!!!

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## **IN COUNTRY DINING AT ITS BEST: TO "C" OR NOT TO "C", THAT IS THE QUESTION**

*Joe Harrelson, Stagecoach 26*



The C- Ration as we knew it got its start in World War II as one of a series of meals designated as A-D. **A** was fresh foods usually served in a Mess Hall; **B** was meals prepared in a mess hall from canned or dried foods; **C** was a single package intended for use for a period of no longer than two weeks at a time; and finally, **D**, which was a bitter tasting (intentionally to avoid the soldier wanting to eat it like candy) high calorie emergency chocolate bar. A single bar was divided into three 1,200 calorie meals.

From 1958-1980 the army issued a series of meals named "Meal, Combat, Individual Ration," commonly known as C-Rations, which were the meals we so much enjoyed when away from base. The Crew Chief always had a supply. Each C-Ration meal was packaged in a rectangular cardboard box containing one large can and three small cans plus an accessory pack containing salt, sugar, instant coffee, non-dairy creamer, two pieces of chewing gum (Chicklets), a packet of toilet paper, a four-pack of cigarettes (Camel, Chesterfield, Kool, Kent, Marlboro, Pall Mall, Salem, or Winston) and a book of moisture resistant matches. The box lid was of a size that

it could be used as a post card. When we resupplied the soldiers in the field, we often were given a supply of these to be returned to base and mailed. No postage was required. The sender simply wrote "Free" in the corner. Almost every GI in the field had a bottle of Tabasco sauce to liven up the meal.

Each lid had three lines of information. First was "MEAL, COMBAT, INDIVIDUAL." The second line indicated the name of the meat unit in bold capital letters, such as "TURKEY LOAF."

The third line indicated the type of cracker spread; B1 was Chocolate Fudge, B2 had Cheese Spread, and B3 contained Cocoa Beverage Powder. The C-rations came in a case of twelve meals banded by bailing wire. The first M-16 rifles had a split flash suppressor which could be used to cut the wire. Later M-16's had a closed suppressor so other means such as pliers had to be utilized to cut the wire.

Eash case contained a pack of four folding P38 can openers. The P38 dates from WWII, no one seems to know the origin of the P38 name. The best guess is that it took 38 strokes to open a large can. The P38 had a small hole in the handle which we all used to add one to our dog tags - until it invariably came open and stabbed us in the chest.

In the twelve individual meal boxes, the large can was the Meat unit. M1 was Beefsteak, Chicken or Turkey loaf, Ham and eggs, or Ham slices. M2 was Meat chunks with beans in tomato sauce, Ham and Lima beans, Beef slices with potatoes in gravy, or Beans and Frankfurter Chunks. M3 was Beef in Spiced Sauce, Boned Chicken or Turkey, Chicken with Noodles or Pork Steak. One of the small cans contained Crackers and another had jelly, chocolate, or cheese spread. The other small can contained either peaches, fruit cocktail, fruit cake or white bread.

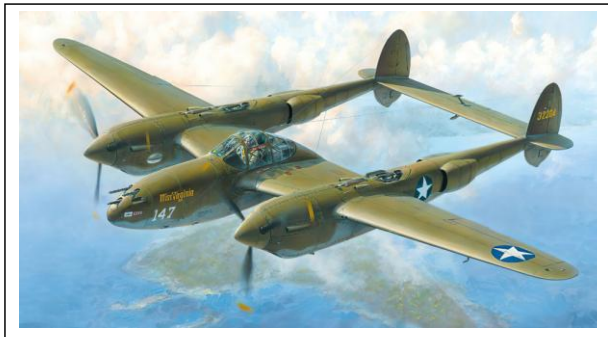
The flight crews became quite adept at making a field stove out of one of the small cans by cutting holes around the base, covering the bottom with sand or stones then adding JP4 or shaved C-4 (dynamite??). To the best of my knowledge the make-shift stove worked well and no one got blown up.

We all had Meat favorites. What was yours?

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**P38 Can Opener**



**World War II  
P-38 Lightning**

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## RECAP OF 2024 155 AHC REUNION

*Rueben Hunter, Falcon Gunner, '65-'66*

At the 2023 reunion, I convinced the officers to let me host the 2024 reunion in Indy. My plan was to take the 155 group to the Huey 369 Museum and hopefully get a ride in a helicopter.

In December I started calling hotels to see what I could find. I talked to about ten different hotels. There are so many things that we would like to have. Some things like a hospitality room are so important, free breakfast and room price were also important to me. In January I drove down to Indy to visit as many hotels as I could to check them out. I didn't like some of them as they didn't have all we needed. I went home very disappointed.

Late January, I called more hotels. Holiday Inn seemed to have most of what we needed except free breakfast. The first Sales Director was great, we worked through all the details. One thing I learned was that everything needs to be in a contract. I went through four different Sales Directors. Each one had new ideas. Lesson learned: get it in writing. But it did work out. We were allowed to buy discount coupons for breakfast.

I made another trip to Indy on August 4. The week before our reunion I gathered five large coolers and filled them with beer, soda, and alcohol. Also some snacks. (I was planning on 80 to 90 members, so we ended up with way too much.) I put everything in my truck and headed to Indy. I arrived on Thursday morning. Thanks to Wayne Cranford and his wife for helping me move in all the coolers. The Hospitality Room was all set up for us. The staff at the Holiday Inn were great all the way; front desk, dining room, and kitchen.

Members started to come in slowly. But the weather was bad, windy and rainy. The airport was closed for a brief time. People in Florida and North Carolina had to contend with hurricanes. By Friday we only had 34 guests. Although our numbers were down, we had a great time. The dinner on Saturday was delicious, the food was hot and very good.

Saturday morning I called John Walker at the Huey 369, and he told me they would be flying to Logansport to give rides at the airshow there. Eight of us left soon after, hoping the weather would allow us to go flying in a Huey again – after all these years. John greeted us upon arrival, and talked with the group. As he spoke, I witnessed a couple of guys starting to get very emotional. This happened to me before, so I knew what they were feeling. John noticed it too, and we helped them get through it. We had about a ten to fifteen minute ride in the H model; it sure brought back some memories.

On Sunday, we packed everything and headed our separate ways. We were feeling good about spending a few days with old friends. Hopefully we can do this again. Whoever hosts the next reunion, I hope I can be around to help. And I'm sure Jim and Les will help again, too. I'll see you at the next one!

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INDY WAS A GOOD TIME FOR THE 155 - NUMBERS WERE SMALL, BUT THE FUN WAS

**BIG**

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## VOLUNTEER AT THE WALL

### *Les Davison, Falcon 2*

I started volunteering at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (the Wall) back in 2018. Engravings on the Wall memorialize the 58,281 US military personnel (all men except for eight women who were nurses) who died in Vietnam and surrounding areas. It's a national monument on the Mall in Washington, DC, so there's lots of visitors, lots of tourists, lots of school groups – a LOT of people come by.

But for some, the Wall is more – so much more. It is a very special place, often a very emotional place – for visiting

family members or vets who served with the fallen. They come here to find a particular name or names on the Wall to remember them - to honor them - and to grieve their loss. Stories of good times might be told, and memories can be shared. Tears are not uncommon here, often shared among the visiting vets, family members, and Volunteers.

Truth be told, the family members and battle buddies are the ones I volunteer for: to talk quietly with them, to hear their stories, to share their grief – and to let them know that their loved ones are not forgotten. Here's a couple of notes from my Wall diary.



Presenting the rubbing requested by an Honor Flight Vietnam vet. *Davison photo*

**Wall Encounter #1:** I approached a lady who'd been standing alone in front of (approx) 10W. When she noticed me and turned, tears were running down her cheeks. I asked quietly if I could help her, if she wanted a rubbing. She simply shook her head, and I moved away. We were about ten feet apart, no one else around. A few minutes later she turned to me and said, "And my son is buried at Arlington."

**Wall Encounter #2:** - As I approached a small group near 15E, a man pointed at a name. I stood nearby, and waited for a lull in the conversation to ask if he wanted a rubbing. No, just a photo was fine. As we stood looking at the names, he and I exchanged Vietnam small talk: who were you with, when were you there, etc. As that happened, his family members slowly worked themselves away from the Wall. When it was just the vet and I, he started talking.

"I was a Medic with the 101<sup>st</sup>." Pointing at a name, he said, "When I got there, he was the senior Medic, he took me under his wing. We got to be close friends. When he was hit, he called my name. He was at least a klick away, I still don't know if I heard him call - or I just knew that he called for me." A silent pause, remembering. He pointed at another name. "He was a 60 gunner, they walked into a U-shaped ambush. He got hit right off, but then went

John Wayne and stood up to provide covering fire for his guys. He got stitched and went down. I was able to get to him, I knew it was bad. I was giving him mouth-to-mouth, he was coughing up blood and I was swallowing his blood. He didn't make it."

"After that, I knew I couldn't be friends with these guys; otherwise, I wouldn't be able to survive. So I became a total asshole." Tears were flowing, a family member came with a hug, another rubbed his arm and put her head on his shoulder. All were quiet as he regained his composure; the women gradually moved away. And then he continued his story. Finding another name, he told me, "He found a grenade along the trail, and put it in his pouch. We think he forgot to check the pin. When we stopped for a break and he took the pouch off, the grenade exploded. Several guys nearby were injured, I didn't have enough fingers to stop the bleeding from all his wounds."

Then, a quiet period as he wrestled with his memories. We talked a little about survivor's guilt, shared small talk, and he glanced toward his family. He had disengaged his personal blast shield, shared his worst nightmares with a fellow vet - and now it was time to deal with the World again. He shook my hand, saying, "Thank you for being here." I responded, "Welcome home." And then he walked back to his family.

**POSTSCRIPT:** If anyone is coming to Washington, DC, I would love to meet up at the Wall. Honor Flights, too. Contact info on last page, **please** get in touch.

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## **GREAT HANDS: A COMING HOME STORY**

### **Ken Donovan, Stagecoach 28**

I am sure many of us have heard or even experienced how some of us received a less than warm welcome home we got home. My story I believe be much different, I could not have dreamed of a better welcome home.

My story started when I got on the big bird to go home in December '69. We finally



***Freedom Bird***

were number one for take-off, and started rolling down the runway, the aircraft was very quiet, as if we had shared disbelief that we were really going home. The aircraft rotated, and I felt the landing gear being retracted into the wheel wells, still no response, a short time later the captain announced that we had left Vietnam airspace, and it was like the aircraft exploded into the loudest cheering I have ever experienced, we were really going home. Then everyone settled in for the long flight home.

I lucked out and was assigned an aisle seat, there was a real knock out stewardess going up and down the aisle, for some reason every time she walked by, she would drop something and

then have to pick it up. I would just smile "GREAT HANDS" this happened about 5 times during the flight. When we got off the plane in Seattle, she was standing near the doorway. As I approached her, I smiled and said, "THANKS, BY THE WAY YOU HAVE GREAT LEGS TOO." She smiled and laughed and I said good bye.

I remember walking down a hallway to process my orders and seeing a large sign that

said, "WELCOME HOME SOLDIER, AMERICA IS PROUD OF YOU!" I had to laugh at that one. Soon I had my tickets for my flight back home to Flint, Michigan. I had about a three hours until my flight, and was looking for a place to eat, when I saw HANDS was walking toward me. We stopped. I asked if she knew of a good place to eat in the airport, she said yes. I then asked her if she would like to have dinner, I'll be damned she said yes.

We had a great dinner for about the next hour, I wish I could remember her name, but even without it she became part of my Vietnam experience. In my wildest dreams I never thought within less than an hour after landing in the United States I would be having dinner with such a kind person. Wherever you are, I hope life has shown you the same kindness that you shared with me the night I made it home.

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### 155 Ass'n Business News

No reunion this year. Dues are temporarily suspended. It's not breaking news that our membership is aging – and the number of members is declining. Occifers plan to meet this summer to discuss future plans for the organization. Future reunions, future issues of the *Ban Me Thuot Barb*, future "Incoming" notices; all will be discussed. If you have relevant ideas, thoughts, and/or opinions, please pass them along to any occifer.

If you're disappointed that there will be no reunion this year, call some of your friends, find a good place to meet up – and do it! Rueben showed us at Indy (see story above) that we don't need a travel resort destination to gather. The Holiday Inn worked out well there, and your nearby small motel probably would, too. Good luck!

Special thanks to **Ken Donovan** for helping put this edition of the Barb together. Comments, criticism, and general feedback are invited.

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

Joe Harrelson – President  
Jeff Schrader - Treasurer  
Bob Gardner - Treasurer's Aide  
Les Davison – Historian & Roster  
Tom Hunt – Member-at-Large  
Bruce McInnes – Member-at-Large  
Jim Cunningham – Member-at-Large  
Bob Alberts – Member-at-Large

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**COVER PHOTO:** This looks like a Frito Bandito advertisement. Who are these guys?



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