



July 2026

PRESIDENTS LETTER

You Are Legendary

The other evening, Wayne Laessig and I were on the phone doing what a couple of 80-year-old veterans do best, solving the world's problems, complaining about our aches and pains, and laughing at ourselves.

Before long, our conversation drifted to our AC-119 Gunship reunions. We talked about the good times we've shared over the years, the friends we've lost in Vietnam, and the brothers we've said goodbye to since coming home. As always, there were laughs, a few quiet moments, and more memories than either of us could count.

Somewhere during that conversation, Wayne said something that stuck with me. People call us "elderly" now. Some even joke that we're just a bunch of "grumpy old veterans." Maybe so, but those labels don't begin to tell our story.

At this year's reunion I'll be 81 years old, and when I look around the room at our attendees, I don't just see older men and women. I see the last living witnesses to a chapter of American history that fewer and fewer people truly understand. I see men who flew through the darkness over Vietnam, who trusted one another with their lives, and who came home carrying memories that have lasted a lifetime.

We're not simply growing old. We're living history. We are legendary. Our generation has seen things that no generation before us, or after us, will ever experience the same way.

We grew up without computers, cell phones, or the internet. We played outside until the streetlights came on. We wrote letters by hand and waited days or weeks for a reply. We listened to baseball on the radio, watched black-and-white television, and learned life's lessons face to face instead of on a screen.

Then came Vietnam. For many of us, those years changed everything. While much of America was discovering Woodstock, rock music, and social change, we were flying combat missions, maintaining aircraft, or supporting the mission in

countless other ways. We were young men carrying responsibilities that few people our age could imagine.

The AC-119 wasn't just another airplane... It was a fierce gunship that not many have heard of. It became our home, our workplace, and sometimes the difference between life and death, for us and for the troops depending on us below. Those experiences created a bond that only another Gunship veteran can fully understand.

After the war, life moved on. We raised families, built careers, buried parents, celebrated grandchildren, and somehow kept adapting as the world changed around us. We watched men walk on the Moon. We saw computers shrink from room-sized machines to devices we carry in our pockets. We've lived through medical breakthroughs, the birth of the internet, and now artificial intelligence.

What an incredible journey it's been. Yet for all the changes we've witnessed, one thing has never changed. The value of friendship, our brotherhood. The comfort of sitting across the table from someone who doesn't need every detail explained because they were there. Someone who remembers the sounds, the smells, the tension, the humor, and the pride of serving with the AC-119 gunship community. That's why our reunion matters.

At our age, every reunion becomes a little more precious. The truth is one none of us likes to talk about, but we all understand. Every year there are fewer empty chairs waiting to be filled. Every year there are a few more names added to the memorial service. Every year becomes one more opportunity that none of us can assume we'll have again. That's not meant to be sad. It's meant to remind us how valuable our time together really is. Our children and grandchildren know us as fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, neighbors, and friends. But when we gather at an AC-119 gunship reunion, we're something else entirely.

We're crew members and maintainers. We're pilots, navigators, flight engineers, gunners, Illuminator operators/scanners, loadmasters and support personnel. *We're brothers.* And for a few wonderful days, we're young again.

We tell the same stories. We laugh at the same jokes. We remember the friends who never made it home and those who have gone ahead of us. We honor them simply by remembering them together. No one else can do that the way we can.

If you've been thinking about coming but aren't sure, I'd encourage you to make this *the* year. If it's been a while since you've attended, we'd love to see you again. If you've never been to one of our reunions, you'll discover something special. You'll find people who already know your story because, in many ways, it's their story too.

This October, let's gather once again in Phoenix. Let's shake hands and share a few laughs. Let's remember those who are no longer with us. Above all, let's celebrate the remarkable lives we've been fortunate enough to live.

We may be 80-something now. We may walk a little slower and hear a little less. But we're still the AC-119 Gunship family. We're still the generation that answered the call. We're still living proof of courage, sacrifice, friendship, and resilience. We are what legends are made of.

I hope you'll join me, Wayne, and the rest of your legendary AC-119 family in Phoenix this October. The stories aren't finished until we're no longer here to tell them. Let's tell a few more together... I'll be looking for you.

Bill Petrie
President, AC-119 Gunship Association

2026 REUNION UPDATE

Simply put, read President Bill Petrie's message, check out the "Who's Coming" list, and GET OFF THE FENCE!!!

Go to <https://www.ac119gunships.com/reunion/upcoming-reunion-2026/> for everything about the upcoming Reunion or go to <https://www.events.afr-reg.com/e/AC119Gunship26> if you're ready to register!!

Will we SEE you in 3 months!?!?

Questions? Contact Wayne Laessig 707-592-4492 wayne.laessig@gmail.com, or Dave Voisey 713-818-9234 dvoisey@hotmail.com !!

P.S. We're still working with the AC-130J Ghost rider folks to have them bring one to our Reunion. We'll send a Flash on that!

Special opportunity to meet with Veterans Administration Officer (VSO) AT the Phoenix Reunion

DO NOT READ THIS, since you must already have your act totally together with the VA – right? But....., if that's not totally accurate, READ THIS and DO IT!!!! So far, Bob Dydo, Mike Drzyzga, John Forbes, Ron Hinton, Wayne Laessig, Bob Safreno, Jim Rash, and Doug Wohlgamuth are the only ones smart enough to sign up for this great opportunity! Most of them are bringing their spouse too!!

Maybe some of your spouses would like to learn a bit more about what they might expect (or not) from the VA, even if YOU don't want to :>) NOTE TO SPOUSES: YOU can sign up by yourself!!

VSO Joe Mras (18th SOS - Gunner 71-72) is an Accredited VSO for Veterans Benefits and is offering his services to fellow gunshippers at the reunion. Details and timing depend on how many want to meet with him and what they need. He is offering review and claim services, and if you like, also a look into your VA Benefit files to see where there may be opportunities for you.

If you want to meet with Joe at the reunion, all you have to do is contact him directly at post12vso@gmail.com with your name and phone number, and to confirm you will attend the reunion. Joe will contact you and get what information he needs prior to arrival to authorize him access to your files; he will send a form to you for your electronic signature. If you want to do this, please NOTE: Schedule your session with Joe ASAP! Joe will follow up with you to see what functions you are doing, so he can schedule around those.

WHO Is Coming to the Reunion as of: July 18, 2026

Yes, Brother Ev Sprous will be at our Phoenix Reunion! We've missed him for too many years, but you can join us there to see Ev again!

Larry & Debbi Barbee	Stinger 41 IO Ken Brown's	Joaquin & Sally Ramirez
Paul & Teri Beagley	Nephew Randy Holbrook	Jim Rash, Matt & Annette
Jim Boyd	Jim Acquaviva's Daughter	Robeck
Windell & Bernadette	Pam Kalbfleisch & Guest	Bob Safreno & Sandy
Bunton	James "Pops" & Alice	Paxton with Richard
Craig & Jan Corbett	Knuckles	Safreno
Roy Davis & Paula	Mike Krauss	Terry & Theresa Sarul
Pascoe	Wayne & Lynette Laessig	Gus Sininger
Mike & Andrea Drzyzga	Don Luke	Ski Sledzinski & Yami
Bob & Janet Dydo	Dale & Jeanette Martin with	Lust-Sledzinski
John & Penny Forbes	Chris & Brad Martin	Ev Sprous & his sister
Ron & Patty Gilbert	John & Lynn Morrow	Ruth Chapman
Jerry & Ellen Hester &	Joe Mras	Wayne & Darcy Taylor
guests	Bill & Karen Petrie	Dave Voisey
Clement Hill & Suzanne		Doug & Karen
Aust-Hill		Wohlgamuth

AND....if YOU haven't registered yet, will THEY get to see YOU there again?

REUNION EXHIBIT

“THEN AND NOW”

Every year we strive to make each reunion better than the previous one. This year we are trying a “new thing” that can bring smiles and laughter to us all. We’ll have an exhibit in our Hootch for “Then and Now” photographs. What we need you to do is submit “Then and Now,” photographs of yourself. We would love to “see” you.

So far the brave souls whose pictures we’ll see are Mike Drzyzga, James Farrell, David Frederickson, Clement Hill, Wayne Laessig, and Wayne Taylor (3 Ground Crew, 2 Pilots. & 1 Gunner). ***How about some more, (I guess FEs, IOs, & Navs just don’t want to mess up the exhibit showing what they look like now :>)***

Email your images as a jpeg directly to Clement E. Hill at cehill44@gmail.com. If you cannot send pictures as a jpeg file, you can mail COPIES of your images directly to:

Mike Drzyzga
37 Pecan Lane
Oak Ridge, NJ 07438

DO NOT MAIL ORIGINALS!!

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Open Position – Quartermaster

An important position in our AC-119 Gunship Association is the Quartermaster. Gus Sininger has done a great job since the beginning, along with his grandson Tyler, and we love him for this, but he cannot continue. Your Association needs a reliable person(s) to take over this valued task.

The Quartermaster position requires an energetic person or team. You interact with Board members, maintain an inventory of items in storage, receive emails for purchase requests via the Association's Website, and pack-up and ship items to our customers. And if possible, you bring a large part of the inventory to display and sell at our annual reunions. The Quartermaster has a separate bank account that requires financial responsibility, supported and coordinated with the Treasurer. The Quartermaster works with the WebMaster to keep the store current. To view what the store offers, click on this link. [Store - AC-119 Gunship Association](#).

Please consider helping the Association fill this position. If you want more information about the work involved, contact Gus by cell phone: 850-865-2634 or email: stinger7172@live.com.

NOTE: This position does not require Association membership. We've had family members or friends accept and excel at several key positions in our Association, and we welcome them to take this position! Also, the inventory is in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. If you live within driving distance of Fort Walton Beach, we can arrange to help with transferring the inventory.

How You Can Help!

We're also looking for someone to help us when we get "Undeliverable" replies to our Flash and Firing Circle emailing's. Our POCs could use your help calling the "Undeliverable" folks' phones and getting updated info. It's a relatively easy role :>) Contact Wayne Laessig at 707-592-4492 or wayne.laessig@gmail.com if you're interested or have questions. NOTE: this is another great opportunity for a family member to get involved; it doesn't require that you be an AC-119 air or ground crewmember!

Veterans Service Officer (VSO) **Contact Information**

To obtain information regarding contacting your local VSO click the link below -

[Search for a VA-accredited representative](#)

Final Flight

Brothers who made their Final Flight. Please remember their families in your prayers. R.I.P. Brothers.

Franklin A. Rudolph

18th SOS

Pilot

June 19, 2026