



### **President's Message – October 2019**

Greetings from TX!! Having only been on the Board for a year as the Association's Vice President, my election came as quite a surprise! I may have been a bit reluctant to accept the position, but with the support of the Association Board and the entire membership, I'm sure we can keep the Association moving forward in our efforts to promote the history and legacy of the AC-119 Program. Although I have only been on the Board for the past year, I've been with the Association since the very first Reunion. I admit I missed one of the reunions, but I feel like I made up for it by hosting our 2013 Reunion in San Antonio (*with a **lot** of assistance from our family*). I hope the attendees all enjoyed our TX hospitality!

For those who were unable to attend this year's Reunion in Salt Lake City, UT, you missed some special moments in our Association's history. This reunion was special, because we celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Association, as well as the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AC-119 Gunships' arrival in Southeast Asia. Although the turnout was a bit less than expected (159 attendees), we may have set a record for "first timers" (27 attendees). Another first for this Reunion was our new Sponsorship Program that raised almost \$3,000 to help defray some of the costs for the Reunion (see the Sponsorship article in this newsletter for more information).

The most significant change this year was the Regular Members voting to give our Associate Members the right to vote and to hold office. After Mike Drzyzga stepped down as President (replacing Larry Fletcher as the Board's Past-President) and I was elected President, we needed a new Vice President, so Roy Davis was elected to be our VP. Two other Board members stepped down for personal reasons, so Andrea Drzyzga was elected to replace Ralph Lefarth as Secretary, and Jenna Laird was elected to replace Cash McCall as Member-at-Large. This made Andrea and Jenna our first Associate Members to join the Board. Our remaining Board Members (Treasurer – Doug Wohlgamuth and Members-at-Large Jim Dunn and John Wolff) remained in their same positions.

The Reunion also had a special personal memory for me during our optional visit to the Hill AFB Aerospace Museum. One of their display aircraft was my C-7A Caribou (tail number 63-9757) that I was crew chief on in 1969 when I was assigned to the 537<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron at Phu Cat AB, Vietnam (before I joined the Gunships). After extensive advance coordination, the Museum Curator got permission to open the aircraft so I could show it to my daughters and grandchildren who were at the Reunion (my wife decided it was a bit too crowded, so she waited outside).

Finally, I'd like to give a great big **THANK YOU** to:

- Chuck Williams, our Reunion XX Coordinator at Salt Lake City, UT, for all of the time and effort it took to put this Reunion together (having done this before, we know how much work takes).
- All the Regular and Associate Members who helped with various key aspects for the Reunion, including the on-line registration/payments, the Park City Tour, the live auction at the banquet, the silent auction in the Hooch, the Golf Tournament (sorry if I forgot anyone here).
- The Little America hotel and catering staff for the exceptional support they provided.
- The Utah Military Academy for providing cadets to serve as our color guard and National Anthem singer at the banquet and to assist in the Hooch throughout the Reunion.
- And a special **THANKS** to everyone who helped create the "**Our Story**" video shown at the banquet (a link to an extended version is available on our Association website).

I'd also like to wish the best for the hosts for our next two reunions: Gus Sininger (2020 at Fort Walton Beach, FL) and Jerry McDonald (2021 at Branson, MO). Both of them have done this before, so I'm sure the reunions will be terrific!!

Respectfully,

Jerry Hester, President