

Association President's Message – September 2022

Greetings from NJ to AC-119 Gunshippers, friends, and family! I hope that you are having a good experience with summer 2022. Only a few more weeks left – but I dare not want to rush it!

1. Branson, MO, Reunion XXII, Sept 28 - Oct 2, 2022, some quick notes and reminders:
 - A) We will have an auction as we have done in the past, as part of the Sat. night banquet. Please bring something unique and/or interesting to donate to the auction.
 - B) We are fortunate to have our videographer, JP Mac Isaac again to capture YOUR oral history videos. If you have NOT done one yet, please seriously consider what a video would mean to your family members. We have many personal bios on our [Website](#) – you can look at what others have done. Tell your stories! It is not for you it is for them. Roy Davis will help JP get you signed up
 - C) The Who's Coming list grows almost daily. Take a look in the Firing Circle and see who's going to enjoy a great time in Branson.!!
 - D) If you plan to attend this reunion, AND you have an AC-119 neck lanyard from a previous reunion to hold your name tag, PLEASE remember to BRING IT with you. If you want a valuable "Neck Wallet" from the Branson Chamber of Commerce, contact Jerry McDonald, reunion coordinator at email: jmshadow6869@yahoo.com.
 - E) Our Wed. and Thur. social events are sold-out or close to it. Thank you, Wayne Laessig, for getting the word out and addressing the issue.
2. Plaque Project for the SEA Pavilion at the USAF Academy: I'm pleased to report that very many of you responded to Steve "Col Mac" Mac Isaac's efforts to obtain donations. At this time, we are planning to move forward with due focus and take the necessary steps to mark our place in history, where it would have been otherwise missing. In terms of process, it seems the Association FLASH message gets folks attention. We will keep you well informed as we make progress.
3. Do you know that the Association has an agreement with The Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University (TTU) in Lubbock TX? This had been established many years ago. The Center is accepting Vietnam-era memorabilia for archiving. Steve "Col Mac" Mac Isaac and Roy Davis have been in contact with key individuals there. If you are inclined to offer your "stuff" from VN to archive for historical keeping, you may want to investigate TTU's facility. We have the info on our Website here: [Association Recommended Historical Repository – AC-119 Gunship Association \(ac119gunships.com\)](#).
4. Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins (PACT) Act. The Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances, such as Agent Orange. This law helps us provide generations of Veterans, and their survivors, with the care and benefits. There are 20 new presumptive conditions added to the list. If you are not on the Agent Orange registry, YOU SHOULD BE! Hopefully, you are aware of this, but here a link to more info: [The PACT Act And Your VA Benefits | Veterans Affairs](#)
5. Do you realize that next year will be the 50th anniversary of the "cease-fire" ending the hostilities between North Vietnam and the US and its allies? The USAF is planning a documentary as a memorial to the war effort. It is too early to know much, but the Association expects to be involved in whatever the USAF is planning. More info to come as this project evolves. Thank you to Terry Sarul for taking the lead on this task.

Now, back to planning for Branson, Reunion XXII. My to-do list grows. I am so looking forward to seeing many of you there. Stay well and be safe!

Mike Drzyzga, President (2015-2022)

2022 AC-119 Gunship Reunion XXII

September 28 – October 2, 2022 at Branson, Missouri

“53 Years of Remembrance of the AC-119 Gunships”

In 2000 our Association’s Founding Fathers got us together to affirm our place in military and SEA history. 400 of us met at Fort Walton. Since then, we have held reunions every year, except 2020, at locations all over our great country doing exactly what our Founding Fathers set out to do. Since then, we added more reasons to get together, like renewing old friendships, making new friends, and including family members of our honored KIAs. Show your family, friends, and history your pride in being a part of this AC-119 Gunship family. Join us at **the Radisson Hotel** in Branson, MO and be a part of **“53 Years of Remembrance of the AC-119 Gunships!”** We will notify you and update the website if anything changes. **The important thing right now is to complete your Hotel Reservation** and your **Reunion Registration!** Shadow Jerry McDonald is our Branson Reunion Coordinator. If you have a question, contact him at jmshadowvet6869@yahoo.com or 417-793-3738.

Radisson Hotel, 120 South Wildwood Dr, Branson, MO 65616

- **Room Rates:** All are Double Queen Room or King Room and will include 13.35% tax



[Single/Double occupancy \\$92.95 + tax](#); [Triple \\$97.95 + tax](#)

[Quad \\$102.95 + tax](#) Hot breakfast is included, served 6:30–11:00 AM

Phone Reservation: call 417-335-5767. Use Block Code:

2108ACGUAS. Let them know you are with the AC-119 Gunship

Association. **Online Reservation is at:**

www.radissonhotelsamericas.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-branson

Input occupancy, and select Promotional Code ACGA under Special

Rates. Select room type and follow procedures to reserve the room. As

long as rooms are available on the extended dates, you can still receive the Reunion rates, which are valid from Mon Sept 26 through Wed Oct 5, 2022.

REGISTER FOR THE REUNION

- **Register Online:** go to <https://www.ac119gunships.com/reunion/upcoming-reunion> and register, then send your check to Doug Wohlgamuth, 504 Shea Place, Sun City Center, FL 33573. Please print your registration confirmation email and bring it with you to the reunion. **NOTE:** the fees for PayPal and credit card payments cost the Association over \$800 last year. That’s more than we can afford, so we’re going back to payments by checks or money orders only. If you cannot pay by check, call Doug at 813-781-5728 (East coast time). **Reunion Registration cut-off date was September 1, 2022**, but, if you still want to attend, register now and we will honor your registration. If you cancel, we may have to pay contracted funds so a refund may not be available. However, we understand unforeseeable circumstances may take place, so please talk to us if you need to cancel for family emergencies or losses.
- **When you arrive:** Head over to our Reunion Table to pick up your **Reunion Registration** packet. This will include your name tags, event tickets, etc. If we are not there when you arrive, check in with the Hotel desk and go to the Hootch to pick up your packet.

REUNION SPECIAL INFORMATION

- **Silent Auction:** if you want to contribute, something that fits in luggage works well. If you have an item you think needs to be bid upon as an active auction item, please contact Jerry and he will coordinate with our auction team on whether it will be a silent or active auction item.
- **Special Raffle: Commemorative Kimber 45 Pistol** crafted and donated by Cherokee Firearms gunsmith Ron Soderquist. This Classic model 1911 is Stainless Steel with Combat Trigger; ambidextrous safety; in a special box; includes AC-119 commemoration pistol grips; two magazines, carrying case, and gun lock. Raffle tickets are 1 for \$10; 6 for \$55, and 13 for \$110 (LIMIT 100 Tickets per person). You can

buy your tickets from Doug Wohlgamuth now or at the Reunion; you don't need to be present to win! Send your check or money order to Doug Wohlgamuth, 504 Shea Place, Sun City Center, FL 33573-5726.

- Kimber Classic Stainless Steel 1911 Style Pistol
- 45 ACP Caliber with 5-inch barrel
- Combat Trigger and Beavertail Grip Safety
- Ambidextrous Extended Thumb Safety
- Tactical Hammer and Sear
- Original Rosewood Grip Panels Will be Included when sent.
- Custom Engraved Grips: AC-119 Association Patch on one grip panel and Brothers image on the other
- Flat Checkered Main Spring Housing
- Open Mag Well
- Fitted Barrel Bushing with Guide Rod
- Fiber Optics Sights Installed
- Slide has "Vietnam 68 – 73" and the 71st, 17th and 18th SOS engrave



• **Oral History Videos and Bios:** Over 250 of our air and ground crew plus family members and spouses have made oral history videos and/or written bios. New Videos and bios are posted on our Association website at <https://www.ac119gunships.com/bios-videos-and-stories>. Videos may be done solo or with your spouse, crew, or other crew members. If you have not made a video or written a bio, we encourage you to do so. You can sign up to do a video or bio when you complete your Reunion Registration.

REUNION AGENDA

Wednesday, September 28th

- **Reunion Registration**
 - **Hootch** is opened daily from 0800-2200 except during our Meet & Greet, Banquet, and Farewell BBQ. Hootch snacks and beverages are free (donations are always welcomed and appreciated ☺)
 - **1730: Dixie Stampede** may only have seating separate from our group. If that occurs, you can choose to cancel when we notify you, or attend with our group but with the dinner/show seating separate from our group.
- \$54.07 ages 10 years and up, \$29.21 ages 3-9 years. Cut off date is July 15, 2022.**

Thursday, September 29th

- **Reunion Registration and Hootch**
- **1600 Showboat Branson Belle.** Sorry – this one is FULL!

Friday, September 30th

- **Reunion Registration and Hootch**
- **Meet and Greet!** –Hospitality Room TableRock A 1700 - Cash Bar 1800 – Dinner Introductions of Reunion newcomers, special guests, and KIA Family

\$26 per person

Assorted Meat and Cheese Tray
Fresh Garden Vegetables with Dip Tray
Tortilla Chips with Salsa
Swedish Meatballs, Spicy Chicken Wings, BBQ
Cocktail Mini Smokies
Pork and Vegetable Eggrolls
Turkey & Ham Sandwich Pinwheels
Water, Coffee, and Iced Tea.

Bronze Kid's Buffet

\$14 per person

Chicken Tenders and BBQ Meatballs
Spring Rolls with Sweet and Sour Sauce
Salsa and Fresh Fried Tortilla Chips
French Fries

Saturday, October 1st

- **Association Membership Meeting**
- **Hootch**
- **Banquet – Hospitality Room TableRock A 1700 – Cash Bar 1800 – Dinner**

\$42 per Person Prime Rib w/Creamy Horseradish Sauce	\$30 per Person Chicken Mansfield	\$28 per Person Tortilla Crusted or Plain Tilapia
All served with Choice of Ozark Salad (Mixed Greens, Tomato, Red Onion, Cucumber) with Raspberry Vinaigrette or Ranch Dressing, or Caesar Salad with Feta Cheese; plus Vegetables, Potato, Rolls & Butter, Chef's Choice of dessert, Water, Iced Tea, Coffee.		

Bronze Kid's Buffet \$14 per person

Chicken Tenders and BBQ Meatballs
Spring Rolls with Sweet and Sour Sauce
Salsa and Fresh Fried Tortilla Chips

Sunday, October 2nd

- **Early Golf Tournament: \$10.** Jerry McDonald will coordinate details with golfers
- **Hootch**
- **Farewell BBQ - Hospitality Room TableRock A 1700 - Cash Bar 1800 – BBQ**

\$26 per Person

Smoked Beef Brisket and Shredded BBQ Pork w/Buns
Deviled Egg Potato Salad
Baked Beans, Sweet Buttered Corn
Green Beans with Bacon, Garlic, Onions
Homemade Cobbler
Water, Iced Tea, and Coffee

Bronze Kid's Buffet

\$14 per person

Chicken Tenders and BBQ Meatballs
Spring Rolls with Sweet and Sour Sauce
Salsa and Fresh Fried Tortilla Chips

Your friends are registering! Wanna see them again? Go to <https://www.ac119gunships.com/reunion/upcoming-reunion>, and register there, then send your check to Doug Wohlgamuth, 504 Shea Place, Sun City Center, FL 33573. And....., if you already registered, make sure you've sent Doug your check :>)

Also please contact the Radisson Hotel to reserve a room!! **Online Reservation is at www.radissonhotelsamericas.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-branson** Input occupancy, and select Promotional Code ACGA under Special Rates. Select room type and follow the online procedures to reserve your room. You have till August 29, 2022 to reserve your room at the guaranteed Reunion rates, which are valid from Mon Sept 26 through Wed Oct 5, 2022 as long as rooms are available on the extended dates. If you reserve after August 29th, they'll honor our Reunion rates, but only as long as they have available rooms. Don't wait!!

And, if you're already signed up for our Branson Reunion's Dixie Stampede and Branson Belle options, you're good to go! But, if you snooze(d) you lose (maybe):

1. The Branson Belle option is closed – the early registrants (i.e. the non-fence sitters :>) booked every available seat and there ain't no more :<(

2. We still have a few slots for the Dixie Stampede, so first come, first served for those remaining slots (i.e. it's time to stop sitting on that fence :-). For the Dixie Stampede we negotiated to take other groups' leftover dinner/show seats - but those will be in a different location than our main AC-119 group. As soon as we reach **our** AC-119 group's booking max for the Stampede, we'll send a Flash that will tell you the remaining seats will be in a different location than our AC-119 group. If you sign up after that Flash, you'll be seated with another group.

Who's Coming to Branson, MO Reunion

- Henry & Maria Alau
- Leslie Alford & Tracy Moore
- Stan & Cindy Baker
- George Bare
- Shirley Bartlett
- Jack & Carolyn Bastin, with Luci Algood & Linda McCoin
- Paul, Mark, & Mike Beagley
- Tad & Patricia Berkebile
- Greg & Debbie Blackmon
- Jim & Joann Boyd
- George & Cindy Carter
- George Chapman
- John & Denise Cootz, with daughter Angelique Bolli & husband Joe
- Leslie Davis & Connie Alexander
- Roy Davis & Paula Pascoe with Pam Snow
- Mike & Andrea Drzyzga
- Bob Dydo
- Norm Evans & Shirley Hagan
- Jim & Tina Farrell
- Jim & Carolyn Fiala with Alan & Anna Marie Fiala
- Sue Fletcher
- Leroy & Rose Frahm
- Rod Friese & Dave King
- Lloyd & Mary Ellen Froelich
- Sam & Debbie Gallo
- Ron & Patty Gilbert
- Janis & son Ben Goryl
- Shelly Gravitte & Thomas Freeman
- David & Mary Ann Hathaway
- Jerry & Ellen Hester
- Ron & Carol Hinton
- Larry Hunter
- Jake & Bev Jaeckle, with Kally Jaeckle
- Mike & Mary Alice Kimmel
- Wayne & Lynette Laessig
- Pono Jesse Lau & Melvin Jackson
- Ralph & Joyce Lefarth, with daughter Nancy, Stamm & Ryan & Evan Stamm
- Don Luke
- Bob & Cheryl Lyall
- JP Mac Isaac
- Steve "Col Mac" & Nancy Mac Isaac
- Dan & Arlene Mages
- Dale & Jeanette Martin
- Cash McCall
- Jerry & Karen McDonald
- Sonja McDuffie
- Larry Mersek & Susie Ryslinge
- Larry Middleton
- Harold Morgan
- John & Lynn Morrow
- Mike & Theresa Mullen
- Larry & Lorrie Nelson
- Bruce Phillips
- Jim Rash
- Jim & Jackie Ray
- Al & Karen Reynolds, with daughter Lisa Bock & husband Darren
- Terry & Theresa Sarul
- Gus Sininger
- Ski Sledzinski & Yami Lust
- Jerry & Diane Snyder
- Ronnie & Venita Soderquist
- EV Sprous & sister Ruth Chapman
- Larry & Cathy Swanson
- Mark Tarpley
- Dan Thompson
- Wilma Tyler, with daughter Cheree Bachmann & husband Steve
- Loren & Judi Van Duyn
- Gene & Jim Van Over
- Dave & Mary Voisey
- Tom & Marisa Weisenfluh
- Chuck Williams
- Doug & Karen Wohlgamuth
- Bill & Paula Zito

Association Board Selection

This fall at the reunion membership meeting we will elect a new slate of Board of Directors. The Board consists of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Prior President, and up to three Board Members at Large. A slate consisting of these positions will be selected by the current Board of Directors and presented to the voting members in attendance at the reunion membership meeting. A majority vote is required for approval of the new Board members.

Basically, this means that individuals interested in becoming a member of the Board will have to let President Mike Drzyzga know prior to the August Board meeting on 9 August 2022. This will allow the new Board members to be better prepared to begin their new duties.

A description of Board member positions is in our ByLaws at [ASSOCIATION BYLAWS](#). If you are interested in becoming a Board member or want to nominate someone (with their concurrence), be sure to let Mike know no later than 9 August at drzyzga513@hotmail.com

SAGA OF STINGER 41

In his quest for info, Roy Davis again began connecting the dots. He wound up talking to Spc 4 Leonard "Bruce" Shearer; a Huey Saber gunner involved in the rescue of the crew of a C-130 that was shot down at An Loc, two weeks prior to the shoot down of Stinger 41. This C-130 was attempting an airdrop of palletized ammunition when it was hit in the right wing by 37mm AAA. The aircraft crashed and Bruce was involved on the aircrew rescue. Here is an excerpt from an article.

"NVA predators were already closing in for the kill. A sizable force was headed for the helicopter and crash site. The Huey door gunners, Spc.

4s Leonard Shearer and John Deslauriers, took turns keeping the enemy at bay with M60 machine gun fire. Meanwhile, two Cobras provided

suppressive fire and prevented NVA troops from approaching the wrecked aircraft. While Deslauriers kept up his furious M60 fire, Shearer dismounted and made three trips to help the C-130 crew members into the helicopter. Shearer got one crewmember out on the first trip, two out on the second trip and two out on the third trip for a total of five. That made a full load." The Rescue Huey crew was awarded Silver Stars for their efforts.

When Roy was talking to Bruce, he asked if he had any other significant missions. Bruce said he did. He and his crew were scrambled in their Huey and told they were going on a body recovery mission. They were told that they would be recovering three bodies from an Air Force gunship that had been shot down four days prior. That's all they were told. When they got to the wreckage site, they saw that they could not land because of the high jungle canopy (200 feet), and that the bodies were being guarded by South Vietnamese rangers. They tied two 160 foot long rescue ropes together and used an M60 machine gun barrel as a weight to get the rope through the foliage. They recovered the three bodies by pulling the body bags up 200 feet by hand—not an easy task. While hovering, they were being shot at by enemy forces.

The three recovered crewmembers were our Stinger 41 KIAs; Courtney, Slagle and Brown. While it is a sad story, it is good to close another episode in the saga of Stinger 41 and get to know some of the men who brought them home.

In gratitude for Bruce recovering our lost brothers while under fire, the Association presented Bruce and his fellow gunner, John, a Certificate of Appreciation, a Stinger coin, and a 50th Anniversary shootdown t-shirt. Our own favorite gunner, Ev Sprou, met Bruce and presented him with these gifts. Thanks, Ev.



(Above) Bruce and Roy

AC119 Association Membership Updates

No new membership updates.

Final Flight

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. We raise a glass to all. R.I.P. Brothers.

- Pete Chamberlain, 18th SOS Stinger Navigator, passed on August 22, 2022.
- Robert L. Masterson, 71st SOS Shadow Illuminator Operator, passed July 18, 2022.
- Donald Foster, 18th SOS Stinger NCOIC of the Gunners, passed 21 June of 2022.

We also lost Becky Hansen, spouse of 18th SOS Vern Hansen who passed August 23, 2022, after a valiant battle and now resting in peace. R.I.P. Becky

Additional details are on our Association Mail Call at <https://www.ac119gunships.com/mail-call/mail-call/> and our Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/195912423919726>. Ev Sprous and his Outreach Team do a super job locating, contacting, and reconnecting with our remaining living crewmates but they also find many who are already deceased. They can only reconnect us with our remaining living Brothers if they know who to look for!

PLEASE visit <https://www.ac119gunships.com/membership-contact-information/alpha-roster> and add any missing names or contacts you have.

Administrative Updates and Reminders

1. Our website has a new feature called **Meet Your Brother – Spotlight of the Week**, where we've randomly selected one of your Bio Stories and created a link directly to it. Our goal is to give everyone visiting our website the opportunity to learn a little more about the men who flew and supported our AC-119s. Go to any main page on our website and you'll see a "Widget" link on the side of the page. **NOTE on Oral History Videos and History Book Bios:** Over 250 of our air and ground crew, plus family members and spouses, have made oral history videos and/or written History Book bios. New videos and bios are posted on our Association web site. Videos may be done solo or with your spouse, crew or other crew members. If you have not made a video or written a bio, we encourage you to do so. You can sign up to do a video or History Book Bio when you complete your Reunion Registration. Click on this link for some tips for making a video or writing a bio. **Bio and Video Info and Samples.**

2. **Extending our Gunship Legacy:** United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) AC-119 Plaque Project (info at <https://www.70seapavilion.com/>) Good news on this project to include our AC-119 as one of the heritage gunships in SEA; others associated with us are actively interested. Col Mac is now officially the Chair of the "USAFA AC-119 Plaque Committee", he is in communication with the others on this. Picture shows Spectre example. Send your best donation, none too big or too small to Steve Mac Isaac, 6449 Coventry Hills Dr NE, Rio Rancho, NM 87144. The memo space on your check should say for AC-119 Gunship Plaque, made out to AC-119 Gunship Association. Questions, call Col Mac at 302-249-1499, or e-mail colmacmac@mac.com



3. PLEASE remember to contact your group POC, the Membership Coordinator Ev Sprous, or the Association Secretary Andrea Drzyzga when you **change contact information, especially your email address**. We very much want to keep in contact with you. If you receive the *Firing Circle* by walking to the mailbox after its postal delivery, AND you have and use an EMAIL ADDRESS, TELL Mike Drzyzga, Roy Davis, your unit POC, or our Membership Coordinator NOW if you want future Newsletters and FLASHES sent via email. You can **SAVE** us a lot by reducing the cost of postage, printer paper, envelopes, ink cartridges, etc. Contact Association Membership Coordinator Ev Sprous, at ac119kstingerunner@gmail.com or call (520) 528-9444.

4. Are you interested in some AC-119 Gunship historical facts, current events, interesting dialogue, photos and stories about AC-119s? If you have Internet access on your computer, tablet or cell phone, then you have to join the Association's **Facebook page**. It now has **over 723 members** – not just directly related AC119ers, but also history buffs, AC-130 folk (including some new 73rd SOS Shadows), model makers, etc. Just browse to: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/195912423919726/>. Also, there are Facebook Pages dedicated to “Air Force Gunners”, “Air Force 462 Weapons”, “Happy Valley – Phan Rang” (almost 1400 members), and “U.S. Military Veterans - News you can use” – very interesting pictures and history, current news, and other valuable information.
5. **Awards and Decorations** coordinator Steve “Col Mac” Mac Isaac continues to aid us in fixing incorrect DD214s. He has helped many get on the trail to receiving decorations they earned through research of documentation and orders shared by association members. Questions and comments: Contact Col Mac at email: colmacmac@mac.com, or (MST) Cell phone: (302) 249-1499.
6. **WE NEED YOU TO SEND US YOUR SPECIAL ORDERS.** Please send Ev Sprouss copies of your special orders. These are needed to help our comrades with claims and family members after their loved one passes. Send them to Everett Sprouss at ac119kstingergunner@gmail.com or 639 E. Orchard Lane, Gilbert, AZ 85296 or call Ev at (520) 528-9444. Please do this as soon as possible.
7. **Books:** Our web Store has 7 books written about and by AC-119ers. Their experiences and legacy are treasures to read, learn from, and enjoy! These include our original History Book; a History book with all the original plus new Bios; a book of Stories; *Spooky, Spectre, and the Man* by Mike Friel about Ron Terry’s battles to create and utilize fixed-wing gunships; a book of the cartoons that were our way of inserting humor into SEA; *The Gunship Chronicles* by Larry Barbee including his Stinger 41 story; and *History of Fairchild C-119 Flying Boxcar* by Wendell Cosner. Your actual selections and purchase in the store are via Amazon.

Future Reunion

2023 AC-119 Gunship Association Reunion XXIII will be in Washington, D.C.