

AC-119 Gunship Association

**22nd Anniversary AC-119 Gunship Reunion
Celebrating
52 Years of Brotherhood!**

Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, Ft. Walton Beach, Florida

October 6 - 10, 2021

News Release

For Immediate Release

June 18, 2020

CONTACT: Gus Sininger

850-865-2634

**Air Force Vietnam Veterans organization to celebrate 52 Years of Brotherhood
at Four Points Hotel, Ft Walton Beach, Florida**

Ft. Walton Beach: The AC-119 Gunship Association announced today plans to hold their annual reunion in Ft. Walton Beach, FL, Oct. 6 -10, 2021. This unique, highly decorated Special Operations organization served in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand from 1968 to 1973. Composed of 52 aircraft divided into three squadrons: the AC-119G ‘Shadow’ Gunships and the AC-119K ‘Stinger’ Gunships flew their legendary air commando missions including night or day hunter / killer truck interdiction, troops-in-contact (TIC), night or day armed reconnaissance, base defense, night FACs, flareships, and night resupply cover.

The AC-119 Gunship Association is dedicated to the more than 3,000 personnel who flew, maintained, and supported AC-119G ‘Shadow’ and AC-119K ‘Stinger’ gunships during the Vietnam War. It is home for the combat veterans from the 71st, 17th, & 18th Special Operations Squadrons and those who served in AC-119s.

Why We Exist:

- To preserve our fixed-wing gunship heritage and history;
- To remember our fallen and to keep lit the flames of our camaraderie;
- To educate historians and the public about the mission, aircrews, ground crews, and others associated with the AC-119 gunships;
- To honor the dedication, sacrifice, and patriotism of those who are still with us today.

During the Vietnam era, the manned aviation portion of the US Air Force was broken into three major operational areas: Strategic Air Command (SAC) – bombers and missiles; Military Airlift Command (MAC) – transports; and Tactical Air Command (TAC) – fighters. Air Commando and Special Operations units, for the most part, were considered the “bastard stepchildren,” of the Air Force. Despite the significance of their mission, being assigned to Special Operations was not necessarily considered a career enhancing assignment.

And yet still they came ... from all over the Air Force ... representing incredible operations experience from WWII, Korea, and Cold War missions. Men who had been flying 30 or more years to those who had never flown until a few months before going to ‘Nam’.

In addition, as in the case with the AC-119s, many of these aircraft had been retired from the active Air Force inventory, and were now being reactivated, renovated and sent to Southeast Asia to fly missions the aircraft was not designed to perform.

Crews were cobbled together quickly, trained, and sent, along with their aircraft, to Southeast Asia. So rapidly was the mission assembled that in 1968 crews and planes from the Air Force Reserves' 71st SOS were sent to Vietnam in advance of the active-duty new crews being trained stateside. The USAF Reserves' 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron of Bakalar AFB, Indiana eventually became the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) Shadows. This was the only time in the Vietnam War that a Reserve Unit was activated, deployed, flew combat, and deactivated as an Air Force Reserves Unit.

When the AC-119ers first arrived in-country, many looked at them with a jaundiced eye, but very quickly troops on the ground began to look to the night skies for the ugly square 'flying boxcars' that defended their positions against the enemy they couldn't see. From 1968 to 1973 hundreds of USAF, VNAF, and civilian personnel owe their lives to the AC-119s known by the enemy as Dragon Ships.

In five years, thousands of night and day sorties were flown by AC-119 gunships – more than all the rest of the gunship units in Vietnam combined. These side-firing, twin-engine and four engine warbirds, with eight-man crews, were equipped with 7.62cal and 20mm mini guns; flare launchers; moonlight, infrared, & radar sensors; and white lights. From Vietnam, to Laos, to Cambodia, to Thailand, Shadow and Stinger AC-119s were the Guardians of the Night.

71st SOS & 17th SOS (Special Operation Squadrons) – Call Sign: **Shadow:**

The AC-119G Motto – Deny Him the Dark

(Who Knows What Evil Lurks Below the Jungle Canopy – *The Shadow Knows*).

18th SOS (Special Operation Squadron) - Call Sign: **Stinger:**

The AC-119K Motto – Vengeance by Night – Hunter / Killers of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

Now these proud veterans of the AC-119 Gunship Association are celebrating 52 years of brotherhood. We invite anyone who is familiar with or was personally touched by our mission to visit our website or to drop by our reunion 'Hootch' in the Four Points Hotel in Ft. Walton Beach, FL from October 6 - 10, 2021.



71st and 17th SOS AC-119G 'Shadow'



18th SOS AC-119K 'Stinger'