

REUNION XXIII WASHINGTON DC -Terry Sarul

Greetings my fellow 119rs! I apologize that this reunion recap has taken so long, but Theresa and I have been very busy since we got back from DC, with all the different doctor appointments, trying to decorate for the Christmas holiday season and plan for a family get together and dinner.

The DC reunion was a huge success, even though there were a few hurdles that had to be overcome and issues that were unexpected. However, from the able leadership of the Board of Directors, and quite frankly, to the entire group of attendees, not only did we persevere, but we also allowed this reunion to be a **RESOUNDING SUCCESS!**

Some of the issues that were encountered were out of control of the BOD or the Armed Forces Reunions, the event coordinators. The main issue was the construction that was going on inside the Hilton Arlington Hotel. This construction was supposed to have been completed in October, which is why we rescheduled our original reunion dates in the first place to the second week of November. Theresa and I were the first to arrive on Monday and I immediately thought the worst. Painting walls and ceilings in the hallways, saws and hammer drills going on in the main lobby and plaza area where our "Hootch"/registration table would be located. It immediately came to my mind was, "how in the hell are we going to navigate all of these distractions, and I could only imagine a long list of complaints by our attendees". But guess what? **EVERYONE** just went with the flow. We had the triumvirate leadership of Mike Drzyzga, Wayne Laessig, and VP Terry Sarul and the full support of the Board of Directors that were in attendance that circumnavigated us through several roadblocks and hiccups that presented us with plenty of challenges throughout the week. **BUT MOST OF ALL**, we had the full support of the membership attendees that simply went with the flow and made sure we had a successful and memorable week for all involved.

HOOTCH NOTES

Let's get on with the fantastic reunion that prevailed. So many moments that were awe inspiring and really set the tone for one of our most memorable reunions.

Mike and I got there early enough in the week, prior to registration opening, where we were able to go shopping with Andrea and Theresa to stock the Hootch with drinks and munchies from Costco. This was the first time that I oversaw the Hootch and could not have done it without the help of Mike and Wayne to guide me through it. By all accounts, it must have been successful, as there were no complaints from the attendees. Also, I would like to thank Gerry Heuer for his willing help to make some runs to the BX for resupplies.

In addition to Hootch notes, there was a nice line up of silent and live auction items displayed on the tables. Also, there needs to be a huge shout out **"THANK YOU"** to Mike Drzyzga for conquering the A/V equipment set up. The BOD had previously set in motion the purchase of our very own A/V equipment, which was purchased by our past President, John Cootz, and shipped to the reunion hotel. Since Mike did not purchase the equipment, and seeing it for the first time, he diligently studied all the paperwork, and with a determination that was unwavering, managed to get all of the equipment hooked up in time before the Hootch officially opened on Wednesday.

While still on the subject of the Hootch, I had purchased a 6'x 2' vinyl banner that we attached to one of the walls, with the sole purpose of having our attendees and guests signing the banner. The end objective is to roll it up after the reunion, and bring it along for the next reunion, and everyone thereafter to add more signatures. I was very pleased with the results, as we got plenty of signatures including those of our honored guests, which included Whit Peters, ex-Secretary of The Air Force, who attended the Friday Meet & Greet, the AC-130J Ghost rider crew and I even had the Color Guard that presented the colors at the Banquet sign our banner. I am confident that the tradition will continue going forward and we will have many more signatures from our members and distinguished guests at all future reunions to be added to the banner.

THURSDAY

Thursday was a busy day for all of us. We had TWO tours lined up for the day.

The Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center and the Odyssey Lunch Cruise. I cannot speak about the museum tour since both were scheduled for the same day and at the same time. As Theresa and I opted for the cruise, I can vouch that we had a great time traveling down the Potomac River, had a wonderful lunch and enjoying the DJ that was provided. We even had a few brave souls out on the dance floor, doing their best rendition of the "Twist". Oh my, a site to behold. But a good time was had by all.

The second memorable event was the visit to our Hootch by the AC-130J Ghost rider crew on Thursday evening. A good time was had by all, with our attendees and the current "Jackal" crew swapping stories, and everyone trying to outdo the other with stories that got crazier and more unbelievable as the night wore on, which I would like to report went on until the wee hours of the night. I literally had to start flickering the lights to give fair warning that I had to shut the Hootch down. Also, by the end of the night, it was quite apparent that we would have to make another beer run in the morning, as the stock was significantly depleted. I congratulated the gunners especially for keeping up the tradition of stamina that they so admirably upheld. We finally closed the Hootch down, bid farewell to the crew, and told them to get back to their hotel to get some rest, as this rowdy bunch of 119rs would be invading their plane the next day, and any hangovers aside, we were expecting a thorough tour and inspection of their newest generation gunship.

FRIDAY

The next day, Friday, was jam packed. The bus ride to Dulles International to tour the AC-130J. Even though the weather was less than optimal, a bit rainy with a slight drizzle or mist, it went off without a hitch. The plane itself was spectacular, but even more so than the gunship with all the modern equipment and systems, was the crew. The flight crew was there, and yes, I'm sure there was a headache or two, but also involved with the tour was the ground support crew that traveled with them. They were very informative about everything that the aircraft had to offer. Even more impressive was the crew. They were so patient with all the attendees including the wives and family that made the bus trip. I just cannot say enough how respectful these young airmen and airwomen were to us, and how they truly were not only proud of their aircraft and mission, but also interested in hearing our story!

Friday evening was also highlighted by the traditional 'Meet & Greet' with Wayne Laessig as the emcee. Everything went as planned. We got to mingle with other attendees, especially meeting and welcoming the first timers to a reunion and sharing time with the KIA families that attended which included:

STINGER 41 KIA KEN BROWN FAMILY MEMBERS: Sandra Layne-widow, Thomas and Dolores Reitz- Son and Daughter-in-Law, and Ayden and Robert Kenneth Reitz-Grandsons.

SHADOW 78 KIA MEREDITH "Andy" ANDERSON FAMILY MEMBERS: Lee and Tim Jordan- Daughter and Son-in-Law, Dale Anderson-Son, Scarlet and Jacob Jordan- Grandchildren.

Also, in conjunction with the KIA agenda, Matt and Annette Robeck trailered the "AC-119 KIA Tribute Trike" 12 hours from Antioch, TN and had it on display outside the hotel. Needless to say, the Trike got a tremendous amount of interest, not only from our own attendees, but also from the general public entering and leaving the Hilton.

SATURDAY

Saturday kicked off with the membership business meeting. Because our President was unable to attend the reunion, Mike, Wayne, and I decided it would be easier for the three of us to split the duties of the three main events. As mentioned above, Wayne took over the emcee duties for the Meet & Greet, I took over the Saturday business meeting, and Mike would handle the all-encompassing Banquet on Saturday evening.

The business meeting was uneventful. Doug Wohlgamuth gave the Treasurers report. (Good news here, we are not in the RED, and still above water, in the black with our bank account. LOL). Membership numbers were announced, and Wayne gave us an update on the Web site. A spirited discussion was had on the future length and content of

future reunions. The Board will take up this issue at future board meetings. After all of the “nuts & bolts” of the Associations status, we were honored to have Lt.Col. Brian Schmidt, Deputy Group Commander, 27th Special Operation Group give a heartfelt speech on the importance of the Legacy/Heritage aspect of our gunship brotherhood.

We wrapped up the business meeting with another Quilt of Valor presentation, which was organized by Carol Hinton again. Thirteen (13) quilts were presented, including a quilt presented to Lt. Col. Schmidt. To date: Carol, through her organization, Quilts of Valor, has presented 94 quilts to our members.

JOB WELL DONE CAROL!

Saturday ended up with the evening banquet. Mike handled the emcee duties for the night, and there were several items on the agenda, besides the actual dinner itself.

The evening began with the presentation of colors by the Burke Composite Squadron, Civil Air Patrol, led by Capt. Sara Demyanovich.

The POW Ceremony Table liturgy was ably presented by Mark Tarpley.

John Morrow led us in the Invocation.

As soon as dinner was over, the agenda proceeded with a presentation by our guest speaker for the night, Barry Levine. Barry has written an article for Vietnam Magazine that covers the history of the AC-119 program. Quite knowledgeable on the subject, he gave a very enlightening power point presentation of the history of the 119 from the very beginning of the AC-119 conversion from the Korean War version of the C-119 cargo/paratroop version. Thank you, Barry, we were fortunate to have you and your daughter join us for the reunion.

Barry’s presentation was followed up by Mike with the Awards Ceremony, which included the following awards:

TERRY COURTNEY “ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARD”:

JOHN PAUL MAC ISAAC: For his contribution to the History Video Presentations over the years.

ANDREA DRZYZGA: For her dedicated work as past Association Secretary, FB Admin from the beginning, past tour coordinator, and Auction Coordinator.

LIMITED EDITION CHALLENGE COINS:

CAROL HINTON: For organizing and presenting Quilts of Valor to our members over the past three years.

MARK TARPLEY: For coordinating the John O’Neal Rucker Commemoration in Linden, TX, and also helping coordinate the AC-119 Plaque Ceremony at the Air Force Academy.

BARRY LEVINE: Author and Historian for bringing to light our AC-119 History through museum presentations and writing a story and article in Vietnam Magazine.

The evening concluded with yet another successful Live Auction, which featured a Stinger 41, half scale nose gear door shadow box, with the aircraft number of 826, that was conceived, and hand built by Terry Sarul’s Canadian artist/master modeler, Vern Gwin. Also of note: the shadow box was signed by three of the survivors from Stinger 41: Larry Barbee, Frank “Ski” Sledzinski, and Craig Corbett. The high bidder on it was Sandra Layne, widow of Stinger 41 KIA, Ken Brown. Sandra then gave it to her son, Thomas Reitz, who is going to display it in his wife’s Dolores’ barber shop/beauty shop on base at Warner-Robins AFB, GA. She has a wall in her shop that is devoted to “everything” military and promises a picture of it on the wall after it gets hung. Look for a photo in a future FC.

SUNDAY

The reunion concluded on Sunday, with the traditional, obligatory Board of Directors meeting in the morning. Much good feedback from the board members that were present, but also discussed were a few ‘lessons learned’ from the week. There was plenty of information to take back to the AFR for use in our future reunions.

Despite a few glitches, and with the overall number of attendees dropping off to approximately 120 for various reasons, whether it was health, distance, or scheduling conflicts. The officers and the BOD will call this reunion, "OVER" and a RESOUNDING AND REWARDING SUCCESS! It won't be long, and we'll start planning for REUNION XXIV in Colorado Springs, CO in the fall of 2024! It is shaping up to be to be a very rewarding reunion, with plenty of options for tours and visits, especially the Air Force Academy with our newly installed AC-119 plaque in place.

We would really like to see the numbers go up in attendance for XXIV and encourage each one of our members to try and make it on to your calendar or 'to-do' list for next year. One thing we can guarantee, YOU WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED, and as the years fly by, it will give you a fantastic opportunity to connect with the brothers that we served with on Shadow and Stinger gunships. You will not regret it.

We also look forward to seeing several key Board members next year that were unable to attend this reunion. They include Everett Sprou, Gus Sininger, Roy Davis and Larry Hunter.

One final personal note. Without getting into the weeds of the incident that occurred with myself and Theresa, we would like to thank everyone that helped us get through the week, especially all the ladies that flocked around Theresa with her bummed up ankle and knees. The women especially huddled around her like a flock of 'mother hens. LOL. So many to mention and at the risk of missing someone, we would like to thank: Andrea Drzyzga, Peggy Craig, Kathy Stout, Lynette Laessig, Carmel Smith and Brooks Lyall.

On a final sad note: We were saddened to hear of the passing of one of everyone's favorites, Sam Gallo just prior to the reunion. We also were saddened to hear of the passing of Cheryl Lyall after she got home from the reunion. We sat with her and Brooks on the river cruise, and she was a delightful person. May they both Rest in Peace.

FROM YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS, HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Here are two links to the Association's web site, for video's that John Paul Mac Isaac created:

<https://youtu.be/6a8x22RPfkc>

<https://youtu.be/Nrk-rRIa1tg>

SEE Pictures following two pages.



Hootch - new A/V system



Swapping stories with Ghostriders



WISO and 1st timer Stinger IP Gerry Heuer



Stinger 41 meets former SECAF Whit Peters



Wayne Laessig opening the Meet & Greet



Mike Krauss and Jo Anna Byrd



Lunch time – Potomac River cruise



Bus to Smithsonian Museum at Dulles Airport



Sat. morning Business Meeting Attendees





Mark Tarpley –POW/MIA ceremony



Terry Sarul and two Ghostriders



Former 17th SOS "Jackal" AC-130J Ghost rider

		
<p>Big Smile – Left Seat – Power ON!</p>	<p>Bob Lyall, Dave Voisey – 105mm Howitzer</p>	<p>Weapons/Sensor Officer (WISO) telling us what he can</p>
		
<p>Carol Hinton – Another meaningful Quilts of Valor ceremony</p>	<p>Lt.Col Brian Schmidt – 27th SOG Deputy Commander</p>	<p>Some of this year's Quilt recipients</p>
		
<p>John Paul Mac Isaac, Andrea Drzyzga Above and Beyond award recipients</p>	<p>Mike Drzyzga, Mark Tarpley and Terry Sarul –“let's get this right!”</p>	<p>Peggy Craig and Jo Anna Byrd</p>