

2020 Mike Drzyzga President's Messages

President's Message – November 2020

Greetings fellow Gunshippers, family, and friends,

This very peculiar year is slipping away into history, for what I hope and pray will become a brighter future. All the uncertainty we had about cancelling this year's reunion, seems now to have led to a good decision. I know that those of us using Facebook, posted some sadness of not being able to reunite this year in Ft. Walton Beach. The good news is that the details for our 21st reunion in FWB next Oct. have been finalized, and will be (or is now) posted on the Association's Web Site, and in the November *Firing Circle*.

With a safe and effective vaccine on its way from the super virologist in our pharmaceutical companies, the pandemic should wind down as the earth slowly makes another trip around the sun. A side thought, as I mentioned in the Aug. *Firing Circle*, Andrea and I did NOT venture to visit friends and family in FL in Oct., and sat in NJ avoiding the TV news as much as possible.

As I often report, the Association's Board of Directors is very active keeping the Association focused on the future. With many organizations using video conferencing (i.e. ZOOM) to have "virtual" meetings, your BOD tried a video conference for our Board Meeting on Nov.10. What a hoot!. We did have some technical glitches, even after some good testing, but the consensus is: it is enjoyable to see one another, not just listen to our voices on the phone.

NEWS – With the passing of Shadow Pilot **Don Craig**, we lost our "legacy unit" Point-of-Contact (POC) for the 17th SOS, who were flying MC-130Js from Kadena AFB. I have been communicating with the 17th Past Cmdr., and learned that the 17th STOOD DOWN. The 130's stayed at Kadena with the 1st SOS. Now, what is intriguing RUMOR has it that USAF wants another AC-130J squadron, probably at Cannon AFB, and they may become the 17th SOS (with gunships this time). That would be so cool. I'll keep an ear-to-the-ground.

With the passing of Stinger Gunner **Bruce Byrd**, we lost our "tracker" of the last remaining AC-119 Gunship that is Stinger 850, at TSN. A Google Earth search shows that our 850 was fully reassembled by March 2020, and out of the hangar, now sitting in line with other VN era former USAF A/C. The Association's goal is to see that OUR HISTORY of 850 is well presented if/when the Stinger is put on public display at a TSN museum.

Association Web Site – Our Web Site has become a full-feature place for news, our history, and purchasing of AC-119 memorabilia. Quartermaster Gus Sininger has added new items to "our store". Also, Roy Davis, Wayne Laessig, and our Web Master Liz Buss, built a super "our stories" page where all of our Oral Video interviews, Biographies and Stories are readily available. Superb effort! The best thing our members can do is read the bios and stories and watch the videos of their fellow 119ers. You all must take a look, www.ac119gunships.com.



Kimber Classic Pistol Raffle – The Association is fortunate to have for raffle a highly customized Kimber Stainless Steel .45 ACP pistol provided by Cherokee Firearms master gunsmith Ron Soderquist. This is a beautiful tribute to our AC-119s, and everyone involved with our success in Vietnam. See the *Firing Circle* for details on the beautiful customization and obtaining raffle tickets.

Secretary Andrea and I wish everyone a safe and peaceful Thanksgiving and Christmas time. Have faith that this pandemic will pass into history and we will again be traveling freely.

Mike Drzyzga, President

President's Message – August 2020

Greetings from New Jersey, fellow AC-119 Gunship Brothers and families!!

I hope and pray that this message finds you all well and safe. It is an unusual and stressful time, dealing with social distancing and facemasks in public. Still, time seems to be passing by quickly. Although this year's reunion has been postponed, I was hoping to take a trip to the FL panhandle in October, visit with my AC-119 brothers and families, but I now worry a bit about a COVID-19 resurgence in the autumn. It is likely I'll be sitting in NJ this October. Uncertainty is awful.

I'm happy to report that your Association Board continues to work on routine matters, and dealing with some special projects that enhance our Association. We are now teleconferencing every other month (instead of monthly). I do hope you found our May *Firing Circle* and June FLASH message interesting. As you read through these, you can see how engaged we are with our Outreach Program, and special history capturing activities.

Organization Update: Many large associations have a position named Sergeant-at-Arms. There had been and will be a few situations where the AC-119 Gunship Association needed "security" oversight. Therefore, to make things official, we created a new Appointed Position name Sgt-at-Arms. I asked our long-time member, Larry "Baby Huey" Hunter if he would accept the appointment. He gladly did. Larry has helped us in the past and I am thrilled to officially help us moving forward. **Thank you, Baby Huey.**

Some News (for more detail, see Aug. *Firing Circle*):

1. For those who served at Phan Rang and are using social media Facebook, there is a FB page for "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB. That FB site's managers publish a "Happy Valley" Newsletter, which includes a wide variety of Phan Rang history. In a recent issue, they published our V.P Roy Davis' story of ferrying an AC-119 from Ohio to Phan Rang. This put the AC-119 into a highlight for those Happy Valley FB members. Thank You, Roy.
2. Association T-Shirts: For those who purchased T-Shirts for this year's reunion, you all now have a rare one, the T-Shirt for the reunion that wasn't!! But wait, there is now an updated version of Shirts for next year's reunion at Ft. Walton Beach, 2021. The back has listed the past reunions, and 2020 is referred to as COVID-19.

Quartermaster Gus Sininger will be announcing opportunities to purchase in the future.

3. Good News: **Master Gunsmith Ron Soderquist has completed** a stainless Kimber Classic 1911 .45 ACP pistol, which is currently being raffled with the drawing to be done at the 2021 FWB reunion. Ron is dealing with many of the supply chain issues that we see every day, but is working through the issues. Good job, Ron.

Enjoy the remainder of the summer! I will miss seeing many of you this year. I trust that if we all do the correct things to practice safe behavior; we will get past this global crisis and stay healthy.

All the best,

Mike Drzyzga, President

President's Message - May 13, 2020

Greetings from NJ.

We are in a global situation unlike anything we have ever seen in our life-times.

My everyday activities are extremely altered compared to what was previously a life of normal retired guy. Nonetheless, I have taken on again the responsibility to lead the Association moving forward. Thankfully, the members of the Board of Directors, appointed officers, and committees are still working, focused on continued success. We are fortunate to have dedicated and conscientious folks participating. The Shadow and Stinger spirit is as strong as ever.

REUNION 2020 IS CANCELLED!

It saddens me to announce that the Board has decided that the Association will *postpone* the Fort Walton Beach Reunion *until* 2021. We considered all of the uncertainty associated with the October timeframe, we've had meaningful discussions with the Four Points Hotel staff (Thank You, Gus Sininger), we discussed many of our member's health concerns, and then we envisioned a reunion requiring social distancing and face masks. No way will that work. Will there be another spike in "the curve?" Will a therapeutic or vaccine be widely available? No one knows if this is the perfect decision. Personally, I love FWB and will miss all the activities we would be doing. Thankfully, Reunion Coordinator Jerry McDonald for the Branson, MO reunion is willing and able to work on moving that Reunion from 2021 to 2022.

Thank you to Association newsletter editor Don Luke, for pulling the May newsletter together. Please, thoroughly check it out. Beyond all the routine news, there is so much information regarding: the raffle for a highly customized semi-auto Kimber Classic .45 ACP pistol; new items in the Quartermaster's store; an ongoing request for copies of your Special Orders from our Outreach Committee Chairperson Ev Sprou; the Sponsorship Program, and more.

I pray that if we all do the correct things to stay safe, we will get past this global crisis and stay healthy.

All the best,

Mike Drzyzga, President

News Flash – March 25, 2020

Praying this FLASH message finds you all well — dealing rationally with the crisis the world is facing, and taking all the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Change to Board of Directors

We are sad to announce that President Jerry Hester had to resign from the President position due to health and other issues. During a teleconference Board meeting, the Board understandingly accepted his resignation. Jerry did an outstanding job dealing with Association business since the previous reunion in Salt Lake City, successfully tackling some tough challenges like improving our website management, rebuilding our treasury, re-energizing our Outreach, and creating a super online repository for all our Oral History Videos. We thank him for those! The Association is in great condition, and we will continue to move forward with our goals and objectives. Following Jerry's notification, the Board took action to fill the President's position. As a result, Mike Drzyzga will step back up into the position, and Wayne Laessig will fill the Prior President's position, which was vacated by Mike. Jerry and Ellen are doing well in TX and we look forward to seeing them at Reunion XXI in Ft. Walton Beach, FL in October.

Reunion XXI Planning for FWB

This year's reunion is still a GO! By October, we are confident that the hard choices being made now will successfully win over the COVID-19 pandemic. Reunion XXI will be a very-much-needed fun time. Coordinator Gus Sininger has done a great job planning the Fort Walton Beach Reunion. The Association is working to publish a detailed **April Firing Circle** Newsletter, which will present specific information about special topics, such as: the raffle of a custom Kimber 1911 .45 ACP hand gun, the wide selection of reunion T-shirts that are available now, and several cool new items in the Association's Quartermaster web page. I encourage you to make your Reunion XXI plans now: first the on-line Reunion registration, and then book a room at the Four Points in FWB.

Everything you need to know about the Reunion and to register is easily found on the Association's web-site at: <https://www.ac119gunships.com/reunion/upcoming-reunion/>

All the best to you and your families, be smart, stay well!!! See you in October.

Michael Drzyzga

Back as President