

Reunion XI – Fairfield California



# The Firing Circle

**Dedicated to all AC-119 & AC-47 Gunship Aircrew, Maintenance, & Support Personnel**

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I sincerely thank you for your support in electing me as your AC-119 Gunship Association President for 2010-2011. This will be the 4<sup>th</sup> time that I have served as Association President. I am humbled by your vote of confidence. You have again placed a great deal of responsibility on me but I fully accept that responsibility and challenge in order to ensure that our association remains strong and full of life. I will do everything in my power to not let you down as I work closely with your elected Board of Directors to make the AC-119 Gunship Association the Very Best.

**Reunion Highlights:** For all of you who attended our 2010 reunion in California, thank you very much. I hope every one of you had a great time. We had two wonderful tours. The San Francisco tour included a walk-thru of China Town, lunch and shopping at Fisherman's Wharf, Pier 39, and then we toured the city via motor coach, seeing a LOT of old Victorian houses, historical buildings and districts on our way to the Presidio and Fort Point. Due to heavy fog, our drive across the Golden Gate Bridge was memorable. The Wine Country tour of Napa Valley was filled with fun, laughter, and a lot of wine sampling.

Meet & Greet Friday night was a blast with many new faces at the reunion. We had delicious foods to eat at all our functions from Friday night M & G, the Saturday night Banquet and of course our Farewell BBQ on Sunday night. The Air Force Ensemble of musicians and singers was excellent entertainment at the Saturday night banquet. I want to recognize and thank reunion coordinator Wayne Laessig for an outstanding reunion and all of his helpers, especially his wife Lynette and Bill Zito.

Our 2011 Reunion will be held in Charleston, South Carolina from September 30<sup>th</sup> to October 3<sup>rd</sup>. For information on Charleston go to <http://www.charleston-sc.gov/home.aspx> . Our Hotel is the **Embassy Suites Hotel @ Charleston Area Convention Center**. One NOTE about Reunion costs: when we sign the contract for a reunion hotel, we guarantee a certain occupancy rate to the hotel. When that rate is not met, we lose money. You all help when you stay in the Reunion hotel, not off-site. It's getting more and more difficult to get reasonable room rates with breakfast included; consequently our efforts to get reasonable room rates with full breakfast is made much easier if you stay at the Reunion hotel. This, leads to my next point: ***Effective with Reunion XII, the reunion registration fee will be \$35.00 for those who do not stay at the Reunion hotel.***

Once again we will be raffling off another "Commemorative Gun" at the Charleston Reunion. It's a .45 cal. Pistol with special markings and case with accessory. See the Ticket Form in this newsletter. Tickets are One (1) for \$10, Six (6) for \$50 and Thirteen (13) for \$100. You don't have to present to win. Doug will hold tickets and bring them to the Reunion. Be sure to write your name and phone number on the form. FYI, the cost of our litho's has again been reduced; this time to \$35.00.

Let's continue to work together to make our Reunions better and better each year. Your participation is welcome. I am already looking forward to seeing all of my brothers and their families in Charleston.

Gus Sininger, President  
AC-119 Gunship Association

p.s. Our 2012 Reunion will be held at Home Base in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

## AC-119 Gunship Association - Annual Meeting Minutes, September 18, 2010, Fairfield, CA

1. Association President Gus Sininger called the annual meeting to order at 0900 hours, with Larry Hunter offering the Invocation followed by Gus leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Gus also formally made note of the USAF's birthday and the passing of USAF Gen. Heinie Aderholt.

2. **Gus presented the Secretary's report on behalf of Jim Alvis:** Membership decreased slightly again, from 413 to 412 members. We did gain some AC-47 members, yet Annual Membership dropped primarily from the increase in Life Membership.

- ✓ Newsletter mailing cost rose to \$573 annually; as was stressed last year, updating your emails can save us some money that may be put towards running the Association.

3. **Doug Wohlgamuth presented the Treasurer's report:** Expected account balance after this Reunion will be close to \$14,118. We are keeping records to demonstrate that our funds are below the IRS reporting level of \$25k.

- ✓ History books are selling at 20 per yr. Members should continue to look for libraries and museums to offer donations. A number of members did speak to successful donation projects.
- ✓ Litho sales are slow. Gus suggested we lower the price. A motion was made and passed to lower the price. The membership agreed that the Board can decide on the new price (At Sunday's Board meeting, the Board agreed on \$35, still sufficient to be profitable).

4. **Wayne Laessig discussed our Association communication tools: Website & Newsletter:** Bill Petrie's website maintenance is commended. He is embarking on a needed switch to "Dream weaver" base developer's tool and is working to provide a more easily navigated web site, with a cleaner look. It may be a year-long endeavor. Our website needs a volunteer that knows the newer developer's technology.

- ✓ Tony Pakutinski produced 3 Newsletters since Reunion X - lots of information and excellent presentation - Great work formally noted. We continue to assure secured email address to avoid propagating spam.
- ✓ A few members asked about getting a hard-copy of the newsletter. The answer indicated: send a request to the Association Secretary, Mike Drzyzga at [Drzyzga513@hotmail.com](mailto:Drzyzga513@hotmail.com)

**Points of Contact (POCs):** Currently, the Association's POCs for the various groups are working well, except for the Maintenance Support due to Bob Farmer's illness. The Board will discuss options, with the possibility of moving the Maintenance members into the 17th/18th groups.

- ✓ A suggestion was made to make the Master Contact List available for distribution as an Adobe PDF file, but again the concern was for protecting email addresses.
- ✓ Points of Contact (POCs): we considered again revising their role, this time with the Secretary sending only "all e-mails and postal mails" -- and POCs in primarily a "new contact" or helping folks contact each other mode. At Sunday's Board Meeting, the Board decided the Secretary will send all snail mails and the POCs will send all e-mails.

5. **Active Duty Squadron Liaisons:** Gus's slide in the agenda listed FOUR contacts and Association reps. Steve Mac' indicated that the 71st at Kirkland is having a change in command again, and Col. Cordosa is returning as the 58th SOW Commander.

6. **Original Shadow and Stinger paintings:** The AFSOC Commander at Hurlburt believes that the original AC-119 paintings by Darby Perrin should be displayed there. Both paintings are currently archived in the USAF Museum in Dayton (and not displayed). The Association provided the AFSOC Project.

- ✓ AFSOC at Hurlburt believes that the original painting should be displayed there. Both paintings are currently archived in the USAF Museum in Dayton (and not displayed). Since the Museum is in the USAF chain of command, this is a situation that the Association can have little, if any; influence.
- ✓ Officer with our picture donation information. AFSOC will work with the AF Museum to borrow the pictures for prominent HQ AFSOC display.
- ✓ The original two 18th SOS patches were never officially approved by the Air Force. Now there is a proposed patch by our active duty Squadron, the 18th FTS, that combines elements of our unofficial AC-119 Stinger patch with the 18th FTS patch. This does not change our unofficial Stinger patch - it's still ours even though the AF never approved it.

**7. JP MacIsaac and Ev Sprous:** Continue to collect video interviews at our reunion. They prepare and sell DVDs of all prior video interviews for \$7 plus \$1 for S&H. Steve Mac' made a point that our Book is capturing part of our history, yet another part comes from the videos. Together they create a living history. Steve Mac put us on the spot and called for a show of hands for those who already DID a video! Too many have not yet and were encouraged to sign up. Note: about 20 folks finally did an interview this reunion, bringing our total to well over 140 total videos that JP and Ev Sprous can customize into any combination you'd like.

**8. Libraries and the History Book - Lesson learned:** Many libraries have a Reference Section for books that are not intended for check-out. You often have to find the correct person on the library staff to contact in order to make a donation.

- ✓ Ralph LeFarth reported on the possibility of an "e-book" for us. Currently, e-books are textstrong and image-weak, while our History Book is to the contrary. We will wait until the technology catches up in the future.
- ✓ Larry Fletcher reported on his effort to initiate a US Certificate of Copyright, and was initially snagged by the simple "who's the author's name"? Actually, the "AC119 Gunship Association" is the author, and he submitted TWO hard-cover books to the Library of Congress; we are now waiting for the Certification.
- ✓ Larry also reported on a major project he's working on to do a "third" book (Larry authored both Shadows of Saigon and The Shadow Spirit). His third is a non-fiction history about the 71st & 17th SOSs. He has obtained now declassified quarterly reports from the USAF, and a 90 page text which had been transcribed from tape recording interviews taken in-country.

**9. Major Projects:** Stinger Monument: the damage and discoloration was due mostly from the ground sprinkler system. Gus worked with the Air Park staff to solve the problem and repair the monument.

- ✓ Reduce Inventory - sell lithos: Gus suggested we auction two at the Banquet. One each will be set out for all attendees to sign.
- ✓ As previously discussed, the History book represents \$26K in inventory. We reduced the price during the reunion and sold a fair number.

**10. AC-47 Membership:** The concern here is that a group of AC-47 folks met at Branson a week earlier. Therefore, we may have lost 40 attendees. John Pitts attended that reunion affair, and spoke about his observations that they have no formal association, limited communication within the group, and the group's longevity may fade. Steve Mac' motioned that we should suspend spending Association funds on purchasing an AC-47 Flag until the situation stabilizes. We are in process of spending a small amount to make a flag representing both the 3rd/4th SOS. The motion was not carried, and deferred to the Board for further consideration.

**11. Out-Reach efforts:** Goal is to obtain more information on potential members, and make contact. The Large-sized Master Contact List will be improved for member's interaction next year. Ron Julian (our MCL-meister) will assure to keep the POCs updated.

**12. "850" at Ho Chi Minh Airport:** Bruce Byrd made another excellent presentation about the status of the only known AC-119 Gunship, #53-7850, a K-Model. Aerial images show that the airport is being renovated for more commercial air traffic, and that the "military museum" and 850 have been moved. Based on last years directions (and carried motion), Bruce spent NO money on this effort, and discovered that the USA has no Air Attaché. From informal on-the-ground sources, "850" is not available. Those with familiarity in Southeast Asia nuances believe that means the subject may still be open for discussion. A suggestion was made to use the footwear manufacturer, NIKE, as a contact for Vietnamese authorities. We may "talk out-loud" about this subject, but use NO contact names. Bruce will update us next year.

**13. Reunion's Comparison Chart:** Gus showed a table comparing 2006 - 2010 reunion costs. Air Fare is getting more costly, the membership consumes more and more for the Meet & Greet and when the hootch is open, and hotel prices are difficult to keep at a low level. We discussed two lessons learned:

- ✓ Use servers to control the distribution of food at the main affairs -- will be added to the reunion "checklist",
- ✓ Have sufficient number of bar tenders to address the number of attendees.

**14. Next Reunion:** Jimmy Ward volunteered as reunion coordinator for Reunion XII in 2011 in Charleston, SC, on September 28 - Oct. 3.

- ✓ Gus is having difficulty communicating with Jim, and has increased his involvement to see it through. He will travel to Charleston to meet with the Hotel Management. Room rate is set at \$119, all events will be at the Hotel, there is a lot to see and do with much history, and there are two RV parks.
- ✓ Wayne stressed that attendees stay at the hotel to help keep costs under control.
- ✓ We have many who were in AC-119s, or who were helped out by AC-119s, that have no idea of our Association's existence.
- ✓ Motion was made and carried to advertise the Association in magazines such as the Military Times, VFW and American Legion - with the Board in control of spending.
- ✓ The goal is to find those who were in AC-119s as well as guys on the ground who were helped by a Shadow or Stinger overhead.
- ✓ Members voted that we return to Ft. Walton Beach for Reunion XIII for 2012. Steve Mac' and Norm Evans will be co-coordinators.

**15. Election of officers for 2010-2011:** President: Association members nominated and voted for Gus. Gus accepted a consecutive term.

- ✓ Vice-President: Association members nominated Mike Krauss, and members voted him in.
- ✓ Secretary: Gus nominated Mike Drzyzga, and he too was voted in.
- ✓ Treasurer: Doug Wohlgamuth offered to continue for another year, and the members voted him in again.
- ✓ Past Board Member: Association members nominated Larry Fletcher; who accepted and was voted in.

16. We closed the annual meeting at 1120 hours, and proceeded to have an array of group "pictures" taken.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Michael J. Drzyzga, Secretary

# AC-119 Gunship Association Reunion XI





# **“AC-119 Gunship Heritage Circle”**



**Tank Busters  
The AC-119K Stinger Gunship**



**Alpha Flight  
18th Special Operations Squadron  
VENGEANCE BY NIGHT**



**By  
Dr. Larry Elton Fletcher**

The fragged mission on the night of 28 February 1971 sounded like another bummer. For the ten crewmembers of the AC-119 Gunship, radio call sign Stinger 04, flying armed escort and recon missions the past three weeks for South Vietnam Army (ARVN) convoys advancing into Laos had become “old hat”. More often than not, convoy caps involved seemingly endless hours of boring holes in the sky.

Normally, 18th Special Operations Squadron “Stinger” Gunships of Alpha Flight stationed at Da Nang roamed the target-rich Ho Chi Minh Trails, hunting and killing North Vietnam trucks. Even so, the Gunship had proven time and again to be extremely effective providing direct fire support for allied ground troops in close combat with enemy forces. The ARVN offensive into Laos, Operation Lam Son 719 had cut through the Ho Chi Minh Trail at Route 9 and was now staging for an assault on Tchepone. North Vietnam military resistance to the invasion, weak at first, had progressively grown to the point of putting the South Vietnamese forces on the defensive. A large armor column of ARVN tanks and support vehicles were moving slowly but steadily westward toward Tchepone on Route 9 to reinforce the offensive when Stinger 04 lifted off Da Nang runway 36 at 2300 hours.

Climbing at a rate of 200 feet per minute through dark gray clouds, the two-tailed, converted C-119 “flying boxcar” of Korean War vintage shook and vibrated with the roaring sounds of two radial and two jet engines. Five Stinger 04 crewmembers buckled-up in the cargo area watched aft through the two open doorways as the lights of Da Nang quickly disappeared behind them. Upper and lower red rotating beacons marked the location of the black and camouflage-painted Gunship. Tracking northwestward off Da Nang TACAN Channel 103, Stinger 04 would soon replace Stinger 02 in the area of operation (AO). Upon reaching 8,500 feet altitude, Aircraft Commander, Major Earl R. Glass leveled the Gunship, reduced power and called for the cruise checklist. Copilot, 1st Lt. Charles T. Robertson, Jr. contacted Moonbeam, radio call sign for the airborne battlefield command and control center (ABCCC) to report an estimated rendezvous time of forty minutes past the hour. ABCCC instructed Robertson to contact the forward air controller (FAC), radio call sign Hammer 97 just prior to rendezvous time. Tonight as past cap missions of ARVN convoys, Stinger 04 would not rendezvous with an F-4 “Gunfighter” escort who ordinarily loitered high above the Gunship to attack and suppress enemy anti-aircraft guns firing at the Stinger. Stinger crews had been forewarned at Intel briefing to expect heavy anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) in the AO. Enemy triple-A 23mm, 37mm, even 57mm guns lined the valley leading to Tchepone, Laos. North and south of Route 9, the high ground was laced with 12.7mm machine guns poised for slow, low flying aircraft like AC-119 Gunships.

Major Glass radioed Stinger 02 for a situation report (sit rep) in the AO. Stinger 02 reported they had worked a T-I-C (troops in contact). While working the T-I-C, they had spotted large numbers of enemy trucks on the move. They were returning to base (RTB) having reached bingo fuel. Stinger 02 aircraft commander alerted Glass of a potential battle forming in the AO, sector 8 because of so much enemy movement. Those onboard

Stinger 04 who heard the radio transmission welcomed thoughts of mixing it up with enemy ground troops more than just capping a convoy. Already unbuckled from the FLIR operator's seat, Flight Engineer (FE), Technical Sergeant Herbert S. Simons called over intercom for one of the gunners to send an empty ammunition can up to the flight deck. Positioned directly behind the pilot's center console, Simons would straddle the ammo can monitoring engine instruments, especially fuel gauges until mission completion. His switching fuel tanks and figuring fuel required (bingo fuel) to RTB and safely land with reserve fuel were vital.

The FLIR (forward looking infra-red) operator, Major Douglas A. Frost, who had ridden in the flight deck "fold-down jump seat" during take-off, took his swivel seat which Simons had vacated. Navigator, Major Boyd E. Phillips was seated at the navigator's table to the left of Frost. The flight deck crew of five were now at battle stations. Unbuckled from their seats, crewmembers in the cargo area began stirring about making ready for battle. Major Edward J. Kroon checked his telescopic infra-red night observation scope (NOS) which also utilized moonlight and starlight. Staff Sergeant William O. Petrie, the IO (illuminator operator) checked the big white light, a 20 kW Xenon variable beam spotlight aimed out the port paratroop doorway. Seldom, if ever, was the spotlight used because it attracted enemy ground fire. Petrie rechecked the LAU-74A flare launcher located in the starboard paratroop doorway. Twenty-four Mark-4 flares filled the launcher that could be jettisoned in case the crew had to bailout. Petrie was also responsible for deployment of ground markers, Mk-6 white flare logs, called LuLu's.

The three gunners, Staff Sergeant Raymond Garcia, Sergeant Thomas E. Nolan and Airman First Class Stephan B. McCloskey diligently worked, muscling heavy ammo cans to load the four G. E. MXU-470 7.62 millimeter (mm) miniguns with flash suppressers and the two M61A1 20mm Vulcan cannons with new barrels that added to the efficiency and effectiveness of the weapon. The Gunship carried 4,500 rounds of mixed armor-piercing incendiary (API) and high explosive incendiary (HEI) 20mm ammunition. Each Vulcan cannon fired 2,500 rounds per minute. The payload of 7.62mm ammunition totaled 31,500 rounds. One minigun fired 6,000 rounds per minute at high rate of fire or 3,000 rounds per minute at low rate. Every fifth round of 7.62mm ball ammunition was a red tracer bullet. Slipping through the last cloud remnants, Major Glass commented over the intercom, "Looks clear up ahead. Beautiful area out here, full of trucks." Upon approaching the AO a few minutes later, Glass stated, "Okay crew, lights out. Visors down. Scanners out. Pre-strike checklist."

Robertson read checklist items which included a crew briefing from Navigator Phillips, "(We're) about one-hundred forty (140 knots) indicated airspeed, 700 feet is average terrain, 8.5 flight level. We can descend any time, 2800 feet highest terrain in area. Escape and evasion - go east. Emergency airfield - Da Nang, heading 130 degrees for 40 minutes, feet wet - 050 degrees for fifteen minutes. (Fire Control) Computer set for delta altitude (4500 feet AGL), ten mil wind-age. Altimeter setting 29.76." Major Glass added, "Gunner, give me one gun on line." Head gunner Garcia switched on a 20mm cannon and stated, "You've got number 6 gun online." Gun numbers 1 and 6 were Vulcan cannons. Numbers 2, 3, 4, 5 were 7.62 miniguns. Pre-strike checklist was complete.

Major Frost checked the FLIR heat sensor and started scanning the ground for "hot spots". Interestingly, Majors Phillips, Frost, and Kroon all held aeronautical navigator ratings. All three were trained and qualified to perform the duties of the table navigator (NAV), FLIR operator, and NOS operator. Collectively, they were referred to as "sensor operators". Radio transmissions between aircraft working sector 8 cluttered the headsets of Stinger 04 Pilot Glass, Copilot Robertson, and Navigator Phillips. Stinger 02 climbing to 9,500 feet to RTB. Two AC-130 Gunships, Spectre 07 and Spectre 13 working at 14,000 feet with a flight of F-4 Gunfighters suppressing enemy triple-A gunfire for the Spectre Gunships. One C-123 flare-ship Candlestick 23 illuminating Highway 9 for the ARVN convoy. And one FAC, Hammer 97 coordinating air assets with ARVN ground units while flying an OV-10 Bronco at 5,000 feet. Glass gradually descended the Stinger Gunship to 7,000 feet. Ten miles from the ARVN convoy location, Robertson contacted the FAC, "Hammer 97, Stinger 04.



What have you got for us?" Hammer replied, "Nothing much going on right now. Escorting an armor column. Supposedly have some movers dead ahead of the ARVN column." Robertson responded, "What do you want us to do?" Hammer answered, "Work west on this road for a few miles and see what you can find." Hammer 97 continued his radio transmission to warn that friendly troops and armor were in the vicinity around two ARVN fire support bases, one located five clicks to the northeast and the other FSB on Hill 31 just two clicks to the northeast of Stinger's location. Anything spotted south of the river that paralleled Highway 9 was probably enemy. With no T-I-C to support, Glass stated over intercom, "Outstanding!" Stinger 04 could now go hunting.

"Aircraft went right across our tail," reported one of the scanners. Within minutes, the ARVN armor column was spotted below on Highway 9 inching its way westward nearly bumper-to-bumper. Approximately fifty vehicles comprised the convoy of tanks, armored personnel carriers, tankers, trucks and jeeps. Only a few vehicles displayed lights. "FLIR is tracking," stated Major Frost, his screen filled with a line of hot vehicles. Level at 7,000 feet and orbiting the convoy with over two hours of fuel to remain on station. Major Glass told Simons to turn off the lower rotating beacon and stated, "IO, set flares for same setting as last night." "Roger, they're set," replied Petrie.

On the ground, things were quiet. Nothing was happening regardless of Stinger 04 scanners sporadically reporting, "LuLu at 1 o'clock". "Aircraft at 10 o'clock." "Triple-A at 4 o'clock, no sweat." "Aircraft at 4 o'clock with landing lights on." "Nice highway down there." Flying in wide counter-clockwise orbits with the business side of the Gunship, the port side, facing the road, Stinger 04 pressed ahead of the convoy. Glass took directions from the NOS and IO to keep the road in sight. A thick jungle hid the road at times but a river just south of the road helped visual navigation. In the open NOS doorway barely two feet from the tips of the twirling four-bladed propeller of the left recip engine stood Major Kroon. He braced himself against the scope's mounting and steadily aimed the starlight scope at Highway 9.

With extreme wind pressure on his head and neck and snot running into his eyes and ears, IO Petrie leaned out into the slip stream eagle-eyeing the highway and scanning for enemy ground fire. His body was nearly halfway outside the Gunship as he stood securely wedged between strung cargo straps and the doorframe of the flare launcher doorway. His elbow was propped against the doorframe to support his helmeted head in the violent wind. Airman McCloskey was positioned in the illuminator (spotlight) doorway to scan for triple-A. Secured to the aircraft fuselage with a cable attached to his harness, called a "monkey strap", the gunner lay prone on his stomach with his head protruding outside the Gunship, hanging over the bottom of the doorway. His body was wedged between the illuminator and cargo tie-down straps stretched across the doorframe. The "monkey strap" provided insurance against falling out of the Gunship during evasive maneuvers. His eyes burned from the fierce wind blast. Approximately two miles ahead of the ARVN convoy, Major Frost picked up a hot spot on his screen. "FLIR has a target," he announced, "He's not moving very fast, but he's moving."

The hot spot was creeping along westward on Highway 9 in the same direction as the ARVN convoy, i.e. away from the ARVN column. NOS operator Kroon found the mover on his starlight scope. He reported there was an intersection with a north-south road farther up the highway. Glass established a firing circle and called for the strike checklist. Robertson called Hammer 97, "We've got a mover." Frost announced, "There's another one coming up behind him. Good size. He's hot all over." Probably got a tank," someone stated over intercom. Robertson immediately radioed Hammer 97, "We've got two movers." "Roger Stinger 04. Give grid of movers."

Robertson waited for NAV Phillips to determine exact coordinates and then called Hammer, "Grid coordinates are Xray Delta-483407." "Roger Stinger. Standby." Anxious Stinger 04 crewmen awaited Hammer's reply. Hopefully, they would receive clearance to fire. From past combat experience, the crew just knew the movers were enemy but not exactly what type of vehicles. Speculations ran from tanks to armored personnel carriers to

heavily laden trucks. What ever they were, they were moving at a snail's pace. Could they be preparing to stop and ambush the ARVN convoy? Time was of essence.

"Holding on the lead one," stated NOS Kroon, his starlight scope glued to the lead vehicle. FLIR Frost took the opportunity to scan the area for more hot spots. Major Glass maintained a steady thirty-degree banked left turn to keep the fixed crosshairs in his Gunsight superimposed on the movable crosshairs electronically transmitted through the fire control computer from the night observation scope to the gunsight. Copilot Robertson maintained the altitude while Simons meticulously monitored engine instruments. In the firing circle, it took all three crewmen to coordinate flying the Gunship. "How long do we wait?" Robertson asked Hammer 97. "Stinger 04, Hammer 97. We have tentative clearance. Friendlies are close. Turn off beacon for ID." "Roger Hammer. Beacon going off," Robertson replied and turned off the upper beacon. Glass allowed the Gunship to gradually descend closer to firing altitude.

Hidden in the night sky, the blacked-out AC-119 Gunship stalked its prey below. Except for the faint red glow of instrument panel and sensor lights on the flight deck and ruby beams of two small flashlights which cargo area gunners clinched between their teeth, the Stinger was sinister. The two jet engines idled, ready to be energized to 100% power for a quick get-away in case enemy triple-A should open fire. Fuel mixtures of the reciprocating engines were lean as possible to eliminate stack exhaust flames that could be detected from the ground. Only the hum of the two recip engines and their twirling propellers was heard. Evidently, the "tanks" did not hear or see the ominous killer lurking above for they did not scatter to hide. Heavy flak appeared in the sky not far from the Gunship. Various crewmembers reacted with comments over the intercom, "Pretty good size flak." "Are they shooting at us?" "They can't hear us." "We're the only ones here right now." IO Petrie stated over intercom, "Keep your eyes peeled. They might shoot at us. If those tanks detect us, they might be brave enough or crazy enough to back into a road ditch or crater to get muzzle elevation and take a pot shot at us."

Shadowing the movers, NAV Phillips provided updated grid coordinates to Robertson who relayed them to Hammer, "Hammer 97. I have new coordinates for movers: Xray Delta-443409." In a matter of seconds, Hammer 97 radioed, "Roger, copy. You're cleared to expend. You have consent." Spontaneous remarks resounded among those who heard Hammer's transmission. "Cleared to shoot 'em up." "Oh boy, Ya-hoo!" "Give me number 6 gun online." "Number 6 gun hot." "Airbursts, triple-A, 37 millimeter, no sweat." Glass pressed the trigger on his yoke for a short burst of fire. The 20mm rounds hit way low of the target. "Wind is tricky, it's not light," he stated. Adjusting his aim, he again fired at the lead vehicle but again missed. NAV Phillips added mils to the computer for increased wind-age. NOS Kroon encouraged Glass, "Take your time. I've still got them." Glass ordered over intercom, "Gunners, take number six off. Put number one online." FE Simons stated, "Airspeed, ten knots low, now six knots." Higher than expected winds not only affected trajectory of bullets but also the firing circle airspeed. Power adjustments were made to build airspeed to 146 knots. Glass aligned the crosshairs in his gunsight and pressed the trigger for a three second burst of fire. "Two more targets up ahead," FLIR Frost announced, "Tracking four movers." Reaching the "T" intersection, the lead vehicle turned right onto the northeast road while the other three vehicles briefly stopped before following the lead vehicle. Frost said, "I'd hate to lose these guys. If they're enemy, they're doing us a favor."

NAV Phillips updated target coordinates XD-473409 for Robertson to pass along to Hammer. Robertson also stated Stinger's DME fix for Hammer, "Stinger is working on the 262 degree radial at 46 miles off Channel 103." After a short wait, Hammer radioed Stinger 04, "Stinger cleared to fire. Ground says anything west of fifty gridline is enemy." Another slow mover appeared on the FLIR screen, just ahead of the four movers. The vehicles started moving into the woods bordering the road. From an altitude of 4,800 feet, Glass kept pounding away at the lead vehicle with Vulcan cannon number one. NAV Phillips urged, "Keep shooting in area. Highest terrain in five mile radius is 2,240 feet." "YOU HIT IT!" confirmed NOS Kroon, watching the enemy "tank"

blow up and then erupt into a large secondary explosion. Fire consumed the vehicle, brightly lighting the area. The column of vehicles stopped dead in their tracks to become stationary targets. It became obvious the enemy had no clue what had hit them. Having descended to an altitude of 4,600 feet, Glass found his firing groove and proceeded to hit one target after another. Kroon reported over intercom, "We've got four tanks hit. There's a total of five down there. Oh, you hit two of them!"

Two explosions erupted followed by secondaries. Blazing fires marked the targets in pink and red glows. Circling at 5,000 feet, well clear of Stinger's sting, Hammer 97 witnessed the destruction and commented, "Good shootin' Stinger." Fifteen miles west of Stinger 04, Spectre 07 was also working sector 8 from an altitude of 14,000 feet along with their escort of F-4 fighter/bombers. Candlestick 21 replaced Candlestick 23 to provide lighting for the ARVN convoy in sector 8. "Triple-A, 2 o'clock, no sweat," reported scanner, Petrie. A brilliant red explosion on the horizon proved F-4 Gunfighters were doing their job protecting the Spectre Gunship from anti-aircraft guns. Major Glass directed, "Gunners, put a mini-ball on with the twenty." With minigun tracer bullets, Glass could now follow a red line of fire to targets and make adjustments; whereas, firing 20mm non-tracer ammunition alone only provided the point of impact. Glass again opened fire. The dissonant sounds of minigun fire Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr and cannon fire Brapapapapapapapa reverberated in the smoky cargo deck area that smelled of cordite. Gunners Garcia and Nolan busily tended the weapons, clearing, loading and shuffling empty and full ammo cans, careful not to slip on 20mm spent casings that cluttered the deck floor. Pinpointing targets with the starlight telescope, Major Kroon reported his sighting, "You got it! Right on it! I saw a secondary. It's on fire. Next one!" Glass responded, "Good heading to shoot from." Glass had found the section of the firing circle where the wind and the aircraft's speed perfectly matched to produce maximum accuracy. He quickly ordered Sergeant Petrie to drop two more LuLu's.

Glass continued firing bursts of three to five seconds duration. He didn't want to overheat the guns for fear of jams or malfunctions. FLIR operator Frost reported, "Here comes another one down the road to join them. That makes six." NOS Kroon excitedly reported his observations, "Oh, got him. Number two, destroyed. Two destroyed." Two sustained fires and four secondary explosions illuminated the tank formation. Everyone onboard who could see the targets mostly agreed that the vehicles had to be tanks because they were such slow movers. But then, someone onboard said, "Might be armored personnel carriers." Coming around on his favorite heading to strike, Glass raked the area with minigun fire again and again, assuring that any enemy ground troops accompanying the vehicles would suffer Stinger's vengeance. FE Simons reported to Major Glass, "Approximately twenty minutes until we reach bingo fuel for RTB." Glass stopped strafing the area and called for a Vulcan cannon and commenced firing. Gunners Garcia and Nolan switched back and forth from number one to number six cannon to keep the Vulcans loaded and cooled. With four miniguns, switching and loading was no problem for the two veteran gun-plumbers. Even with the imminent threat of triple-A, the whole scene had become a "turkey shoot". Why the enemy vehicles had stopped and not scattered for cover became obvious. The vehicles were tanks. They couldn't hear or see what was attacking them.

Adrenalin-pumped Stinger crewmembers acted as one war machine in the heat of battle. Each crewman's job aboard the Gunship was essential in the strikes. Teamwork was vital. The opportunity to repeatedly wallop the enemy at freewill without dodging bullets was unusual to say the least. Robertson heard Spectre 21 call Hammer 97, "Is Stinger going to pull off those vehicles he's working?" The AC-130 Gunship hungered for a piece of the action. "There's two more," FLIR operator Frost stated. That made eight enemy vehicles. With only 300 rounds of 20mm and 1200 rounds of 7.62mm ammo remaining onboard, Glass hit vehicle number 6. A blazing fire erupted from the massive explosion and secondary. The target area glowed in blazing red. Was Stinger silhouetted in the night sky by the inferno? When would enemy gunners open up on the vulnerable Gunship? Vehicle numbers 7 and 8 were summarily hit and destroyed with intercom comments abounding, "Oh dear!" "Oh beautiful!" "Oh man, did that blow. Secondaries and sustained fires." Having severely damaged or

destroyed all eight vehicles, Stinger 04 still had a small amount of ammunition remaining. Glass headed the Gunship up the main road in search of other targets. In the process, Stinger 04 flew closer and closer to the area of active triple-A sites witnessed during their attacks on the tanks. No more targets were sighted. Glass flew the Gunship back to again sting his prey that had not exploded or sustained fires. To be termed, “destroyed” on bomb damage assessment (BDA) reports, vehicles had to sustain damage or fires that rendered them unusable. FE Simons stated, “We’ve got ten minutes left.”

Glass entered a firing orbit and proceeded to kick rudder and dip the wing while strafing the eight tanks. He commented, “It’s like a shooting gallery, with the targets not moving.” Instead, the shooter was moving. Stinger 04 went “Winchester” as the last bullets were expended. It was time to RTB. Their replacement, Stinger 03 was twenty minutes from the AO. Robertson called Hammer 97, “Please confirm that Stinger kills are tanks.” Hammer replied, “Will confirm at first light.” Navigator Phillips gave Glass a heading of 080 degrees for Da Nang before stating, “We’re RTB at 0130.” Intercom comments followed: “That’s sure going to make a lot of ground troops happy.” “What’s the score?” “Eight for eight!” “That’s a nice piece of work, Major Glass.” Copilot Robertson gave a sit rep to Stinger 03 as they passed in the night. NAV Phillips reported BDA to the ABCCC, Moonbeam, “Target coordinate Xray Delta-463413. Time on target 2350. Time off 0130. Eight movers, suspect they were tanks, moved west bound. 13 secondaries, 2 small, 1 large sustained fires. Eight destroyed, let’s call them tanks. No gunfighter passes. Request recce in morning. That completes our BDA.”

With aerial reconnaissance at first light confirming Stinger 04 kills, after-action reports identified all eight North Vietnam tanks as Soviet PT-76 amphibious tanks with 76mm guns. In Vietnam, the PT-76 became the first Soviet-made tank to attack US troops since the Korean War. But, the PT-76 tank had proven to be defenseless against the firepower of the AC-119K Stinger Gunship. The 18th Special Operations Squadron was activated on 25 January 1969 at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. The first combat mission in Vietnam for an AC-119K Stinger Gunship was 13 November 1969. The 18th SOS was deactivated in Southeast Asia on 31 December 1972. AC-119G “Shadow” and AC-119K “Stinger” Gunships efficiently and effectively filled the gap between the AC-47 “Spooky” Gunship, affectionately called “Puff the Magic Dragon” and the super fixed-wing Gunship AC-130 “Spectre” that today carries USAF history and traditions of fixed-wing Gunships established by Air Commando and Special Operations Squadrons in Southeast Asia.

*Primary sources for this account of Stinger 04 “Tank Busters” mission conducted on 21 February 1971 are a copy of the actual mission tape recordings and the recollections of Stinger 04 crewmembers, particularly CMSgt. William “Bill” O. Petrie, USAF Retired.*

**Editor’s Note:** As we move into 2011, ‘**The AC-119 Gunship Heritage Circle**’ will be, hopefully, the focus for being a continual source of your amazing stories. Inputs from all of you will be critical to the effort. Reading the Stinger 04 article from ‘Doc’ Fletcher was outstanding. I could smell the 20MM cans, and remember re-loading # 1, as if it was yesterday. That’s what I want to achieve – give you all that sensation – (good, great & terrifying).

These are your heroic achievements, let’s share them! I hope you enjoy this Newsletter; my intention is to keep it at 16 to 20 pages, and full of good reading and memories.

Tony Pakutinski,  
AC-119 Gunship Association Newsletter Editor

# “Retired Chief Master Sergeant Returns to Lackland AFB to See Plaque”



[Simon Gutierrez](#), KSAT 12 News Reporter  
POSTED: Monday, September 27, 2010

**SAN ANTONIO --** The U.S. Air Force bestowed a great honor on retired Chief Master Sgt. William O. Petrie: a plaque in front of the plane that carried him through nearly 200 missions during the Vietnam War. Until recently, he had no idea it existed. Petrie said friends recently e-mailed him, remarking that they'd seen a plaque with his name on it, detailing a mission during which Petrie and his fellow Gunship crewmen took out eight enemy tanks on the Ho Chi Minh trail, saving a South

Vietnamese convoy from certain annihilation.

Monday, Petrie returned to Lackland Air Force base for the first time in 30 years to see the plaque for himself. "It's pretty humbling to have my name over here, because I'm just one enlisted guy," said Petrie. "I hope it's representative for all the Gunship folks that I flew with, that my name stands there as testimony to the job that they did."

Petrie served four tours of duty during the Vietnam War, and served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron as an illuminator/scanner on the AC-119K Stinger Gunship in 1970-1971, lighting up target zones for the plane's gunners. The majority of his missions were along the Ho Chi Minh trail in the Republic of Laos, he said; his plane regularly dodging through hails of anti-aircraft fire. "I like to term it aerial dodgeball," said Petrie. "We actually jinked the plane up and around and flew in between the rounds that were coming up at us."



Petrie said he appreciates the plaque, but wishes the honor and recognition could have been shared with his fellow crewmen. "There are four other guys on this plane whose names should be on that plaque with me," said Petrie. "And I wish they were. That I don't forget. And I'll never forget. And I'll never forget where I came from and who I flew with." Petrie is a decorated Air Force veteran, who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and several medals and commendations.

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<http://www.ksat.com/video/25184845/index.html?taf=ant>



## Shadow Gunships at Saigon and Distant Places April 1970 to April 1971

By Colonel Tom A. Teal  
C Flight Commander

Shadow Gunships from C Flight never operated over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to my knowledge, but some cargo from the Trail ended up in Cambodia and South Vietnam. These war goods were transported by elephants, trucks, individual backs, and bicycles. It was reported that a bicycle could be pushed along the Trail with 500 pounds of ammunition, etc. loaded on it, through swamps, up and down hills, in rain and heat, battling mosquitoes, snakes, and hostile fire. I have not measured it but the trail is reported to be 1,000 miles long. We fired on some of these supply areas. With the Trail information as a background, it has been told that a North Vietnamese peasant had unloaded his bicycle, after arriving in Cambodia, of everything except three mortar shells. He is told by his boss to take the 3 shells to that mortar squad over there and give them to the sergeant. The sergeant thanked him, fired the three shells, fump...., fump...., fump....and said with a smile, go get three more. I know that this is probably an apocryphal story, but it illustrates the dedication and resourcefulness of an enemy that we who flew did not give much thought or reflection on that same enemy, and his substitution of masses of people for machines. Some of our aircraft were shot up from time to time, nothing serious as things turned out but it certainly could have been. Combat casualties are acceptable in war; however, we did not have to accept them. Luck was with us. One crew has a Night Observation Scope (NOS) operator, standing in the open doorway in the guns compartment, dropped an object on the floor and bent down to pick it up. As he bent over, an enemy round passed where he had been standing and exited the aircraft after passing between flight control cables and electrical lines. It only punched a hole in that very thin aluminum high on the starboard side of the aircraft.

We had another Shadow crew receive some .50 caliber rounds in the cockpit area on a Sunday morning mission. Once again luck was with the crew, especially the copilot, First Lieutenant Don Craig. A .50 caliber chrome plated round came through the thin aircraft skin, hit the armor protection plates which was supposed to keep the projectile out but kept it inside the cockpit and bounced back onto the leg of Don Craig in the copilot's seat, hitting him with the flat side of the projectile. He wound up with a large, very sore spot on his leg instead of a much more serious injury. I believe he received a Purple Heart for that shot and I am sure he kept the infamous round. I also believe I remember him saying that he was going to Chapel services that night.

Now we have had Shadows shot in the nose, in mid-body and then we had one shot in the tail booms. One again no one was hurt and the aircraft was not seriously damaged. I met the crew at their parking spot, looked at the damage, and then told the crew to all go get a haircut. There were a lot of surprised looks on their faces but they complied. I saw a promoted Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Smith five years later at the Carswell Officers Club and the first thing he wanted to know was why, after getting shot up for the first time, that I told the crew to go get haircuts. I told him with a smile that the crew really needed haircuts and that there were other valid reasons for him to ponder. We had other aircraft hit but once again no one was hurt and the aircraft was not badly damaged.

The enemy did not hurt us but a 14th SOW standardization pilot did. He wrote up a well-qualified pilot for taxiing too fast. When this major from wing came by my office to introduce himself before the flight, I was not impressed. When I heard about his write up of taxiing too fast, I called him in and told him factitiously that I was not aware of a speedometer on a Gunship by which to measure taxi speeds. He knew that I was protesting the write up. He answered that in his opinion the pilot was taxiing too fast and the write up would stand. I told him that I would protest to the DCO which I did. I called Colonel Brown, told him about the write up and

wondered about the background of the check pilot. Colonel Brown said that he did not know but to send him in writing ASAP the facts I had given him over the phone. I wondered about the ASAP but complied immediately and, in fact, embellished some of the things I did not like about the check pilot. I considered Colonel Brown a friend as well as my superior. I got an irate phone call from the 14th SOW Wing Commander, Colonel Frank Eaton asking me who I thought I was to write such official correspondence about his stand board pilot. I wondered how he got the written information and he told me. He said that Colonel Brown had just departed PCS for the States and that he, Colonel Eaton, checked Colonel Brown's desk to see what correspondence needed to be answered and discovered the unfortunate document. After about five more minutes of wondering who I thought I was, comments in that vein, the boss hung up. Funny thing, Colonel Eaton flew down to C Flight unannounced early the next night, found me in my office and said let us go out and walk the flight line. It was a beautiful night in Saigon during the dry season. As we got some distance from Shadow Ops, he told me without preamble that C Flight was the only wing unit flying that night out of sixteen units in the Wing. That comment was not meant to be an apology but it was as close as I would ever get. The longer we flew over Cambodia, the more complicated the missions became. Working troops in contact makes it easy to get clearance to fire from the ground commander, but our areas of operations were now getting free fire clearance for designated areas and stretches of lines of communication outside of those areas. What this meant was that 7th AF and the Cambodian representatives were designating areas that were completely in enemy hands and targets of opportunity, such as sampans, could be shot at will because of the pre-approved status. To make sure that the crews had accurate and up-to-date information for these free fire zones, I had classified folders assembled with appropriate maps marked, the latest messages included and other important information generally pertaining to the missions. I had installed a large map that covered the wall in my office. This map was used for each crew to brief me or Lt. Col. Bill Gregory, Flight operations officer, on the free fire zones and other parts of their mission. It worked. I do not remember any reports of firing mistakes outside the areas. Major Earl Farney, a navigator who was our Det. Admin. Officer took care of this time consuming chore as well as flying and overseeing all the paper work for the unit. Everything he did was outstanding and very much appreciated by me.

Things were never dull in C Flight. One day the maintenance officer brought in one of his men and said that the young man had told him that he could no longer work on Shadow Gunships because they were killing people. He said that he was a conscientious objector and that was his right. I told the maintenance supervisor to take him off direct work on the Gunships but to keep him fully employed for eight hours a day until I could contact the Base legal officer for guidance. The legal officer said that the procedure we had established to use him on cleaning the revetments, washing vehicles, etc. was correct but that the young man needed a new I.D. showing his new status as a non-combatant. We were curious as to how the change to peaceful orientation took place so suddenly since this was his second volunteer tour in Vietnam, in Saigon. We asked questions of acquaintances and discovered that he had come back to Saigon to be with a girl friend that he had admired so much on the first tour. Things went well at the start of the second tour with his girl friend until her ardor cooled and he was left alone with a lot of the second tour to endure by himself. He thought being a conscientious objector would get him a quick trip home. At that time we had a big school bus assigned us and washing, waxing and cleaning it plus the other vehicles plus the revetments gave him another change in heart. I had an open door policy for my office. I heard a firm knock on the door edge, looked up and saw this sharply dressed individual, you know who, requisitioning permission to enter and speak. Permission granted, he approached the desk, saluted and said, "Sir, I am no longer a conscientious objector."

I almost got in trouble with Wing again. I got maybe five calls over four months from my superior and rating officer. I cannot remember who it was at the time but each call was complaining that the effectiveness reports that I wrote were much higher than the rest of the Wing's reports and that the Air Force was setting standards for reducing inflated reports. I kept answering each phone call with the same reply, this is an outstanding unit doing an outstanding job and each individual deserves the high effectiveness rating I marked and signed on his report. Finally, on the last phone call he told me that if I persisted in the high ratings, it would reflect on my own effectiveness primarily in the judgment area. I said very respectfully that I could not rate outstanding people

other than outstanding and he hung up the phone. I sweated out my next evaluation report. It turned out all right. This was 1971. I came up for promotion to colonel in October 1972 and was not promoted. Strange thing, I had a friend call me and tell me he had seen my name on the promotion list. A second promotion list was coming out in two months to be announced in December 1972, and again another person told me I was on the list. I told him he was crazy but he was not. I was number 23 on that promotion list and very happy to have made the eagle zone.

Earlier I had remarked about the VNAF 119 Wing collocated at Saigon which had shared its supplies with us while waiting for the Air Force to ship what we needed. We paid them back when our supply request was filled. For a brief period, spare engines were needed at an increasing rate when the rebuilt engines from the States started having a much shorter effective life before failing, thus causing the supply of them to dry up. In fact, we would have to test fly over the base every engine that was changed until the quality of the rebuilt engines improved and the flight became unnecessary. Even that short flight did not always provide a long running engine. I was getting a check ride one hot afternoon, when on takeoff the right engine started winding down just as the wheels went into the well. We feathered the correct prop and shut down that engine and watched that fat aircraft climb out slowly from approximately 200 feet. By final approach we were at normal altitude and airspeed and made an uneventful landing after declaring an airborne emergency. It seemed to me to have been a very quick trip around the traffic pattern and landing, punctuated by the before landing and after landing checklists.

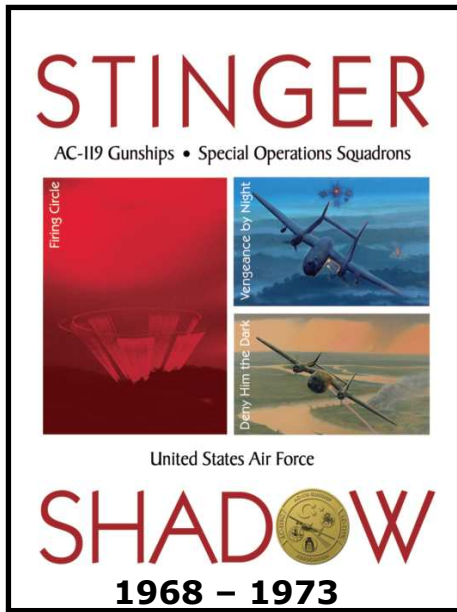
I do not remember how the need of a Shadow Hooch came up but I do know that I made an appointment with the Base Commander and asked for this place where off duty crewmembers could relax without going to the club with its dress code, etc. The Base Commander was reluctant to assign us such a place. I reminded him that Shadow was the only combat group on base that was firing real ammo at the enemy and flying around the clock, 7 days a week and holidays. He said that he knew that but did not want to set a precedent, etc. I must have been persistent in calls and visits to him because he relented and Shadow got its party Hooch which brings me to the last event to be covered before returning to the States for five months.

That event was the second Dining In at the Officers Club. I inquired at 7th AF if General Clay, the Commander, would like to attend, pin on medals, etc. He sent word that he would like to attend and would accept a Shadow One award, pin on medals, etc. Of course, the 14th SOW Commander, DCO, and DCM also would attend and participate. We invited the TSN Base Commander, in appreciation for the Shadow Party Hooch, so he could be thanked publicly by our unit. I was not prepared for his reply when I introduced him at the head table, thanked him for the Hooch when he said in front of God and everyone that he would have liked to have fired me, long pause, but only to hire me to work for him. Got out of that alright and proceeded with the business of the night, pinning on medal, etc. As our main speaker we had an interesting talk by a very high ranking civilian on other clandestine operations that were going on in Southeast Asia. Then Bill Gregory caught me completely unaware when he read the citation from the Shadow Men of Fighting C Flight, presenting the Shadow 1 Award to me. Without thinking I protested that the Award was meant for persons outside our unit. General Clay said take the award and I always obey four stars. I am so glad I did.

That award has been hanging next to my desk for thirty years and is a constant reminder of an outstanding unit whose performance set all kinds of records. I was very lucky to have been a part of it. For me as Commander, the most important record we set, flying in combat in all conditions of weather and enemy fire is that we relentlessly performed in combat operations but did not have any one killed or seriously wounded and lost no aircraft in accidents or in combat. As I told you in Commanders Calls, I wanted to return each and every one of you to your loved ones in the same healthy condition that you joined our unit. Despite the rigors and dangers of combat, weather and chance, you made it happen and established combat and safety records at the same time. What a performance by an outstanding group of people. *You indeed made Shadow proud.*

**Next Newsletter will feature: 'STINGER GUNSHIPS AT DA NANG AND DISTANT PLACES'**





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