



“The Firing Circle” is a 2.5 min. timed-lapsed photo of an AC-119G “Shadow” gunship flying in a standard firing circle, with four 7.62 mm GAU-11 mini-guns each firing 6000 rounds per minute. The sheets of red fire are tracer rounds which represent only one of every five bullets fired from the Shadow’s mini-guns. **Story Inside!**

The Firing Circle

Dedicated to all AC-119 & AC-47 Gunship Aircrew, Maintenance, & Support Personnel

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The Story of The Firing Circle: Sept. 1970, Phan Rang AFB, RVN As an Aerial Gunner (AG) and part of the Shadow 61 crew, I was upset, to say the least, that the Flight Surgeon grounded me (DNIF(Duty Not Involving Flying) for 8 days) after a really bad experience with the base DDS relative to an impacted wisdom tooth. On a stormy night, Shadow 61 launched without me as I played cards with alert crews in the Hootch. "61's" frag was cancelled and had to RTB(Return to Base) due to very bad weather. While Shadow 61 was returning, "Charlie" was attempting to infiltrate the base perimeter with sapper explosives. As the base alert siren motivated most in our Hootch into a defensive posture, the phone rang and I learned from the Ops Officer that Shadow 61 would be firing on Phan Rang's perimeter to repel the attack. Cool!! I ran for my Minolta 7s rangefinder camera freshly loaded with Ektachrome 160. Without a tri-pod of my own (yet), or other airmen in sight outside the hootch to borrow one from, I propped the camera on top of a Ford F100 pick-up truck. I took only two exposures: one about 40 seconds; the other 2.5 minutes. I helped set up the Phan Rang Photo Hobby Shop to develop Ektachrome transparency film (slides). It was a wonderful place to get away on a "day-off". In the fine print of the Kodak developing instructions, I learned you can "push" the ASA160 to ASA400. A few days later, I spent some nervous time in the dark room, processing and pushing the film. While wiping off the final rinse solution from the developed film strip, I could feel other airmen peering over my shoulder to see what the images from the other night looked like. WOW was the mildest of adjectives used. Many reproductions were made for officers and enlisted, and flight and maintenance crews. *Michael Drzyzga (former SSgt, 17th SOS) October 12, 2006*

THIS IS ARTICLE'S AN EXCERPT FROM "THE AC-119 GUNSHIP ASSOCIATION HISTORY BOOK - PG. 3"

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



I went to the Change of Command for the 18th Flight Test Squadron on Hurlburt on 20 May 2011. Lt. Col. Landreth has left for another assignment. A Lt. Col. Patrick Duke Pope is now the new Commander of the 18th FTS. I presented him with an 18th SOS Coin and Patch. I will also present him with his Honorary Life Member Certificate in the coming weeks. Lt. Col. Pope was the Director of Operation for the 18th FTS before becoming the Commander.

"FLASH"

REUNION XII IS COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER; PLEASE MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS SOONER THEN LATER:

Become a GAMECOCK when you attend our 12th Reunion in Charleston. Gamecocks are the mascot for USC located in Columbia, SC; but many gamecocks live in Charleston. See if you find a real GAMECOCK in Charleston. 2011 marks the 150th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War. The first shot was fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. Five tours conducted daily at \$15.00 per senior citizen. A tour of old town Charleston will make your day during Reunion XII. Learn lots about Charleston history on the Thursday Tour. The guide will tell you why there is a North Carolina and a South Carolina.

“Reunion XII” - September 28-OCTOBER 2, 2011, Charleston, South Carolina.

Once again, we will be raffling off another “Commemorative Gun” at the Charleston Reunion. It's a .45 cal. Pistol with special markings and case with accessory. See the Ticket Form in this newsletter. Tickets are One (1) for \$10, Six (6 for \$50 and Thirteen (13) for \$100. You don't have to present to win. Doug will hold tickets and bring them to the Reunion. Be sure to write your name and phone number on the form. FYI, please get your tickets for if we don't get enough tickets sold I will have to keep the gun. Ha Ha, Thanks! Also, the cost of our litho's has again been reduced; **this time to \$35.00.** *One NOTE about Reunion costs: when we sign the contract for a reunion hotel, we guarantee a certain occupancy rate to the hotel. When that rate is not met, we lose money. When you stay in the Reunion hotel and not off-site it helps. It's getting more and more difficult to get reasonable room rates with breakfast included; consequently our efforts to get reasonable room rates with full breakfast is made much easier if you stay at the Reunion hotel.*

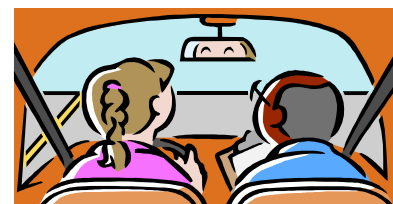
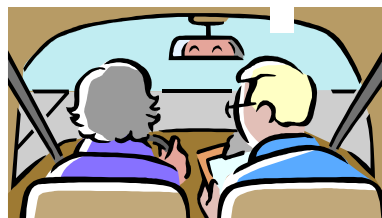
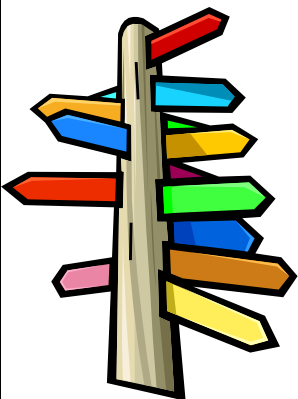
Let's continue to work together to make our Reunions better and better each year. Your participation is welcome. I am already looking forward to seeing all of my brothers and their families in Charleston.

- ❖ **Bring your AC-119 Gunship Association Name Tag Lanyard – to Reunion XII**
- ❖ **Our 2012 Reunion will be held at Home Base in Fort Walton Beach, Florida**
- ❖ **Sept 26th –Sept 30th at the Four Points Sheraton. Room rates are the same as this reunion \$119.00, except for Courtyard, Beachfront & Suites.**

Hope to see you all in Charleston.

**Gus Sininger, President
AC-119 Gunship Association**

EMAIL PAKMAN03@GMAIL.COM WITH YOUR DRIVING PLANS TO CHARLESTON – IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A RIDER TO HELP PAY THE COST OF THE TRIP! ALL INFO WILL BE UPDATED BY NEWSLETTER OR EMAIL.



This is Not your Hotel Registration (This is your Reunion Registration Only!)

Name: (First, Middle Initial, Last) _____

Are you an AC-119 Gunship Association member? ___Yes ___No

Years Served with Gunships: 19___ to 19___; 19___ to 19___

Squadron: ___71st; ___17th; ___18th; ___3rd or 4th ACS; ___other (____); Crew Position/Role: _____

Address: (include Zip 4) _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Spouse/Guest Name: (First, Middle Initial, Last) _____

Additional Guests: (#) _____ Name(s) _____

Are you staying at the Reunion Hotel: Yes__No__Staying somewhere else__ Where_____

REUNION FEE.....# attending ___ X \$25 = \$ ___

YES! I / We will attend:

• Thursday Charleston Tour# attending ___ X \$37 = \$ ___

• Friday Night Meet & Greet# attending ___ X \$29 = \$ ___

• Saturday Night Banquet

▶ Salmon with Citrus Beurre Blanc.....# of meals ___ X \$36 = \$ ___

▶ Apple-Cider Spiked Chicken.....# of meals ___ X \$35 = \$ ___

▶ Sliced Flank Steak with Roasted Peppers, Onions & Mushrooms.....# of meals ___ X \$36 = \$ ___

▶ Chef's Choice Vegetarian Entrée.....# of meals ___ X \$35 = \$ ___

• Sunday Morning Golf Tournament (Green Fees separate).....# playing ___ X \$10 = \$ ___

• Sunday Afternoon BBQ (See web or Newsletter for menu).....# attending ___ X \$30 = \$ ___

Check # _____ Total Payment \$ _____

NOTE: For special meal needs, contact Gus Sininger at 850-865-2634 or stinger7172@cox.net

After filling-in this page mail it (if you use the web version, print it first since it will not save your info) with your payment - make check payable to AC-119 Gunship Association – and send to:

Doug Wohlgamuth (AC-119) - 504 Shea Place - Sun City Center, FL 33573-5726

Contact the Embassy Suites, direct, for your Hotel registration: call 1-843-747-1882, (mention the AC-119 Association). Or on the Web: http://embassysuites.hilton.com/en/es/groups/personalized/C/CHSEMES-AC1-20110928/index.jhtml?WT.mc_id=POG. If you have Questions: Check our Web Site at <http://www.ac-119gunships.com>; call Doug at 813-938-1886 or 813-781-5728 e-mail Busch791@tampabay.rr.com; or Gus at 850-865-2634 e-mail stinger7172@cox.net.

Cancellation Policies:

- Reunion Registration cancellations on or before September 1st = refund or donation as requested
- Reunion Registration cancellations after September 1st = we have to pay hotel “guarantees”, so no refunds (but talk to us if there are special circumstances like family emergencies or losses)
- Hotel Registration: if you cancel after their minimum 24 hour notification, you may still be charged

Reunion XII - September 28th – October 2nd 2011 - Agenda

Wednesday, September 28th

1800 – Hootch opens & stays open, until 1800 Sunday night, Meeting Rooms 6 & 7, in the Convention Center. Soda, Beer, & Snacks Free to Reunion Attendees. *Hootch closed during Scheduled Events.*

Thursday, September 29th

0845 - 1340: Historic Charleston Tour with free time, Lunch & Shopping. In The Old City Market.

1340 – Transportation on Concord Street behind the US Customs House for RTB – **\$37**

Friday, September 30th

1900 - 2200 – Meet & Greet at the Convention Center Meeting Rooms 10 & 11.

Buffet Style -- Dress casual or Party suites. * **\$29**

Saturday, October 1st

0830 - 1000 – Membership Meeting at the Convention Center Meeting Rooms 10 & 11.

0930 - Photographs to be taken by Jill Norman. **No Obligation, immediate on site printing.**

0900 - 1000 – Women’s Meeting at the Convention Center Meeting Room 9.

0930 - Photographs to be taken by Jill Norman. **No Obligation, immediate on site printing.**

1800 – Happy Hour at the Convention Center Ball Room “A”, Coat & tie or party suit.

1900 – Banquet Dinner Ball Room “A” **

2100 – Association Awards & Raffles

Sunday, October 2nd

0900 - Golf Tournament on Charleston AFB Golf Course – Green Fees **\$20**

Tournament Coordinators: Doug Wohlgamuth & Col Mac. Cart **\$12**

1700 - 2100 - Farewell BBQ at the Convention Center Ball Room “A”,

Buffet Style – Dress - Casual * **\$30**

* Pay as You go Bar

* See Registration Form

REUNION XII COMMEMORATIVE PISTOL

R
A
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F
L
E



Tickets are (1) for \$10 - (6) for \$50 - (13) for \$100. You don't have to present to win.

Features: Stainless steel w/ black trim – Ambidextrous thumb safety – Combat Grips (2 sets, 1 presentation) – Beveled Mag well for ease of loading – High Beavertail grip safety – Felta hammer – Target trigger – Match barrel – Full length recoil guide rod – Front cocking serrations – Fully adjustable rear Trijicon night sight – Dovetail Trijicon front night sight – Checkered flat mainspring housing – Supplied with mag pouch, belt holster, cleaning brush, gun locks and two mags with lockable hard case - Presentation box is a plain case with Association information on Black background with silver wings – The poem “Our Lady of the Night”, by Bill Petrie. Let us not forget those “Still Flying”.

Cherokee Firearms Repair, LLC – 3019 227th Street E – Spanaway WA 98387 – Ron Soderquist, FE, 18th SOS.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **STATE:** _____ **ZIP:** _____

E-Mail: _____ **Phone:**() _____

Total Tickets: _____ **Total Donation:** _____

Make Checks payable to:

"AC-119 GUNSHIP ASSOCIATION COMMEMORATIVE RAFFLE"

**Doug Wohlgamuth, Treasurer
AC-119 Gunship Association
504 Shea Place
Sun City Center, FL 33573
(813)-938-1886
bush791@tampabay.rr.com**



“AC-119 Gunship Heritage Circle”



Stinger Gunships at Da Nang and Distant Places



**December 1971 to April 1973
By Colonel Tom A. Teal
Detachment I Commander
USAF (Ret)**

Stinger operations and personal equipment occupied a two-story building next to the 366th Gunfighter Wing headquarters. As a tenant unit, our location contained some pretty comfortable quarters. On the front of our building was an impressive two-story sign showing the Stinger symbol in great detail and in brilliant color. There were two much smaller signs below the Stinger logo which stated who were the lucky commander and first sergeant at that time. Some efficient individual had already put my name there. The building itself was divided between operations which occupied the second floor and flying equipment situated on the ground floor. This made the personal equipment easy to load and unload for crew flying duties.

Not far away were our living quarters. These two-story prefabricated barracks were comfortable but had certain disadvantages, particularly the second floor. Second floor was not choice living space due to the nasty habit of rocket explosions projecting shrapnel in an ever rising cone from the impact area. My first tour of the barracks revealed that some people on the second floor had piled sandbags neatly around and under their beds. Rocket attacks of 125 rockets, more or less, sometimes a single rocket, were always in the back of one's mind. I was so busy learning people and procedures that I was not really aware of this mindset until one day I was standing in the Officers Quarters on the first floor talking to a small group when this very loud bang occurred over our heads. They all dropped to the floor and I belatedly joined them. Then they got up laughing and told me that by preplanned action, a case of drinks was thrown on the floor above to simulate a rocket attack. It was a great initiation to the real world of Da Nang.

Now let me regress to the day of my arrival at the Stinger maintenance area. After meeting our people, operations and maintenance personnel took me inside our big hanger and pointed out a very sobering sight. Parked there was a Stinger gunship with about 17 or 18 feet of its wing blown off over the Ho Chi Minh Trail and yet made it home due to superb airmanship by the pilot and crew. I believe the pilot won a high national Award for that feat of demonstrated professionalism. This narrow Stinger gunship miss with disaster over the Trail, pretty much spelled fini or end to Stinger missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail and other hot spots. Prior to 1972, Stinger gunship and crews had written a proud history of mission accomplishment over the Trail. During 1970 and 1971 Stingers had been particularly effective as evidenced by the number of vehicles destroyed during those years. I have heard of 20 to 30 vehicles destroyed on a single mission. Also another Stinger crew was put in for decorations after that crew destroyed 8 tanks during a single mission. Another reason that the Stinger sorties over the Trail diminished in 1972 was that the antiaircraft defense over and along the Trail had improved to the point that the Stingers were not meant or able to perform in such a hostile environment. However, the 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Offensive was perhaps the main reason for the change in mission because our world at Da Nang changed with the offensive. Now our unit would be flying missions which responded primarily to troops in contact (TIC).

The North Vietnamese Offensive began without warning on 30 March 1972. In I Corps coordinated attacks were made across the DMZ by North Vietnamese professional Army units in large numbers and supported by heavy artillery and tanks. The North Vietnamese forces overran South Vietnamese defensive positions and captured Quang Tri City north of us in April. Their next objective was Hue, just 35 miles from Da Nang. Our flying missions at that time had to be flexible, responding to the combat situation on that day. During April, I also had to plan for the worst that Da Nang would also be overrun or within the estimated 30 mile range of enemy 130mm artillery; so we, in conjunction with the Gunfighter Wing, started to write a planned evacuation of aircraft, equipment and personnel. We could save all the aircraft and crews plus additional people by packing our aircraft to the maximum allowed by the weight and amount of fuel to get them to safety in Thailand. The rest of our people would have to evacuate over the beaches for pickup by US naval forces or any other friendly ship or boat available, like Dunkirk in WWII. We had learned that another North Vietnamese force had invaded the Highlands of South Vietnam in II Corps in an attempt to cut South Vietnam into two parts by reaching the South China Sea. We had also learned that a third North Vietnamese force had attacked the South from Cambodia and after capturing An Loc in III Corps, was aiming at Saigon. Thailand was certainly the best place for haven at that time.

Thank God that plan was never needed. The plucky South Vietnamese forces stabilized their positions, particularly in our area in May and the North Vietnamese forces never took Hue but they came very close to achieving that goal. I remember flying a mission northeast of Hue just before sunset when I looked out of the side window and saw a small appearing ground to air missile pass the aircraft from nose to tail. I said that must be a big missile from the DMZ area that was fired at us and missed by a good distance. Only after landing and in intelligence debriefing were we told that what we thought was a big missile a long way off was indeed a small missile up close and personal. The North forces had become equipped with shoulder-fired SA-7 missiles with heat seeking warheads and had also launched them at other aircraft that night in our area. This introduction of SA-7s into the War that night caused our gunship missions to be flown at higher altitudes than before and needed immediate countermeasures for us to remain effective in the new environment. The Stingers adopted a B-52 defense tactic I had remembered. We would cruise at 6,000 feet which was near the max altitude of the SA-7. Then when we had to descend to a lower altitude to perform our mission, crew members who were missile lookouts would upon sighting a missile launch, would say over the interphone, missile launch, break right or break left and a big flare would be launched ASAP. We only had to use this procedure once. We were cruising over the base at 6,000 feet one evening at sunset when an excited voice said over the interphone, break left, missile launch, and the IO said flare away and ignited. He also said that the missile was following the one million candlepower flare. The he gave us the welcome news that the missile exploded in the flare and no other missile launches had been observed. This procedure worked for us but other aircraft never saw missiles launched behind them and a single engine fighter landed at Da Nang with a heat seeking head lodged in his right exhaust pipe unexploded.

We had a close relationship with 7th AF Operations. I had told them that with our procedure for defense against SA-7s, that we could still be useful for troops in contact, etc. The Easter Offensive ground to a halt in May, and in June and July, the South Vietnamese forces counterattacked which resulted in the recapture of Quang Tri City in September. Meanwhile, during the period of fighting in I Corps, the 366th Wing Commander requested that 7th Air Force change the Stinger mission to missile defense of Da Nang. The 366th Wing had given us almost no notice to this request but when 7th AF agreed, I concurred that we should give the base defense mission a try. Da Nang was known all over Vietnam as Rocket City and well deserved the name. Rockets had been fired at the Base since 1967. Our new Da Nang missile defense mission would require sorties to seamlessly cover the period from sundown to sunup. It would required two or three sorties each night and would be stated by 7th AF in a general order and executed daily. We performed this new mission for about three nights and I came to the conclusion that this boring mission would not be an adequate defense of Da Nang. It was only a show of force with no teeth. I explained this conclusion to the Wing representatives and said that the

base missile defense had to be coordinated with all the military in the area, especially with the South Vietnamese units. We needed radio call signs and frequencies of all the units in order to get clearance to fire, to receive ground observations and to request artillery suppression if being directed into an ongoing artillery fire action. Above all we could use a Vietnamese interpreter flying with us to communicate with the ground units. This airborne interpreter solved a lot of problems with Shadows operating out of Saigon. I told them that our Detachment did not have the capability or horse power to call such a meeting to coordinate all the units involved. If this defense mission could not get the proper organization, then I would ask 7th Air Force to change our mission back to TICs, etc. where we could be effective. The Wing got busy and coordinated a great, well attended meeting for all concerned units and the basic ideas of missile defense were presented. This general briefing was followed by the request for cooperation and the necessary information such as call signs and frequencies, to allow the Plan to work. There was very little animosity or defending one's own program because missile suppression was absolutely in the best interest of the base and the surrounding area. It also had the advantage of much closer coordination of all units with Stinger in case of a ground attack by enemy troops. This of course was never required but the missile defense plan turned out to be a great idea and very effective as the Stingers put the plan into action. I can remember only one rocket attack of limited numbers in June and another small attack that occurred close to Christmas after the defense plan was initiated. There may have been an attack sometime in late July 1972, but I am not certain that it occurred. I am certain of the Christmas attack because of its spectacular impact on Christmas celebrations.

This is how we put the Base missile defense plan into action. I went next door to Wing intelligence and asked them for planning information such as the range of missiles being fired at us, history of previous attacks, any thing that could help us forecast impending attacks such as time of day or night, wind direction and velocity, previous positions from which rockets had been launched, holidays, full moon, anything that could help us to anticipate the firings. One piece of information intelligence gave us was that our rocket defense range should be at least a ten mile arc from the outskirts of the base. With this vital piece of information, our sorties began. We established a series of takeoff and landing times in order to have a short overlap in changing the guard from old Stinger to just airborne Stinger. This stabilized crew life and crew rest so that everyone knew when they were flying, etc. This also simplified maintenance schedules and its production of aircraft for sorties. Finally I wrote a single page of tactics to be used in flying these missions with the watchword being the use of unpredictability to keep the enemy below in the Zone guessing what the Stinger was going to do next. Generally, in the rocket zone, we flew at 3500 feet with the aircraft commander having the option to change firing altitude as the situation demanded.

Wing intelligence worked hard and long to supply us with information that we could use to anticipate rocket attacks. They researched data from all the rocket attacks against the Base including date, time of impact, number of rockets, weather conditions, phases of the moon and approximate launch site/sites. There seemed to be no common denominator to help us figure out when the next attack would come, from what direction, night or day or day of the week. Then we came to the conclusion that it took some time to set up and set off a rocket attack of a large number of rockets. We then received additional information from ground patrols that the rockets were fired by crude flashlight battery operated times; that they were sighted in and the rockets elevated by the crude system of wooden supports that had been adjusted to the proper degree of elevation for the distance from the target. Not a very accurate way for precise target impact; but with a large number of rockets, quantity made up for quality. This told us that the real purpose of the large numbers of rocket launches in a short time was for destruction and not merely for a psychological program of a single rocket explosion randomly day or night. This individual rocket attacks at random was used, I thought, pretty effectively at Phan Rang in III Corps a couple of years ago in 1970. We did try to tighten up the control of battery disposal on the base as we suspected that we may have been supplying the batteries to shoot the rockets at us.

With the North Vietnamese Army units contained and being defeated up north of us, things, like the old cliché, settled down to a dull roar. This was a mission that motivated everyone because it was a win / win situation. We also received notification that the unit would, at a later date, be training VNAF crews in gunship operations and tactics. Like the Shadow VNAF training by my old unit, the 17th SOS in Saigon, we would train the Stinger crews and maintenance people and then turn the aircraft over to them. This was the very heart of the Vietnamization program in Vietnam; Train, give equipment and leave the VNAF to continue the fight. This meant that we had to identify how many future instructors such as instructor pilots, copilots, navigators, engineers, illuminator operators, and gunners that would be required, and then train them with our current instructors. This also meant additional sorties, from time to time, that were not combat sorties in the rocket belt. None of this seemed to be a problem because we were scheduled to receive additional aircraft and maintenance people before the training started. We would eventually have all the AC-119Ks in the Air Force inventory to use and turn over to the VNAF. We also had to acquire a much bigger building than our present one. The new building, a large hanger, was found across the runway from us and housed what became the training division of our unit. I appointed Lt. Col. Philip Deering as chief of the VNAF AC-119K training program. Of course, Major Robert Kruger was greatly involved as the Stinger operations officer.

Flowers were another thing that did not change from the Shadow building in Saigon to the Stinger building in Da Nang. In Shadowland South at Saigon, our Vietnamese maid put about six inches of dirt on top of concrete bunkers on the south side of our Flight line building. She was the young widow of a deceased naval officer and could use some extra money. We had asked her to also get some blooming flowers, plant them, and keep them blooming by watering, etc. She did what was asked very well, with some help from some big guys who just wanted to help. I cannot remember any other flowers on the base there. In Stingerland North, flowers were already growing on each side of the walk entering the Stinger building, just south of the 366th Headquarters building. This small group of flowers was lovingly attended to by a gnarled old Vietnamese warrior. It was told about our unit that this old gardener had served valiantly with the French Foreign Legion and had been released due to wounds. He never came in the building but came and went on his own. He only smiled and to himself when he was working with the flowers. For all I know, he could have been a spy and was laughing at us but I don't think so. I do know that the Stingers had the only flowers that I saw on the Base at that time. Funny thing, I do not remember any one remarking about the old Vietnamese and his flowers. Both were just there. I also don't remember hearing any birds singing in Vietnam during my multiple tours there. I do remember birds singing in Thailand with great gusto; and as for beautiful flowers, Thailand had a large supply of both natural and cultivated flowers. I was once offered a dozen very long stemmed red roses for the outrageous price of fifty cents for the lot.

Back to the Stinger war in our corner of South Vietnam. The aircraft maintenance at Da Nang was superb. It was run by a real professional, Chief Master Sergeant Marion McGee who knew exactly what he was doing and his maintenance crews and specialists believed in him and trusted him. Having your own dedicated unit maintenance run by professionals is absolutely one of the nicest things that a Commander can inherit from his predecessor. We also got support from the Gunfighter maintenance. It was run at the time by an old friend of mine, Col. Jack Shaffer. We had flown C-124s together from Hill Air Force Base in Utah from 1953 to 1956. His replacement gave us the same amount of attention. The constant changing of personnel each month as one year tours of duty were completed for individuals sure made life interesting for everyone, particularly unit commanders. Mathematically, this meant that almost seventeen percent of one's unit changed in two months. Individuals had different ways of calculating how long before they would return to the World, the U.S. of A. I've heard them going down the hall saying I'm one bar of soap, two bars of soap, etc. away from going home. Each bar represented one month left on the tour; and when the final month arrived, that individual let everyone know by saying I'm short, I'm short. Of course not everyone used the one bar a month routine. In Saigon, I heard a Shadow NCO going down the hall saying loudly I'm short, really short. I did not think that this

individual had been there that long so I asked admin. to check out his arrival and departure dates. He was short all right. All he had left on his tour was five months and 29 days.

Talking about Da Nang being Rocket City brings to mind an Air Force policy that non-combat aircraft would stay on the ground at Da Nang for a maximum of one hour. Never saw it in writing but saw it in action. Consequently we never had a parade of higher headquarters inspectors coming to call. In fact I remember that our 56th SOW Commander visited us unannounced and got a good idea of what we were doing and how our mission had changed. This was a very welcome show of interest by our boss, Colonel Norbert L. Simon, whom I had never met. I remember that only a very few other Wing officers, maybe two, came to see what the situation was in over a year at Da Nang. I know this. I will always treasure the visit by our 56th Commander, not that we needed help, but that Colonel Simon came to Da Nang and exposed himself to hazardous conditions that he did not have to. He did not want to inspect buildings or barracks. He did not want to criticize but to learn. He just wanted to meet his people. This is the hallmark of a great commander and person. Back to the Rocket Belt. The flight of Stingers just off the base perimeter in early evening and at night became a large attraction for base personnel. The sound of the engines, the flares and light from the aircraft search light were quite a sight; and when a target /targets were located and permission to fire was obtained, the sound and tracers from the Gatling guns and cannon were spectacular to behold and hear. It was a cat and mouse game being played just off the base, but it was on most occasions, long periods of dark aircraft patrolling the air space. Over 100 rockets had been discovered on back to back Stinger missions. Other sorties had seen what turned out to be hostile people and received permission to fire on them. Things were going fine for the old Stingers and the Base and area, but we were never certain that the bad guys would not change their tactics unnoticed.

A short time after we had been working the rocket area, a very welcome and much needed addition to our detection force was added. These were low flying helicopters call Night Hawks from the 7th or 11th or 17th Air Calvary, U.S. Army, collocated at Da Nang. The Air Calvary commander and I got together to work out their participation in the hunt. These gutsy fliers volunteered to fly about 30 feet off the ground to better observe conditions at that altitude, than a 3500 feet where the Stingers habitually flew. Here is how the two aircraft worked together in the Belt. The low flying helicopter would spot a target, drop a flare on it, describe the target and the clear the area so Stinger could put some fire on it. At first, the low helicopters took some ground fire from time to time; but when ground fire at Little Buddy brought the Stingers over the bad guys, the word spread that you don't mess with Little Buddy. Even the most dedicated Viet Cong did not want to experience The Wrath of God put out by Stinger in the form of cannon and minigun fire with red tracers, and themselves exposed like day by large flare and searchlight illumination. Also the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) 3rd Division started to make armed daylight sweeps of the areas fired upon or other reported sites that were suspect. This was a very welcome and logical addition to the night patrolling of the Belt. It confirmed what had been reported by the night crews and passed suspect targets for the following night for Stinger and helicopter to monitor for enemy activity. This was how the missile defense mission had evolved to a high level of sophistication and in a short time. Nothing can completely stop a determined and crafty enemy from launching rockets; but as stated before, huge rocket showers had been avoided and everyone was grateful, including Stinger.

The ARVN 3rd Division was commanded by a Brigadier General who was respected and admired by Stinger crew members, well at least 30 of us. We were invited to bus over to his headquarters to receive Vietnamese decorations, the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. The Division Headquarters was on a small hill just west of the base. There we were lined up and received our medals from the General as he had the citations read in both English and Vietnamese and pinned the medals on our flying suits. We also received the citations in Vietnamese which I have to this day. What a proud feeling on that occasion. The only thing that would have made it better would have been for the entire Stinger unit, including maintenance and life support, to have been included in the recognition of a vital job well done.

To be continued!

“AC-119 Gunship Heritage Circle”

MISSOURI AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Volume II Number I Spring 2011:

I had the honor to recently meet with Everett Sprous, of the AC-119 Gunship Association, Ev was a gunner on those venerable War Birds, and was very kind to talk with me about his service in Vietnam. Here is the email that he sent to me, describing his duties from 1969 on. Since that initial email, I have had the privilege of meeting with Everett, as he invited me out to Logan College one afternoon, where he works, and presented me with a copy of their squadron history book! This was inscribed to the Missouri Aviation Historical Society, by their President, Gus Sininger. It was such an honor, to receive this book, and I will bring it to the meeting for all to see. There are several Veteran"s from Missouri, who are members of the AC-119 Gunship Association, and I will be working with Gus, Everett, and their webmaster, to make sure they know about our group, and I want to help get the word out about their wonderful association as well. *I want to extend a hearty “Welcome Aboard” to Everett, Gus, and all the veterans of the AC-119 Gunship Association, and their families, and sincerely “Thank You” for their sacrifice and service to our country.*

Everett Dale Sprous, Gunner

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1971-72

I was born April 18, 1946 in St. Louis County, Missouri and attended public schools in DeSoto and Festus, Missouri. In April 1963, I joined the Air Force and trained as a security policeman. I returned to civilian life in April 1967, then reenlisted in June 1968 and trained as a weapons mechanic. Eventually, I learned that the Air Force was looking for former weapons troops to volunteer as aerial gunners. I zipped up to Headquarters and signed up. I didn't know or care what aircraft I flew on; I just knew that I was really going to fly. The program was Project Palace Gun. I started my training by going to the altitude chamber at Castle AFB, CA, followed by flight training at Hurlburt Field, FL. It was then that I learned that I would be doing as a gunner. I would be an inflight weapons mechanic on AC-119K Stinger Gunships. Now most folk picture a gunner as manning a gun and firing at attacking enemy aircraft. Not so with this “modern” flying, fighting machine. Our job was to load and repair two 20mm Vulcan cannons and four 7.62mm mini-guns during flight. The guns were actually fired by the Aircraft Commander. What a thrill it was to walk out on the flight line and see the AC-119K gunship, an old converted boxcar with a black coat and six guns hanging out. the left side. I soon learned why it was painted black. Enroute to Southeast Asia, I attended Survival Training in Washington State and Jungle Survival Training in the Philippines. My initial assignment was to Phan Rang Air Base but, while at Clark Air Base, it was changed to Nakhon Phanom RTAB, Thailand. Well, Praise the Lord, I did not have to go to Vietnam. We flew most of our missions in Laos on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a country that I had never heard of, and a country in which it was officially denied that we were flying missions. We did go TDY to Vietnam a few times. I was finally flying and I loved it. The word got around how much I liked to fly and some of the other gunners would ask me to fly their missions. Some people asked if it was scary flying combat.



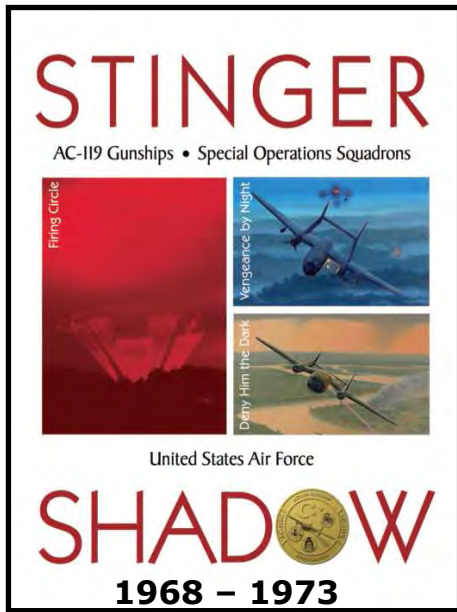
I said there wasn't time to be afraid. What was it like in the gun bay? There were three enlisted Gunners, an enlisted Illuminator Operator (IO) and an officer Night Observation Sight Operator (NOS) in the cargo area. The NOS stood at his station which was located in the original entry door immediately forward of the left engine. The IO operated the flare launcher and the 1.5 million candle power light (white light and infra-red) at the rear of the aircraft. He also served as jumpmaster in case of bailout. Imagine two 20mm cannon firing 2,500 round per minute and four 7.62mm mini-guns firing at 6,000 rounds minute. The gunship was shaking so hard that you believed at any second the aircraft would come apart. The noise and smoke were so intense that it would take a couple hours after a mission to clear your brain. Gun barrels would turn red, then white, from bullets being fired at such high rates. For the most part, we used only the 20mm cannons over the trail against trucks and tanks. Reloading the guns, especially the 20mm's, was always an adventure. We used a big drill-like device to reload and it must have weighted 30 to 40 pounds. Once inserted into the gun, we squeezed a trigger to feed the ammo belts from the ammo can into the drum. Gunners found that they first must disconnect their intercom microphone/headset cord before feeding the ammo belt into the drum or risk the chance of the their headset cord getting caught and pulled along with the ammo. Without communication with the rest of the crew, a gunner could not

hear "break" calls to evade AAA. So, there you were with this heavy loader in both hands, the gunship flying in a left-hand orbit, guns firing, and all of a sudden the gunship breaks a hard right turn or left turn. Needless to say, we quickly learned to stay braced and ready when not wearing our headsets. Gunners had another job other than maintaining the guns on combat missions. Along with the IO who hung out the right side of the plane, one of the three gunners would hang out the left side of the plane scanning enemy territory below for AAA fire. If we could see a round that we thought might hit our plane, we would call the pilot over intercom to "break right" or "break left", depending on which side of the plane the round was headed. In heavy AAA, the gunner scanner and the IO scanner might call out "break right" and "break left" at the same time which caused the pilot to decide which way to break. We did take a lot of hits, but thank God, there was only one Stinger lost due to enemy ground fire. After we pulled off targets and were bingo fuel (enough fuel to fly back to base with reserves) gunners would clean up the gun bay/cargo compartment. There were expended shell casings to be policed and empty ammo cans to secure. On one mission, during this clean up, I pulled an empty ammo can out of the rack, and noticed a nasty gash through the bottom of the can. I showed the can to the IO who turned a few



different colors as he thought about the direction of the enemy round which was headed toward his position in the back of the gunship. When we landed, we found that we had also taken another round, very close to the battery compartment. Of course, it took us a few rounds of our own at the club to get over the enemy rounds. Even with the hazards of flying in combat in an aircraft that had a bad record of staying in the air, it was the best year and a half in my Air Force career. I would most certainly do it again. My significant awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters. I presently live in the St. Louis area where I am employed at Washington University in St. Louis as a Protective Services Officer. I hope to retire soon, do some traveling, and continue enjoying my four children and seven grandchildren.

The previous article is an excerpt from the AC-119 Gunship Association History Book, page 220.



AC-119 Gunship History Book Order Form

“Our book seems to cover every aspect of the AC-119 Vietnam experience. Personal accounts of guys, who flew Gunship missions, and including those of maintenance and other support people, highlight the good, the bad and the ugly of operating has-been aircraft in less than desirable conditions while flying highly important missions. The little known history of AC-119 Gunship operations, missions that provided an important tactical piece to the Vietnam puzzle, is fully exposed in our History Book. Our book will be immediately valued by those who served and will become more valued by those who inherit the book down through the ages”. “Needless to say, I treasure my copy of our History Book”.

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