

## 2018 Mike Drzyzga President's Messages

**President's Message - November 2018.** Hi, it is me again. One of the many important tasks accomplished during Reunion XIX in Tucson, AZ, was the election of Association Board Members, which allows the AC-119 Gunship Association to continue strongly for another year. We elected a new Vice President, Jerry Hester, to take the position vacated by Bob LaRosa. And we elected John Wolff as Board-Member-at-Large, to hold the position vacated by Terry Sarul. We all thank Bob & Terry for providing dedication & valuable service, & wish Jerry & John success helping the Board continue. The other Board Members happily will continue for another year. I feel privileged & honored to continue as Association President for one more year. Also, TWO more items of good news: (1) Life Member & Tucson resident Donald Luke volunteered to take on the Newsletter Editor's position. THANK YOU, Don! Don has both technical & practical experience for this important function. We are working on a Firing Circle for distribution this month, & (2) The Association has a new Web Master – Liz Buss, an Information Technology professional who understands website maintenance, & will help the Board keep the Association's website fresh & current. Please browse to [www.ac119gunships.com](http://www.ac119gunships.com) & check it out. Welcome, Don and Liz, to a great team!



The Tucson reunion was a great success. The Association's Facebook page exploded with pictures & stories for at least ten days afterwards. We had about 230 attendees, & there would have been more except that Hurricane Michael dampened the travel plans of many northern Floridians. Coordinator Everett Sprou, with assistance from Lee Jordan, Craig Corbett, & Don Luke, really worked energetically to pull this together. The Hootch was huge, & resupplied with our always-there volunteer support. We had many "first timers" who appeared to be whole-heartily thrilled to attend. Thursday evening, over 100 of us car pooled to the well-known Pinnacle Peak restaurant for dinner. Although Friday morning started off with rain showers, the USAF "Bone Yard"/ Pima Air Museum—and the Mini-Museum—tours were enjoyed by all attending, as the weather cleared. The Saturday morning Business Meeting was very successful. Among other items, the membership accepted updated Association By-Laws; voted on the Reunion XXI location for 2020; received updated info regarding membership numbers; reviewed our financial report from Treasurer Doug Wohlgamuth; & heard updates on the website from Wayne Laessig & updates on "our store" from Quartermaster Gus Sininger. The Awards Banquet on Saturday night went quite smoothly, with the exception of under-staffed hotel servers delaying dinner for some. Our Mystery Guest Speaker, Howard Reid, entertained us with his USAF anecdotes for 20 minutes. And Gus Sininger & Andrea Drzyzga successfully held our traditional silent & live auctions. Sunday was a beautiful, fun day for those who went on the buses to visit Old Tucson. A lot of pictures were taken as we engaged in entertaining events, learned local history, & enjoyed places to eat. We did experience a number of other disappointing hiccups with the Double-Tree Hilton, where they clearly over extended the capabilities of the facility, which affected our Friday Meet & Greet buffet & the operation of the Hootch on Sunday. The Board addressed these with hotel management the

best we could. And going forward, our tough lessons learned from Reunion XIX will not be forgotten.

Speaking of pictures, I must thank Jim Alvis, Dan Thompson, Ev Sprous, & others, who picked up the task of capturing images of the week's events while I was busy. The November Firing Circle will contain a great review of the week with many images. Of course, I want to thank Larry "Baby Huey" Hunter, our Chaplain, for continuing to provide his service. And we are thankful that Sam & Debbie Gallo ran our 50/50 at the Banquet.

On a personal note there are FOUR things on my frontal brain. (1) Upon arriving in Tucson, Andrea & I learned that Sam Gallo had a minor heart attack in Alamogordo, NM, on his way across country from Pittsburgh. Sam spent four days in the Tucson VA Medical Center (very nice facility) & they fixed him good enough for Sam to join us on Thursday for the remainder of the reunion. "Love You, Man!" (2) I have been to the Pima Air Museum twice already, but this visit was very special. As I roamed about the Air Park & joined a few different small groups of former airmen, I saw some who became clearly emotional while being up close & personal with an aircraft they loved to work on or fly. I just listened as they told some wonderful personal stories of their experiences, & I learned some interesting details about the aircraft. (3) It was wonderful to see the real joy on the first-timers faces as they were welcomed by other attendees. We were all "first-timers" at some point, & this brotherhood really shows the spirit of us gunshippers! (4) It was super to have so many family members join us for this reunion. I pray that this trend continues & our family members continue to gather with us. We can make our reunions a "Family Reunion."

OK, I dropped the news above, about the upcoming reunions. The Board is fully engaged with Chuck Williams as we plan important details with the "pipper" centered on Salt Lake City for next September. What about 2020? Gus Sininger & Larry Hunter volunteered to host us at Ft. Walton Beach once again. I know FOR SURE that our two legacy special ops units at Hurlburt (the 18th TFS & the 73rd SOS Shadows) will welcome us warmly again. Keep scanning the mailbox for registration details for SLC in the upcoming Firing Circles. The membership voted in a large majority for FWB; therefore, John (& Laura) Wolff will keep the proposal for Omaha, NB, (in 2021) on the back burner for us. Thank you, John & Laura!

Have a safe & happy holiday season ahead.

Respectfully,  
Mike Drzyzga, President, 2016–2019

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**President's Message - August 12, 2018.** Greetings from NJ, the Garden State. Hope everyone is having an enjoyable summer 2018. Many are not, & our thoughts & prayers go out to victims of flood, fire storms, & other nasty events.

This message is "not a president's message," as usual. The info intended for an opening paragraph originally flowed out & into the computer from both the President's & Firing Circle editor's seat. As the summer races along, the Association's Board is working on the final details for the Tucson, AZ reunion. We are solid! The reunion registrations for Tucson are increasing quickly. As we track registration numbers, this sure looks like it will be very well attended. I'm happy to say

that a good number of “first-timers” have registered. See the “Who’s Coming” list later in the *Firing Circle*.

We are also working with reunion coordinator Chuck Williams, who has begun planning for a super Reunion XX in Salt Lake City in Sept., 2019.

One of our Points-of-Contact for the 16<sup>th</sup> SOS at Canon AFB, Steve “Col Mac” MacIsaac, attended a Change-of-Command Ceremony. Also, there is a story in the *Firing Circle* about Marshall Mullins’ Trike being donated to a Patriot Guard Rider. And the *Firing Circle* contains important information & updates for reunion attendees.

Be safe out there: be seeing many of you in Tucson for a fun reunion.  
Mike Drzyzga, President, 2016-2018 & *Firing Circle* editor

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**President’s Message - June 10, 2018.** I hope this finds you all well & enjoying the ending-weeks of springtime. As time seems to pass so quickly, we are now about four months from the next reunion in Tucson, AZ. The Association’s Board has been meeting by teleconference every month to keep all of the routine & special business items in our cross-hairs. I am happy to report that all is well. The *Firing Circle* for June 2018 provides updated information regarding the reunion, a list of “routine business” announcements that are always included, plus some special HOT NEWS items. I usually find a reason to have meaningful color images to dress-up the newsletter, but not so for this one. The written info fills the space! I look forward to see so many of you in Tucson.

Let me switch hats, & write as the Newsletter editor. This is a fun task for me because it really keeps all the Association activity in focus. I have not used any special “publishing” software, & have relied on MS Word to make them. Nevertheless, doing the *Firing Circle* & performing as Association President has become burdensome. The Association would benefit from a fresh mind to focus on just publishing the newsletter. I have been sending 4–6 per year, which seems to be sufficient. So here is the pitch: we need a volunteer who is savvy enough using a personal computer to take over as the Association’s Newsletter editor. If you feel up to taking on the task, please contact me directly via email: [drzyzga513@hotmail.com](mailto:drzyzga513@hotmail.com), or cell: 201-310-2943.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mike Drzyzga, President, 2016-2018

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**President’s Message - March 24, 2018.** I hope this message finds you all well, as we turn the corner from winter into springtime. This message is focused on two special items: First, the NEW & simpler on-line reunion registration process; Second, the new 73<sup>rd</sup> SOS Shadow gunship “stand-up” ceremony at Hurlburt Field.

**REUNION REGISTRATION:** My last message indicated that our IT Committee, headed by Wayne Laessig, was hard at work implementing a major revision to our web-site, in order to improve the reunion registration process. As most new technology has its “bumps” to iron out, the update we installed on the web site did not do what we needed, even though the vendor’s product description said so. Ugh! They recalled their product, revised it as they had to, & it is working perfectly now on

our web-site. It just took more time than we could have expected. Our hard-working POCs blasted out a two-part FLASH message that contains ALL the info you need regarding the reunion in Tucson, AZ, the social events (tours), & how to register. A successful super-effort by Wayne Laessig! If you have not done so yet, you should go to the Association's web-site & make plans to attend. Reunion coordinator Ev Sprous set forth a great effort putting our Reunion XIX together! I am so looking forward to seeing as many of you all that can attend.

**AC-130J, Shadow's Stand-Up Ceremony:** It is difficult for me to briefly tell this story, but here goes. I was forwarded an email that originated from Capt. Chris Zenc, Flight Commander (& Pilot) with a NEW AC-130J gunship Squadron at Hurlburt, & he wanted to know all about our AC-119G Shadow Patch. We began exchanging emails. I gave him details, pictures, & indicated our sincere interest to stay in close contact. All of a sudden, we were invited to attend the 73<sup>rd</sup> SOS Stand-Up ceremony on 2/23/2018. My wife Andrea & I extended our already-planned FL vacation to include attending the ceremony. It was an awesome event. About 24 former Shadows/ Stingers & spouses attended. We were seated up front in the hangar, & recognized by the Commander, Lt. Col Tracey Iverson, as their honored guests. There was many a teared eye in our group, including my own. A "J" was on static display, the first aircraft with the new nose art displayed. After the 20-min ceremony, we toured the new Shadow from the flight deck to the Griffin missile launchers in the rear. The 105mm Howitzers, removed from the AC- 130H that were retired to the bone-yard, are refurbished & installed in the aft. After the tour, we reconvened in the Squadron Ops hootch, & had refreshments, snacks, & cut-a-Shadow-cake. I presented LC Iverson with her Life Membership Certificate, a hard copy of the AC-119 Gunship Association History Book, a 17<sup>th</sup> SOS Association Coin, our Shadow patch, & an autographed copy of Larry Fletcher's book "Charlie Chasers."

Now, I saw a few teared eyes in those young special operations warriors! Our local Associate, former Shadow Gunner, Norman Evans, is our Point-Of-Contact with the 73<sup>rd</sup>. We have a well-established relationship that will continue for a long time. I could certainly interject at least four personally memorable moments that day, but space disallows that. Ask me in Tucson.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mike Drzyzga, President, 2016-2018

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**President's Message - January, 2018.** Greetings fellow Gunshippers, Happy, Healthy & Prosperous New Year! I pray that 2018 will be an awesome year for all.

The Association's Board is at full-power now, focused on the detailed planning for the October 2018 reunion in Tucson, AZ. Thank you to all the attendees of last year's Dayton reunion for completing the post reunion "survey forms". Secretary Ralph Lefarth did a superb job of summarizing your comments & feedback, & all that information will go into future planning.

When can you Register for the Tucson reunion? The IT Committee is quickly implementing an easier on-line Registration process. You will be able to go to the Quartermaster's Page on the Association's Web site, & complete the registration process. Our Web site required an upgrade, & then some thorough testing. This should be completed soon.

But, you can now make your Hotel reservations at the Double-Tree Hilton at the Airport. -- call the hotel directly at 520-225-0800 or 800-222-TREE [8733] or go to <http://group.doubletree.com/AC119GunshipAssn>

**New Active-Duty Shadows!!** This is HOT news. Chief (Ret) William Petrie passed to me an email from the Duty Officer of a NEW AC-130J squadron formed under the 1<sup>st</sup> SOW at Hurlburt. Captain Chris Zenk asked us to provide detailed information regarding the components of the 17th SOS Shadow Patch, for the new 73rd SOS gunship unit known "Shadows", & they are in the process of creating the unit's patch. As of this writing, I have not heard of the patch being finalized, but it WILL have the skull & horse carried from the AC-119J test unit "Ghostriders", & it will have our black-capped & hatted Shadow. Who knows what evil lurks in the desert sand? (I just made that up).

**Donation to USO:** Ron Julian received a heart-felt thank you letter from the USO, Southern OH group, for the wonderful generosity of the AC-119 Organization! This is a result of the money donated by the Dayton Reunion attendees last Oct. Al Heuss' AC-119 flag holder, table center pieces, were taken home by a person seated at the table based on their donation. The Holiday Inn matched us dollar-for-dollar, & the USO was able to provide a much warmer & caring effort to airmen not home for the holiday season. Well done, my brothers!

**Happy Valley – Phan Rang AFB – Facebook Page:** I joined this FB page & find it very interesting. Lot of history, pictures, & the stories range from long before AC-119s arrived. They have nearly 1400 members. Their group is planning another reunion, this year Oct 11, 2018, in Nashville, TN the same week of our Association's reunion in Tucson.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mike Drzyzga, President, 2016-2018