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Edgar "Doc" Clement, a former reconnaissance pilot



JOURNAL PHOTOS BY DAVID ROLFE

Edgar "Doc" Clement was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses for his service as a reconnaissance pilot during the Vietnam War.

Dangerous, But Necessary

tells story of how he saved American lives

By Kim Underwood
JOURNAL REPORTER

BERMUDA RUN — As a "Catkiller" in Vietnam, Edgar "Doc" Clement's job was to get reconnaissance teams on the ground in the demilitarized zone out of trouble.

When a radio call came in from American soldiers who were in trouble, he would fly his single-engine Cessna 0-1 Bird Dog to their location and, by radio, direct artillery fire and the F-4 jets that would drop bombs and napalm on enemy locations.

The mission might include not only subduing the enemy but also the destruction of foliage and other impediments to create a path to a spot clear enough for a helicopter to fly in and pick up the soldiers.

It was incredibly dangerous work. A mission might last a couple of hours, and during that entire time, he had to fly his relatively slow-moving airplane at altitudes as low as 100 feet, which meant that the unarmed plane could be shot down by rifle fire from the ground.

"It was nuts," Clements said. But necessary, he said. "That's what we did trying to save American lives."

Jim Hooper, the author of a book about Clement and the other members of the 220th Airplane Reconnaissance Company, emphasized how dangerous the work was by pointing out that the helicopters coming in to pick up soldiers might be under direct fire for two minutes, and the jets for even less time.

"These guys, whenever they flew, they were being shot at," Hooper said.

Clement, 64, was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses. He arrived in Vietnam in 1968 as a first lieutenant and, after extending his tour for six months, left 1½ years later as a captain. For the first 12 months, he was stationed about 15 miles south of the demilitarized zone in Ha Dong. His adventures during that time are central to Hooper's *A Hundred Feet Over Hell: Flying with the Men of the 220th Recon Airplane Company Over I Corps and the DMZ, Vietnam 1968-1969* (Zenith Press, \$25).

Hooper, who lives in London, has extensive experience as a war correspon-



Clement (left) helped Jim Hooper (right) write a book about Clement's flying experiences.



See Pilot, Page A8 Clement flew a single-engine Cessna 0-1 Bird Dog to rescue American soldiers.

Pilot

Continued From Page A6

dent and has written other nonfiction books and a number of articles about wars throughout the world. His interest in writing about the 220th can be traced to his brother, Bill, being a member of the company.

During the 10-year process of getting everyone's stories together and verifying information for the book, which was published earlier this year, Clement and Hooper became friends.

Earlier this week, after

a book-signing at the Smithsonian Institution, Hooper headed south to visit Clement at the Bermuda Run home that he shares with his wife, Brenda.

Clement grew up in Winston-Salem.

He has the same name as his father so some sort of nickname was inevitable, he said, and the "Doc" from Bugs Bunny's line "What's up, Doc?" was what stuck.

He was a running back at Northwest High School (now Northwest Middle), and after graduating in 1963 he went to Austin Peay State University in

Tennessee on a football scholarship. He dropped out after a year, and in April 1966 the Army drafted him.

Clement has a taste for adrenalin, and after being discharged from the Army he headed to Alaska, where he spent eight years flying in areas where airstrips were rare and he routinely had to search for clearings long enough to land.

After that, he became a pilot for Piedmont (now US Airways) and retired in 2005.

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