



# **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.

## **COMMANDER'S LETTER:**

### **"DEAR WOODY AND OTHER CHARTER MEMBERS"**

#### **MAJOR WILLIAM "BILL" OTTO SCHMALE**

**Commander, 220<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company, 1 March 1966–14 October 1966**

**Major William "Bill" Otto Schmale,  
220th Aviation Company  
Catkiller 5/6, 1965-66**

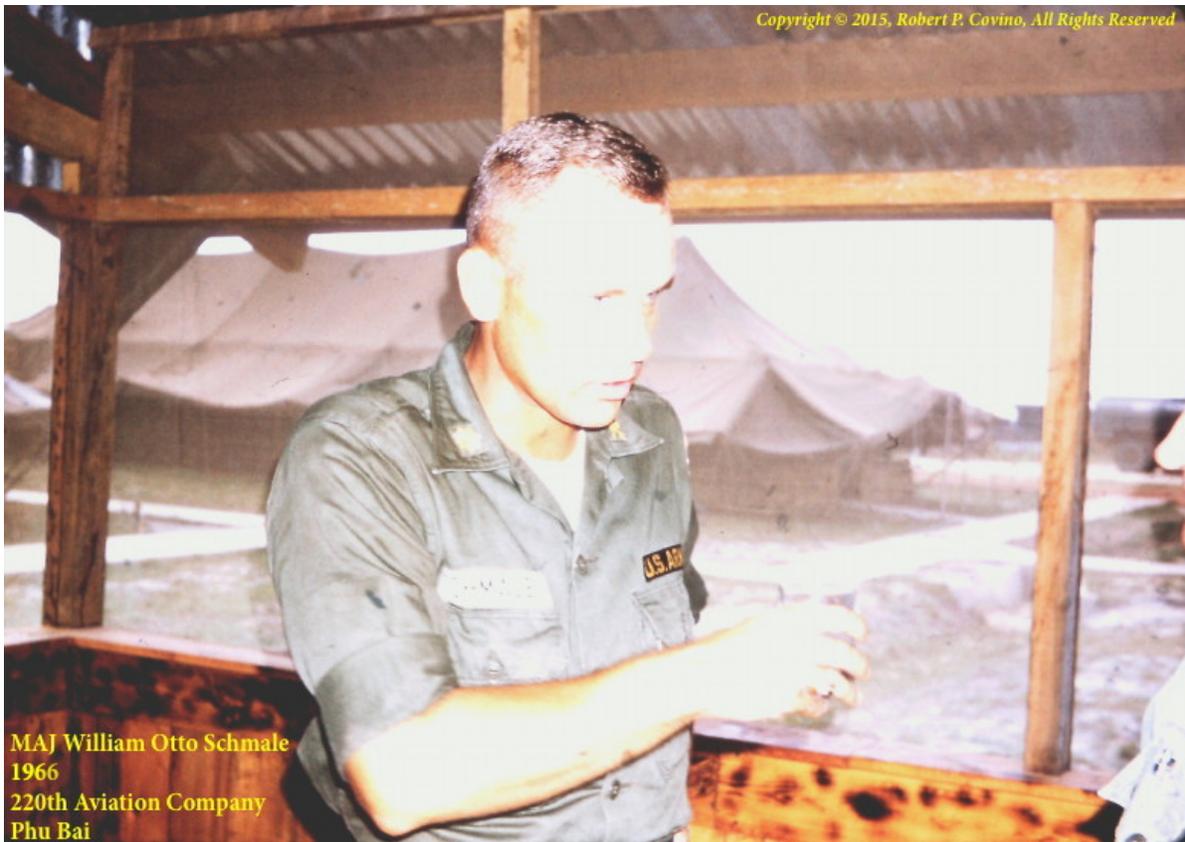


Legion of Merit awarded for service as Executive Officer and Company Commander of the 220th, 1965–66



**CHARLES "WOODY" WOODHURST**

The location of the photograph below is the Mess Hall, just inside the entry door and to the left by the officer's table, which provided seating for the CO, XO, Opns Off, Asst Opns Off, Acft Maint/Supply Off, Maint Tech, 231<sup>st</sup> Sig Det CO and one open guest chair as desired.



**MAJ William Otto Schmale**  
1966  
220th Aviation Company  
Phu Bai

The letter you are about to read originated by the hand of Major Bill Schmale, Commanding Officer of the 220<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company, but came to us from among several other items that "Stu" Miller was able to copy from a document 'box' he was allowed to go through during a visit at the National Archives in 1990:

“27 October 1966

Dear Woody and Other Charter Members,

I was delighted to hear from you and find out a few facts about the “old crew”. Much has happened since all of you left and I’ll try to bring you up to date as best I can.

As you can see from the return address I am no longer with the 220<sup>th</sup>. I turned the company over to Major Robert V. Dunne on 14 October and am spending my last three weeks in RVN at battalion headquarters writing my memoirs. The 223<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, by the way, is new and has all fixed wing units in the 17<sup>th</sup> Group. Right now it is a mess and personally I think the 220<sup>th</sup> was better off conducting a semi-autonomous operation under the 14<sup>th</sup>. Oh well—Frankly, I’m glad to be out. Dunne is a good man and by far the best of the six or so who were trying to get the company.

So much for command alignment; now for a chronological treatment of the 220<sup>th</sup> since 1 July. As you noted in your letter, action in I Corps (or Vietnam for that matter), shifted to the DMZ shortly after all of you left. Operation Hastings was a seven-battalion affair that was the largest USMC venture to that date. The Marines did well and clobbered old Charlie repeatedly with artillery, NGF (Naval Gun Fire), and air, all of which was Catkiller directed of course. The 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon worked its butt off and all of the company headquarters types got into the act as well. [ *Note 1* ] The 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and headquarters (officers) have been recommended for the Navy Unit Commendation.

With the end of July came the end of our first year of operation in RVN. If you recall we were declared operational on 1 August ’65. We closed out the year with 30,721 hours [ *Note: 1 Aug 1965 – 31 Jul 1966* ] flown for an average utilization of 114 hours per aircraft per month. July was a big month – 143.2 hours per bird. High aircraft – from Da Nang, had 234 hours, crewed by SP5 [ *Jack* ] Richter.

The company also was credited with 410 confirmed KIA, and another 426 probable’s from attacking targets of opportunity on routine VR missions during the first 11-1/2 months.

Operation Hastings closed out, or more correctly, phased out in early August. Operation Prairie began where Hastings left off and continued as a two-battalion walk in the sun for the next several weeks. Activity picked up in late August and September and the Marines now have a permanent location established at Dong Ha. The DMZ activity has continued to increase and it looks as though an effort to completely seal it off is at last

underway. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division has relocated at Phu Bai and elements of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade are going into the action. One battalion of Army artillery came directly from CONUS to the DMZ and two battalions of Army 175mm guns have been brought up and put in at Khe Sanh and Dong Ha. From an activity standpoint I wish I were back with the 220<sup>th</sup>.

Oh yes, the entire company was recommended for the Navy Unit Commendation for the first 30 days of Prairie. Also, the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion nominated the 220<sup>th</sup> for the AAAA Aviation Unit of The Year Award. We didn't get it but it is the thought that counts. [Note 2]

We had an unfortunate loss in late September. The new platoon leader at Quang Ngai, Captain Bob Garth, was killed by ground fire about 15 km southeast of Quang Ngai. The USMC AO [Captain Frank Houston Adams] brought the plane back to Quang Ngai and put it down safely. The bird was a total loss but he walked away unscathed.

Woody, this is about the whole ball of wax at the present time. I might mention before closing that I finally succeeded in getting the building program underway. So far there are buildings for the EM Club, supply and supply storage, orderly room, two officer's quarters, NCO quarters and transient EM. Made transient officers quarters out of the rear third of the operations building – holds six. The whole thing was made possible by pushing an arrangement whereby the Navy issued materials from Da Nang for PA&E projects in I Corps. Complicated but successful. [Note 3]

This wraps it up except to say that I'll be in Deutschland for *Fasching* this year. NLT 31 December –fantastic!

Warmest regards to all,  
Bill Schmale

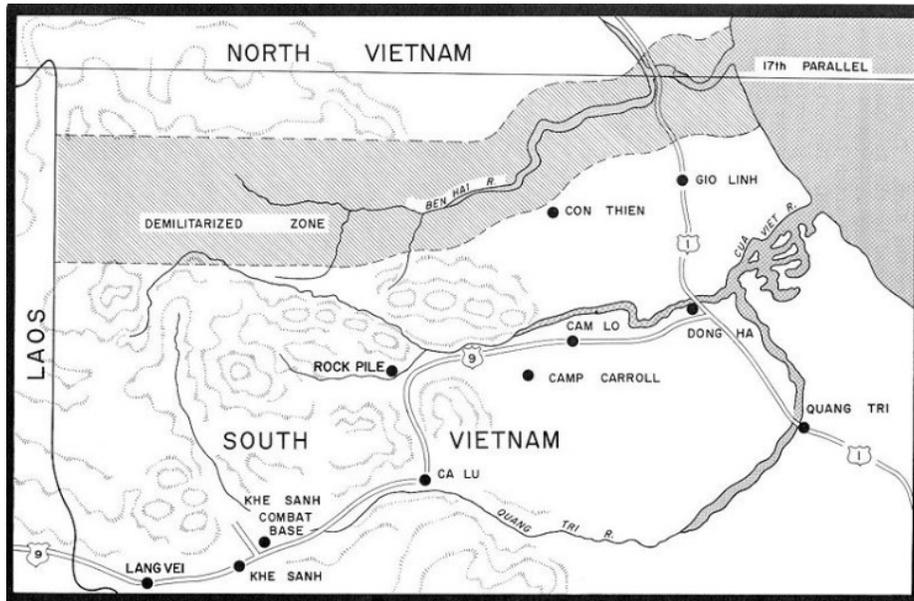
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### Casualty in Vietnam:



**Air Loss as Non-Crew Member aboard a Helicopter  
near Tay Ninh in Binh Long Province, 23 August 1968**

**Note 1: Map of northern I Corps/DMZ, where Operations Hastings and Prairie I & II actually began the movement of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division to the Dong Ha Base in 1966**



**Note 2: NUC**

**Department of the Army  
220<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company  
APO 96308**

**12 May 1967**

**Subject: Receiving of Award**

People to receive Navy Unit Commendation for Operation Prairie I (if rec'd)



MAJ William O. Schmale, 097870	SFC Thomas J. Long, Sr., RA12384643
CPT Donald E. Wilson, 083533	SP5 Theodore W. Dempsey, RA23788083
CPT Walter E. Fernandez, 05213151	SP5 Kirk B. Marshall, RA51253618
CPT Palmer S. Haines, 098379	SP4 William E. Blades, RA18705709
CPT Jerry T. Willis, 088231	SP4 Willis D. Blades, RA 18705720
1LT Richard E. Bielot, 05225664	SP4 Eugene A. Smith, RA16781124
1LT Joseph W. Davis, 05416748	PFC Paul D. Abbott, US52628343
1LT Jerry D. Jackson, 05415100	PFC Richard B. Choppa, RA16847537
1LT Jerome W. Tastad, 05533474	PFC Bernard R. Whitman, US55820117
1LT Walter H. Yates Jr., 05320714	
CWO Joseph L. Hamm, W3152213	
CWO Charles W. Morris W2216098	
WO Ira W. Meisenheimer III W3152715	
WO Ernesto Serna, W4152722	

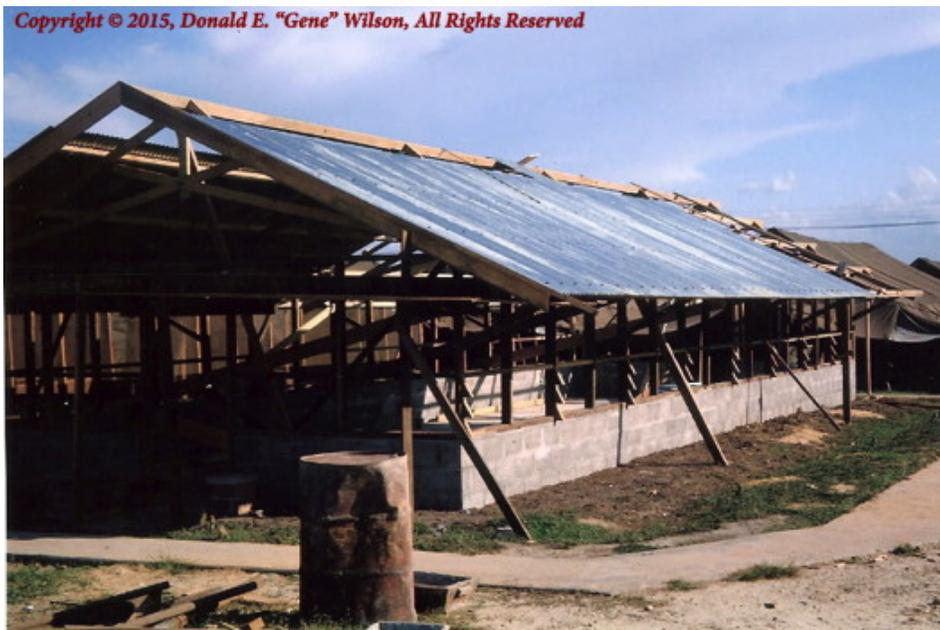
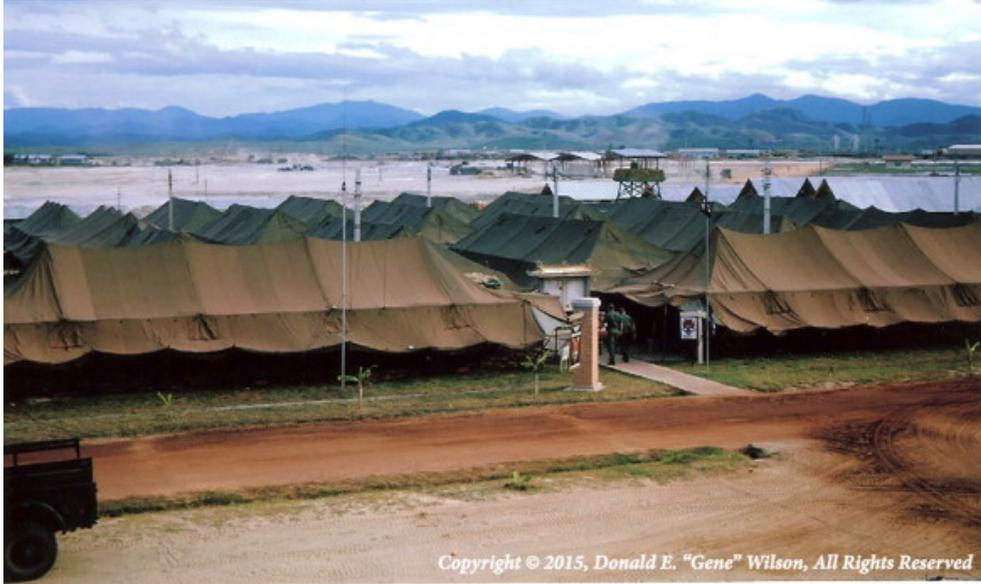
Donald E. Wilson  
Major Artillery  
Operations Officer

**Schmale Letter-5**

**NOTE:** The NUC is a ribbon bar – worn on the right side by the Army.

*This 'memo' was made up as a reminder in the Operations files as I departed, if the award ever came through, since we had never seen any 'paperwork' on this award – there must have also been a similar 'memo' for Operation Hastings at some time. However, any recommendations for the NUCs apparently were never awarded but were superseded by a later award of the Navy PUC. The higher award included the Army units in support of the USMC with the 220<sup>th</sup> during the same time period and more (29 Mar 66-30 Jan 67). I learned of our award of the PUC when I called the 220<sup>th</sup> from Quan Loi (C/2/20<sup>th</sup> ARA with the 1<sup>st</sup> CAV in III Corps) just to say "Hello" and 'met' MAJ Gene Gebhardt over the field phone about Oct-Nov 1969 – he had just received the orders and sent me a copy so that I could start contacting as many of the former members of the 220<sup>th</sup> as possible and get the word out. See Marine Corps Bulletin 1650, 15 Mar 1969 and DA PAM 672-3, citing DAGO 59, 1969.*

**Note 3: 'Tent City' and the 1966 New Construction by PA&E**



## COMMENTS:

I will never forget his side of the telephone conversation with MAJ Bill Schmale the night before I got to Phu Bai when I called from Marble Mountain, “Hustle on up here – “J” has his bag packed, is ready to go and is just keeping the chair warm until he hops aboard the ‘Freedom Bird.’” This was about June 7<sup>th</sup> and I had to hit the ground running just to keep up and quickly learn the 220<sup>th</sup> ropes from Bill (“Sir”), who had been the original XO until he extended his tour and moved into the command driver’s seat on March 1st. I met “Woody” at Phu Bai as he was clearing the Company on his way ‘out’ and telling a lot of ‘wild tales’ and other stories as I was coming in as “J” Weight’s replacement as XO.

Bill was on the go from sun-up until sundown and then some. He knew his platoons, the Marine and Army Advisory Headquarters that we supported and every In and Out from A to Z. He was also U-1A “Otter” qualified and usually took one of us along as co-pilot when we had use of the battalion ‘log-bird’. He put his complete trust in his staff and we in him - it was a pleasure to work for and with him. After about 90 days on the job, he even ‘allowed’ me to be the Acting Commander when he took his final R & R to Hong Kong. He was so excited when he returned that he could hardly wait to show me the huge diamond ring that he had purchased for a ‘special girl’ who was waiting for him back home. Then I had to brief him on a more somber event – the KIA and Memorial Service for Bob Garth – and a more ‘exciting’ evening when we experienced a ‘friendly fire’ exchange, with helicopters flying and shooting in the black of night and not knowing what was going on, between two units which were located between our Company rear and Hwy 1. His ‘vacation’ had turned into a trial by fire for me – but we survived. I had been taught by one of the best!

**Photo 1: Catkiller ‘Warbird’ on the 220<sup>th</sup> ‘Hot Spot’**



**Photo 2: MAJ Schmale on a visit to Marble Mountain, seen with Roger Putnam + others**



**Photo 3: "Spud 700" – the 'Log Bird'**



I had the fortuitous pleasure of seeing Bill in Germany in the Summer of 1968 when he was the XO of the 18<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion in Hanau (V Corps) and I was the XO of the 16<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion at Nelligen Barracks (VII Corps) when he called and then flew a Birddog down to Stuttgart for lunch and to show me a new TO&E for an O-1 Company that he had been working on – just before he returned to Vietnam and we learned that he was KIA. I was also able to see and 'rub shoulders' with "Woody" for the year of 1971-72 at Fort Leavenworth during the Command and General Staff College. I was pleased to know and be associated with both of them as fellow Artillery Aviators and Catkillers of the 220<sup>th</sup>.

Donald E. "Gene" Wilson, COL, Retired  
Catkiller 5/3

“Everything seemed to fall into place as the men, pilots, officers, and equipment began to arrive. Our first CO was Major Curry. It was during his command that the original "We Observe" 220th patch was designed. The only patch we wore was the MACV patch. We did not have a patch to distinguish us as a unit. Our first unit patch is a design done on an engine crate (artwork) by Gustof Fageron, of Texas. Major Curry gave his approval and we went to Hue to have them made.

Our next CO would be Major William Schmale. No words could ever describe what a fine man and CO that any man could stay and serve under. A class act by all means. I was his crew chief and had the opportunity to fly with him on many occasions. He would often ask, "Is this plane safe to fly?" I would reply that it was safe. He would then say, "Get in." Old timers will remember that Major Schmale had a special punishment if you got out of line. He would have you fill 1,000 sand bags. Major Schmale was able to talk Sergeant 1st Class Barnaby and me into extending our tours. I am still not sure how he was able to do that, since we both had to fill a thousand sand bags.

Dewey Grocox” [SP5, Catkiller Crew Chief, 1965-66]

SOURCE: Page 1, Dewey Grocox history page: <http://www.catkillers.org/history1965.htm>

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“As an enlisted man I had very few encounters with Major Schmale during my short time at Phu Bai. Some might say that was a good thing, given that any direct contact probably meant you were in trouble and were about to find out how deep in the do-do you actually were. However, given that we were a military unit, in a war zone, we did have to conduct ourselves in such a manner as to demonstrate our readiness to defend ourselves should the need arise. While we stood reveille every morning to account for our presence and readiness to work, on occasion these formations required the additional inspection of our weapons. My responsibility during an alert or possible ground attack was to man the tower at the corner of our company area, and with that responsibility I was issued a M60 machine gun. Most everyone else was issued the standard M14 rifle. Now fast forward to the weapons inspection part. We are all standing at port arms as Major Schmale is making his way down the ranks, crisply snatching each persons weapon from their grasp and smartly inspecting each weapon with a serious look on his face. So here I am, the very first time experiencing such an inspection, with an M60 no less, and wondering how is he going to handle this weapon. This is not an M14! As he approached the man standing next to me, I am now, through sideways glances, feeling the seriousness of his inspection intent. At the conclusion of that person’s inspection he once again crisply returns the weapon to that soldiers grasp and turns to approach me. As he performs his initial inspection of my appearance, I can sense a pause as he appraises my weapon and the twinkle in his eye as he smiles and gingerly removes the M60 from my hands. While his inspection was thorough, his continued smiling expression convinced me that I had passed his expectations, as he returned my weapon in the same manner as he had retrieved it. The photo of him (on the Catkiller roster) looking back over his shoulder and grinning at the photographer made me think of that interaction.

Dennis Currie” [SP5, Crew Chief/Inspector, Quang Tri, Phu Bai, 1966-68]

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“My first meeting with Major Schmale was on or around 6/12/66, when I reported for duty with three other enlisted men at the 220th in Phu Bai. He gave us a briefing on the company mission and what was expected of us; when he was finished he asked each of us how much money we had in our pocket I believe my reply was \$2 and the other three were about the same. At that point he reached in his pocket and gave each of us \$20, at that time I knew I had a good CO. The next time I saw him is when I paid the \$20 back. Very sad loss.

Leonard C. Brand” [SP4, Crew Chief, Phu Bai and 3rd Platoon, Marble Mountain, June 1966–June 1967]

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*Dennis D. Currie, Assistant Editor transcribed Major Schmale's letter, from a copy of the original document on file at [www.catkillers.org](http://www.catkillers.org). Other team contributors to this effort, directly or indirectly, include "Stu" Miller, Bill Everett, Gene Wilson, Bob Covino, Roger Putnam, Dewey Grocox, and of course, Don Ricks and Dennis Currie.*

*If anyone else would like to add a comment or tribute to Bill, along with any photos that add to experiences with him, please contact Don or Dennis.*