



220TH 'CATKILLERS' – I CORPS WATCHDOGS

Story and Photos By SP5 David M. Gerrol, USA

Saigon (MACV) Imagine what it must have been like to have been a World War I “flying ace”. Think of the vintage aircraft, the esprit de corps, the lack of sophisticated instruments to direct flying under poor weather conditions. The Army pilots of World War I flew “by the seat of their pants.”

The 220th Reconnaissance Airplane Company (RAC) of the 212th Combat Support Aviation Battalion at Phu Bai brings back memories of those early days of Army aerial warfare. The “Catkillers” job is visual reconnaissance – keeping an eye on the enemy in northern I Corps.



The 220th's aircraft, O-1 Birddog, are almost “vintage,” the last one having been built in 1957. The slow moving Birddogs are none the less, well suited for their reconnaissance mission. The rockets they carry mounted under the wings are primarily used to mark targets.

World War I pilots routinely threw a farewell salute to an enemy aviator whose smoking aircraft plunged to earth for the last time. One of the “Catkillers” exchanges a salutatory wave with one particular NVA soldier whenever the pilot flies over the enemy’s position. That soldier knows that because the “Catkillers” are aware of his presence, his days are numbered.

As for esprit de corps, few units can match the camaraderie, which exists among the officers of the 220th RAC, commanded by Major Edward H. Miler.

Until the cessation of allied air activity north of the Demilitarized Z, prior to November 1, 1968 bombing halt, the pilots of the 220th RAC had served as Tactical Air Controllers, Airborne (TACA) over North Vietnam. They were aware of enemy troop and supply movements before the aggressors were able to enter

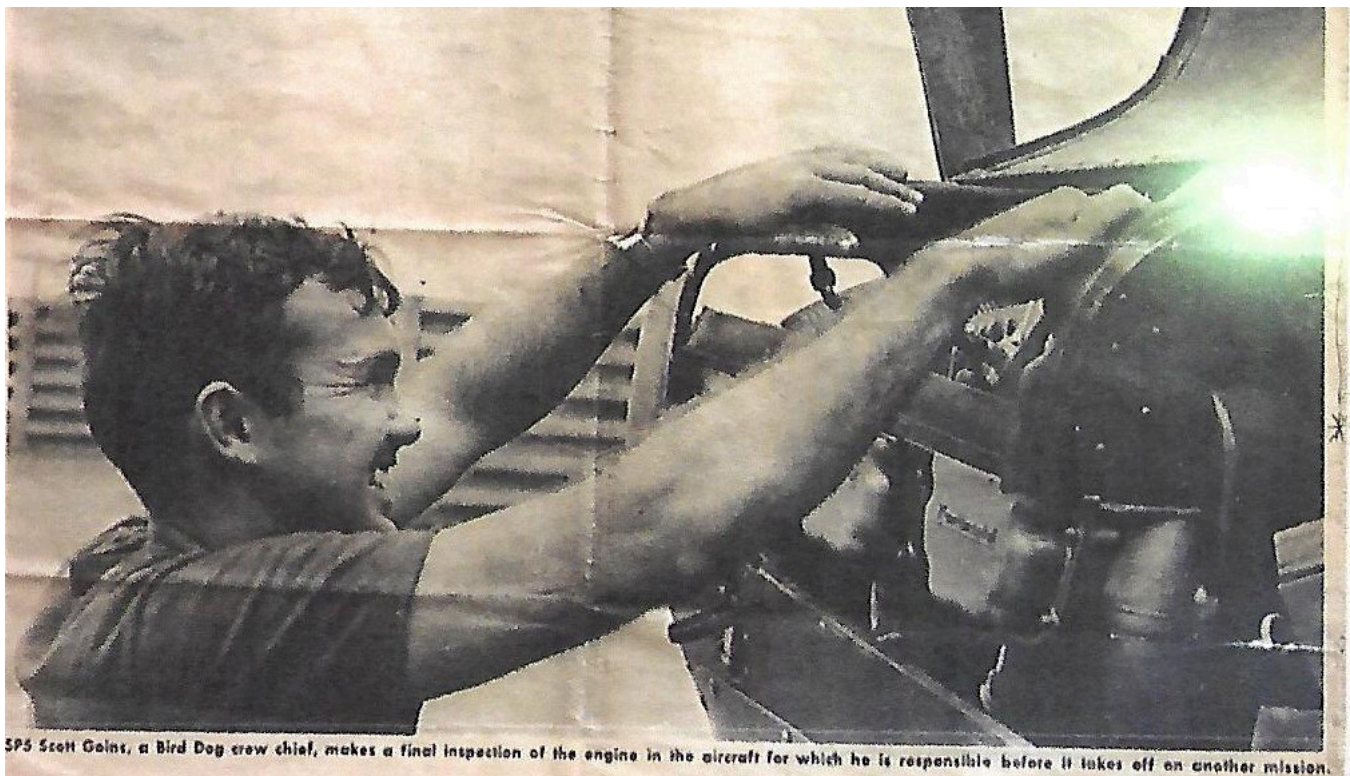
South Vietnam. Because of the perception of the 220th, much of the enemy movement was halted before it was able to cross the DMZ.

Since the halt of air operations north of the DMZ, the “Catkillers” area of operations has become northern I Corps, south of the Ben Hai River. Their original mission was strictly visual reconnaissance. The mission has been expanded to include directing air strikes, artillery and naval gunfire and to fly cover for friendly convoys.

The 220th RAC flies in support of the US Army, Navy, Marines and the ARVN.

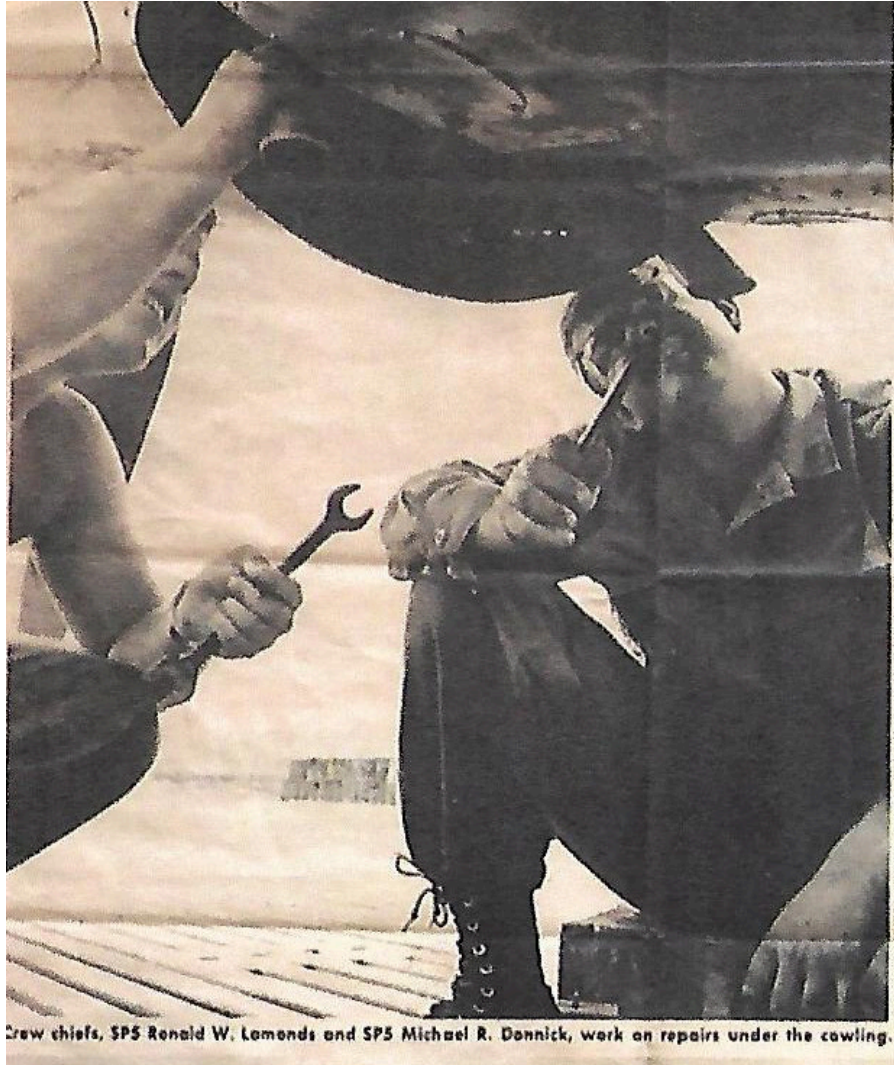


According to Captain Quinton D. Anderson Jr., operations officer, “It’s kind of an unwritten rule around here to help the guys on the ground as much as we can.”



As adventuresome and expert as are the pilots of the 220th RAC, they could never accomplish their mission without the professional assistance of the crew chiefs who service the Birddogs on the ground. Though they

are responsible only for first echelon maintenance, “each crew chief knows everything there is to know about his own aircraft,” said Specialist 5 Morris Buster, a crew chief.



Crew chiefs, SP5 Ronald W. Lamonds and SP5 Michael R. Donnicks, work on repairs under the cowling.

The 220th sheet metal shop repairs structural damage done to the aircraft, thereby eliminating the necessity of transporting damaged aircraft southward for repair.

An avionics crew administers all radio repairs. The Birdog is equipped with a radio with FM, UHF and ADF (automatic direction finder) capabilities. “The longest we’ve had an aircraft on the ground because of radio difficulty has been one day,” Specialist Buster asserted.

“It’s a fascinating business,” concluded Captain Glenn Strange, company intelligence officer.

Catkiller Roster Photos:



MAJ Miler:

MAJ, CDR, Catkiller 6, Feb—July
Deceased 17 May 2019 (obit)



CPT Anderson:

CPT, AT, Catkiller 30/10/03, DFC 12/13/1968,
3rd Plat, Da Nang, then 1st Plat



CPT Strange:

CPT, TC, Catkiller 22/4, Asst
Operations



SP5 Morris Buster



SP5 Ronald Lamonds

Listed No Picture

Not Listed

SP Michael Donnick

SP5 Scott Goins

Transcribed from the original article by Dennis D. Currie, Assistant Editor. Stars and Stripes document source citing not available, but from an article copy provided by Jack Bentley, Catkiller 17/16 Jack said "I happened to be going through some of my Mom's photos from years ago and found this article about the Catkillers from April 25, 1969. Credits say: By Sp5 David M Gerrol, USA. I've seen the article before, but I realized today that one of the photos has a picture of Ron Lamonds. So here are a couple of PDF files showing the complete article and as close a shot of Ron as I could get.

Jack Bentley"