

EYES IN THE SKY

# **The 220th Recon Airplane Company Vietnam 1968-1969**

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## **The “Catkillers” of the DMZ**

Ed Miler - Catkiller 6

September 11, 2012



A pictorial snapshot of the 220th Reconnaissance Airplane Company in action during the war in Vietnam.

**The 220<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company**  
**The Catkillers 1968-1969**  
**Major Edward Miler, Commanding Officer, 1969**

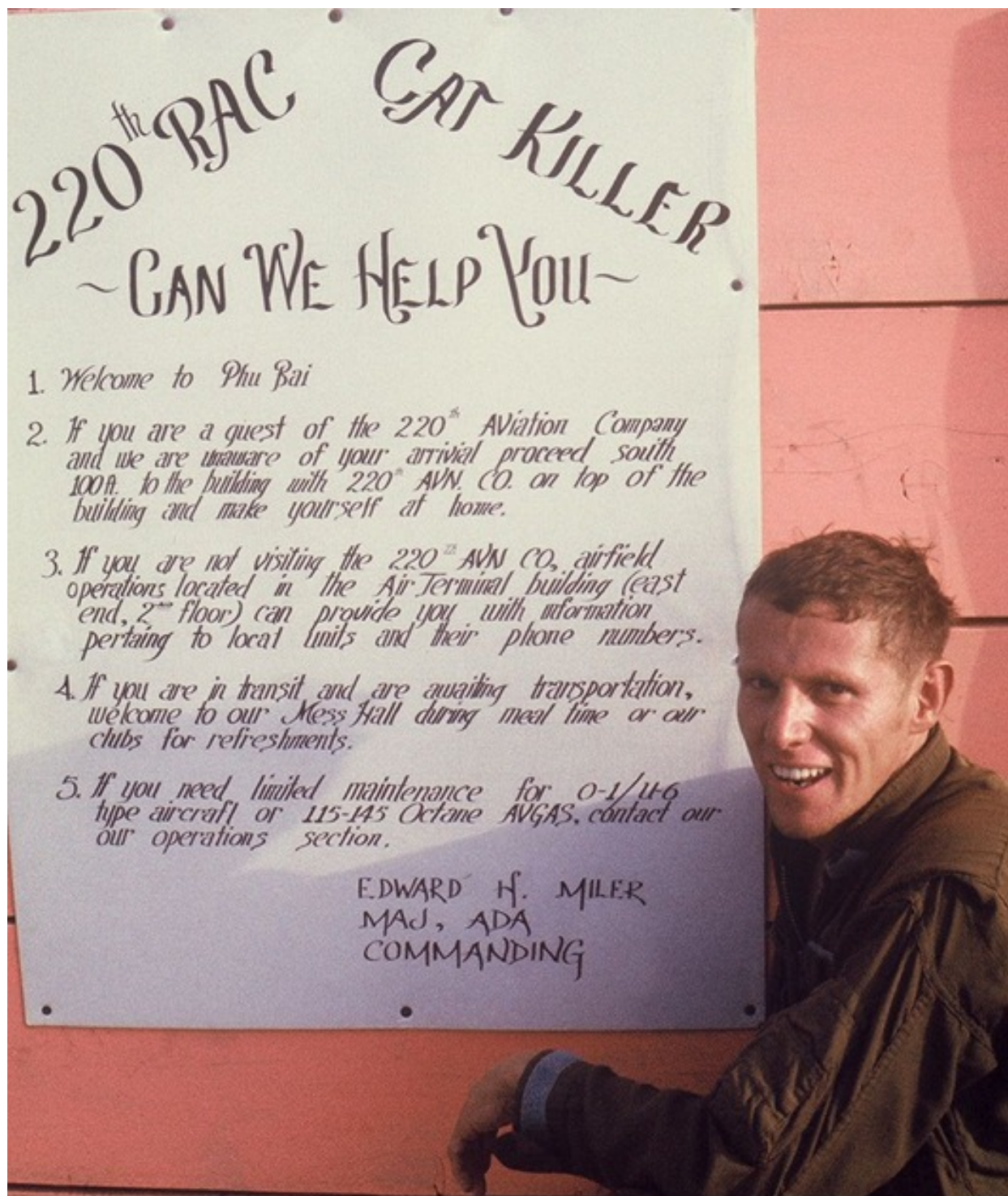


## The Catkiller Company Area Phu Bai, Vietnam 1969



Building identifications are at page 45.





Visitors Welcome to the 220<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company Area.  
Captain Charles Finch – Official Greeter!



## **The 220<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company, the Catkillers**

### **--- Mission Statement ---**

“Catkillers, Guardians of the DMZ, Eyes of I Corps”, these are the names of the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC. Being the only Bird Dog unit in I Corps from June 1965 until January 1968 tends to give a unit such as the 220<sup>th</sup> many nicknames. Under the operational control of the Third Marine Division, the 220<sup>th</sup> served almost every type of unit in I Corps. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division, 108th Artillery Group, 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division, and the Naval Task Force off the coast of Vietnam all utilized the services of the 220<sup>th</sup> Bird Dogs. The mission was initially to find the enemy, the NVA and the Viet Cong, report their positions to the supported units, and direct the US forces to engage the enemy, and to adjust artillery fire on the enemy. The mission was broadened to suit the wishes of the supported Marine Corps units to include fire direction for Marine, and Air Force fighter/bomber aircraft, as well as to call for and adjust the fire of Navy ships off the coast. This added mission made the 220<sup>th</sup> unique among all of the Recon Airplane companies, 19 of them, in Vietnam. When fire direction missions were needed north of the DMZ, the 220<sup>th</sup> was there first with its O-1 aircraft. They served as eyes for the guns in the south. Flying over 850 missions per month, the “Catkillers” located the enemy and called in the firepower to complete the job.

## The Men of the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC – The Catkillers



Lt Col Jack Mullen, CO 212<sup>th</sup> CSAB,  
and Major Ed Miler, CO 220<sup>th</sup> RAC, Spring 1969



Lt Col Jack Mullen





Change of Command; Major Jim Wisby to Major Ed Miler, 220<sup>th</sup> RAC, February 1969.

Top: Russ Blanchard, XO, and 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt Epling, facing camera; Maj. Miler, LTC Mullen, and Maj. Wisby, backs to camera. Bottom: Unknown US officer, unknown ARVN colonel, LTC Mullen, Maj. Miler, and Maj. Wisby behind Mullen.





Top photo: Charles Finch and Jim Wisby, CO 220<sup>th</sup> RAC, before Ed Miller assumed command. Bottom: Awards Ceremony, 220<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Ramp, Phu Bai, Vietnam, 1969. Major General Allen Burdette, CG, 1st Aviation Brigade, pins the Distinguished Flying Cross on Roger Bounds.





Awards Ceremony, 220<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Ramp of the  
Silver Star to Charlie Finch & Bill Hooper, Phu Bai, RVN. 1969





Top: Some Catkillers, identifications are at page 44.  
 Bottom: Finch and "Nasty Ned" Wilson. Phu Bai. 1969





Top: Ed Miler, CO, Russ Blanchard, XO, & Dale Moore  
Bottom: Charlie Finch and his Bird Dog, "Funny Bunny"



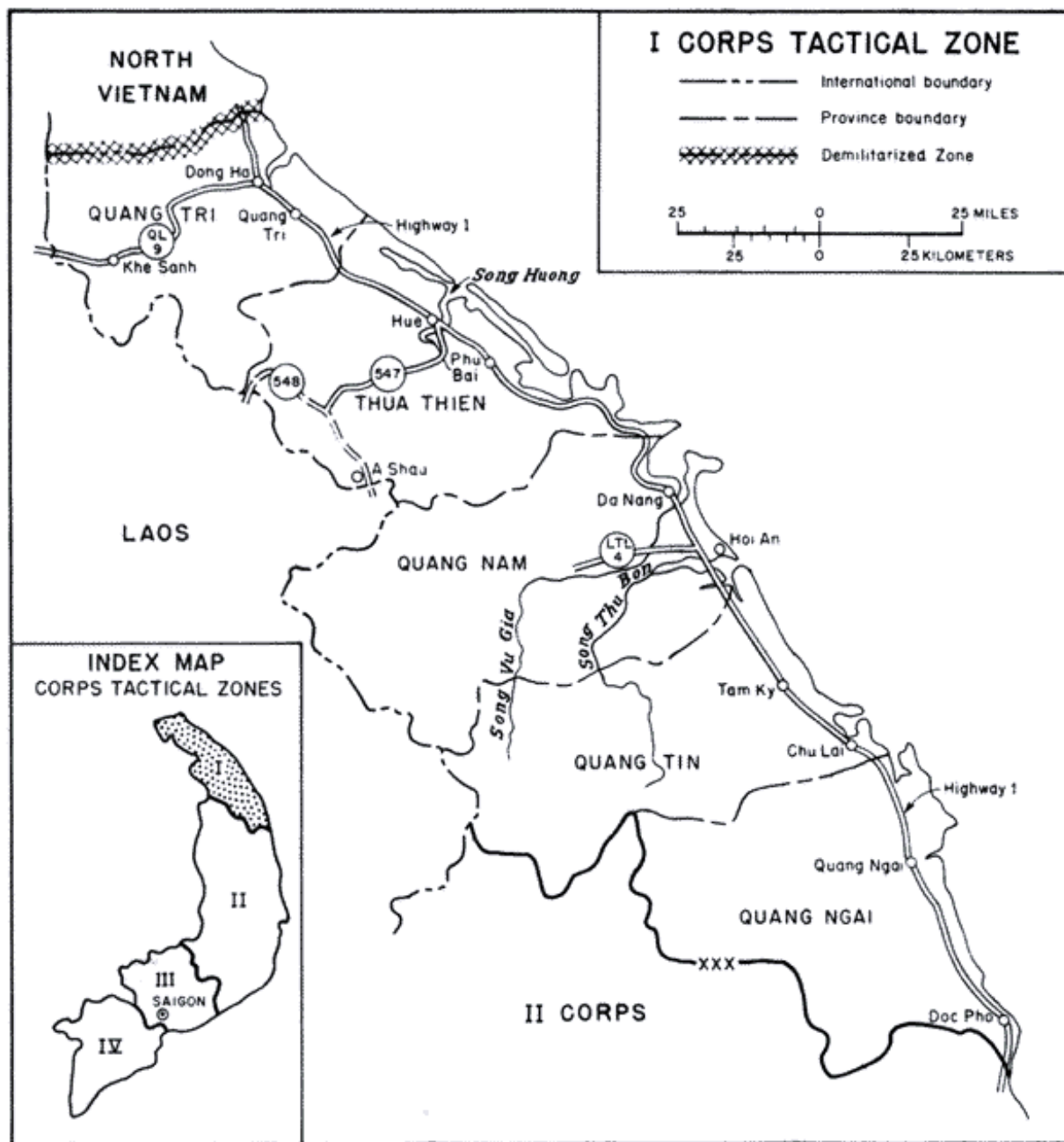






SP5 "Lucy" Lucianno, 220<sup>th</sup> Company Clerk, Charlie Finch & Ed Miller

# The 220<sup>th</sup> RAC Area of Operations Northern I Corps, the DMZ, and “Tally Ho” (North Vietnam)









## The Catkiller Aircraft, the Cessna O-1 “Bird Dog”



Bird Dogs on the ramp at Dong Ha





Top: Bird Dog Crew Chiefs Rich Buster and Dennis Jenkins at Dong Ha.  
Bottom: Bird Dog in flight over the Freedom Bridge on the Ben Hai River separating North and South Vietnam.





Bird Dogs in flight over Vietnam. 1968-69





Bird Dog in flight and shot-up Dog

# Bent Dog #015013

Phu Bai, South Vietnam



Photo courtesy Johnny Moore

Broken Bird Dog  
photo by Phil Lowentrit  
April, 1970, near Fire Base Bastogne  
South Vietnam

220th Recon Airplane Co.  
"Catkillers"



Broken Bird Dogs



As stated in the mission statement on page four, the 220th RAC was initially tasked to find the enemy, the NVA and the Viet Cong, report their positions to the supported units, and direct the US forces to engage the enemy, and to adjust artillery fire on the enemy. The mission was broadened to suit the wishes of the supported Marine Corps units to include fire direction for Marine, and Air Force fighter/bomber aircraft, as well as to call for and adjust the fire of Navy ships off the coast. Some of the sister services weapons platforms are shown below.

A-6 Intruder



F-4 Phantom



Above is the Grumman A-6 Intruder, which was used extensively by the Navy and Marines in the DMZ, as was the Air Force McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom shown below. The gunfire and bombing missions of both of these aircraft and other were often controlled by The Catkillers of the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC.

## Battleship New Jersey (BB-62)



The battleship New Jersey was stationed off the coast of South Vietnam during 1968 – 1969. She was just one of a number of Navy ships whose gunfire was directed by Catkiller pilots. For an interesting and amusing account of one such fire mission, see Chapter 13, Night Contact, of Jim Hooper's book, *A Hundred Feet over Hell*.





Top: Catkillers Roger Bounds and Charles Finch aboard the USS New Jersey. Bottom: Bounds and Finch with the New Jersey CO, Navy Captain Ed Snyder. These photos were taken in December 1968.





Top: Andy Anderson being congratulated by the CO, Ed Miler, on his last flight as a Catkiller in Vietnam in early 1969.  
Bottom: Jim Hudson, Edgar "Doc" Clement, and Glenn Strange.





Top: Catkillers in "Dress Blues" at 220<sup>th</sup> Officers Club.  
Bottom: Keith Wendall, John Herring, Charles Finch, Phil Caverhill, and "Tank" Meehan, Marine Corps liaison officer to the 220<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company (see next page).





Major Thomas "Tank" Meehan of the 12<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, was the Marine Corps liaison officer to the Army 220<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company, The Catkillers. As such, it was his job to keep the Catkillers away from the political infighting of those who wanted to tell them how to fly and when to fly (from Hooper's book, Chapter 1, page 1). Since the 220<sup>th</sup> was under the operational control of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, Meehan was an invaluable addition to the 220<sup>th</sup> bringing knowledge of Marine Corps operations and wisdom which accompanies maturity to a bunch of young, fresh out of flight school, each with a different view on how things ought to be done. Tank was an invaluable asset to the company and assistant to the company commander, Major Ed Miler.





At the top is Bobby Goodspeed, Ed Miler & Kieth Klett. The bottom photo is of a "Bunch of the Boys" at the club in front of the dart board and "Short Timers" list.





Top: Officer's Club dartboard and "Short Timers" list. Bottom: Doc Clement and unknown Vietnamese woman and Lynn "Bum" Bumgardner walking in the rear.



Catkiller Beach  
Phu Bai, South Vietnam  
1970



Above: "Catkiller Beach" behind the officer's club and below is Sarge Means with two American Red Cross nurses





One of the nurses of the Medical Detachment adjacent to 220<sup>th</sup> RAC Company area.

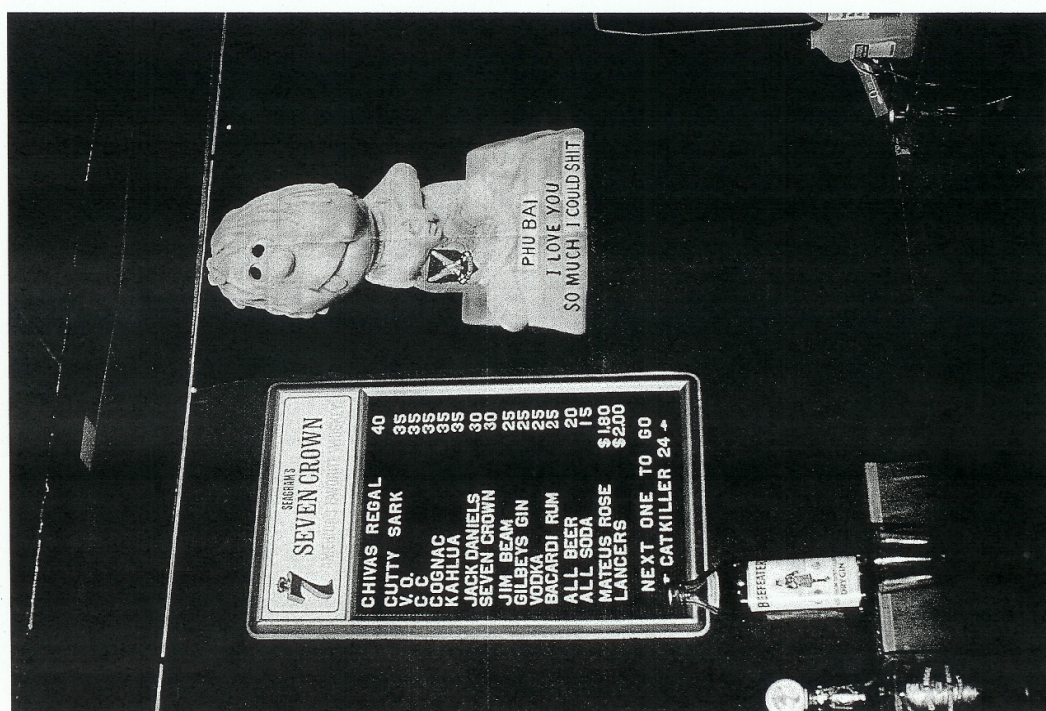




Top photo, from left to right: BG Frank Clay, MACV J-1, Gypsy Rose Lee, and Captain Bill Hooper, Catkiller 12, 220<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company, Saigon, Vietnam in January of 1969. MACV had sent a USO request for a bachelor over six feet tall and with a solid combat record to serve as escort officer for Miss Lee for the USO show for a two week period; Hooper was selected for this duty. MACV was the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

In the photo to the left is Bill Hooper, SMG Salvatore Cherry, MACV, Miss Lee, and an unidentified officer in the foreground. Photo is courtesy of the Capital Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and was taken in January, 1969.





Top photo: The ever present poker game at the Catkiller club at Phu Bai, RVN, 1969. Facing camera is Russ Blanchard, Charles Finch, and Glenn Strange (profile view). I don't know the other back of the heads. Bottom: Behind the Catkiller club bar. Note the prices.

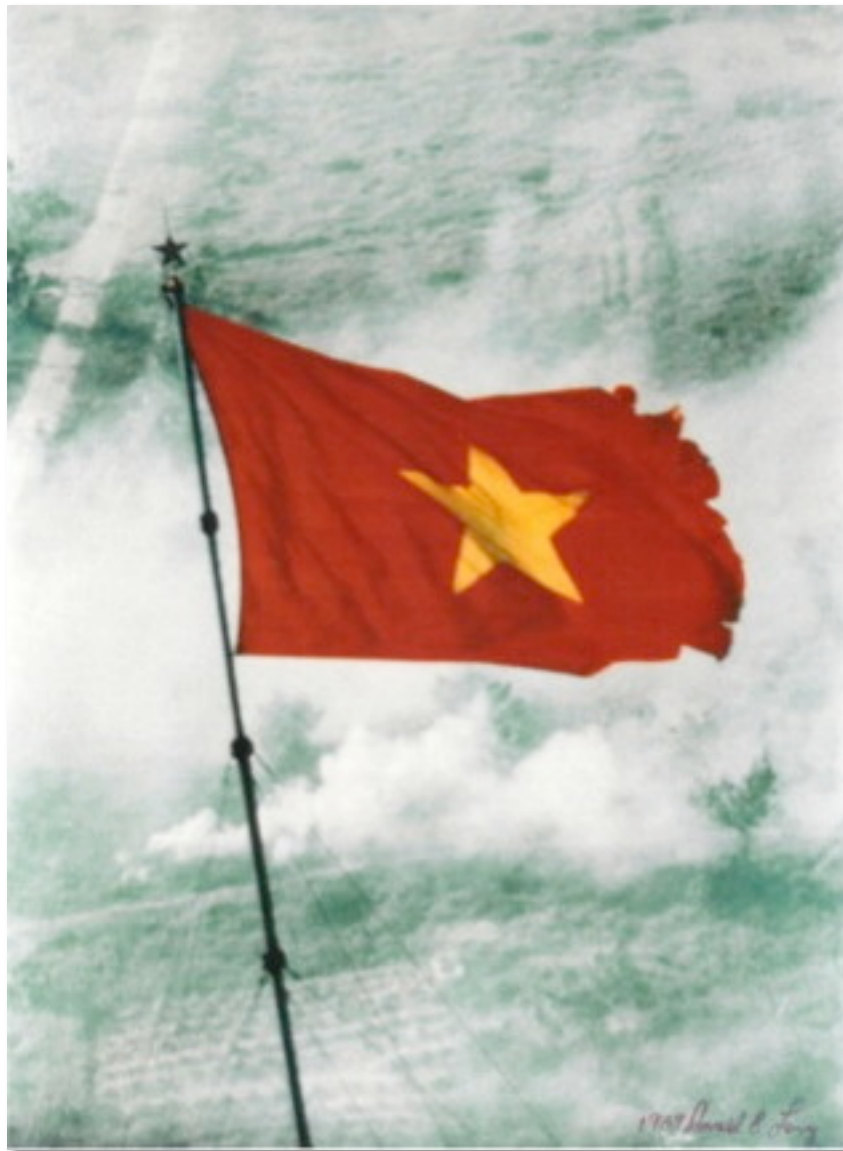




The infamous "Bird Strike" incident, so called as a cover for what really happened one day in June of 1969. Don Long, on the right, was flying the Bird Dog a bit low on one of his combat missions and hit a small tree, causing the dent on the leading edge of the wing which can be seen between Roger Bounds, left, and Bill Norton. Because all of the pilots had been lectured about flying too low by the CO (Major Miler), these three cooked up a story about Long's aircraft hitting a bird while in flight, thereby causing the dent. To add realism to the story, the resourceful pilots got a chicken at a nearby village market, dispatched it, and then spread its blood and some feathers on and around the dent. Long then flew the aircraft back to Phu Bai and reported to maintenance that he had struck a bird in flight. The incident was reported to the CO who bought the story hook, line, and sinker! The CO (me) was never aware of the actual facts until Don Long called him some 35 years later to apologize for having deceived him.



## The Enemy Flag



A close look at the official flag of the Army of the Peoples Republic of North Vietnam, under which the soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the National Liberation Front/Viet Cong (NLF/VC) irregular forces fought the Americans, the Army of (South) Vietnam (ARVN), and their allies.

- Photo by Catkiller Don Long taken from his aircraft in 1969





Freedom Bridge over the Ben Hai and NVA flag on the North Vietnam side of the river. Note Bird Dog near the NVA flag.





Top: Bird Dog over North Vietnam near NVA flag and Freedom Bridge.  
Bottom: In flight over heavily bombed area.

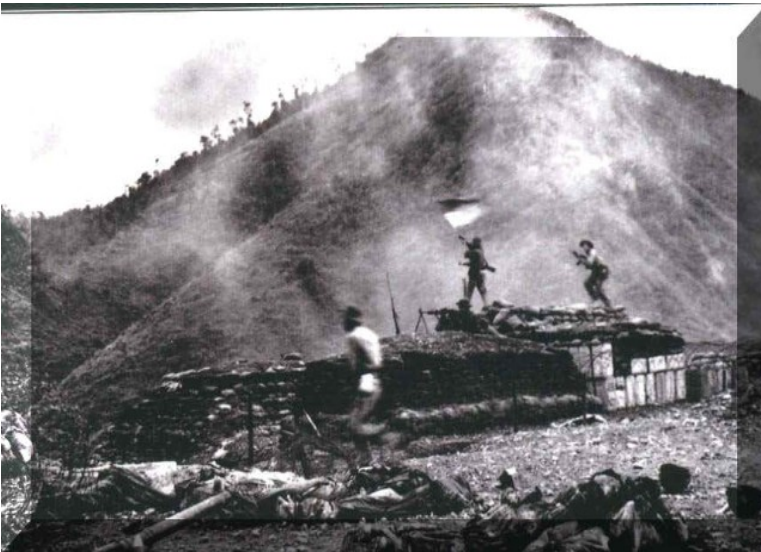




Napalm strike against NVA position at the Ben Hai River, top photo, and a US B-52 strike, called "ARC Light", in the DMZ.



## The Enemy – The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong (VC)



NVA soldiers overrunning an American position



Two NVA soldiers manning a machine gun



Viet Cong soldiers atop a destroyed US armored personnel carrier



A typical VC soldier in a cave

**General Vo Nguyen Giap** was the overall commander of all of the “Enemy Forces” in Vietnam. Gen. Giap planned and directed the military operations against the French that culminated in their defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. During the 1960's and early 1970's, Giap controlled guerrilla operations against South Vietnam, the United States, and their Allies.





General Giap was a brilliant, highly respected leader of the North Vietnam military. The following quote is from his memoirs currently found in the Vietnam War memorial in Hanoi: "What we still don't understand is why you Americans stopped the bombing of Hanoi. You had us on the ropes... If you had pressed us a little harder, just for another day or two, we were ready to surrender! It was the same at the battle of TET. You defeated us! We knew it, and we thought you knew it. But we were elated to notice your media was helping us." They were causing more disruption in America than we could in the battlefields. We were ready to surrender. ***You had won!***"



## The Enemy Dead



Dead NVA soldiers in a creek in the DMZ

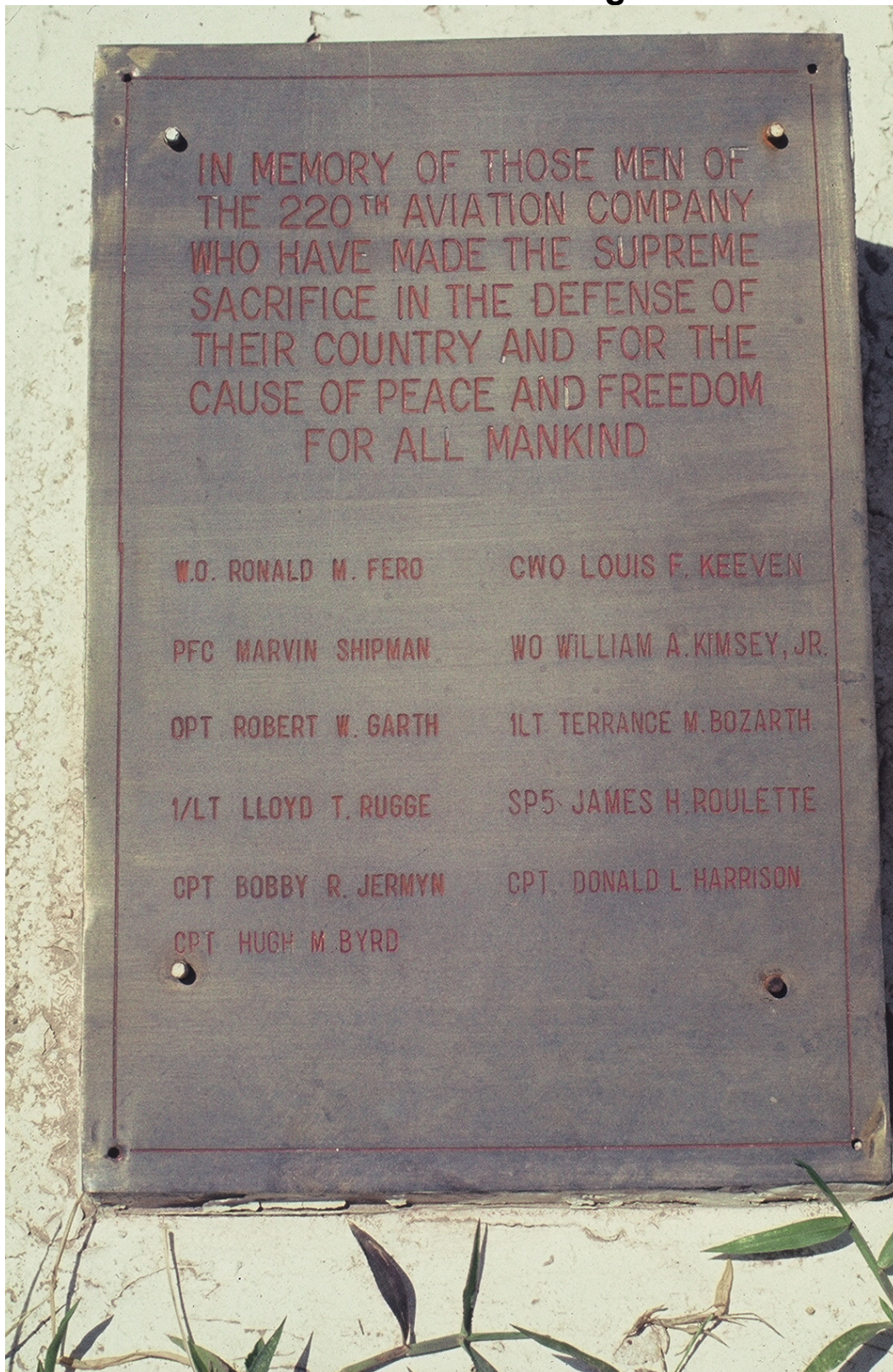




More NVA dead in an open area in the DMZ: It has been estimated that the Communist contingent in Vietnam lost well over 500,000 soldiers to combat related fatalities in the Vietnam War, over a 10 year period. Pictured here are but a few of the enemy losses.



## The Catkillers who did not go Home







DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
**Lineage and Honors**

220th AVIATION COMPANY

Constituted 16 March 1965 in the Regular Army as the 220th Aviation Company  
Activated 31 March 1965 at Fort Lewis, Washington

CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION CREDIT

Vietnam  
Defense  
Counteroffensive  
Counteroffensive, Phase II  
Counteroffensive, Phase III  
Tet counteroffensive  
(other campaigns to be determined)

DECORATIONS

Presidential Unit Citation (Ravy), Streamer embroidered CHU LAI  
Meritorious Unit Commendation, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1966  
Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1966-1967  
Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1967-1968

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

*Kenneth G. Wickham*  
KENNETH G. WICKHAM  
Major General, USA,  
The Adjutant General

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24 JUL 1970



**Letter from President George H. W. Bush to the Catkillers  
on the occasion of their reunion at Nassau Bay, TX, on Oct 6, 2006**



GEORGE BUSH

September 25, 2006  
for  
October 6, 2006

Barbara and I send greetings and a hearty "Welcome to Texas" to the members of the 220<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Airplane Company.

As veterans of the United States Armed Forces, you are heroes in the truest sense of the word. Your courage and sacrifices reflect the great spirit of which General MacArthur spoke at West Point: that of duty, honor, and country.

As a Navy man and a former Commander-in-Chief, I salute each of you for taking up the torch of freedom and answering your country's call to duty. I also join you in remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. All Americans owe them a lasting debt of gratitude.

Have a wonderful and memorable gathering in Nassau Bay. We Bushes send our very best wishes to all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Bush".



## Some of the Catkillers on the ramp at Phu Bai, RVN, 1969





## 220<sup>th</sup> RAC Company Area as of February 1969



Notes: Area to the west of the Officer's Club is the Medical Detachment; area to the east of EM club is the 131<sup>st</sup> SAC area; Officer hooches numbered 3 or 4; Aircraft maintenance hangar is off the photo to the west. Directions assume that the top of the page is north.



## Ed Miler .....On becoming an Aviator (1957)



Ed (Ned) Miler upon completion of the ROTC Flight Training Program at John's Island, SC, shortly after graduating from The Citadel, in Charleston, in June of 1957. The program was run by a Mr. Scott, aka "Scotty". Besides being an excellent instructor pilot, Scotty was well known for his need to make an occasional unscheduled stop at any available patch of grass to "bleed the lizard". Photo taken by a good friend at the time, Gail Jacobs.



## Acknowledgements and Credits

This booklet was inspired by the book ***A Hundred Feet over Hell***, subtitled *Flying with the men of the 220<sup>th</sup> Recon Airplane Company over I Corps and the DMZ, Vietnam 1968 – 1969*, written by Jim Hooper, and published by Zenith Press in 2009. It is designed to complement and to supplement Hooper's book, and was motivated by a question asked by one of my children, "Dad, what did you do in Vietnam?" While the book is certainly not about me, it is about the men who flew the flimsy, unarmed, and very slow Cessna O-1 "Bird Dog" aircraft into harm's way every day; the brave and fearless men of the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC, of which I was fortunate enough to be the commanding officer for the first half of 1969. Since the booklet was originally to be for my children and grandchildren, there are a number of photos of me on its pages.

-- Ed Miler  
Catkiller 6  
November 2011

With the exception of those listed below, all of the photos in this booklet are courtesy of Col. Charles Finch, Catkiller 19, one of those fearless airmen mentioned above who, along with the brother of the author, Bill Hooper, was one of the central characters in the book. The exceptions are:

Page 18 – bottom: Richard Wright  
Page 19 – top: Johnny Moore  
                    -- bottom: Phil Lowentrit  
Page 20 – Internet Sources  
Page 21 – Internet sources  
Page 24 – top: Sarge Means  
Page 28 – top: unknown  
Page 30 – top and bottom: Capital Military Assistance Command, Vietnam  
Page 32 – Don Long  
Page 33 – Don Long  
Page 35 – bottom: Don Long  
Page 36 – top: Don Long  
                    -- bottom: Curt Perry  
Page 37 – AP Wire Photos and Time Magazine, taken from Internet sources  
Page 38 – From the Internet  
Page 42 – From the 220<sup>th</sup> RAC Unit History  
Page 43 – From 220<sup>th</sup> RAC reunion material, October 6, 2006  
Page 46 – Ed Miler