

REFLECTIONS



When Carl [Drechsel] invited me to attend The Catkiller Reunion of 2010, he asked me to collect a remembrance or two on paper.

Reflecting along a back trail of years, that Lincoln would have called two score and something, attempting to visualize Vietnam, 1969, the 220th RAC, a phrase from an old hillbilly song (that's what we called "country music" back in the olden days) persisted in my mind.

"... I was lookin' back to see if you were lookin' back to see if I was lookin' back to see if you were lookin' back at me ..."

At a reunion, we call up past time together with intense focus, and I'm thinking, "Boy, those guys must be really getting old by now!"

I mean, look at those pictures that Ed Miler put together in his coffee table quality pictorial review of the Catkillers from way back during the latter 20th Century.

I remember the Catkillers—indeed all the folks of the 212th Combat Aviation Battalion-- as the youthful warriors that you were back then in early 1969. I probably wouldn't recognize a one of you today. My first view of Ed Miler's photo, when he contacted me during the drafting stage of Mr. Hooper's book, set me aback.

We are forever young in the context of that memory, as are many of you who are memorialized in Jim Hooper's collection of memoirs and Ed Miler's booklet.

General Mac Arthur gave us a phrase in his book, *Reminiscences*. "My memory has grown dim tone and tint."

That is five-star permission to look at our past lives through rose-colored glasses, to minimize gaffs and errors and to maximize great pleasures and powerful lessons.

Our lives are defined by experience that comes sometimes through stress and often from just brief moments, where all the forces of nature and the universe seemed to coalesce with an indelible, unforgettable glow.

Our Vietnam adventure has elements of both.

I have a special empathy for the Birddog. I learned to fly in it, and my first RVN command was a Birddog company—the 187th RAC in Ban Me Thuot. During TET of 1968, when the press was busy giving the NVA an unearned victory, I gathered my troops to fill in some information gaps and to reassure them about our roll.

“Hey, look at the bright side, I told them. This is probably the only war you will get to be in! If you get killed, you’ve got nothing more to worry about. If you live, 40 years from now you’ll be sitting on your porch telling your grandkids what you did in the war!”

And here we are. Besides being vindicated for our effort as revisionist history is stripped of its politically motivated inaccuracies, we enjoy an extraordinary satisfaction from that special fellowship that is only known among comrades-in-arms.

One of my vivid memories of Ed Miler is seeing him silhouetted against the sky sitting on the roof of one of company buildings, elbow on knee, head resting in palm, emulating The Thinker.

I recall the tremendous excitement of working with seven company commanders who frankly couldn’t see any useful purpose for BATTALION.

Commanders’ meetings were charged with the collective self-confidence of highly competent, resourceful and operationally successful young officers. Each in his own way dared me to show a sign of weakness, and I learned never to let my guard down when I visited each unit. Sergeant Major Routh would say with a grin as we dismounted the aircraft, “What do you think they’ll pull this time?”

One company would usually “just happen” to have a company formation in progress as I arrived. “Perhaps you might have some encouraging remarks for the men . . .”

“Some of you may recall the “impromptu meeting” in the officers club when Ed Miler said something like, “Can I have your attention. I’d like to welcome the battalion commander. I’m sure he will be happy to address any of your questions, like for example the Officers Writing Project. My favorite that night was a little later when the officer, English major, insisted on paying for my drink said, “I’d have been disappointed if you didn’t handle my s___!”

Compliments about your performance from officers and commanders of your supported units, in passing, at meetings or social functions really filled me with pride. First Aviation Brigade gave me a lot of credit for your remarkable statistics in readiness, safety, and promptness in administrative reporting.

You have truly honored me by including me in the celebrations of your unity and loyalty to each other. I really appreciate the continuing flow of information about your reunions, The Catkillers Association and Hooper’s book.

Your presence here in Philadelphia and continued pride in what you honorably contributed to America, Vietnam and most of all to each other is a tribute to your magnificence that outlives both tone and tint of our memories of that remarkable time.

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[LTC Jack Mullen, 212th Combat Aviation Battalion, 1969]