

Greetings AC-119 Gunshippers

Sometimes people ask me, “What is the AC-119 Gunship Association about?” Here’s what I answer: *Old friendships, new friendships, and putting the AC-119 Shadow and Stinger Gunships into the history books and peoples’ awareness.*

Fred Graves, Jim Bennes, Norm Evans, and Bill Petrie started us down that path 8 years ago and we’ve kept true to what they began. Bottom lines are that we ARE AC-119 Gunshippers – we DO exist – we ARE damn proud of our roles – our friendships ARE forever – and it’s time to make sure historians and people know that. Period.

So, with our 7th Reunion coming up, there’s an opportunity to meet old friends, make new ones, and there’s something we need from each and every one of you to help us with our place in history. A little background first:

Our Reunion this year is about our common heritage as AC-119ers. As part of that, our own Dr. Larry “Fletch” Fletcher is working on an Association history project with Turner Publishing, to create a History Book on AC-119s. We wanted to do the book last year but we did not have inputs from most of the folks we have contact info on. Since it can’t be a true history unless it captures most of our missions and experiences, it won’t work if it’s only about 100 guys and what we did. It has to include as many guys as we can get - what we did and the heritage we left for future warriors.

- Here’s the challenge: Ron Julian manages a database of almost 1,000 guys who worked on, supported our mission, or flew AC-119s. Last year Ron sent everyone a letter and e-mail to make sure our contact information is current, and for those who aren’t members, to provide information about the Reunion and Association. We’ll be contacting most of those who are not members in the next month or so, with our Vice-President Vern Hansen leading a team of folks to close the loop with as many newbies as we can.
- If you’re reading this, we need EVERYONE we know who was in AC-119s to send Fletch a short bio and stories about your AC-119 experience – that means YOU. Fletch has examples in the Newsletter and they’re on the website. It’s our heritage, our history, and definitely one of the Association’s prime reasons for existing. When we’re gone so are our stories unless we put them down for our families and history.

Bottom line: we can show the depth and breadth of our AC-119 existence with 15 minutes effort from you, so please take the time to send Fletch a bio and something about your experiences around AC-119s!

Some Reunion Plan highlights:

- Reunion VII is in beautiful Albuquerque and our Reunion Coordinator Steve “Mac” MacIsaac has created a full slate of Reunion activities as well as plenty of time to visit with old friends and make some new ones. The MCM Elegante Hotel is our location for Friday’s Social, the Saturday Association Meeting, Saturday night’s Banquet, Sunday’s western BBQ, and a great Hootch area set up just for us! Most of you told us, “*have some Reunions other places*” so it’s time to get your butts in gear and show up!
- Our AC-119 Gunship extended family continues to grow. For the last several years we’ve been honored to have family members of those we lost in SEA as our guests at the Reunion. Getting to know them (and them getting to know us) is one of the highlights for the folks who come to the Reunions. We will have several of those honored families at this year’s Reunion in Albuquerque. Don’t miss the chance to meet them, talk with them, and become part of a larger family. It’s an experience that leaves you humbler and proud at the same time – richer but with recognition of our mutual losses at the same time. I wouldn’t trade it for anything, and take a look at Jim Terry’s pictures of visits he had with Tommy Hamman’s daughter and Tommy’s grand-kids in Hawaii, plus his visit with Thomas Rucker’s parents in Texas. Their lives were lost in SEA but they live on in their families and us. Never forgotten.
- Also, the re-activated 71st SOS is stationed at Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque and their Squadron Commander wants his troops to understand their AC-119 Gunship heritage from all of us, so we’ll visit with them Friday afternoon. Plus, the 58th Wing Commander calls us AC-119ers a “treasure” he wants all his Special Ops and Rescue troops to meet, so he’s putting on the dog with static displays Friday morning of all their Special; Ops and Rescue aircraft along with a chance for lunch and some time with today’s young Air Force warriors. The Reunion schedule includes opportunities for visits with both units and their young troops – 90% of whom will go into a combat assignment when they complete their training there. What an opportunity to build on our common heritage with today’s new warriors and help them understand who we were as the “been there, done that, you can do it too” generation!

Mac has more details on all the Reunion activities in the Newsletter - take the time to fill out your Reunion Registration Form and then call the Elegante at 1-866-650-8900 to make your reservation (be sure to use Reunion Code AC-119). Do this soon since we may max out the Banquet and it is first-come first-served for that. All the other events and activities should be fine but sign up now before this gets put aside and you forget! Also, take some time to visit the website, where Bill Petrie has tons of info accessible through the site. Add it to your “Favorites” list and read the Guest book entries - there are messages from spouses, sons and daughters and lots of fellow Gunshippers.

At the last Association Meeting we voted to select a Reunion location two-years out, and next year’s Reunion is already voted on for Fort Walton Beach as a joint Reunion with AC-119, AC-47, and AC-130 Gunshippers! Gus Sininger and Norm Evans are working that as our Reunion VIII Coordinators. And that brings me to another request - if you’re interested in hosting a future Reunion in your location there are three things you need to do:

1. Volunteer as the Reunion Coordinator (or identify who that will be).
2. Bring a short “pitch” to the Association Meeting at the Reunion (Saturday morning) and convince all the gnarly old farts who will be there why they should vote for your location.

3. Have specific locale information that includes:

- Hotel, meal, and activity facilities (including a Hootch)
- Room costs and nearest airline cities with info on transportation options to the Reunion site
- Activities or local interest areas – for before or after the Reunion, including any local heritage stuff like Air Museums, Air Force Bases, Vietnam or other AC-119 historical interest things, etc.

Whoever brings a Reunion location candidate will brief us and we will vote on this at the Saturday morning Membership Meeting. If you think you might want to do one in your area, call me at 707-592-4492 and we can get more detailed on what to prepare and bring.

Please join me in remembering those who have left us in the years past, and those we lost this year, including: Milo Yowell, Bill Hamilton, Tony Agnello, Robert Conley; Ed Holbrook; and John Brooks. Our prayers are with them, their families, and their friends.

Lastly, serving on the Association Board is an honor with responsibility - our volunteers keep us going and the Bottom Line is we can always use volunteers. Contact any of us if you're interested in helping us keep the Association healthy and fun!

Some folks are "friends always" – that's what this is all about, and hope to see many of you in Albuquerque at the MCM Elegante next September 29th for a fun weekend!!

Wayne Laessig

President AC-119 Gunship Association