

## 2019 Mike Drzyzga President's Messages

### **Outgoing President's Message - October 2019**

My three-year term as Association President ended with the Salt Lake City, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion. It has been fun, at times stressful, but most of all it has been "rewarding". I'm so proud to be part of the Association, and to have had your faith and encouragement to keep it going. And that we did!

One of the most "interesting" events for me this past year, was during the two-hour Membership Business Meeting on Sat. morning in SLC. We had the "spouses" join the "guys" – we were all in one room. The Board had talked since last year about changing the Association By-laws so that Associate Members (spouses and immediate family) can hold Board positions and vote. After I discussed this situation at the meeting, we had a vote. It was not unanimous, but a vast majority agreed. Our Associate members are now able to take direct action to help the Association thrive. Near the end of the meeting, we had to elect new Board members to fill-in the now open President, Secretary and one Member-at-Large positions. Not unexpected, V.P. Jerry Hester stepped up to President (now opening the V.P. position), and TWO Associate Members were voted in: Andrea Drzyzga as Secretary and Jenna Laird (Jerry's daughter) as Member-at-Large. Without forgetting the V.P. position, Roy Davis accepted the nomination and was voted in. We have a full and well-staffed Board of Directors. Whew! I ended the meeting feeling really good. I'm still on the Board, now as "Prior President" (letting Larry Fletcher off the hook) and will continue to aid the well being of the Association.

We did some special things this year at the Sat. evening Awards Banquet: One was a special "Toast" offered by former Stinger NOS/NAV and author Larry Barbee to our family members who are veterans and/or currently serving, and to our Associates Members who support our efforts. The other special event was a 15-minute video presentation put together by Coordinator Chuck Williams and new V.P. Roy Davis. It was awesome, our history and mission and a memorial to our brothers lost in combat. There was not a dry-eye in the audience! Yet, one of the most difficult tasks I had arrived at the Awards Banquet. I presented this year's "Above & Beyond Award", posthumously, to a dear friend and hard-working Life Member, Robert LaRosa. Bob had died this past summer quite unexpectedly. I only hoped that his son, Tony LaRosa, was able to join us and accept his dad's award, yet he could not. But, as good fortune still shines, Jerry Hester will deliver the Award to Tony in Arkansas as the Hester's travel across that state.

One last noteworthy: Many attending this reunion took the 25 min drive to visit the Hill AFB Air Museum. It is a well-run, well-staffed, and apparently adequately funded facility. Many unique and detailed displays. YET, from some of us who voiced an opinion, they missed the mark. The AC-119s were NOT represented at all, and the story of the side-fining gunships was missing. I heard from Craig Corbett, former Stinger Gunner, that he talked with the museum curator and explained who we are and what we believe is missing in the facility. Well, the following day during my visit, I found the "Authorized Personnel Only" door and kind-of barged in on the museum director. After some minutes of explaining our story, he said something like "you guys are very serious, I had another bunch here yesterday (Craig's group) saying the same stuff you are." I left him my Association Business card, and wrote a two-page letter on Association letterhead to follow up. I'm pushing one of our Association's goals: to better mark the place of the AC-119s in the history of the Vietnam War.

Carry on brothers . . . . Hope to see you all in Fort Walton Beach in 2020

Mike Drzyzga, Past President

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**President's Message - August 2019**

"Time passes quickly if you are having fun"! Wow, ain't that the truth! We are only a few weeks away from our special 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion in Salt Lake City. The crunch is "on" with a load of last minute details to coordinate. Needless to say, with all that happened, my third year as President passed quickly. It was busy, but very rewarding to see what we have done. For all of you coming to SLC, I am so much looking forward to spending time with you. Also, we have over 11 new attendees who are our special 1<sup>st</sup>-timers!

**Who all is Coming? Here's the latest list: come join us:**

Mario & Thelma Alfaro with Guests Anthony & Jessica Perez  
Jim & Judi Alvis  
Jeff Baker  
Larry & Debbie Barbee  
Frank & Shirley Bartlett  
Jack & Carolyn Bastin  
Tad & Tricia Berkebile  
Jim Boyd  
Liz & Dan Buss (Webmaster)  
Bruce & Jo Anna Byrd  
Pete & Brother Dean Chamberlain  
Bob Connolly & Cathy Henry  
Jim Cooper  
Don & Peggy Craig  
Dennis & Judy Davis with Daughter & Son-In-Law Sheri & Brett, & Grandsons Nane & Ben  
Roy Davis & Paula Pascoe  
Mike & Andrea Drzyzga  
Wade Dunn  
Dan & Kay Eramo  
Allen & Judy Evans  
Jim & Tina Farrell  
Larry & Sue Fletcher  
LeRoy & Rose Frahm  
Lloyd & Mary Ellen Froelich  
John, Victoria, & John Funk Jr  
Ron & Patty Gilbert  
Joe & Jan Goryl  
Karen Graves  
Rich Hall  
Vern Hansen with Son Chuck  
Jerry & Ellen Hester with Daughters Becky, Jenna Laird, & Granddaughters Amber & Aubrey Laird  
Al & Helen Heuss

Cleo & Joyce Mason  
Jim Mattison  
Cash McCall  
Charles & Elisabeth Meir with Son & Daughter-In-Law Louis & Andrea  
Larry & Susie Ryslinge Mersek  
Bruce Milne  
Jim & Elaine Montgomery with Guests Bruce & Marlene Artis  
John & Lynn Morrow  
Larry & Lorrie Nelson  
Dan & Geri O'Leary  
Dave Olsen  
Dan & Jacque Olson  
Kenny & Judy Preston  
Vern & Betty Raveling  
Bob Reess with Guest Terry Brandfass  
George & Becky Renfroe  
Al Reynolds with Guest  
Gary & Becky Rubingh  
Terry Sarul  
Ed Schwartz  
Jim & Christine Shope  
Jay Simmons  
Gus Sininger  
Frank "Ski" Sledzinski & Yami Lust-Sledzinski  
Ev Sprous  
Jim Stewart with Guest  
Larry Swanson  
Mark Tarpley  
Greg & Lois Terral  
Bill & Wilma Tyler with Daughter Cheree & Steve Bachmann  
Loren & Judi Van Duyn

Ron & Carol Hinton  
Baby Huey Hunter  
Jake & Charlotte Jacobson  
Jim Keller  
Mike Krauss  
Wayne & Lynette Laessig  
Ralph & Joyce Lefarth  
Don Luke  
Col Mac & Nancy Mac Isaac with Son JP  
Dale & Jeanette Martin

Dave & Mary Voisey  
Chuck & Stefani Williams with children  
KateE, Hannah, Jack, James, Charlie,  
Alex, Matthew, & Elesa (Williams)  
Huibregtse  
Doug Wohlgamuth  
John & Laura Wolff  
Hans & Karen Wurfel  
Jim Yanacsek with Guest  
Bill & Paula Zito  
Steve Zolock

Here are a few items for your information.

1. Due to personal matters, John and Laura Wolff have withdrawn their proposal for a reunion in 2021 in Omaha, NE. If the Association wants to continue this special event that gathers so many friends, families, air crews, and maintainers, we will need a proposal for reunion 2021, hopefully at this year's Sat. morning business meeting in SLC.
2. The 20<sup>th</sup> reunion T-Shirt program is a guns-hot success. The ordering window closed on August 7. There were more than 150 ordered on-line with a simple process established by Roy Davis. Job well done Roy! I'll be wearing mine in SLC.
3. Larry Barbee, Stinger 41 NAV/NOS, wrote a book years ago: "Gunship Chronicles – Stinger 41". The book is now published, available on the Association's web site in the "store" (yes we have a store) – Quartermaster's page. I have not yet read it, but those that have said it is an engaging story – highly recommended. Larry will have them available in SLC, where I'll buy one for my collection (and, Larry is donating all profits from these sales to our AC-119 Gunship Association) Oh, this project is also achieved by the effective skill and energy of Roy Davis.

Wishing you all a best of mid-summer 2019.

Mike Drzyzga, President 2016-2019

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### **President's Message - July 2019**

Greetings fellow gunshippers, friends and family,

Happy summertime to all! I know there has been so much nasty springtime weather across the USA. Many of our associates felt some set-back from the weather. Hopefully your summertime will be enjoyable.

Excitement is growing for our reunion in Salt Lake City. Andrea and I have our flight reservations from Newark, NJ to Salt Lake City. As many email threads and Facebook posts demonstrate, we are looking forward to a special time with those that can attend. If you are already registered, and you do not see your buddies name on the Who's Coming list, get on the phone and encourage them to attend. Our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary will only happen once!

**New Member of the Zipper Club.** On June 4, I had five arteries by-passed during open heart surgery. All went well, and I am on the road to full recovery. I discovered that many of my friends and associates in this Association, and the American Legion, and the Senior Club in town, have a long incision down the chest that looks like a zipper, hence the "zipper club". For those of you who caught this news on our Facebook Page, and sent lots of love, prayers and well-wishes – **thank you!** It has been difficult working while on pain meds, and I feel that I am falling behind. Nevertheless, your Board and all its committees are working full throttle to keep the Association moving in the correct direction. On a side note, it pains me to see in the past month so many of our senior members and families – serious illness, medical set-backs and losses. This is clearly a sign of the aging of our Associates, and in my mind, a very compelling reason to make it to the Salt Lake City reunion in Sept!

**Successful "outreach" efforts.** One of our very "busy" Associates is Ev Sprous. Ev took the initiative and has successfully located folks that we lost contact with. He started with the 71<sup>st</sup> SOS and unfortunately learned that the reason we lost contact is that our guys have passed. But, on a way happier note, he also made some contact with guys who didn't know about us or reconnected with some who hadn't updated their personal contact info. I spoke with a 71<sup>st</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> SOS Pilot who is thrilled we found him, and is coming to SLC (his 1<sup>st</sup> reunion), AND he is signed up to do a personal history video. Great job Ev, Thank You.

**Personal Interview (Oral History) Videos.** Here is a very newsworthy update. Almost all of the personal video interviews are easily viewed from an easy to get-to link: <https://island-escape.com/AC119/>. The Association's web site is gaining more and more functionality, and it needed a reorganization to put all our history book stories, interviews, and other stories on one page. A big Thank You goes to Roy Davis, with help from Everett Sprous and Jerry Hester to attain this achievement. Also remember that the Association is supporting new video sessions at the SLC reunion. Many reunion registrants have signed up already. I encourage you to help tell the story of the AC-119 gunships – do it not for yourself, but do it for your family's history.

**T-Shirts for 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion:** Since this is a special reunion, we decided to make a special t-shirt. These t-shirts can be ordered on-line until August 7<sup>th</sup>. The T-shirt orders are going strongly – as of this note, more than 80 are ordered. Woo-hoo!. The cost per shirt will be approximately \$18.50 plus tax. There will be a small upcharge for shirts larger than XL. The shirts will be available for pick up at the reunion. If you're not planning to pick up your t-shirt at the reunion, you will have to pay for shipping when you order. If you have any questions call Roy Davis at 253-549-2044 or email at [roy@island-escape.com](mailto:roy@island-escape.com). LAST DAY TO ORDER IS AUGUST 7<sup>TH</sup>. Link: <https://www.customink.com/g/wvq0-00bu-h3fe> You can also find a link to this Order Form on the Association Web-site under the Quartermaster's page.

**July 2019 Firing Circle:** We are working on a full-featured July Newsletter. One of the featured stories is the 50<sup>th</sup> Homecoming Anniversary celebration of the 71<sup>st</sup> SOS reservists return to

**Columbus, ID. Thank you** to Jim Alvis for writing a super summary of this very special event. Keep scanning your inbox!

That's it for now,

Yours in Service,

Mike Drzyzga, President 2016-2019

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### **President's Message - April 29, 2019**

Greetings, fellow AC-119ers, families and friends: Happy springtime to all! Spring is finally in bloom in NJ, and the warmer weather is welcome over the gloomy, short winter days. This message is a Newsletter FLASH, a Facebook post, and an upload to the Association's website. I feel it's important to have the REUNION XX REGISTRATION Launch for Salt Lake City be a "focused" announcement. I know many of you wondered if you missed the announcements – nope, but the time is here. Beyond this, I will work with Editor Don Luke to send a full-featured *Firing Circle* soon.

**Registration is live on-line!!** After LOTs of work, we're ready, and the Reunion information flyer provides EVERYTHING you need to know, plus we tweaked our website to make the process as easy as possible for you. The flyer certainly should be printed as a hard copy, for you to have as a handy reference. Wayne Laessig and our Webmaster Liz Buss have my utmost gratitude for putting in the time and effort to get it done. There were many unforeseen delays that resulted in a process that took much longer than imagined. Next year it shall be much quicker. I encourage you to go to <https://www.ac119gunships.com/reunion/upcoming-reunion/> and carefully read all about the activities associated with our Reunion in Salt Lake City.

**LET'S CELEBRATE:** Reunion Coordinator Chuck Williams is giving us a grand event, something special to celebrate our Association's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion, and our 50 years of special "brotherhood" as AC-119ers. This dual anniversary will never happen again. What I hear as I meet and talk with you, and what I see on Facebook, is that you love the bonds that we formed and the brotherhood we share. So, let's reunite in SLC, and make this reunion something special! I am sure it will be. The venue hosted by the Little America Hotel is properly elegant for our anniversary reunion. The fresh food is prepared on the spot for us, the hotel amenities are the best, the hootch is very large and well arranged, and the hotel staff will be doing all the leg work for refreshment resupply missions. It will be a pleasure to be more "catered to."

**Publicity:** Time to spread the word and gather together as many of us as possible in SLC. Board members Cash McCall and Jim Dunn sent out the reunion announcements to a dozen military related publications. Also, Chuck Williams has a very well formatted "publicity" news release that he will use throughout his military contacts, and with local outlets. Nevertheless, we (you and me) can also reach out to our buddies, former hootch and crew mates, and our AC-119 email contact lists, and make this Reunion special.

**President's thoughts regarding local social tours:** The Association embraced having a "tour coordinator" create this additional reunion activity to make the reunion more interesting to everyone. It is very effective, with past reunion tours well attended and well liked. Andrea Drzyzga accepted the

challenge again this year. She began at the end of February. Without venting here all the details, we faced a huge communications breakdown on three fronts. The result was that on April 15, after 6 weeks of effort, the tour for Thursday night that I have been writing about--to attend the Tabernacle Choir rehearsal at Temple Square--was CLOSED to the public. An apology came with an explanation that they were locking down to assure the security of their Church's President visit. Therefore, without delaying the reunion registration launch any longer, we now plan on only **one** formal tour: a great Sunday bus trip to historic Main Street, Park City, UT. PLEASE check out the Tour flyer linked on the website reunion page. There is also much to see and do in Salt Lake City, beyond "hootch time" and our routine formal events, some of which is discussed in the reunion flyer.

**Looking ahead:** The Association's Board members engage in monthly teleconferences, discussing and brainstorming current events and the future. One thing ahead is a super reunion XXI in November 2010 in Fort Walton Beach, FL. Gus Sininger indicated that our legacy USAF units at Hurlburt, the 18<sup>th</sup> FTS and 73<sup>rd</sup> SOS Shadows, are eager to have us visit. Also ahead, for me, is the end of my third year as President. As the Association's by-laws allow, I intend to relieve Larry "Doc" Fletcher from the "Past Presidents" position, and I will start working now with the Board to seek a qualified new President for 2020. With your support, we will keep the AC-119 Gunship Association vibrant and moving forward.

"With sails unfurled,"

Mike Drzyzga, President 2016-2019

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**President's Message - March, 2019.** Greetings fellow Gunshippers. Hope this finds you all well. All is well as the AC-119 Gunship Association navigates its way through 2019. Your Board is fully engaged with a few projects, most importantly finalizing plans for our Salt Lake City Reunion in Sept. This, our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion, is expected to be more elegant, in a beautiful facility, the Little American Hotel. The Board has embarked on a plan to obtain donations and sponsorships in order to keep the costs as low as possible for attendees, to allow us to continue to offer incentives for our special families to attend, and to continue to support the Association's primary mission. We are offering an opportunity for anyone to help out. Follow this link to learn more: *Become an AC-119 Gunship Association Sponsor.*

Keep scanning for an April *Firing Circle* Newsletter. It will be published with any and all updated information, plus new news. There will be info regarding some events with our active legacy squadrons, and info about the need for veterans to push into the VA's benefit programs, including getting on the national database Agent Orange registration.

I am pleased to say that our Facebook membership continues to increase. Many "lost" fellow AC-119ers and family are appearing and sharing. Thanks again to the FB team for keeping it active.

See you all in Salt Lake City.....Until next time...

Mike Drzyzga, President 2016-2019

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**President's Message - February 20, 2019.** Greetings, fellow AC-119ers.

As expected, your Board of Directors is working diligently to tweak-up plans for the Salt Lake City, UT reunion, Sept. 3–8, 2019. We are meeting monthly by teleconference and tackling issues as they arise. Reunion Coordinator Chuck Williams is planning for a special event to recognize our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion, and wow.....50 years of brotherhood. I am expecting Reunion XX in SLC to be awesome.

The previous *Firing Circle* did not have many reunion details, so we are blasting out a FLASH message to provide a lot more information. I am sure many of you are waiting for the registration process to go on-line. We are finalizing a few critical components before we can. (1) We have secured an Associate Member of the Association, who helped with tours in the past, to help with making tour arranges for this year, and (2) the IT team, headed by Wayne Laessig and new webmaster Liz Buss, have to first update a few of our web site "service modules" before we can get the registration page up and running. This is an internet issue that many well-established web sites are experiencing.

Chuck is asking for a number of volunteers at the reunion to: (1) help with organizing the Sat. night auctions, (2) welcome and sign-in attendees at the hotel registration desk, and (3) "watch-over" the Hootch if/when any Association Board members may not be present. We will have sign-up sheets available for those who are willing and able to help.

In closing, I cannot help but let "some cats out of the bag." The next full *Firing Circle* will have information about Larry "Doc" Fletcher's "Association History Project," and an outstanding return-on-investment with an outreach effort by Everett Sprou (Membership Coordinator) and new member Roy Davis. (We are in contact with many new or "lost" AC-119ers.)

"Chance favors the prepared mind."

Mike Drzyzga, President 2016–2019

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**President's Message - January 2019.** Happy New Year! The New Year is starting off well for the Association. The Board of Directors is very active, using teleconference meetings combined with lots of email traffic, to keep the "pipper" on our Association business targets. We are fortunate to have a hard-working and dedicated bunch of former gunshippers to help keep us moving forward. The Association website improvements are being implemented by Wayne Laessig with the assistance of a new "volunteer" IT support specialist, Liz Buss. Of special importance, the website updates are crucial to get the reunion registrations page ready.

PLEASE make the time to visit our Web site, [www.ac119gunships.com](http://www.ac119gunships.com), and look at the wealth of information, as well as the Quartermaster page. Our Salt Lake City Reunion Coordinator, Chuck Williams, is busy moving forward with plans for a super Reunion XX, in Utah. We are also fortunate

to have your leadership team enhanced with Don Luke, the Newsletter Editor. He published the November *Firing Circle* – very well done! A January *Firing Circle* is forthcoming and will have lots of updated information and more details for you.

Now, my shout-out for our Facebook team. There is a lot of valuable info being shared on Facebook. It is probably not appropriate to single out any one thing in particular. However, I will do so. Former Shadow Maintainer Jim Alvis did an entire series of Facebook posts describing the days of his Shadow ferry experience from St. Augustine, FL (where the “slicks” were converted into AC’s) to Nha Trang on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the flights, very cool. I understand that there is a lot of junk (to put it mildly) on social media websites, but “OUR” Facebook page is very well managed!

Wishing “yous-guys” a great 2019. See ya in Salt Lake City in September.

Respectfully,

Mike Drzyzga, President 2016–2019