

## President's Message (11-17-2016)

Greetings from NJ: The challenge to keep the AC-119 Gunship Association vibrant & progressive will be faced with continued gunshipper's spirit. I am honored to step-up to this position & continue the great work done by all my predecessors. Uh Oh? You ask, who will publish the *Firing Circle*, who is our Secretary now, & who will handle all the Membership Tasks. Here is your 2016-17 Board of Directors:

President: Michael Drzyzga                      V.P.: Robert La Rosa                      Secretary: Ralph Lefarth (& Asst Treasurer)  
Treasurer: Doug Wohlgamuth                      Past Pres. Larry Fletcher                      Membership Coordinator: Ev Sprous  
Members-at-Large: Cash McCall, Jim Dunn & (new) Terry Sarul

We intend to serve you well. I'm sure the transition for me will be just as easy as it is for Obama/Trump!! Also, until I find another, I'll continue as *Firing Circle* editor (any volunteers?).

**Reunion XVII, Ft Walton Beach, FL, at the Ramada Resorts, "A Summary":** Our primary reunion coordinator, Gus Sininger was ill during this reunion. Yet, that tough fighter that he is would not sit down until he could not stand anymore. My personal admiration to Gus for what he did, & to everyone else who helped out to make the reunion very successful – with a special thanks to Larry Hunter, Association Chaplain (& policy enforcer), who was right there whenever a bump-in-the-process was looming. We welcome 13 "first-timers", but only 12 attended (Colorado wildfire fighting took precedence for one!). Look at the pictures in the post-reunion *Firing Circle*.

Fri Social Event: About 50 attendees went on a bus ride to Pensacola to visit historic old-town, then to McGuire's Irish Pub for lunch, then to Veteran's Memorial Park. The weather was beautiful, & everyone had an enjoyable time. I saw a few teared eyes as we found our fallen AC-119ers on "the WALL" at the Memorial. Thank you Carol Hinton (& Andrea Drzyzga) for pulling this tour together.

Fri evening's Meet & Greet was excellent. No-one was unhappy with a bountiful buffet. The catering services at the Ramada were complimented. Saturday's early Business Meeting was well attended – we went through Pres. Fletcher's detailed agenda. We were actually finished by 1000 hrs, in time to arrange car-pooling to get to Hurlburt. A solemn memorial service was held at the Air Park, followed by pizza & drinks at the 18<sup>th</sup> FTS Operations Building. I'm still happy to see our AC-119 legacy proudly displayed in the Building. But the main-attraction was a tour of an AC-130J "Ghost Rider". Every crew position was staffed & they answered all our questions (well, "mostly" all). And, if you want to know, YES, they did refurb the 105mm that was pulled from the retired 130H's, & it sticks out the left rear, on a new articulated gun mount, to supplement the 30mm Bushmaster in front. Oh Yeah, a real Gunship she is! What touched my heart were the comments from a few 1<sup>st</sup> timers & spouses. Here's one: "the new respect they have for our current sophisticated airmen, & the planes they fight in." We did return for some Hootch time, but the Banquet was close. After the color guard posted the colors, & Cash McCall again officiated the POW/MIA Table, we ate, gathered for pictures & socializing with new friends & long-time friends, & told the best war stories ever (?). Our 18<sup>th</sup> FTS guests: Cmdr Lt Col Dan Kobs, his DO, Lt Col Matt Winters, & their PO, Lt Col Leeds, were enjoying the evening with us. Col Kobs presented beautiful engraved clear glass mugs to L. Fletcher & G. Sininger. THANK YOU to Sam Gallo, & Maintainer POC Andy Bright for doing a successful 50/50. Another THANK YOU to Cindy Posey & her team for smoothly doing the largest Association "silent auctions" to date. WHO WON the raffled .45 ACP Custom Pistol? Our AC-130W Associate & Facebook member TSgt. Hassan Ali (we met him in San Antonio, & he is now at Hurlburt). Sunday: Doug Wohlgamuth did a fun golf outing, or lots of pool-time as some did, or more Hootch time for others (or a trip to the Naval Air Station Museum in Pensacola), &, of course, the Halloween Party Farewell BBQ. So many dressed in costumes – it was so much fun!! In closing, this one was a reunion that should stand-out in our historical records.

**Minor Reorganization:** Some of you may know that I accepted the nomination, if & only if, we had qualified people to accept the responsibilities I had as Secretary & Newsletter Editor. The Secretary also handled ALL Membership tasks. Therefore, Secretary Ralph Lefarth will help handle business meetings, send out the agenda, host any Telecoms, & record minutes. Membership Coordinator Ev Sprous (along with being our Media Manager & 18<sup>th</sup> SOS POC) is now handling all Membership related task, such as annual member renewals, adding Life Members & sending out Life Certs & member ID Cards. (Thank you Ralph & Ev).

Wishing you all, & your families, a happy, healthy, & safe Holiday Season.  
God Bless.

Mike Drzyzga, President