



# 220th Aviation Company

(Surveillance Airplane Light)

(Reconnaissance Airplane)

(Utility Airplane)



"Catkillers" and Family, and all Friends and brothers in Arms, in memory of those who have served.



SP5 STEPHEN G. BADGER  
CAMP HOLLOWAY, PLEIKU VIETNAM

## *My Army and Vietnam Timeline*

### *Headhunter To Catkiller*

In early 1965 I was out of school, working a part time job as a bagger in a local grocery market and knew I was due to be drafted—so I signed to enlist into the Army with a guarantee to go to Germany. I remember taking the Army entrance tests and must have done well in mechanical ability; however, before I got to do anything mechanical I had to go to basic training.

So my Army journey began at the old Boston Army base where a group of inductees boarded buses and headed to the train depot. Our train left Boston's South Station for Fort Jackson, Columbia, South Carolina. The train ride wasn't bad but the bus stop at Fort Jackson was the worst thing that I ever had gone through; I thought my life was over. However, I made it through in one piece graduating from basic training and going on to my next assignment at Fort Rucker Alabama, where I attended aircraft maintenance schooling. I earned my rating as a Single Engine Observation/Utility Airplane Mechanic (MOS 67B20), and was on my way to becoming a full-fledged mechanic/crew chief.

After AIT, I went on to Germany where I was stationed at Mannheim working on a U-6 Beaver. My guarantee having been fulfilled was short lived, however, and after four months I was transferred to a base in

Orleans, France. At that juncture, I started to figure my time in Europe was coming to an end and Vietnam was to be in my near future. Well, it was sooner than I thought, because after only four more months, France was kicking the American troops out and closing bases. Needless to say, my orders came down for the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Company in Saigon, Vietnam.

I travelled home on leave for 30 days visiting family and friends. It's amazing how fast 30 days goes by when you're on leave. However, at the end of my leave, when I went to fly to California, I found the airlines were on strike. It was a long train ride that started in Boston on 9 August 1966 and ended in Washington State. From Washington, on 24 August, I flew out of Travis Air Force Base to Saigon on a Flying Tiger Line, Boeing 707, and flight 243 at 0900 hours. (Details found on a boarding pass I kept).

I spent a few days at the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Company before being sent to my new company; the 219<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company (Headhunters) at Camp Holloway, Pleiku. I was assigned as a crew chief/mechanic on a Birddog performing all of the daily and routine maintenances required as well as pre-flight inspections. After a couple of months in country three other crew chiefs and me, four pilots and our aircraft were assigned temporary duty to Hue. While there we were billeted at the MACV compound on the south side of the Perfume River, a couple of miles from the airstrip. Each day, we took a jeep to the airstrip and readied the aircraft for the pilots who flew daily missions in the area. If memory serves me, there was also an ARVN Birddog aircraft flying out of the field.



**Hue Airfield**



**MACV 1966**

Our stay in Hue ended after one month and we returned to Pleiku. While at the 219<sup>th</sup>, I had many memorable moments including flying to Tuy Hoa for maintenance and being stuck there for several days due to a typhoon, seeing the Bob Hope show with the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, and of course the war. At 0135 hours, on 7 January 1967, I was going through my first mortar attack, with several of the incoming rounds landing in our company area and damaging a couple of aircraft. In addition, during my short stay with the 219<sup>th</sup>, I remember the loss of one pilot during an operation near the Laotian border. He was shot down during the mission. Another pilot crash-landed at Pleiku as his landing strut broke off.

The big move came in March 1967 when three other crew chiefs and me, four pilots and aircraft from the 219<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company were transferred to the 220<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company

(Catkillers), where we were to be assigned to the newly created 4<sup>th</sup> platoon at Dong Ha. As Lloyd Oak mentioned in his history write up, he and I arrived first to establish living quarters, (a hooch we found and shared with the Marine cooks), and maintenance shack on the flight-line. The remaining platoon members followed shortly thereafter.

After our arrival the intensity of the war was felt at Dong Ha by an increase in incoming rounds by mortar, artillery and rockets. I suppose this was to be our indication of the type of duty assignment we would be experiencing this close to the DMZ. Throughout my stay there, Dong Ha would on several occasions in late '67 and early '68 be the scene of an airfield completely filled with helicopters, from one end to the other, and hundreds of Marines loading up to be taken to Hills 881, 881a or Khe Sanh.



**Dong Ha Air Base**

I am not sure of the date, or pilot, but my plane "57-2817" crashed on the west end of the runway. The pilot and observer were safe but the plane was a total loss. I was never made aware of the cause of the crash, but it was not due to hostile actions. Also, on 23 May 1967, I remember one of the 220<sup>th</sup> pilots crashed in the area of Con Tien. The pilot, Captain Bobby Ray Jermyn, was killed but the back seat observer escaped.



“I’m the pilot who had the landing accident at Dong Ha. The date was 8 October 1967, verified from my flight records. We were repositioning from Phu Bai to Dong Ha and where landing to get mission briefing or something. I landed short of the runway and hit a ditch, which sheared the main gears and the aircraft began to spin, causing further structural damage. Pilot screw up all the way; young, invincible and I didn't know my limitations.

The Marine backseater (and for the life of me I can't remember his name) had some injuries. I was more or less intact. Airplane was not! I can confirm two things—72817 was indeed a total loss, as the pictures indicate. The pictures were taken after the aircraft was moved to get us out.

Dave Ohare  
Catkiller43”

*Editor: You gotta love those 4th Platoon pilots, with their bravery and honesty! It would be difficult and a pride-burtful event for **any** of us to experience such a crash, but I'll bet my pension Dave was a better pilot after all that unwanted excitement. He earned a DFC on 12 December the next year, which points to that fact!*

We did build a bunker at the flight line maintenance shack. I think it was one of the first underground designed bunkers, and it was very well built, except for a water problem during the monsoons. Thank goodness for our fire fighters and their pumps, because, believe me, it was a well-used and much appreciated bunker. Another memory I have of the flight line was the Marine crash/fire truck, which served nobly in the rescues it was asked to perform only to be rewarded with many shrapnel holes in its body. I must say that it did its job very well for as long as we were there.

On 29 June, at about 1400 hours, the Dong Ha Combat Base ammo dump was hit by incoming rounds and exploded. (I read some place that about 8,500 tons of small arms ammo exploded all day). The ammo dump was located in the southeast corner of the base; however, the explosion destroyed a large area including the hooch we shared with the marine cooks. For some reason, I was not on the base that day, but returned the next day to see the devastation. Due to hostile actions the 4<sup>th</sup> platoon evacuated from Dong Ha to Phu Bai, from 4–7 July. In August, the platoon was ordered back to Phu Bai and returned to Dong Ha about 3 September. I stayed there until early December, at which time I returned to Phu Bai.



**Ammo Dump Aftermath**

On 4 December 1967, the irony of war was to consume me full force while I was preparing for a late morning or early afternoon flight. The pilot, CW2 Louis F. Keeven, and I were chatting about his upcoming leave for Hawaii in a few days to meet his girlfriend and get married. Mr. Keeven's confidence and positive outlook were apparent when I asked him if he wanted me to arm the rockets, he said, "There is a truce on, we won't need them." Mr. Keeven was fatality wounded during that flight by small arms fire. The back seat observer managed to land at Quang Tri, where the pilot was removed from the aircraft and the plane was then flown back to Phu Bai. I will live with that final conversation for the rest of my life. We celebrated Mr. Keeven's life with a Requiem Mass at the III Medical Battalion Chapel on 6 December.

<p><b>Requiem Mass</b></p> <p><b>for</b></p> <p><b>the repose of the soul</b></p> <p><b>of</b></p> <p><b>Louis F. Keeven</b></p> <p><b>CW2 W3152366</b></p> <p><b>220th Reconnaissance Airplane Company</b></p> <p><b>III Medical Battalion Chapel</b></p> <p><b>6 December 1967.....1700</b></p> <p><b>Fr. Philip M. Floersh.....Celebrant</b></p> <p><b>Major Gary L. Clark.....Commanding Officer</b></p>	
	<p><b>Remember, O Lord, your servant Louis, who has gone before us with the sign of faith, and rests in the bsleep of peace. To him, O Lord, and to all who rest in Christ, grant, we beseech Thee, light and peace. Amen</b></p>

**Editor's Note: Fr. Philip M. Floersh, seen below (Celebrant for the Requiem Mass):**

August 20, 2014

A funeral Mass was celebrated Aug. 18 at the Church of the Assumption in Perryville for Father Philip M. Floersh, a former seminary teacher, parish priest and Army chaplain.

Father Floersh, 78, died Aug. 13 at St. Mary's of the Barrens Nursing Facility in Perryville.

Born in Nashville, Father Floersh attended St. Vincent's College high school in Cape Girardeau, Mo., and then entered the Vincentian novitiate at St. Mary's Seminary in Perryville in 1953. He made vows in 1955 and studied philosophy and theology at St. Mary's of the Barrens Seminary. Father Floersh was ordained in 1962 by his uncle, Archbishop John Floersh, in Louisville, Ky. He entered the Catholic University of America, where he earned a master's degree in secondary education and taught for the two years at St. Louis Preparatory Seminary.

In 1966, he entered the U.S. Army as a chaplain. He served soldiers and their families the next 26 years, achieving the rank of colonel and serving in Vietnam. After his retirement from the military in 1992, Father Floersh was active in parishes around the province, including as associate pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Perryville. He studied at St. Thomas Theological Seminary in Denver, Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., and the University of Arizona in Tucson. He was spiritual adviser of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Arizona.

In late 2009, Father Floersh moved to Apostle of Charity Residence in Perryville in July of 2010.



The Holidays were always a tough period of time, especially after the loss of one of our own. Here we are half a world away from family and friends and the weather forecast in Vietnam is absolutely no chance of snow in the forecast. However, Major Gary Clark was a great commander and did his best to express his appreciation for our sacrifice and service during this difficult time away from home. His approach was “food”, and lots of it and deliciously prepared, as if we were sitting at our own family table. My adopted family, the men I served with, compensated in good measure for the missed Thanksgiving and Christmas home cooked dinners that 1967 Holiday Season.

1967



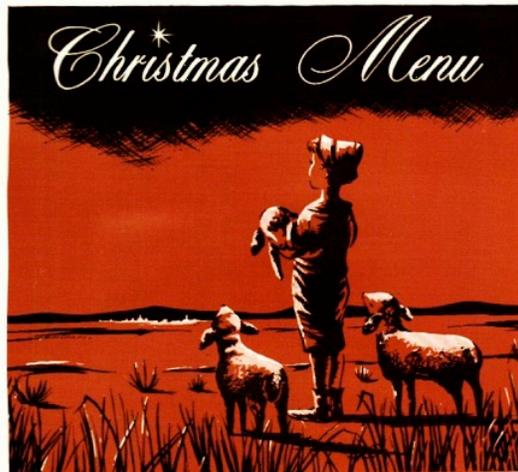
### Thanksgiving Message

The necessity for keeping the defenses of our nation strong and alert has placed you a long way from home on a holiday that is traditionally a family affair. Your family, along with millions of other Americans, will thank God this day that you protect our country. Traditionally, Thanksgiving stands for your neighborhood church, friends and family, the smell of fall in the air, your favorite college football game, turkey and pumpkin pie. But it also stands for much more... a nation founded on the principles of a hard won freedom, a nation of plenty with equal opportunities for all. We thank God this Thanksgiving that there have been in the past and that there are those now willing to risk all that they hold dear that it might remain so. Thanksgiving is an American holiday and you are celebrating it in the finest possible way.

*Gary L. Clark*  
Commanding

## THANKSGIVING DAY MENU

Shrimp Cocktail                      Crackers  
Roast Turkey with Bread Dressing  
Giblet Gravy  
Cranberry Sauce                      Mashed Potatoes  
Glazed Sweet Potatoes              Buttered Peas  
Assorted Relish Tray  
Butter Flake Rolls                      Butter  
Fruit Cake  
Mincemeat Pie or Pumpkin Pie with Whipped Cream  
Assorted Nuts                      Assorted Candy  
Assorted Fresh Fruit  
Tea                      Coffee                      Milk



220th Reconnaissance  
Air Plane Co.  
Dien Phubai, Vietnam

## Christmas Message

It is with renewed sincerity that I wish the Officers and men of this Command a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

I am deeply aware of the fine spirit and devotion to duty which each of you has contributed to this organization.

It is my earnest hope that Peace on Earth will make it again possible for you to spend Christmas with your loved ones at home.

*Gary L. Clark*  
Commanding

## CHRISTMAS DAY MENU

Shrimp Cocktail                      Crackers  
Roast Turkey with Cornbread Dressing  
Giblet Gravy  
Cranberry Sauce                      Glazed Sweet Potatoes  
Mashed Potatoes                      Buttered Mixed Vegetables  
Assorted Relish Tray  
Butter Flake Rolls                      Butter  
Fruit Cake  
Mincemeat Pie or Pumpkin Pie with Whipped Cream  
Assorted Nuts                      Assorted Candy  
Assorted Fresh Fruit  
Tea                      Coffee                      Milk

Our on again, our off-on again presence at Dong Ha was to repeat once again in early January, as we returned to Dong Ha to continue our operations until 31 January—a day we will all remember forever. I recall, we were hastily assembled with little warning and ordered back to Phu Bai once again. While proceeding southbound after takeoff, I remember looking down and seeing the NVA flag flying over the Citadel in Hue and being clueless as to what was going on. I had not even heard that the TET Offensive was happening, although we had been hit hard with incoming at Dong Ha earlier.

Weather was continuously an issue whether on the ground or in the air. One memory I have is of a day it rained all day long and so hard you couldn't see the aircraft parked across the ramp; we put extra tie downs on all the aircraft due to the high winds. The old hanger where we hung out all day cracked and creaked with each gust of wind.

Back in Phu Bai I was assigned to an inspector position, performing major aircraft inspections for the remainder of my tour. As with many others, the rest of my time was a blur and mostly a normal daily routine, fixing planes and going to the bunker, and ultimately repeated the next day.



**Phu Bai Airport, 1967**



**Phu Bai Airport, 1967**



**Phu Bai Airport, 2014**



**Phu Bai Airport, 2014**

As with all crew chief/inspectors, test flights after the performance of a major maintenance and inspection were required to ensure the integrity of the aircraft. Going along for the ride was a measure of our commitment towards the quality of our work. Having gone on so many, and I'm not sure if it was from Dong Ha or Phu Bai, this particular test flight was to be my most memorable. This also reinforced the notion that our pilots were always on the lookout. During our short flight, the pilot asked me to look at a rice paddy near a culvert directly below us, asking me, "What do you see?" I replied, "There are three people crouching near the wall in black PJ's." He went after them, firing our rockets before they escaped to the

culvert. Two of them did not survive, the third one managed to escape. Opportunities like this made me realize the faith our Catkiller pilots placed in the aircraft, crew chiefs and the work we performed—considering the area in which they were flying and the varying locations of their missions. God Bless them all, and especially those whom we lost during the war; RIP.

I finally left Vietnam for home in October 1968, with a total time of 26 months in Vietnam; 20 of those months in the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC. There was a great group of guys in the unit at that time, and before I departed the guys in the hanger made a nice plaque out of plywood and sheet metal showing a picture of an O-1. Some of the names I remember at Phu Bai but are not mentioned in the write up are Sergeant Blankenship, Harry Hall, and Ed Barsis. I see many of the names in the Catkiller site that look and sound familiar, but I'm not sure.



**Headhunters Going Away Plaque**

### **Follow Up:**

In May 2014 I went back to Vietnam with five other crew members and pilots of the 220<sup>th</sup>, in addition to two other Army personnel, five Marines along with two wives and a son. It was a wonderful trip, given that I knew only one other crew chief. The other four arrived after I left for home. However, I was most inspired and humbled to meet these five Marines who were located in the 220<sup>th</sup> operational area. Their trip was somewhat different, in that, they were there to confront their nightmares of a lifetime ago. Why you may ask was I humbled? For many years, almost 50 to be exact, I have felt that I had not done much during my time in Vietnam. Each repetitive day, get up, prepare the aircraft, see the flight off, have breakfast, lunch and dinner and go to bed once again. So after hearing their stories, it made me realize that it might have been my

pilot or aircraft that I saw off—and who flew the mission that helped these men survive their battles. My work was more important than I gave myself credit for. *[Editor: Thank you for expressing that truth, Steve. The officers have tried to convey the same sentiment; you and other ground support personnel were invaluable to mission success and completion—repetitively, all the time.]*

I was surprised to see one of the barracks at the former MACV compound still there and being used as an apartment building. Also all that remained of the Hue airfield was an air traffic control tower. Dong Ha, on the other-hand, had nothing remaining of the old combat base. I was happy to finally see places like Con Tien, Rock Pile, Khe Sanh, Cam Lo, and Leatherneck Square, places I had heard of for so long from our pilots. The six of us, after much discussion, finally came up with an approximate location of our Phu Bai company area. Also, we found some or parts of the airstrips still at Quang Tri, and Quang Ngai.



## Arriving In Phu Bai



Catkillers, L-R, Tom Clark, Lloyd Oake, Steve Badger, Bud Bruton, Don Ricks, and Dennis Currie, surveying the remains of the 220th Aviation Company area at Phu Bai Airport, Wednesday, 10 May 2014 (general vicinity of what we believed to be part of an old wall near the area).





**MACV Compound 2014**



**Don Ricks – Steve Badger – Dennis Currie**

**Quang Ngai Airfield, May 2014**

**Edited and arranged by Dennis Currie, Assistant Editor**

*Copyright © 2014, Stephen G. Badger, All Rights Reserved*