



220th Aviation Company

Staff Sergeant Roger W. Putnam, 1966-67
"Catkiller Provider"



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



1966

1967

"PROVIDER"



SSG Roger W. Putnam

The one and only time I ever wore a “no see me” suit was the day that photo was snapped. If memory serves (and at this far removed, don’t bet on it) there was to be a very large operation into the A Shau Valley—one of the first into that nightmare place. For some reason known but to him, the overall commander wanted all troops, even avn. support, to be in the same uniform which in this case was cammo. We could have been overhead in our birthday suits for all he would ever know but we followed orders.

Jay Snell [left; Roger Putnam, right]



My outfit came from ARVN sources, undoubtedly scrounged by the ever resourceful “Provider.” It was the largest size they had, and it was tight as hell. I only wore the uniform that one time, gladly returning to my American-sized fatigues.

As I remember, the operation was a big blah--much noise and fury and very little combat action. I was probably frowning in the picture because certain “tender parts” were being squeezed in those Asian trousers.

Jay Snell



After going through several files of photos, I finally found one of Roger with his Light Machine Gun [page 1], still have not identified the SFC. I am pretty sure that the crew chief with Roger is SP4, possibly SP5, Jack Richter, who is noted in our Enlisted Soldier Recognition. Jay has explained the photo of him and Roger [above, top]. Note Roger’s pump shotgun. The first big Battle of A Shau when it fell was in March 1966 (before our group got there). We kept an eye on it, but we (US) did not venture back in there on the ground until about a year later, after the wet monsoon in Spring 1967, just before I left Phu Bai. You may also remember my short story about higher headquarters not really believing what we were seeing and reporting anyway—but they became believers when the 1st Cav went there later.

Roger was a “legend in his time” among all of us during 1966-67. The fact that he rose through the NCO ranks and retired as the CSM of the Aviation School at Fort Rucker was not a surprise to any of us.

Gene Wilson, Catkiller 5/3, June 1966—June 1967



Staff Sergeant Roger W. Putnam, 1966-67

The “Rest of the Story”—How Catkiller Provider got his name



When I arrived at Da Nang Main in early June 1966, the first member of the 220th Aviation Company that I met was SSG Roger Putnam, Platoon Sergeant of the 3rd Platoon at Marble Mountain. He and the driver of his 3/4 ton truck made up the 220th welcoming committee for three young Warrant Officers and me. This tall, rangy NCO left an indelible impression upon everyone who met him—and he was to become, and still is, one Catkiller “hero” who all of us of 1966-67 will long remember.

In addition to his doling out a lot of punishment to the VC in Quang Nam Province, from the back seat of a Birddog with his LMG, Roger was the “go to man” when the 220th was in need of any number of things. With the effective end of the Army supply line at Da Nang, well south of the 220th Headquarters in Phu Bai, someone had to look out for and take care of the Company in the midst of the Air Force, Navy and Marines in the best interest of many areas of concern. With Roger, it was, “You need what?” “When?” He positioned CONEX containers not only at Da Nang (Main) AFB, but he had them at Tan Son Nhat in Saigon, Nha Trang and Qui Nhon where we had Army units along the coast. In this manner he and his “friends” could secure, store and safe-guard things until he could arrange safe and “well guarded” transportation to Da Nang or Phu Bai. Needless to say, he was also a very accomplished barterer and trader—how do you think he got his hands on that LMG? He was also a “Provider” for many needs and “nicer things in life” for the Special Forces camps in the I Corps area.

Although it is unconfirmed, even by Roger, it is believed that Bill Schmale, the first 220th XO, who became the second CO, came up with the handle of “Provider” for Roger. It is also known that “Catkiller Provider” was usually involved in being sure that soft drinks, beer, chicken and steaks were available for any Catkiller beach outing before the infamous China Beach became an International Hot Spot. Few people know that Roger was also one of very few Army Enlisted NCOs in the 220th in our time to be personally decorated with a Gallantry Cross with Bronze Star for his service to the Republic of Vietnam. Roger was a “Provider” by his bravery, expertise and friendship in many ways.

Gene Wilson



Above, out in the area “working.”
Below, China Beach, the benefits
of “Provider” skills in action.



SSG Roger Putnam receiving a Vietnamese award during his tour with the 220th Aviation Company “Catkillers.”

