

2021 Mike Drzyzga President's Messages

November 2021 President's Reunion Flash

Greetings Fellow AC-119ers, families and friends! I hope that you are all well and continuing to stay safe. I guess you figured out that I'm continuing as Association President. This message has two main points: a summary of the reunion, and what's next for the Association.

Reunion Summary:

When Andrea and I arrived, the FWB-Destin Four Points Hotel was still training new staff and painting the Hootch. They worked very hard to make our event a success. With the outdoor seating area (Hootch deck) and very nice weather every day, we were able to spread out as needed. If you are on Facebook, there are many pictures posted. We are working on getting a Newsletter published with pictures and a summary of this reunion. The attendance was low, about 130 registered, but the love and energy level was great. Those in attendance made comments like "we really needed to do this!" We opened the Hootch on Wed. with a real team effort – those folks available brought in our snack supplies and Quartermaster inventory. Thursday's bus trip to Pensacola had about 43 attendees. We had guided tours of the NAS Museum, lunch at the Cubi restaurant in the museum, and stopped at the Veterans Memorial Park. Friday was interesting: instead of going on-base at Hurlburt for a picnic hosted by the 18th SOETS, they brought the picnic/memorial service off-base to Navarre Park. Col. Nate Dillon and his team from the 18th seriously cooked up a great meal, Gus Sininger lead the memorial and presented a wreath with KIA family members on each arm. Another highlight was that Matt and Annette Robeck arrived with Marshall Mullin's Memorial Trike. There were many Kodak moments around it. Fri. night's meet and greet was pool-side. The buffet was plentiful and all went well. Sat. morning's business meeting went at a fast pace. TWO TAKE-AWAYS: 1) Your Board of Directors is the same, with two changes for Board Members at Large. Terry Sarul returns, and Ron Dorazio is added. 2) With significant discussion, the members present decided that a proposal for a reunion in Hawaii is not desired, and we will work on Washington, DC for 2023 using a professional event coordinator to take the work load off us. After the meeting, Carol Hinton did an amazing Quilt's of Valor Presentation. This was a very meaningful and emotional event. Each vet who has never received a quilt from any organization was wrapped in a custom, hand-made quilt, along with a hug from the presenter. Sat night's Awards Banquet was also pool-side under a clear starry sky. The buffet was plentiful. All our first-timers and special guests were present. We showed a video presentation covering our first 20 reunions. Thank you Andrea and Roy Davis for that!! Sam and Debbie Gallo did our 50/50, as they do so well, Gus and Wayne did the Live Auction (lots of fun), and Peggie Craig read the winners of the silent auction. Andrea and Peggie did a great job with the auctions. These were very successful! Also, I presented our Above & Beyond Award to V.P. Roy Davis, and Certificates of Appreciation to outgoing Board members Jim Dunn and Jenna Laird, and Wayne Laessig for his tireless support of reunion planning. I had a tough time for a meaningful way to recognize the extreme effort of reunion coordinators Gus Sininger and Larry Hunter. Gus received a custom-made, colorful glass scorpion, and Larry received a "picture book" made from the images of the reunion history video. Whew – a long day it was for me! Sunday night was our Farewell BBQ, again under the setting sun of a clear night. I am very pleased I heard many positive comments on how well the reunion progressed. And Col. Dillon and his crew were amazed at our level of comradery over all these years.



Branson MO Reunion XXII:

We are moving forward finalizing the details for reunion XXII, September 29 – October 2, 2022, Branson, MO at the Radisson Hotel, (where we held reunion IX in 2008). Jerry McDonald is working on the

announcement flyer. The room rate is \$92.95 + 21.1% tax. We expect to have a final plan for the Branson Belle cruise boat trip in the flyer. I expect a large turn-out for this one. Hope to see you there.

Best regards,

Mike Drzyzga, Association President

September 15, 2021 News Flash -Reunion XXI -- Information regarding COVID-19 safety

Counting down the days to Reunion XXI. This has been a tough year, dealing with the ever changing guidance from health and government officials. We want all attendees to know that the Association's Board desires having a wonderful and successful reunion, while keeping us as safe as possible. So many other military reunions have cancelled or significantly curtailed activities for the second year. We are going full ahead, trusting that the vaccines we all received, and additional use of common sense safety protocols, will be effective.

The Four Points' policy is NOT mandating masks (which is in line with much of Florida's businesses). Our 3 main events (Meet & Greet, Banquet, and Farewell BBQ) are all planned as "outdoor" events in the pool area. Nevertheless, we encourage you to wear a mask when "indoors" (CDC guidance*), use hand sanitizers as appropriate, and accept that others attendees may want to refrain from crowding together. It will be your choice; behave as you see best, and accept what others desire.

*CDC Guidance: "If you are fully vaccinated, to maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area where there is a substantial or high probability of COVID virus transmission."

We will have a special presentation to show during the Sat. banquet, we will have the usual 50/50 and auction, the .45 calibre 1911 custom pistol raffle is going strong, and I'm praying for the "hurricane whisperers" to do their thing!

I also pray that this pandemic will go away as natural immunity increases, and our Reunion XXII in Branson, MO will be less troublesome to plan and implement.

Safe travels to those that will be attending.

Mike Drzyzga
President

August 2021 President's Message

Greetings fellow AC-119ers, Family, & Friends,

I hope that this message finds you all well and continuing to stay safe. As the summer of 2021 rushes past, the calendar is flipping daily pages at a steady rate heading towards our Ft. Walton Beach reunion. I have spoken to and emailed many of our Associates about the Board's decision to require vaccinations for all those who want to attend. We must be as safe as we can for situations under our control. Right now, we have far more of our folks who are attending because of the policy, compared to a small number that will not be attending. It hurts badly to have to deal with this pandemic, and make some tough decisions, based on so much uncertainty. But the support we are getting from those that are coming is helping my heart.

Nevertheless, we continue to monitor our hotel and Florida for anything they might implement about masks or anything else based on CDC and Delta variant emergence.

Some News:

I am very happy to say that we have a new Point-of-Contact (POC) for our Maintainers Group. **Bruce Muller**, Phan Rang Shadow Crew Chief, will pick-up this responsibility from **Andy Bright**. Andy did a great job for the Association, and we will be sure to recognize him.

Also, the rumor I spoke of previously about the 17th SOS is TRUE. Lt Col Andrew Saylor, from Cannon AFB, reached out with info about standing-up the new 17th SOS in Oct. Since the 73rd SOS at Hurlburt already commandeered a lot of “Shadow” stuff, their call sign, and squadron patch will be based on the former 17th SOS MC-130Ps JAKAL, formerly at Kadena AFB. Longtime Associate and former Shadow gunner **George Renfro** accepted my “job offer” to be our POC with the 17th. More info to come as we gather it. I already saw a Facebook post on a “Gunships Project page” that Cannon already received its first AC-130J.

Speaking of the Ghost rider, did you see the video circulating on the internet of a “heritage flight” of an AC-47 Spooky and an AC-130J, made in late July at the week-long giant air-show in Oshkosh, WI? I’m sure I’m not alone in thinking it would be miraculous to have a flying C-119, made to look like a Shadow/Stinger, to be part of that heritage flight. The two “Js” at Oshkosh were from the 4th SOS (Spooky again) from Hurlburt.

Looking ahead:

I spoke to two Associates already, one is a Board member, about the new concerns with COVID-19 Delta Variant, and possible more restrictive safety mandates. The Board will be discussing these concerns at our next video conference.

Reunion XXI is less than two months away. I am so looking forward to seeing as many of you as can be in Ft. Walton Beach. We will have our Saturday morning “business meeting” as usual, and deal with planning future reunions and continued functioning of the well-staffed Board of Directors, in order to keep this great Association moving forward. Without dedicated people to give time and talent, we can lose our current momentum.

In closing, same three thoughts: 1. please tell us what you think about our newsletter, *Firing Circle*. Much time and energy goes into making and distributing it. 2. We have 700 people who joined our Facebook page, and a lot of valuable information, stories, and hot news, are shared on it. If you do “social media” please join in! 3. Our web site has been a valuable source of current info, but recently is becoming a great depository of our AC-119 history. Please visit www.ac-119gunships.com and browse around.

Gear-up!!

Mike Drzyzga, Association President
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May 2021 President’s Message

Greetings fellow AC-119ers, Family, & Friends,

Wow, this year is flying quickly past, it seems to me. Good news is that the Association is doing well & on track, especially towards our Reunion XXI in October. We already have about 135 committed to attend, with many “first timers” registered. The June Firing Circle has the list of “Who’s Coming”, & the reunion information flyer – please check it out for names of your friends & fellow crew members. Our Web site has

become a huge resource now holding much of our history – including Oral History Videos, our biographies, & stories. Next time you are browsing the internet, go visit www.ac119gunships.com.

It is already May, & we are heading to a better Memorial Day than we experienced last year during the pandemic lock-down. As more & more States are relaxing the pandemic restrictions, we will have Memorial Day gatherings to honor those brave Americans we lost in “all wars”. Here in northern NJ, American Legion Post 423 will have a small but energetic event, & I’ll be proudly flipping cheese burgers on the grill for those in attendance. It feels like we are slowly getting back to normal. And I trust things will improve as we pass into summer. Please get out & enjoy the ceremonies.

I communicate often with other Association Board members & those who help run the Association, beyond our monthly Board-Plus Meetings. We have developed friendships & great working relationships. It is sad that we see an increasing rate of loss of our most senior members. In fact, member loss is greater than our gaining of new members. Nevertheless, I am very happy to see that our Facebook community is growing, & that we have many younger family members joining the Association. I am hopeful that the younger members attending the reunion feel & see our comradery, & develop an interest in helping continue the Association’s activities. One of the busiest Associates is Ev Sprous – he does outreach, helps with Facebook, is our media manager, & handles membership. Ev can use help with the monthly task of communicating with “annual members” for membership renewal. If you are OK with Excel spreadsheets & Word documents on a Personal Computer, & you have about 1 hr. a month to donate to the Association, we can sure use your help. Please contact me more details & encouragement.

Thinking ahead: We have made preliminary plans for our 2022 reunion in Branson MO. Coordinator Jerry McDonald has firm plans to return us to Branson. I’m already looking forward to it. But, it is NOT too soon to think about what’s next – 2023. If you all want to have our Association continue with our annual reunions, then we will need someone to take the lead for 2023. Past reunion coordinators have written a “guide book” that outlines what needs to be done, & the leader will be part of a committee that includes past coordinators. If available, we intend to use a professional “event coordinator” that will make the reunion coordinator’s task much easier. We have lots of time, so please THINK ABOUT IT!

NKP Reunion #2 For those of us Stingers that served out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP) RTAFB, there is a well-planned reunion in Destin, FL, November 11, 2021. For more info, go to this link: [2021 NKP Reunion Weblink](#).

See you in Ft. Walton Beach. Please stay safe & stay well.

Mike Drzyzga, Association President
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May 2021 President’s Message

[2020 Letter from Mike Drzyzga Proclaiming Founding Fathers](#)



April 2021 President's Message

Great news everyone! After an unusually long time to finalize the details for our 21st reunion in Ft. Walton Beach, between Oct. 6 and Oct.10, we have ALL those details completed to the Association's satisfaction. It was a challenge to get the hotel to provide a suitable contract which allows us to keep the reunion costs to you as low as possible. We owe a BIG thank you to reunion coordinators Gus Slinger and Larry Hunter for the extraordinary effort nailing down the details, and to Wayne Laessig to assure those details meet our requirements, for creating the announcement flyer, and working with our Web master Liz Buss to implement the on-line registration. Ev Sprous has probably posted this on the Association's Facebook page.

For me, this reunion means so much. I see our membership sadly, in increasing numbers, joining the final flight roster. And, the cancellation of the 2020 Reunion due to the ongoing pandemic really hurt. This reunion will be special for me, being able to spend time with you. We will do this in a safe and responsible way. I support the requirement that everyone attending will have been vaccinated against the Corona Virus.

Before you go to the Association's Web site to register, ALL the info you need is being sent to you by your POC, and it is also posted on our Association's Upcoming Reunion web page at <https://www.ac119gunships.com/reunion/upcoming-reunion/>. You really should read it well and understand all the things that are happening and to aid you in completing the registration.

We already have emails and Facebook post from about 50 people who are committed to attend. How cool is that! Remember, you should register with the Four Points hotel as soon as you can. The sooner we get an idea of the potential attendance, the better we can make adjustments to the week's details.

Also, a BIG "thank you" to you-all for an abundance of patience while we got this task accomplished.

Be safe, do the right things, and ... stay healthy!! SEE YA IN FWB!

Mike D

January 2021 President's Message

Greetings fellow AC-119ers, Family, and Friends.

Happy New Year everyone. Last year ended with everyone looking back at a truly CRAZY year. This is a first for me: I wrote and posted on the Association Web site a November President's Message, which told of a Nov. *Firing Circle* newsletter coming, which never happened. Let's say that this is part of 2020!

I sincerely hope and pray that in this New Year, 2021, we will experience a much better world to live in than was 2020. With a safe and effective corona virus vaccine on its way across the USA from the super virologist in our pharmaceutical companies, the pandemic should wind down as 2021 progresses – we hope and pray.

Nevertheless, many of you, I suspect, are expecting to receive a *Firing Circle* newsletter with all the details for our reunion in Ft. Walton Beach in Oct. A January *Firing Circle* is coming, but the reunion registration process is being delayed for two reasons. First, the details and registration process are tied to our web site, which required a significant update to the ancillary modules that allows it work so well. Thank You to web master Liz Buss for her hard work. Second, and more troubling, are the new uncertainties associated with distribution of the corona virus vaccine, and our population attaining "herd immunity" against it. The CDC is

saying now that if 75-80% of the USA population is vaccinated by Sept., we will have the protection and can travel freely. But now, the Association is managing our commitments to the vendors that support the reunion (Hotel, Convention Hall, caterers, tours) so they can provide us necessary flexibility, should the USA NOT "open up" as expected.

As I write this, I foresee having our Oct. reunion as planned. If all registered guests are vaccinated, then the week should be as awesome as we ever had. If there are attendees who were unable to get vaccinated, then the associated risk rests with them. This is my plan: to follow closely the CDC's information on the USA vaccination process, and liaise with other organizations that are planning annual meetings this year. There are organizations that I am associated with, that have larger annual events than we have, and are facing these same issues.