

The AC-119 Gunship Association

March 13, 2023 News Flash

COMMEMORATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR and the
service of SSGT JOHN O'NEAL RUCKER
4 February 2023, Historic Courthouse, Linden, Texas



On January 27, 1973, 11-hours before the cease fire took effect, Sergeant Rucker became *the last American who died at Da Nang and was the Vietnam War's last enlisted casualty*. O'Neal was assigned to aircraft maintenance for the 18th Special Operations Squadron's Stinger aircraft.

Sometimes in life, there is confluence of factors that result in a GREAT outcome. These factors come together perfectly to create an event that is VERY GOOD! That is exactly what this commemoration was.

John O'Neal Rucker is deserving of our remembrance. He served in the 18th SOS and was one of our brothers. O'Neal was chosen by the South Vietnamese as the honoree on a granite marker at DaNang which was dedicated to the men who served there and those who gave their lives in Southeast Asia.

(To access the following links, press "Ctrl" and left click on your mouse.)

[50th Vietnam Commemoration - Short Video](#)

O'Neal's legacy continues today through his strong family. In the next video, hear O'Neal's niece Vicki O'Neal speak of his family's love for him. O'Neal's daughter, Tia McConnell also speaks about her dad and her incredible journey to find him.

[50th Vietnam Commemoration - Long Video:](#)

Vicki O'Neal mentioned that Linden, Texas is a small town with traditional values of Patriotism, Family and Friends. O'Neal embodied these values and no finer remarks can be said of him. O'Neal's Mother, Mae, sat next to Vicki and held Tia's hand during the Commemoration. It was clear that O'Neal and all of the AC-119 brothers lost in Vietnam were cherished by the Rucker family.

[John O'Neal Rucker Bio](#)

[Tia McConnell 2013 Letter to Association](#)

There were eight AC-119ers at the Commemoration. They shared a common theme which can be heard in the video above. AC-119ers played hard, fought hard, and most importantly, we were brothers. As brothers, we know how hard our job was, how dangerous our job was, and how important our job was.

The Commemoration in Linden became the Welcome Home every Vietnam Veteran dreams of, with City volunteers pressure washing the Courthouse and town square sidewalks, and the Mayor and other officials planting flowers around the town square. Everyone from the local Color Guards to the Cass County Judge made all the Air Force Association members, AC-119ers, and Rucker Family feel welcome and appreciated.

[Cass County Citizens Journal article](#)

[Texarkana Gazette News article](#)

The Commemoration was created and facilitated by a strong partnership between the Air Force Association and the AC-119 Gunship Association. This confluence of the Rucker family, Commemoration participants, a deserving person honored, a tremendous story, and local officials determined to show honor, resulted in a GREAT Event.

[Air Force Association Magazine; The 50th Vietnam Linden, TX Commemoration](#)

This partnership is reflected in the Air Force Association magazine article above. The partnership between the AFA, AC-119 Gunship Association resulted in the ABC television story below.

[KLTV ABC Shreveport Newscast](#)

It was the AC-119 Gunship Association's privilege and honor to help plan, facilitate and participate in this Commemoration.

John Cootz; President, AC-119 Gunship Association