

HEADHUNTERS



219th Seeks Hiding Enemy

The O-1 "Bird Dog," like its canine counterpart, locates the quarry and guides the hunters in for the kill. In Vietnam, the quarry is Charlie. The Bird Dogs are single-engine, high-winged mono-planes, and among the men who fly them are the pilots of the 219th Aviation Company (Utility Airplane).

Pilots of the 219th, located at Camp Holloway in Pleiku, fly an estimated 1,600 missions per month, racking up an average of 2,000 air hours. The company's aviators and aircraft spend roughly 75 per cent of this air time performing visual reconnaissance (VR).

In 1966, the 219th officially a-

dopted the name "Headhunters" because of a special low-level type of VR which it originated and successfully employed to find the VC in the rugged Central Highland terrain. The technique was chillingly simple. When the pilot spotted a likely area, he pulled the nose up, dropped a wing and dived "down on the deck" for an eyeball-to-eyeball look. "At times the Bird Dogs flew so low that pilots could peer under the eaves of jungle huts," said CPT Clifford R. Ward, a 219th aviator.

If the Headhunter drew fire or observed the enemy, he marked the location with one of the aircraft's rockets and climbed to a safe altitude. "It's frustrating to be shot at

and not be able to do anything about it directly," said CPT Ward. But, the variety of responses available to a Bird Dog pilot provides some degree of compensation.

Circling from a safe altitude over the target, he can command more firepower than could ever be carried by any other aircraft. Gunships, artillery, mortars, and infantry assault forces are only as far away as the switch on his radio. CPT Ward admits that Bird Dogs are not fired on as frequently now as they were earlier in the war. Though the VC used to like shooting at the slow, low-flying aircraft, over the years they have learned the price for their brief target prac-

tice and found it too expensive.

In addition to VR, the 219th performs several other vital functions. They include flying convoy cover, assisting in radio relay, helping the artillery establish registration points and providing limited personnel transportation.

The company is divided into four platoons which support four different groups. The first platoon supports the Pleiku sector. The second platoon is detached and split into two sections supporting the Civilian Irregular Defense Group troops advised by the 5th Special Forces and Kontum Province. The 52nd Artillery Group and II Corps area are supported by the third platoon, and appropriately, the fourth platoon supports the 4th Infantry Division. With the exception of the second platoon, all the unit's aircraft are based at Camp Holloway near Pleiku.

In certain high-risk areas covered by these platoons, the pilots employ a special dual-ship technique for safety. If one aircraft goes down, the other pilot can mark the location and call for help.

Since its activation in 1965 at Ft. Hood, Tex., the company has received a Valorous Unit Award with a streamer embroidered "Plei-



A marking rocket is placed in its tube.

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Me," and a Meritorious Unit Commendation with a streamer embroidered "Vietnam 1965-1966." When the unit first landed in Vietnam in 1965, it was the largest fixed-wing aviation company in the country.

Currently commanded by MAJ David Nauman, the unit has had nearly five years to build on the tradition displayed in its colorful Headhunter patch. The Headhunter is depicted on the patch with wings denoting flight capability. He is shown armed with a telescope representing the primary duty of visual reconnaissance and a 2.75 inch rocket representing target marking capability. The green in the costume represents the lush Central Highlands over which the pilots fly.

The enemy must be found before he can be fought. Vietnam's jungles make this a difficult task, but the 219th's Bird Dogs continue to make the job easier by serving as the long range eyes of the infantry and artillery.



Long hours in the air mean long hours of maintenance.