

Association President's Message:

Oct. 2017

Greetings associate gunshipper's. It is mid-Oct. and my head is still spinning from an excellent Association reunion in Dayton, OH. It is heartwarming to hear so many compliments on how well organized it was. Those compliments go to Ron Julian and his team: Jim Alvis, Al Heuss, Vern Hansen, and the late Rogers Stevens. Many other volunteers stepped up to help move our Association's flags from the Holiday Inn (HI) to the Museum and back, and to restock the refreshments in the hootch, as needed. We prayed with Chaplin Larry Hunter at every official event. We welcomed 14 "first-timers" and guests! And, I must send a shout-out to Jim Alvis and Jim Mattison for relieving me of what had become over the past 14 years, the "reunion photographer" duties.

A short reunion summary: The hootch opened on Thur., and became busy, very quickly. Thur. night's HI reception was well-done. The Fri. tour to the restoration hangar on WPAFB was "amazing" – and that comment came from those who are very familiar with aircraft repair/restoration, and from many spouses who were unfamiliar with this, and yet awed by the event. We had five experienced museum volunteers as guides that answered everyone's questions. For me though, Fri. afternoon's memorial service and Memorial Bench commemoration at the Museum was the emotional high for the week. After the 30-min. service in the auditorium, (Thank you Larry Fletcher and Bob LaRosa for reading the names of those who gave all), everyone made it "down the street" to the Bench for superior photo-ops. The "Meet & Greet" on Fri night at the HI kicked the reunion into after-burner. Saturday morning's (no Bloody Mary's) Membership Meeting was successful. THREE KEY points from the meeting:

- 1) the membership voted to accept two proposals for future reunions after Tuscon: in Salt Lake City, UT (2019) and Omaha, NE (2020),
- 2) when it came time to nominate candidates and vote for new Association Board members, all I heard was the buzzing of the overhead fluorescent lights – therefore, the entire existing Board volunteered to stay and serve one-more year,
- 3) We had a guest speaker from the Dayton VA talk about the changes occurring now and yet to come, to improve the VA's service. Dr. J. Thomas Hardy started his talk with his Army service story of being on the Cambodian Border with ARVN troops, under heavy attack, and having Spooky save his bacon. He instantly bonded with his audience (us!).

Saturday rushed past towards the Awards Banquet under the wings in the museum. Awesome setting! There were 260 folks seated for dinner! We were so fortunate to have Jim Russel, a FLIR on Al Milacek's MacKay Trophy awarded flight, tell Al's story of bringing Stinger 883 back to base safely with 14 ft. of right wing shot off. (I'm sitting here in NJ typing this with goose bumps on my arms, remembering all the teared-eyes engrossed in the story). Additionally, we honored museum curator Jeff Duford with a Life Membership for his efforts to bring the gunship story into the spot-light of history. We also honored Al Heuss with the "Above and Beyond Award" for working with Jeff for the past 14 years to make the gunship story kiosk a reality. Also, Al made wooden, flag-displaying, table center-pieces, which were taken by attendees at the closing, and who paid a donation into a hurricane relief fund (great idea Al.) During diner time, we had the very-energetic WPAFB band "rock the museum". Finally, thanks to efforts by Jim and Judy Alvis, we also had a successful "silent auction."

Sunday saw the golfers enjoy a nice day on the green, and a bus load of attendees heading to a social tour: the Federal Park's Wright (Brother's) Memorial Hill, and Carillion Historical Park for a German-style lunch at a brew pub. The reunion wound down gracefully with our traditional farewell BBQ at the HI.

I'll be putting together an 8-page *Firing Circle* newsletter in Nov., with lots of pictures from this reunion.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Drzyzga, President 2016-2018.

Administrative Reminders

1. PLEASE remember to contact your group POC, the Membership Chairman, or the Association Secretary when you **change contact information**, especially your email address. We do very much want to keep in contact with you.
2. If you receive the *Firing Circle* by walking to the mail box after its postal delivery, AND you do have an EMAIL ADDRESS, let me, or your unit POC, or our Secretary know if you want future Newsletters and FLASHES sent via email. You can \$AVE us a lot by avoiding stamps, printer paper, envelops, ink cartridges, etc. Contact Association Secretary: Ralph Lefarth at: ralph-l@sbcglobal.net or (314) 846-1009.
3. Are you interested in some AC-119 historical facts, current events, interesting dialogue, photos and stories about AC-119s? If you have Internet (web-www) access on your computer, then you have to join the Association's **Facebook page**. It now has **over 445 members** – not just directly related 119ers, but also history buffs, AC-130 folk, model makers, etc. Just browse to: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/195912423919726/>
4. Also, there are Facebook Pages dedicated to "Air Force Gunners", "Air Force 462 Weapons", "Happy Valley – Phan Rang", and "U.S. Military Veterans - News you can use" – very interesting pictures and history, current news, and other valuable information.
5. "Annual" Association Members – Listen-up!! When you receive notification that it is time to renew your annual membership, please reply promptly less you forget.

Special Request

Ev Sprou posted this on Facebook, and it will get wider distribution here!

November 9, 2017: Stinger Gunner Tom Honzik needs our help. He was wounded by shrapnel during a Rocket Attack at Bien Hoa on 31 September 1972 & the VA & AF denied his Purple Heart. Tom is working with Col. Mac to get this one resolved & they need some help. If anyone can remember that attack or know anything about Tom's injury, please send Wayne Laessig an email at Qadvocate@sbcglobal.net & Wayne will put the two of you in direct contact.

Future Reunions

I know some info has been passed around via email, and on Facebook, regarding our future Association reunions. You must know that I was getting concerned, as of our Sat. Business Meeting in Dayton proceeded, nothing seemed forthcoming for future reunions. Well SURPRISE (and relieved)!! Here's the latest updates:

Oct 11 – Oct 14, 2018 Reunion XIX in Tucson, Arizona

Ev Sproul has done it again! When he was Reunion Coordinator for our St Louis Reunion it was awesome! Now Ev is our Reunion Coordinator for Tucson in 2018!!! Ev is working with the Board to have our web site reset for registration on-line. He is also planning a tour of the Davis-Monthan AFB reclamation center, lovingly known as the USAF “Boneyard”, and the Pima Air Museum. And, a social tour is being considered for Sunday that week. THE NEXT *Firing Circle* NEWSLETTER WILL HAVE MUCH MORE DETAILED INFO.

(Please go to the NEW WEB site for additional details: <https://www.ac119gunships.com>)

2019 – Reunion XX, Salt Lake City, UT

Chuck Williams volunteered to obtain the necessary support, and coordinate our 20th reunion. Of course, there is a lot of planning to do and Chuck is only now getting started. Hill AFB is close by for support. I'll keep you all informed as this effort matures.

2020 – Reunion XXI, Omaha, NE

John and Laura Wolff proposed a reunion in Omaha, NE. Chuck Williams could not do SLC in 2020, so John and Laura agreed that they will work-on the reunion for 2020. Offutt AFB is still an active base and may offer the support we usually count on.

FINAL FLIGHT – May they rest in peace

We remember our human frailty, and the strength of our brotherhood, in the loss of these who joined our Final Flight. Please remember their families in your prayers. R.I.P., Brothers all:

1. John Schumann notified us Richard “Dick” Iversen, 18th SOS Stinger Pilot, passed away September 20, 2017.
2. Larry Fletcher notified us that Bernie Smith, 17th SOS Shadow Nav, passed away August 23, 2017 & was interned at the VFW National Cemetery at Dallas
3. Richard Cosner's son informed us his 17th SOS Shadow Dad passed away February 24, 2017.
4. Jim Alvis sent us info of Bill Withun's passing, 71st SOS Shadow Nav, on July 5, 2017.
5. Jim Alvis also received notification of 71st SOS Shadow IO SSgt Phil Bender who passed on July 17, 2017.

You may find more details on the Association's new Mail Call site at <https://www.ac119gunships.com/mail-call/> or our Facebook site at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/195912423919726>

The Association is fortunate to have Steve Mac Issac (“Col Mac”) -- a hard-working and knowledgeable member, that helps everyone with deficient DD-214s, and obtaining Awards and Decorations. He usually addresses the reunion attendees at the Sat. Business Meeting, but this year's agenda was a bit over the edge. My apologies to Col. Mac. He provides the following three items for your attention:

1. AGENT ORANGE: I took an informal survey of our Brothers at our last TWO Reunions, of both New & Long Term members. The Question I asked them was “..Are You on the VA's Agent Orange Registry?” The answers were like, “yes, I think so...to a simple NO...to a non-convincing YES”.

The ANSWER is very easy for you to know: If you do NOT receive (at the address you receive your U.S.Postal Mail), a 4-page, glossy black/color folded letter twice a year, or a third letter when they add a New Disease to the Registry, YOU HAVE NOT PROPERLY REGISTERED FOR AGENT ORANGE, and need to go to your VA office to do so ASAP!!

There are now 15 “no-proof-needed” diseases on the Agent Orange List. I have had TWO that I beat with early detection/care, and I am currently at a ‘draw’ with a Third one. I know there are those who don't want

to hear anything that an any old-fart Colonel may have to say...Nevertheless... Agent Orange Kills!..GET ON THE REGISTER...Get it done now, That's an Order!

From the VA's web site (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange>) , here is some help:

- A. Apply online using eBenefits (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>) , OR
- B. Work with an accredited representative or agent, (i.e., VFW or American Legion) OR.
- C. Go to a VA regional office and have a VA employee assist you. You can find your regional office on our Facility Locator page.

2. AWARDS & DECORATIONS (A&D): If you are missing the due recognition, and earned awards that are not on your DD-214, it is impossible to obtain that recognition and award. Nothing, repeat nothing, gets accomplished for obtaining your just War-Time Service recognition without a Corrected DD-214. There are ways, taking some time and effort, to get your DD-214 fixed. One of the items helpful, is an order that another gunshipper has in their file, which also has your name on it. There is an idea floating within the Association's IT Committee, to include in our new database, scanned copies of ALL the ORDERS from you. This is a HUGE project that will take time and energy from some folks. The file can be "searched", looking for specific key words, like a person name! IN THE MEANTIME, you can send COPIES (NOT ORIGINALS) of any orders you have to Steve Mac Issac. Questions and comments: Contact Col Mac at email colmacmac@mac.com, or (MST) Cell phone: (302) 249-1499.

3. BATTLE OF AN LOC: A small article in a recent "VIETNAM Magazine" describes the Official U.S. Army history of the Battle of An Loc. There is NO mention of the AC-119 Gunship, not even the list of the aircraft lost. Our AC-119s may have been overlooked in history again! There are two minor references of the SPECTRE Gunship, with little or no credit given.

I flew the first 14 mission nights with the deployed AC-119Ks. I recall No radio calls from FACs or ABCC, that had a SPECTRE call-sign associated. I WAS NOT ALONE up there. PLEASE, any of you AC-119 Brothers that flew missions over An Loc during a battle of survival, please contact me (above). I NEED TO GATHER HARD FACTS. There may be a chance to correct the article.

Welcome new / updated Associates

Thank you for continued support of our Association:

Susan Greco, Associate Life # 456, daughter of John Lewis, 71st SOS, converted from Annual

James Farrell, Life # 457, 71st/17th SOS, Gunner

Pictures from Reunion XIX



1 Registration Desk



2 ID verification for WPAFB Restoration Hangar Tour



3. Tour Guides at Restoration Hanger



4 Small Groups for the tour



5 Quartermaster's - items for sale



6 Large Hootch - always busy



7 Chuck Williams - memorabilia display



8 2nd yr. capturing attendees names on the "Brother Print"



9 Co-owners Voisey, Drzyzga, Zito won auction bid for 17th SOS Limited Edition Coin #14



10 Noonan, Drzyzga, LaRosa, Fletcher, Museum Auditorium Fri. Memorial Service



11 Pres. Drzyzga opens Memorial Service



12 71st SOS group at Memorial Bench



13 17th SOS group at Memorial Bench



14 18th SOS group at Memorial Bench



15 Renfro, Voisey, Zito, Fletcher (holding "Charlie Chasers") at the Museum Gift Shop



16 Ev Sprous, Wade Dunn, Jim Mattison and Jim Farrel



17 R. Lyall, D. Thompson, B. Mueller



18 Jim & Judy Alvis - Photographer and Secret Auctioneers



19 Sam Gallo and Jay Collars - 50/50 tickets to Wayne Laessig and Karen Graves



20 Chaplain Larry Hunter



21 Associates in the Gunship Kiosk



22 AC-119J Satellite Catcher



23 Tables setup for Banquet "under the wings".



24 Sat. Banquet - Pres Drzyzga welcoming Al Huess' decorative wooden flag holders on the lecturn



25 Jeff Duford, Museum curator, receiving honorary Association Life Membership



26 Vern Hanen, Introducing Jim Russel



27 Jim Russel, Guest Speaker, provides captivating story of Stinger 883



28 USAF Band



29 AL Huess receiving his "Above and Beyond Award"



30 Wright Hill Memorial Site



31" Pub Carillon Historical Park - "turn of the century"



32 German Style lunch at the Pub



33 Federal Park Ranger provides briefing about historical site and Huffman Praire



34 Panoramic vista - overview of historic sites



35 George, Becky Renfro, Cindy Posey - restoration hangar's former Chuck Yager's office!!

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