

President's Message:

First, I want to wish Ray and his wife Susan the very best with a full and speedy recovery from his heart surgery.

As your new President, I think a bit of my Gunship background would be in order. I began as the most senior co-pilot in the 18th SOS in 1969, and within a very short period before deployment of the aircraft to the theater, I was upgraded to AC. My crew was now commanded by the most junior AC in the unit. Ours would be the first group of AC-119Ks to depart for Vietnam. We deployed from Lockbourne AFB, OH, on the 18th of October 1969 with five other A-119Ks early in the morning, for what would be more than a year away from my family. I left behind a young family—a wife and son not year a year old (currently a Major in the USAF). This certainly is not an isolated story. Our route of flight was Lockbourne AFB, OH, to Malmstrom AFB, MT; McChord AFB, WA; Elmendorf AFB, AK; Adak NAS, AK; Midway Island; Wake Island; Andersen AFB, Guam; Clark AB, PI; and Phan Rang AB, RVN. We could not fly the standard Hamilton AFB, CA, to Hickam AFB, HI, due to a ferry range problem caused by weight, drag and fuel capacity. My ferry crew consisted of part of our regularly assigned crew—Copilot Capt. Rick Rime, Navigator Capt. Al Meyer, Flight Engineer TSgt Bill Bacon, and Illuminator Operator SSGT Dick Havens. We met Capt. Meyer at McChord—we somehow made it all the way from Lockbourne via airways without a Navigator. (It took a waiver from TAC Headquarters to fly without a Navigator, even stateside.) After an air abort at McChord for a faulty gear indication, piggy backing with another AC-119K to Midway Island because of a failed Loran A, nine days at Midway for a blown Power Recovery Turbine, and a severe main landing gear shimmy at Clark, we arrived second among four Ks at Phan Rang AB, RVN, 22 days after leaving Lockbourne. Major Sternenbergh had beaten this group by several days, and Capt. Goodwin, the 6th and final member of the original deployment, arrived almost two months later (after the third and final group to deploy had already arrived.) His airplane looked like it had sustained major battle damage enroute as so much maintenance had been required to finally get there.

Goal:

Promote the AC-119 legacy we have established by our presence in SEA—still unknown by most. Specifically that we were the second most deadly truck killer and the best fixed wing TIC weapon system in theater at the time we were there. (Considering time on stations, we were a near equal truck killer to the much more capable AC-130A.)

Member Data Base:

Our data base is continually growing through the hard work of our POC's for the 71st, 17th and 18th SOS. We still need your support to locate lost members, potential members, and family members who wish to join. I cannot stress enough the importance of your help to find these folks.

It is hard to believe that we are already coming up on our 8th reunion this year. The 7th was held in Albuquerque and was a great success. We now return to the Panhandle of Florida and a new experience. The first combined fixed wing gunship reunion: AC-47, AC-119, and AC-130 all in one place at the same time. What a chance to show our spirit—our war stories are better than theirs. We flew across the fence. The AC-47 could not chase trucks effectively with only 7.62 guns and the AC-130s did not generally engage in TICs in Vietnam. Some of us did both effectively. Keep in mind that we will not give up our unit identity and will have our own hooch and business meeting. Nothing lost and much to gain. See you there.

Sincerely,

Vernon C. Hansen
President, AC-119 Gunship Association