

Recollection of Crew Chief duties on the Vinh Long flight line. GS Platoon July 67 - Jan 68

Keep in mind that I have not laid wrench to Bird Dog since 1968 and my memory is fuzzy at best. I am sure there was more but it escapes me. These are not necessarily in sequence.

When the pilot is in the airplane it is his airplane. The rest of the time it belongs to the Crew Chief. No matter who is flying the plane that day, the Crew Chief keeps the same plane. The exception being when the plane was used for night cap. No one else maintains your plane like you do. We were never happy when we got the plane back from the night shift.

Get the Bird ready:

Make sure the plane is clean inside and out.

Fueled up, full tank.

Checked oil and added as necessary.

Clean wind shield, used Plexiglas cleaner and polish.

Connect battery.

Do run up. Both mags on then one at a time.

If there was an rpm drop on either mag. then there was probably an oil fouled spark plug. We checked for cold cylinder with a crayon touched against each exhaust pipe. The one that didn't melt the crayon is cold. Oil fouled plugs were a constant problem.

Arm the plane. Load rockets (and flares at night). I never worked on a plane with guns. Only eight tubes in quad brackets with extra bomb shackle on each wing for flares. Six shackles total.

Remove the control surface locks and check that all the controls work properly.

In a sense we did the walk around before the pilot did the walk around.

Stand by with fire extinguisher during start ups.

During the flight:

On the ground we worried about the plane and pilot getting back in one piece.

We should have gotten special pay for grey hair and ulcers.

After Flight:

Wheel chocks and tie down
Call the fuel truck. Always keep the tanks full.
Disconnect the battery.
Disarm the plane.
Put the control surface locks on.
Like a trip to the out house the job is not finished till the paper work is done. Do the paper work.

Resolve discrepancies listed by the pilot. Some would have to be resolved by the maintenance crew during the next routine maintenance.

OTHER:

We helped each other on the flight line as needed. Put out the smudge pots before dark. We didn't have landing lights then. The battery powered lights were unreliable.

We got guard duty in the towers some nights. Got to haul the M60 and field phone up and bring them back down in the morning. One man in each tower.

We were responsible for the perimeter defense of our area during alerts.

I was loaned to the Engineers for two week and got to lay part of the lovely PSP runway. What a back breaking job. It was dirt when we arrived in 67'.

Prior to going to the flight line I worked on PE crew a few months. Routine maintenance is just that. Very repetitious. Change oil and filter, lube wheel bearings, change fuel filter, check control cable tension. A number of other items depending on the hours. Resolve discrepancies.

Bring in the next one. Crank'em out.

Hope this helps. I tried to structure this so you could chop up to your liking.

Cheers

Doc

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A few questions. What did you do (as the crew chief) while the aircraft was airborne? As the crew chief, how much did you get to fly; I was under the impression that the back seat was often occupied by the crew chief (extra eyes) during the VVVL night cap missions. Did each of you have a personal tool box? Did you do the refueling or did the tanker driver do it?

It is my intent to prepare a common crew chief narrative once I get several of them in. Yours is the first; you might consider sending a copy (to include this reply) to Boseman to help him get started.

BJW

1. While the aircraft was out we would help the other crew chiefs out when they needed an extra hand. Bit of house cleaning. Trip to ammo dump for rockets. Trip to POL for oil. What ever miscellaneous work needed to be done. If someone was off for some reason, like guard duty. Someone else would have to take care of their plane too that day. Sit on hands and wait.

I got very little flight time. Probably just because I didn't push it. A few of the guys were air medal hungry and pushed for a lot of time. I didn't care about the medals, just did my job. Maybe they just didn't want the extra weight in the back seat. Some of the guys got a lot, especially out in the sectors. I think some pilots looked at the crew chief as insurance in case they got shot up the crew chief might be able to get them back down.

I heard tales of the night shift crew chief taking the stick so the pilot could catch some Zs. I don't know how true that is.

I think a lot of the time the back seat guy would be MACV or ARVN observer.

I know a Marine that had to land a Bird Dog up north from the back seat. Not well but walked away from it.

2. Tool box was assigned and inventoried to the mechanic/crew chief.

3. I think we fueled up from the tanker when came up. Not positive on that one.