

## Message from the Prez

Two short words sum up last year and our Reunion in Fort Walton Beach. Thank you!

If you weren't there, you missed out on a helluva Reunion and we missed you! Most of us didn't think Gus could do better than he's done so many times before, but he did. The Friday social and Sunday BBQ were great, and the banquet at the Elk's Lodge – damn it was a good one! Gus Sininger, thank you.

Several family members of brothers we lost in SEA were our special guests for the weekend. They met the men who flew with their father or husband; men who had never forgotten their loved one, men who never stopped honoring them. Kirstin, Lee, Barbara, and their families now know their loved one was, is, and always will be part of a larger family. I'll never lose the lump in my throat when the Honor Guard plays Taps and does a 21 gun salute. Being able to meet and talk to the families was something beyond words. There were plenty of emotions including joy that we finally got to meet and talk and hug a little bit as we wiped away tears. Gus Sininger and Jim Terry, thank you.

We now have one heck of a Stinger monument at the Hurlburt Air Park that got nursed from concept to concrete and granite, along with a lot of sweat and hard work. As the monument was lowered into place the day before the dedication Gus was like an expectant father (or is that grandfather...); talk about down to the wire. But Gus came through; again. The text on the monument came from Bill's head and heart; and his dedication was more than words. Bill read his poem called *Our Lady of Night*, and it told our story. Make sure you read the article to understand more about Gus and Bill's labor of love. Gus Sininger and Bill Petrie, thank you.

We had one heck of a guest speaker at our banquet. His opening words were (and I quote), "Good evening, ....and I usually say 'assholes' here...." and it got even better after that! We learned what it was like trying to battle politics and fight a war at the same time. Heinie Aderholt gave us the straight skinny and a memorable evening. Norm Evans, thank you.

VA briefings; Craig Corbett, thank you. Challenge coins and key chains for everyone; Bud Buchanon, thank you. Our ladies got together and found they liked it and had a few ideas of their own; Lynette Laessig, Karen Graves, and Nancy Mac Isaac, thank you.

One helluva year. Craig Corbett, Bud Buchanon, Doug Wohlgamuth, Jim Alvis, Rogers Stevens, Gus Sininger, Bill Petrie, Ev Sprou, Norm Evans, Jim Terry, and others, thank you.

So what could be left for this year? Well, there are a few things.

Albuquerque here we come, with Our Reunion there this year, the week before the big balloon races. We'll include a visit with the reactivated 71<sup>st</sup> SOS to see their aircraft and talk about our mutual heritage! We're already starting to work with the Squadron Commander and he's really enthused!

We're expanding our History project; read the article about it by Larry Fletcher. We also now have a Squadron Coordinator for each Squadron and our Maintenance/Support folks as well as some "regional" POCs to help us contact and find lost and prospective new members. We have 800 or so brothers we haven't made contact with, including the huge number of maintainers and others who kept us flying. Our goal is to get as many as we can to join us to do the three things we exist for:

1. Renew old friendships
2. Make new friendships
3. Let the world know – we existed. We flew and maintained AC-119 gunships and we were damn good.

Our plans are already in progress for a joint AC-119, AC-47, and AC-130 reunion in 2007. Spookys, Shadows, Stingers, and Spectres all at one time will be fun. And yes, we definitely will maintain our AC-119 focus, activities, and history at that reunion. It's a chance to find our common ground and how we might work together in the future.

We have a new process for identifying and deciding reunion locations. Start working it for your area if you're interested. The biggest criteria is: only bring us a nomination if you have a volunteer Coordinator who will honcho all the stuff like Gus, Ron Julian, and Steve Mac Isaac did and are doing for the last seven years. Read the Association minutes for more on this.

Jim Terry is continuing to find more family members of the brothers we lost in SEA and we expect several new ones as well as some returnees at Albuquerque. What a great thing for both them and us!

So, from the new Prez, two short words - not enough, but from the heart. THANK YOU!

Now, let's keep it going!

Wayne Laessig