

The Firing Circle

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

2011 Officers: President: Gus Slinger – stinger7172@cox.net - Vice-President: Mike Krauss - mkrauss@nc.rr.com - Treasurer: Doug Wohlgamuth - busch791@tampabay.rr.com - Secretary and Circulation Manager: Mike Drzyzga – drzyzga513@hotmail.com - Member-at-Large: Larry Fletcher - fletch12@charter.net

Appointees:

Awards & Decorations:
Next-of-Kin Locator:
Reunion XII POC:
Webmaster:
Newsletter Editor:
Chaplain

Steve Mac Isaac
 Wayne Laessig
 Gus Slinger
 Bill Petrie
TBD
 Larry Hunter

colmacmac@mac.com
gadvocate@sbcglobal.net
stinger7172@cox.net
retcmsgt@att.net
hunter40@cox.net

Points of Contact:

71st SOS POC:
 17th SOS POC:
 18th SOS POC:
 18th SOS POC:
 AC-47 POC:

Jim Alvis
 John Morrow
 Everett Sproul
TBD
 Al Sproul

shadow1969@indy.rr.com
morrowjl@tularosa.net
c119gunner@yahoo.com
fjrdriver@earthlink.net

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L to R; FE- TSgt Bill Posey; Lt Col John Fear Nav; AC –Capt John Hope; CP-1st Lt Rick Stidson; Smitty, IO; Nav- 1st Lt Jim Cooper; Jerry Sipple, AG; Sitting AG (Unknown)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Politically Incorrect: The time has come for you old farts to get off your duff and send in your registration form for the Charleston Reunion. There is no place else that you can enjoy so many new, revised, and old war stories.

Politically Correct: The time is fast approaching for you warriors and unsung heroes of Southeast Asia to make your Reunion XII reservations. There's no place else like an AC-119 Gunship Reunion where you can enjoy the camaraderie of your fellow-brothers-in-war.

“Reunion XII” - September 28-OCTOBER 2, 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

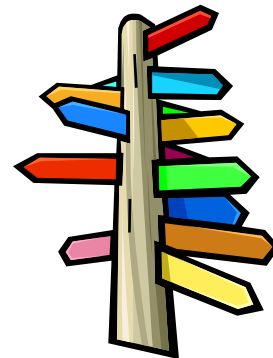
Once again, we will be raffling off another “Commemorative Gun” at the Charleston Reunion. It's a .45 cal. Pistol with special markings and case with accessory. See the Ticket Form in this newsletter. Tickets are One (1) for \$10, Six (6 for \$50 and Thirteen (13) for \$100. You don't have to present 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, please get your tickets for if we don't get enough tickets sold I will have to keep the gun. Ha Ha, Thanks! Also, the cost of our litho's has again been reduced; **this time to \$35.00.** *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. When you stay in the Reunion hotel and not off-site it helps. 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.* Let's continue to work together to make our Reunions better and better each year. Your participation is welcome.

- ❖ **Bring your AC-119 Gunship Association Name Tag Lanyard – to Reunion XII**
- ❖ **Our 2012 Reunion will be held at Home Base in Fort Walton Beach, Florida**
- ❖ **Sept 26th –Sept 30th at the Four Points Sheraton. Room rates are the same as this reunion \$119.00, except for Courtyard, Beachfront & Suites.**

Hope to see you all in Charleston, Here's who you'll see there!

Ray & Susan Barradale, Jack & Carolyn Bastin, William Benzi, Bruce & Jo Anna Byrd, Ernest Cole, Robert Connolly, Cathy Henry, Donald & Marilyn Cooling, Phillip & Mary Lois Diehl, Larry & Sue Fletcher, Samuel & Debby Gallo, Karen Graves & Earl Hollon, Jerry & Lisa Greene, William Hanson, Johnny & Anita Higgins, Ron & Carol Hinton, Larry & Soncy Hunter, Michael Krauss, Robert & Maria Krueger, Wayne Laessig, Ralph & Joyce Lefarth, 'Mac' & Nancy Mac Isaac, Collier & Mary McCall, Mike & Theresa Mullen, Art Perry, Bill & Cindy Posey, Doug Wohlgamuth, Ev Sprouse, Howard Reid, Kenneth & Veronica Stearn, Rogers & Cathi Stevens, Gary & Kathy Totten, Gus & Lonnie Sininger, Robbie Sininger-Dangler, Virgil & Donna Zins, Kenneth Shedd, Ronnie & Venita Soderquist, James & Catherine Moore, William & Frances Jowers.

EMAIL PAKMAN03@GMAIL.COM WITH YOUR DRIVING PLANS TO CHARLESTON – IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A RIDER TO HELP PAY THE COST OF THE TRIP! ALL INFO WILL BE UPDATED BY NEWSLETTER OR EMAIL.



Gus Sininger, President
AC-119 Gunship Association

This is *Not* your Hotel Registration (This is your Reunion Registration Only!)

Name: (First, Middle Initial, Last) _____

Are you an AC-119 Gunship Association member? ___Yes ___No

Years Served with Gunships: 19___ to 19___; 19___ to 19___

Squadron: ___71st; ___17th; ___18th; ___3rd or 4th ACS; ___other (____); Crew Position/Role: _____

Address: (include Zip 4) _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Spouse/Guest Name: (First, Middle Initial, Last) _____

Additional Guests: (#) _____ Name(s) _____

Are you staying at the Reunion Hotel: Yes___No___Staying somewhere else___ Where_____

REUNION FEE.....# attending ___ X \$25 = \$ ___

YES! I / We will attend:

• Thursday Charleston Tour# attending ___ X \$37 = \$ ___

• Friday Night Meet & Greet# attending ___ X \$29 = \$ ___

• Saturday Night Banquet

▶ Salmon with Citrus Beurre Blanc.....# of meals ___ X \$36 = \$ ___

▶ Apple-Cider Spiked Chicken.....# of meals ___ X \$35 = \$ ___

▶ Sliced Flank Steak with Roasted Peppers, Onions & Mushrooms.....# of meals ___ X \$36 = \$ ___

▶ Chef’s Choice Vegetarian Entrée.....# of meals ___ X \$35 = \$ ___

• Sunday Morning Golf Tournament (Green Fees separate).....# playing ___ X \$10 = \$ ___

• Sunday Afternoon BBQ (See web or Newsletter for menu).....# attending ___ X \$30 = \$ ___

Check # _____ Total Payment \$ _____

NOTE: For special meal needs, contact Gus Sininger at 850-865-2634 or stinger7172@cox.net

After filling-in this page mail it (if you use the web version, print it first since it will not save your info) with your payment - make check payable to AC-119 Gunship Association – and send to:

Doug Wohlgamuth (AC-119) - 504 Shea Place - Sun City Center, FL 33573-5726

Contact the Embassy Suites, direct, for your Hotel registration: call 1-843-747-1882, (mention the AC-119 Association). Or on the Web: http://embassysuites.hilton.com/en/es/groups/personalized/C/CHSEMES-AC1-20110928/index.jhtml?WT.mc_id=POG. If you have Questions: Check our Web Site at <http://www.ac-119gunships.com>; call Doug at 813-938-1886 or 813-781-5728 e-mail Busch791@tampabay.rr.com; or Gus at 850-865-2634 e-mail stinger7172@cox.net.

Cancellation Policies:

- Reunion Registration cancellations on or before September 1st = refund or donation as requested
- Reunion Registration cancellations after September 1st = we have to pay hotel “guarantees”, so no refunds (but talk to us if there are special circumstances like family emergencies or losses)
- Hotel Registration: if you cancel after their minimum 24 hour notification, you may still be charged

Reunion XII - September 28th – October 2nd 2011 - Agenda

Wednesday, September 28th

1800 – Hootch opens & stays open, until 1800 Sunday night, Meeting Rooms 6 & 7, in the Convention Center. Soda, Beer, & Snacks Free to Reunion Attendees. *Hootch closed during Scheduled Events.*

Thursday, September 29th

0845 - 1340: Historic Charleston Tour with free time, Lunch & Shopping. In The Old City Market.

1340 – Transportation on Concord Street behind the US Customs House for RTB – **\$37**

Friday, September 30th

1900 - 2200 – Meet & Greet at the Convention Center Meeting Rooms 10 & 11.

Buffet Style -- Dress casual or Party suites. * **\$29**

Saturday, October 1st

0830 - 1000 – Membership Meeting at the Convention Center Meeting Rooms 10 & 11.

0930 - Photographs to be taken by Jill Norman. **No Obligation, immediate on site printing.**

0900 - 1000 – Women’s Meeting at the Convention Center Meeting Room 9.

0930 - Photographs to be taken by Jill Norman. **No Obligation, immediate on site printing.**

1800 – Happy Hour at the Convention Center Ball Room “A”, Coat & tie or party suit.

1900 – Banquet Dinner Ball Room “A” **

2100 – Association Awards & Raffles

Sunday, October 2nd

0900 - Golf Tournament on Charleston AFB Golf Course – Green Fees **\$20**

Tournament Coordinators: Doug Wohlgamuth & Col Mac. Cart **\$12**

1700 - 2100 - Farewell BBQ at the Convention Center Ball Room “A”,

Buffet Style – Dress - Casual * **\$30**

* Pay as You go Bar

* See Registration Form



“AC-119 Gunship Heritage Circle”



Stinger Gunships at Da Nang and Distant Places



December 1971 to April 1973
By Colonel Tom A. Teal
Detachment I Commander
USAF (Ret) – Final Chapter



I am a little ashamed to admit a bone head decision I made in association with the ARVN 3rd Division and our closeness of operations together. The spirit of cooperation had just evolved and took on a life of its own. It was not unusual for the Vietnamese officers who flew with Stinger to drop by my office and talk about a particular mission they had flown with us. Most of the time I had already heard of what happened on the mission but it was nice to hear their side. In fact, one day I looked up at a knock on my door and saw several ARVN soldiers standing there with big smiles on their faces. I was astounded to see that this group was carrying a real 122mm missile to present to the Stingers who had helped them take back some territory what had been the wrong hands for years. This missile was part of the cache they had found and wanted to share it with us. It took four chairs put fairly close together to hold the monster. I had seen debris from earlier 122mm explosions and knew that the missile casing was about one inch thick and some of it broke up into 12 to 18 inch corkscrews which caused grievous injuries or destruction of property. It was a hell of a weapon. Anyhow, the missile was displayed on those chairs in my office for several days and people in our area came to look and marvel at the trophy. After about a week a USAF weapons officer came to look at it and asked, “Has it been disarmed?” I told him I assumed that it had but we ought to make sure. His men came and gently carried it away to find out, armed or disarmed. To this day, I do not know for certain if that missile was armed or not. I choose to think it was unarmed.

Everything was going Stinger’s way until it happened. On a dark night in early June as a young Stinger Captain pilot was walking to Stinger Ops to fly a sortie over the Belt, a rocket landed almost at his feet and exploded. Captain Thomas R. Hamman suffered from life threatening injuries and never regained consciousness for almost a week, but then could fight no more. One of the imponderables of life is the timing things happen to us and our crew mates. You see, Captain Hamman was getting to operations earlier than necessary to fly his mission that night as was his habit. He did not want to let Stinger or his crew down by not being completely prepared for the mission. The Memorial Worship service for Tom Hamman was conducted by Chaplin (Col.) Ersmund Swaffer on 20 June 1972 in the base chapel. Printed on that program were these words, “Captain Hamman gave a full measure of life, with his Stinger team members, during his nearly four months of special activity.” He was 27 years old.

The rocket suppression mission, of course, continued after this loss of Captain Hamman in June. In the Da Nang base newspaper, THE GAZETTE, Stinger had a two page spread with big headlines saying STINGER SAVES DA NANG FROM ATTACK. This was the August 19, 1972 issue which had Miss America and her group featured on the front page. Stinger, as always, was in presentable company. Here are two quotes from that paper that say it all. The first quote below started the story, and the second quote ended the story.

“Personnel at Da Nang Airfield and the population of the city of Da Nang are sleeping more comfortably lately because of the efforts of the dedicated men of the 18th Special Operations Squadron, Det. 1 of the 56th Special Operations Wing and their ugly but well loved ‘Stinger’ aircraft.” “The Stingers pride themselves in being the best, and to the men of Da Nang they are the best in the whole world because they save our butts from rockets. Da Nang may not have the best living, working, or recreational facilities, but to the men here, it is home and the Stingers are making it a safer place to live and work in. Enough praise and thankfulness cannot possibly be heaped on these men who are trying and succeeding in making Rocket City Rocketless.”

We kept on flying our coordinated missions in the Rocket Belt successfully and in the fall I came due for another annual flight check ride in Vietnam. A fine young Stinger pilot, Chief of Standboard Bob Dydo, who replaced Bill Lodge, was giving me the check ride which had to be cut short due to a blown engine. The engine had to be shut down, thus keeping intact my record of having emergencies on check rides in Thailand and Vietnam. Come to think of it, on a non-check ride, I had a backfiring right engine on a daylight mission over Laos but kept it running for an hour until in sight of NKP. Then we shut it down, declared an emergency and landed. On rollout, Tower asked if we want the fire trucks to stay with us to the parking area. I replied yes and parked the aircraft. The fire trucks stayed with us and a good thing because when the left engine was shut down, it caught on fire and the fire trucks promptly put it out. Someone from maintenance gave me a beat up piston head from the back firing engine. It is now on display in my library.

In early December, I don't remember when, we started to train the VNAF in our gun ships and to prepare them to take our place. We started getting more aircraft assigned on base and the VNAF crews were not far behind. Also early in December the Base Commander of Da Nang put out word that he would like each organization to send a Christmas message to the rest of the base. Each organization would check out a piece of 4x8 plywood and paint their Christmas card and then hang that card on a long straight fence along the main road. This was an ingenious idea. Every group, no matter how large or small, planned carefully and executed according to the talent level in that unit. I am not sure but some of the better artists may have had a richer Christmas by painting for other organizations also. I do know that the long fence of Christmas cards was spectacular and seem to change the more times we passed as we saw more and more details unnoticed previously. Do not believe any prize was given for best card. Of course Stinger would have won because our card combined the Christmas spirit and language with the realities of Da Nang. It was the menacing red Stinger logo with cannon high on a white background and with these prominent words proudly stating WE GIVE YOU SILENT NIGHTS. Mostly true. We did have a small group of rockets impact one night just outside the Base Exchange just before Christmas. It set the liqueur stock afire which I believed burned for three days and nights.

Another thing I remember about Christmas at Da Nang was that Chaplain Swaffer invited me to accompany him on his rounds to the barracks around Christmas, which I did. We were welcomed everywhere by the troops as we wished them Merry Christmas, and then do you know what this outstanding Chaplain did on Christmas Eve and Night? Chaplain Swaffer visited 175 lonely sentry posts around the perimeter of the base. I was glad he did not invite me to accompany him on those visits. I don't believe that this old Stinger could have kept up with Paul Revere Swaffer. Truly a dedicated and great man and Chaplain.

In December I was promoted to Colonel effective 1 April when I would change insignia. Due to the promotion and other things, I was designated Task Force Commander on orders listing me 6498th Air Base Wing Commander effective 30 days before the mandatory exit Vietnam date of 29 March 1973. My mission was to shut down the rest of the USAF interest there such as personnel and equipment and to turn the base over to the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). To do this task, I picked a group of thirty people of various specialties such as medics, supply, etc to do this job in an orderly fashion and on time. Except for the gunship training facilities

and various isolated exceptions, the Task Force would move into the main walled compound of Da Nang. This area contained an Officers Club, an NCO Club, a mess hall, barracks and Task Force Headquarters with the Stars and Stripes and the South Vietnamese flag flying side by side. On 29 March 1973, I would terminate USAF interest in Da Nang and turn over our interests to Lt. Col. Tran Thu, the VNAF Air Base Wing Commander.

Also in early December the Paris Peace Talks to end the Vietnamese War almost ground to a halt. The talks had been going on for years and looked like a settlement could be reached but once again the North Vietnamese stalled the talks. To us at Da Nang the peace talks were like background music stuck in the same groove, playing the same sad notes of non-compromise from the North. The North thought that they had all the time in the world until the around the clock Christmas bombing campaign by B-52s taught them the power of the BUFF, (Big Ugly Fighter). The Paris Peace Talks resumed and the Paris Peace Accords were signed on 27 January 1973 thus ending the United States direct involvement in the War, and temporarily ending the fighting between North and South Vietnam. This flawed in place cease fire left many pockets of North Vietnamese troops all over South Vietnam. The North troop pockets could be supplied by the North but could not be increased in personnel or weapons, etc. This flawed cease fire was very evident on a flight from Da Nang to Saigon as we passed over pockets of the North flying their flags surrounded by the South flying their many yellow flags.

I got into trouble again when later a couple of 3rd troops presented the Stingers a muddied Viet Cong flag that had been found in one of our joint operations with Stingers flying shotgun over the troops as they cleared another area. This was a time period before the cease fire took effect; the time when some of the most intense fighting took place to take back as much of the North occupied areas of South Vietnam as possible. Of course, we displayed the flag proudly on the office wall and forgot about it until later when that flag was not good news at all. Just before the war ended, a Vietnamese officer came by the office and got irate when he saw the Viet Cong flag on our wall. In a few days, if not taken down, it would mean that Stinger was an enemy of South Vietnam. Needless to say that flag came down while that officer was in the office. This officer's attitude was typical of South Vietnam's reaction to the approaching cease fire which seemed like a betrayal to them by the United States and they were right.

After the cease fire, an eerie quiet settled over Da Nang as we trained the VNAF full time in the Stinger and gunship operations which were limited mostly to the Rocket Belt. During the several months of this training, the fighter and other aircraft were flown off to other destinations except for all of the AC-119Ks in the Air Force inventory and two C-47s for courier duty and emergencies such as air evacuations, etc. Da Nang was one quiet, almost deserted base except for the fully manned gunship flying training and maintenance personnel associated with it. There was also an important group of people that had been scheduled to leave Vietnam a month before the treaty deadline but were held hostage by the North Vietnamese ploy of equal release of one Vietnamese returned allowed on Yank to go home. Among the 200 odd unscheduled detainees at Da Nang were the 366th Gunfighter Wing Commander, Colonel Bill Hoover and staff plus others who had been scheduled to depart a month before the treaty deadline of 29 March 1973.

In spite of the events taking place on the base as discussed above, things went very well with the gunship training, and the Vietnamization Program was also making rapid progress on the rest of the Base. The tower controllers, navigation aids, and weather station responsibilities were now run by the Vietnamese. Also run by the VNAF were the instrument approach systems such as Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) and the Instrument Landing System (ILS). Maintenance of these systems and duties were also the responsibilities of the VNAF. All in all a very satisfying time for the vital gunship training program that was well on the way to

completing its check out and transfer of aircraft program and the base Viet-Namization Program was on schedule.

The Stinger training program was almost completed when the Vietnamese Air Force called six representatives of the Stinger Vietnamese Training Program, lead by Lt. Col. Philip Deering, division chief, down to Saigon to present VNAF awards and decorations in recognition for the excellent instruction received. The six Stingers also were treated to an awards Parade in their honor. Now this was heady but well earned recognition for the training division's excellence of training and personnel.

And then it happened without warning. It was almost like a flight simulator training mission that no matter how good the crew was, it was going to have to bail out at night over water. Here is how it happened. Training mission after training mission had been flown in beautiful clear night weather in the Rocket Belt, just 10 miles from the runway. Then with a forecast of clear skies, good visibilities and light winds, an ill fated mission took off for the Belt. On board were the VNAF lieutenant colonel squadron commander with 10,000 hours of C-119 flying time and the lieutenant colonel USAF instructor pilot with 10,000 hours of C-119 flying time. This was truly a blue ribbon crew of both Vietnamese and USAF personnel. Upon completion of the mission, never more than 10 miles from the runway, the pilots headed north for a south ILS approach to the base. As the aircraft passed abeam the north end of the runway, they noticed some haze coming in beneath them but visibility was good and they continued out to make a scheduled ILS approach. The visibility was getting worse so the pilot requested a radar monitored ILS approach to the field. They were informed that the radar was down for periodic maintenance, according to forecast weather but would bring it back on line as soon as possible. The AC-119 started its ILS approach but as the aircraft got lower, the visibility got far worse. Somewhere on the ILS approach the crew was notified that the radar equipment was working, that radar had a positive contact, and told the crew that the aircraft was approaching minimums for landing and to either land or go around. The sea fog was so thick that a safe landing was not possible. Radar was advised that the Stinger was going around, would execute an approach from the south heading north and asked radar to monitor their turns and give a GCA approach. Radar was with them all the way but the fog had gotten even worse and landing was impossible. Nothing to do with low fuel, but take the aircraft out over the South China Sea, and bail out. After coordinating with Air Sea Rescue on a bailout route close to shore and abeam an agreed location, the crews bailed out into the fog. It was a successful bailout and pickup in the water except for one VNAF crewman who did not get out of his parachute and was drowned when the rescue boat's propeller got entangled in the crewman's parachute lines. Higher Headquarters cancelled the rest of the VNAF training program and started to conduct an aircraft accident investigation but stopped when they found out that the aircraft had already been transferred to the VNAF. A collateral investigation had already been completed without blame to the unit, but that was not the end that any of us would have written for an outstanding and professional group of people called the Stingers.

On a happier note we Stingers left some permanent good in Vietnam by donating the rest of a fund from donations run by First Sergeant Guidry to Hoa Khanh Children's Hospital in northeast Da Nang. This hospital stands as a memorial to U.S. servicemen and servicewomen in the area who had a genuine compassion for children affected by the war. The hospital was started by Marines supervision and Vietnamese labor in 1967, financed by \$300,000.00 in voluntary contributions from servicemen and U.S. patrons and completed in January 1969. This 120 bed hospital had specialized equipment worth an estimated \$450,000.00 at that time and included two modern air-conditioned operating rooms, three emergency rooms, X-ray machines, etc. Over 1600 children were admitted for treatment the first year while over 10,000 were treated as out-patients at sick call. Between 15% and 20% of patients treated during Tet 1968 were adults and included Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops who were treated and then detained by U.S. authorities.

During my last visit there, Dr. Robert G. Long was the Director on behalf of the World Relief Commission which financed it from voluntary contributions from the U.S. What a wonderful way to leave a little of ourselves, helping children after we have departed Vietnam.

The Da Nang base newspaper, The Gazette, had earlier printed perhaps a fitting epitaph to the Stingers. On the front page of one of the last editions of that paper, a touching poem was written by someone on base. The first two lines seem to say it all:

I wake up each morning twice blessed,

To Stinger my heart, to Charlie the rest.

On 27 March 1973, the rest of the group of detainees headed by Colonel William W. Hoover, now 6498 Air Base Wing Commander due to the long delay, departed Da Nang for their next assignment. There were a lot of Stingers in that group also. On 29 March, I and the Task Force members also departed for our next assignments. For me, my life as a Stinger and a Task Force Commander ended on a bizarre note. The United Nations team of four representatives, two from communist countries and two from non-communist countries watching each other, semi-escorted us to our departing C-130 aircraft, counted us aboard, and insured no one got off. With no USAF Stingers or crews left in Vietnam, it was a relief for the ramp to close and block out a world at Da Nang, that for us, would be no more.

Tom A. Teal
Colonel, USAF (Ret)

25 July 2008

The End



James Alvis, Crew Chief

71st, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969

“Did You Know?”

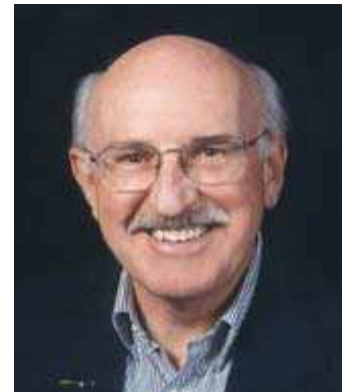


I was born, raised and educated in Indianapolis, Indiana. While working and attending Purdue University in the mid 60s, I was faced with the dilemma of staying in college or being drafted. To avoid being drafted, I enlisted in the Air Force Reserve unit at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana on 2 December 1964. This seemed to be the logical thing to do in order to reduce or eliminate my chances of possibly going to Vietnam, so I thought. Following basic training in January and February 1965, I completed Reciprocating Engine Aircraft Maintenance School at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX. Upon reporting to my reserve unit in June 1965 I was assigned to the flight line to assist other Crew Chiefs with the inspection, maintenance, and pre-flighting of C-119G aircraft. After completing a series of correspondence courses I was promoted

to Sergeant and assigned to a Crew Chief position in 1967.

The biggest military shock of my life occurred on 11 April 1968. While at work someone mentioned they heard on the local radio station that an Air Force Reserve unit from Columbus, Indiana had been called to active duty. Panic and disbelief set in. After gathering more information from subsequent newscasts, I realized it was true. As it turned out, a total of 24,500 reservists and guardsmen across the country were activated that day, not just the unit I was assigned to. I'm sure most other reservists were asking the same question, "Why me?" At the time, I had no idea why the 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron was selected from about 14 other C-119 reserve squadrons across the country. I would later learn the 71st and its sister squadron the 72nd were two of the best prepared and trained C-119 squadrons in the country. Following the recall notice we had 30 days to get our personal affairs in order prior to our report date of 13 May 1968 at Bakalar AFB. Shortly after reporting for active duty on 13 May we learned of the squadron's new mission. The 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron would be transferring to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to transition from the normal cargo aircraft configuration to a new gunship platform. Nearly 400 officers and enlisted personnel, 18 C-119G aircraft and maintenance equipment completed the move by 11 June 1968. On 15 June the squadron was re-designated 71st Air Commando Squadron, and re-designated a second time to 71st Special Operations Squadron on 8 July 1968. During the summer and fall of 1968, the 71st SOS received AC-119G gunships from the Fairchild-Hiller facility in St. Augustine, FL. Air crew and maintenance training increased at a rapid pace as everyone had to become familiar with the new gunship platform. On 27 November 1968, Deputy Defense Secretary Nitze approved the deployment of the 71st SOS to Southeast Asia.

Flight crews were selected to ferry the 18 AC-119G aircraft to Vietnam. The ferry crews were composed of a Pilot, Co-pilot, Navigator, Flight Engineer, and Crew Chief. Being a Crew Chief, I was assigned to ferry crew #17 with Pilots Major Don Horak and Major Bill O'Brien, Navigator Capt. John Martin, and Flight Engineer SSgt. Henry Young to ferry aircraft #52-5925 to Vietnam. We departed Lockbourne AFB on 6 January 1969 to pick up our ferry aircraft at the Fairchild-Hiller facility. Following a thorough acceptance flight of aircraft #925, we began the ferry mission on 7 January 1969.



Our ferry route was along the southern United States to California, Alaska, Midway Island, Wake Island, Guam, Philippines, and finally arriving at Nha Trang, Vietnam on 22 January 1969. Total flying time was about 72 hours. After arriving at Nha Trang, I was assigned to the flight line night shift. After three or four days of shift work, I decided if the war did not kill me, the night shift work would.

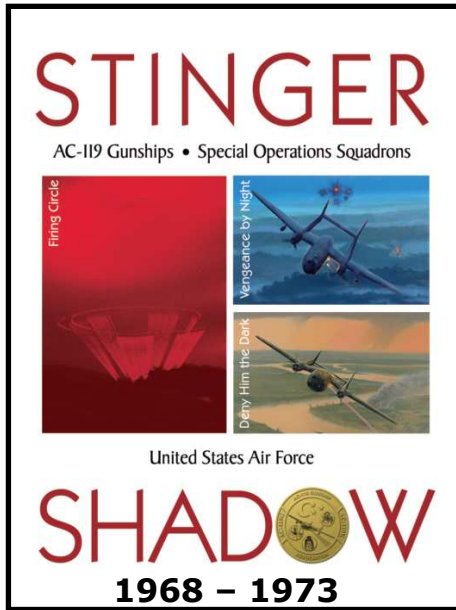


Phan Rang Maintenance - Front Row, L to R: A1c Phillips Wheatley, Sgt. Larry G. Meadors, A1c James R. Day, SMSgt Richard L. Ash, LtCol. William E. Long, Maj. William O'Brien, Maj. Robert Allen, SSgt. Charles J. Dobbs, A1c Sidney E. Fields, TSgt. Mario Alfaro. Second Row, L to R: SSgt. Earl W. Wall, Sgt. James R. Alvis, Sgt. Albert R. Gapuzan, Sgt. Leroy E. Frahm, A1c Larry D. Brooks, A1c Mark E. Brunton, A1c Patrick Conley, SSgt. Harry W. Bungard, A1c James D. Marshall, SSgt. Morris D. Campbell. Third Row, L to R: Sgt. Larry D. Middleton, Sgt. Ronald J. Kugel, MSgt. Glenn O. Smith, A1c Ernest N. Wyatt, A1c Marvin D. Rush, A1c Arnold M. Blair, Sgt David A. Antle, SSgt. James F. Stuckwisch, A1c Richard D. Hehman, SSgt. Steven M. Glidden.

That finally changed on 13 February 1969 when 15 of us maintainers were assigned to the FOL (Forward Operating Location) at Phan Rang where I had the opportunity to work the day shift. I spent the remainder of my time in Vietnam with B Flight at Happy Valley (Phan Rang). My biggest scare at Phan Rang came at 0130 hours on 22 February; the base came under a mortar attack. The air-raid siren was just outside our barracks, about 50 feet from my window. I was sound asleep when it went off and I literally rolled from the top bunk to the floor. It scared the hell out of me. There were many more mortar attacks but we became used to them (complacent) after a while. To this day, every time I hear the severe weather sirens go off, I still recall those moments at Phan Rang.

Following the reservists return home to Indiana on 6 June 1969, I returned to Purdue University and completed my Bachelors degree in Mechanical Engineering Technology and worked in the natural gas industry for over 40 years. During the 1970s and 80s, my main interest was auto racing photography. I photographed seventeen Indianapolis 500 mile races and numerous road racing events. My most recent interests include learning about and presenting the history of the 434th and 71st from WW II to the present. I volunteer at the Atterbury/Bakalar Air Museum on the grounds of the former Bakalar AFB, now the Columbus Municipal Airport. The museum contains many historical artifacts pertaining to the 434th Troop Carrier Group (WW II) and the 71st SOS. I am also a member of the Columbus/Bakalar Chapter #288 of the Air Force Association. Not until the mid-to-late 1990s did I take an interest in the 71st SOS from a historical standpoint.

I started attending 71st SOS reunions and meeting many of my reservist and regular Air Force friends. I have learned through maturity the importance of the common bond we share and have made many new lifelong friendships from casual acquaintances of many years ago. I value these friendships very highly. That is the whole purpose of attending reunions.



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Chuck James - 17th SOS  'A/C'

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