

General Metcalf

Families of those we are here to honor today
AC- 119 gunship association members and guests
Thank you. It is my great honor to be a part of this memorial today.

The military is intertwined with tradition – for us, it binds us to our past - One of valor, service and sacrifice. It is the source of our pride, our honor and instills the conviction to prevail when the odds are against us. No tradition is more sacred than the honor we give our fallen.

Today on these – our hallowed grounds. We honor these men who made the ultimate sacrifice supporting AC-119 combat operations in south east Asia.

They went into harms way knowing - there could be no triumph without loss - no victory without suffering - no freedom without sacrifice. And still they answered their nation's call to arms - All gave some – some gave all.

In remembering - we reopen old wounds. Yet, It's right that we remember, and even that we mourn for our fallen heroes. In doing so we fulfill that sacred pledge we make to every soldier, sailor and airmen who goes to war – to never forget the sacrifices they made for us all.

The AC-119 association and others like it help us keep that solemn promise. For those we honor today and for those still in harms way today - I thank you.

We honor their families, the innocents who pay the highest price in war, for their sacrifices. None can measure the grief of a wife who lost a husband, a parent who lost a son, a sibling who lost a brother or a child who will endure a lifetime never having known their father. To the families of the lost, I assure you, you are not alone.

For I know closeness that forms in units in time of war – far from home - we become one as we share our hopes, dreams, and troubles. Our nation, our unit, our crew, our brothers. All of our lofty ideals aside, it's this unity that compels us to risk our lives. When a mission calls for great risk - we must go. Not for glory – but because we know if we do not, someone else will be called upon to do so – and none of us are willing to sit in safety while we send our brother to such peril.

And for those who do not know – operating a gunship in combat is often perilous. These are little more than cargo planes – big, slow, and not very stealthy - fitted with guns and sent to the sounds of the guns – where men are at risk – and the enemy is prepared to defend themselves. Built to defend our soldiers in close combat – and to do so without endangering the innocent - to save lives.

How many owe their lives to the SHADOW and STINGER – we will never know – but we do know that many men one have come forward to say – if not for the gunship overhead we would have surly perished. I believe that is why these men we honor - and those who fight today risk their lives.

I have had the honor to lead such men in combat and I know the dangers they faced, and I tell you when I read of the courage of the men of the 71st, 17th and 18th SOS I am awed and inspired. The men who flew and supported these aircraft displayed - without exception - uncommon valor.

We airman of the 4th and 16th SOS who fly the AC-130H and U model gunships are keenly aware of our proud heritage of valor and sacrifice. It's what brought us to choose this profession - why many of us will devote our lives to it – and why we are so intent to preserve it for those who will follow us.

I AM A COMMANDO

As my brother Commandos before me, I am proud to step into history as a member of the Air Force Special Operations Command.

I will walk with pride with my head held high, my heart and attitude will show my allegiance to God, country and comrades.
When unable to walk another step, I will walk another mile.

With freedom my goal, I will step into destiny with pride and the Air Force Special Operations Command.

Even now as dusk approaches far to the east – airmen are launching their gunships into combat over the skies of Afghanistan and Iraq. They will be seeking to sort out the friendly, the enemy and the innocent over the field of battle. They are the chosen few of a new generation of warriors who have answered the call to take the fight to the enemy far from our shores. With them rests the hopes and prayers of our great nation. Failure is not an option. They are ready for the challenge for they carry with them the banner of honor, the spirit, and the lessons learned by the men we honor today over the skies of SEA 30 years ago.

To the families – For us all and especially for those who found sanctuary under the watchful eye of the AC-119 - I offer our gratitude for your sacrifices and the deepest sympathy of the nation.

We dedicate this service to you and we offer to comfort you with this indelible fact - they were with us then and they are with us now –They will never be forgotten.