



**Major Gene McCutchan at his Tan Son Nhut office in 1962**

LTC Eugene R. McCutchan was the first and longest serving Red Marker Air Liaison Officer (ALO). Gene arrived for his first tour as a Major in early 1962. He was among the first ten ALO's to be permanently assigned to support various Vietnamese army units and embedded U.S. Army advisory teams spread across the country. Given his choice of units, Gene opted to work with the Vietnamese Airborne.

Gene had been a B-17 pilot during WWII flying missions over Germany from England. During the Korean War he was a flight instructor teaching aviation cadets. Prior to volunteering for service in Vietnam he was the commander of an F-100 squadron.

At the time of his assignment, the Airborne consisted of one Brigade of five battalions. McCutchan's role was to advise the Brigade Commander and the U.S Army advisors of MACV Team 162 about the proper use of air power. That advice ranged from personnel transport, resupply, aerial reconnaissance and close air support during combat operations.

During this first tour, McCutchan did not have an aircraft assigned, so he completed jump school, earning Vietnamese Parachutist Wings and intended to make combat jumps. However, his superior (the Air Force director of the Direct Air Support Center) forbade his jumping in combat. Instead, Gene went in by helicopter to accompany the troopers in the field. It became clear on his first operation that his Air Force uniform stood out. The Airborne commander suggested that he would draw less enemy attention if he blended in. McCutchan immediately ordered sets of camouflage fatigues complete with Airborne patches and a red beret identical to the Vietnamese uniform. The advisors of MACV Team 162 had earlier adopted that uniform and the call sign Red Hat. Gene took the call sign Red Marker signifying his responsibility to mark targets for close air support.

Gene got checked out in an O-1 Bird Dog from the Vietnamese Air Force Liaison Squadron based at Tan Son Nhut. The USAF was training the VNAF in Forward Air Control (FAC) techniques. Consequently, the Liaison Squadron was glad to have another experienced pilot available to fly with them from time to time. Sometimes, he flew reconnaissance missions with a Vietnamese observer or an American advisor in the back seat. Occasionally, he piloted the small FAC aircraft on missions directing fighter airstrikes to assist the Airborne. The Rules of Engagement at the time required that the Vietnamese observer actually control the strike, but Gene was able to direct his actions and mark the best targets for the fighters to hit. The Vietnamese Airborne commander learned to appreciate the contribution of this friendly, aggressive Air Force officer.

Gene went home at the end of his first year in Vietnam, but returned for another tour in 1964, which he extended into 1967. Initially assigned to another unit, he requested a transfer to the Airborne when the ALO position opened in 1965. He was welcomed back with open arms. By that time the Americans provided O-1 Bird Dog aircraft and radio jeeps for McCutchan's detachment. Additionally, the staff included several FACs, crew chiefs and radio operators.

The Airborne grew to a division of three brigades during 1965, and the Red Marker FACs grew along with them. The Red Markers under Gene's leadership became a significant combat unit. The Airborne Division was the tactical reserve of the South Vietnamese Army. It deployed to every significant battle in the country, and the Red Hats and Red Markers went with them. At one point McCutchan simultaneously deployed a Red Marker Tactical Air Control Party in each of the four Corps areas of South Vietnam.



**LTC Gene McCutchan, SGT Luong, MAJ Del Fleener in 1966**



**President Thieu and LTC McCutchan in 1967**

Gene McCutchan was unique. Each FAC used the call sign "Red Marker" followed by a number, e.g., Red Marker 02, or Red Marker 03. Gene, however, was known as "Red Marker" ... without a numerical designator. Regardless, everyone knew who was on the other end of the radio.

By the time Gene left Vietnam in 1967 he had been promoted to Lt. Colonel and his contribution to the success of the Vietnamese Airborne had been recognized by both the American and Vietnamese nations. Both awarded him many medals. The highest award was the National Order of Vietnam Knight personally awarded by President Thieu in a ceremony in Saigon.