



# REVETMENTS

The Official Journal of The Tan Son Nhut Association

A Memorial to the American Experience in Vietnam



FEBRUARY 2022

## FROM THE EDITOR:

My thanks to all who contributed items for this issue.

In that regard, I am inclined to name this “The Csordas Issue”, due to the number of different items from Andy that appear here.

And, recently, our webmaster, Kerry Nivens, forwarded to me an email he had received from a TSN veteran, Jim Henney, regarding Membership in TSNA.

I got in touch with Jim, regarding what he had written to Kerry, and also asked him to write some more about his timing at TSN. The result of that you will see starting on Page 6. Jim mentions about his Crypto equipment days in that great article.

And then, a day later, I receive an additional story from Andy. And what is that about?? Crypto gear!! That item starts on Page 8.

In addition, the miscellaneous pictures shown on different pages are from – guess who? – Andy Csordas!

Larry

## NEW MEMBER

I arrived at Tan Son Nhut on June 26, 1967. First lived in the 1200 area, then after 4 months moved to Barracks directly off the helicopter pad area. Worked in 6470th RITS building. New 2 story concrete building with no windows. Worked 11 to 7 shift 6 days a week. I would brief every morning, General Philbot, on truck activity on Ho Chi Minh Trail, at 7th Air Force Headquarters. After Brig. General Philbot left, briefed lower ranked officers. Tet Offensive in Jan 1968 changed everything. Nightly rounds of 122mm rockets and mortars deprived us of sleep. Thanks for the 25th Infantry Army units, coming on base and saving our asses. They camped out right next to our barracks.

David L. Ross  
6470/12th RITS  
June 1967—June 1968  
dlross1914@gmail.com.



Picture taken from Military bus in Saigon. The wire screening was put on to keep grenades from being thrown into the bus. They just used wire to hang the grenade on the bus.



Guard shack at the entrance to the H-3 Helicopter Port



Huey taking off from H-3 Helicopter Port 1970.

**C-123 RANCH HAND PLANE CRASH  
FEBRUARY 2, 1962**

By: Larry E. Fry  
Det 8, 2nd ADVON  
Dec 61—Mar 62

Somehow, I had come to know Captain Fergus Groves. I have pictures of him taken in the “mess hall” area. Chaplain Kilpatrick had been successful in getting some Vietnamese kids from an on base school to come and visit us, sing for us, and have ice cream with us. Captain Groves is the only one on the pictures I have of that time that was actually “passing the hat” to collect money to help do something for the kids. This was on January 31, 1962.

The Chaplain Section activities log for February 2, 1962 said in part: ***“Chaplain Kilpatrick was busy all morning with the C-123 plane crash. He visited various units within the Ranch Hand organization, and made arrangements for a Memorial Service to be held on February 2.”***

The log for February 2 had this entry: ***“The Break Hangar was turned into the Chapel for the Memorial Service. Attendance was about 300, including BG Anthis and Ambassador Nolting, and many VNAF Officers and men.”***

I came to know and respect a lot of Ranch Hand folks during my 69 days at TSN, and Captain Groves stands out among them.

I wish I could remember more, but that is about it. At the time, I’m not sure anyone realized the unfortunate significance in the fact that it was the first USAF plane crash casualties of Viet Nam.

(You can see Captain Groves helping out the Vietnamese kids who sang for us, by “passing the hat” in this picture.)

After joining the Tan Son Nhut Association in 2002, I began more earnestly pursuing my interest in my time in Vietnam. I also found the Ranch Hand site on the internet and posted a note there that I had known Captain Groves and had two pictures which included him.

Sometime later I received an email—from HIS SON! His son was only 5 months old when his father was killed.

Captain Groves’ father, himself an Air Force Lt. Col. did put together a biography of Fergus, but Hugh Groves was very happy to hear from me; to have me tell him about his father that I knew, however briefly, and to have two pictures of him as well.

I have since also heard from the son of the enlisted man killed in that plane crash, but I didn’t know his father.

2/2/62, USAF 464 TCW . Capt. Fergus Groves II . Capt. Robert Larson . SSgt. Milo Coghill



The School Kids posing for a picture—before or after singing for us—I’m not sure which!!



Captain Groves      School Teacher      Chaplain Kilpatrick

## TSNA 2022 Scholarship Information

By: Rich Carvell, TSNA VP  
Chair, Scholarship Committee

Applications for the \$5,000 Tan Son Nhut Association Scholarship for the college school year 2022-23 are now being accepted.

Applicants must be high school seniors who are a direct descendant of one who served in Vietnam for any period from January 1, 1959, to April 30, 1975, either with the Armed Forces of the United States or the Republic of Vietnam or as a civilian at Tan Son Nhut Air Base either as an American or Vietnamese citizen.

Deadline to apply is May 1, 2022.

The TSNA Scholarship is for a \$5,000 scholarship, awarded in equal amounts over four years, provided the student maintains a minimum 3.00 grade point average at the end of each school term and completes a minimum of 30 semester hours each year.

TSNA Scholarship recipients must furnish an official transcript to the TSNA Scholarship Committee at the end of each spring semester in order to receive the next year's scholarship award.

Recipients must pursue a four-year degree as a resident student at an accredited United States accredited college or university which grants bachelor or higher degrees but may begin higher education studies at a two-year accredited institution and transfer to an accredited school to complete the final two years leading to a bachelor's degree.

The application form is on the TSNA website under scholarships at [www.TSNA.org](http://www.TSNA.org). In addition to the application form, the application must include the following:

- An official high School transcript showing your overall high school GPA. Minimum requirement is 3.0 on a 4-point scale for the three years of high school.
- One letter of recommendation from a faculty member or school administrator (LIMIT TO ONE PAGE).
- Copies of Standardized Test Scores (ACT, SAT, or other acceptable test scores) if not shown on the high school transcript.
- Resume' or list of school and community activities, awards and leadership positions.
- An essay/personal statement written by the applicant addressing what you hope to accomplish as a student in college. Please include your planned major, academic, personal, and leadership goals (LIMIT TO ONE PAGE).
- Proof (a copy of DD Form 214 of the Vietnam service member and/or other acceptable documentation) and applicable birth certificates to show that you are a direct descendent by blood or by legal adoption of someone who served in the Republic of Vietnam for any period from January 1, 1959, to April 30, 1975.

Complete information about eligibility, distribution of benefits, renewal of the scholarship and the application are available at the Tan Son Nhut Association website ([www.TSNA.org](http://www.TSNA.org)) and must be mailed no later than May 1, 2022 to:

TSNA Scholarship Committee  
c/o Committee Chair  
4214 Brenda Street  
Jonesboro, Arkansas 72405

If you wish to honor a person or make a donation in memory of someone, please provide contact information so that we may properly advise the honoree or surviving family of your donation.

Please send donations to "The Tan Son Nhut Association, P.O. Box 236, Penryn, PA, 17564-0236."

TSNA is a 501(c)(19) tax exempt veterans' organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia.





## Giving and Honor By Andy Csordas-Associate Chaplain

The topic of discussion during a recent church sermon was sowing for the future. One of the points included “the secret of living is giving not receiving”. Now as children we were all admonished that giving was so much better than receiving, but as a young child we always enjoyed getting presents more than giving someone else a present. Hopefully we have all gotten past that perspective as we have matured.

Think about what people are honored for in their lifetime. Are they honored for getting things? Sometimes people are honored for accomplishments that may have a tremendous positive impact on people. Military heroes are honored with medals and awards. But if you ask a Medal of Honor recipient about his status as a hero, what does he say? He typically says he receives the award for everyone else involved because he is not the hero; he just did what needed to be done.

We all know arrogant and boastful people. They are not usually fun to be around because we tire of their shallowness and boasting. Do we immediately think of giving honor to this type of individual or personality? I think not.

We do honor people, like the Medal of Honor recipient, who are people who give for the benefit of others. They have given, unlike the arrogant people above who tend to be takers. So what does the scripture say about giving? Luke 6:38 says, ***Give, and it will be given to you . . . For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.***

The Law of the Harvest states you always sow before you reap or plant before you harvest. What are we sowing or planting with our daily lives? Are we sowing, or planting, to grow the kingdom of God, or are we focused on our own prideful self?

God is the greatest giver of all. John 3:16 says, ***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

We cannot out give God, but through a personal relationship with Him we can learn to be more giving and be remembered and honored for what we gave instead of what we took.

### A Note About the Tan Son Nhut Association and Your Federal Taxes.

There is a special tax deduction the 2021 tax year for filers that use the standard deduction for their federal taxes. The following information is taken from the IRS website and the Tan Son Nhut Association is an approved non-profit organization under this act.

**The CARES Act, enacted by Congress last spring, includes a special \$300 deduction (\$600 if filing a joint return) designed especially for people who choose to take the standard deduction, rather than itemizing.**

<https://www.irs.gov/about-irs/special-tax-deductions-available-this-year-for-cash-donations-to-charities-irs-works-to-raise-awareness>

Please note: The above link does not reference the \$600 for filing a joint return, but the \$600 deduction is included on page 23 of the instructions for the Standard Deduction on Form 1040

The actual line from the IRS list of approved organizations is below.

**EIN: 80-0246369 | Cedar Park, TX, United States**

Remember this is not a \$300/\$600 deduction for every charity that has received contributions from you, but a total \$300/\$600 deduction for each filing and is only for the 2021 tax year. Most importantly consult your tax advisor for specific application to you and your circumstances, this is only provided as general information is not legal advice from a tax professional.

Andy Csordas  
Treasurer



## SAVE THE DATE

TSNA Reunion

**September 22-25, 2022**

Hope Hotel

At Wright Patterson AFB

Dayton OH

Registration Information  
and Agenda coming soon  
Save these dates and we hope to  
see you in Dayton

### Tan Son Nhut Association

Photo courtesy of Joel Martin, TSN 1966-67

Unit 1, Main Post Office at

Tan Son Nhut Air Base. 1966

Many of you came here to get your mail. It was not unusual for postal clerks to sell over \$100,000 worth of money orders in a single day as well as handling your incoming and outgoing mail.

Watch your mail/email for Revetments with more information on the reunion



Base Exchange, Theater and Post Office, 1970.

## FROM A SOON-TO-BE NEW MEMBER

My name is James (Jim) Henney and this my military story. I was in the United States Air Force from May 1966 to May 1970. My first duty assignment was the 91st Bomb Wing, Glasgow AFB, Montana. My assignment was communication center specialist. That meant I could operate a switchboard, all teletype gear, and any associated encryption/decryption gear.

When my father was diagnosed with cancer and had major surgery, he was given just a short time to live. I requested and received a humanitarian reassignment to Wright Patterson 17th Bomb Wing, Ohio. This allowed me to make occasional trips home while not using up leave time.

While there I had the same assignment in a small com center this time working all 12-hour night shifts. One of the few perks working nights was I didn't have to perform any barracks cleanup duties. The first sergeant in charge of barracks didn't like this as each time he assigned me to cleaning duty my duty officer would remind him I was a night worker and he would have to excuse me. One day the first sergeant had enough and told me I was working it anyway. It just happened that was the day the Wing Commander was performing his yearly barracks inspection. I ended my shift at the comm center at 6:00 a.m. and hustled back to the barracks and with one other person we cleaned latrines, halls, anything other than rooms. I then stood holding the door for the Wing Commander, still dressed in my duty fatigues. As I saluted, the commander stopped and clearly not happy asked if that is the way to present myself for an inspection. I explained to him that I had worked at my duty station until 6 and didn't have time to change. Still with a scowl he returned my salute and entered the barracks. I didn't hear any more about the exchange but I had a feeling others did. Shortly after that I had my reassignment orders for Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam.

It didn't really dawn on me until months later that Master Sergeants know a lot of people. Can't say for sure, but?

At Tan Son Nhut I was assigned to the 1876th Comm Squadron, PAFCO (Pacific Air Force Communications Operations) relay station. I learned later that at the time this was the busiest torn tape relay station in the world (lucky me). The following is a description of a typical shift at the relay station.

Each shift consisted of about 20-25 airmen, each assigned to 1 to 6 send/receive teletype stations depending on how busy the lines were. The stations consisted of Army, Air Force, Marine bases throughout Vietnam and also lines to many places outside Vietnam (Clark AFB Philippines, Okinawa, Hawaii, the Pentagon, and a UPI line for the press).

The messages were received and sent on teletype tape, not printed out. We had to read the perforations at the beginning of each message to determine the priority (flash, immediate, or routine), the classification (top secret, secret, etc.),

And the routing (where each message was to be sent). The incoming tape could be anywhere from a couple feet to twenty feet long. Since you can't drag a twenty-foot tape across a large room loaded with other machines and people you had to learn to neatly wrap the tape so it could be unwrapped when sending it out on other machines. We did this by carefully wrapping the tape around our thumb and little finger in a figure eight pattern using the last of the tape to secure the center of the bow. Did I mention you had to be quick, because you are manning several stations most of which are also spitting out tapes.

About half of the messages would have more than one addressee that the message had to go to. If it was a flash message (the highest priority) you couldn't send it to one station at a time, it would take too much time. In the middle of the relay station was a machine we called AMARS (automatic multiple address reprocessing system). The operator would insert the one tape received and the tape would be reproduced at each of the send stations for which it was routed. The AMARS operator would then shout out the priority of the message and which stations it was routed to. The shout would go something like this "FLASH COMING TO PHU BAI, PHAN RANG, PLEIKU, CLARK, HICKAM, PENTAGON) the list could go on. The send operator would then immediately start the message out to those stations. This process was repeated many times each hour. Yes, it was intense and never let up.

So, what happens to all that teletype tape after receiving/sending the message?

Also, each message sent/received was recorded on a back-up tape reel doubling the amount of tape used. Most of the messages on the tape were either top secret, or secret. In 3 to 4 days, we had enough waste tape to fill a 2 ½-ton truck. Since we were the ones with top secret need to know clearance, we got the job of escorting the bags of tape to a remote part of the base, where we performed the burn, making sure every last bit of the tape became ash, then stirring the ashes to be sure nothing was recoverable.

Back to the relay station. Each message sent and received was electronically encrypted before leaving the station. This was done by the signal first going through a KW26 encryption machine. Since our station had 50 to 60 bases we connected with we needed that many send and receive crypto machines. During the last part of



my tour, I was in charge of operation of the crypto gear. Mostly this involved a changing of the crypto codes a number of times each day to keep the enemy from zeroing in on our decryption. Each time a crypto code was changed, it had to be done in sync with the associated base for that line. This was done through a book of crypto cards of which the associated station had an identical book. We had to be sure that when I was changing out the card on my send crypto machine, he was using the duplicate card on his receive machine. No room for error. Remember during this time period there is no communication with that base. Mess up and you've lost communications for longer than you want. That's when you start getting visitors in the crypto room wanting to know what's the problem. Also, it now puts you behind getting to the next scheduled crypto change.

One advantage, the crypto gear had to be kept cool, so the room was air conditioned; nice while I was on duty. One unnerving thing, the relay station had only one secure door and no windows. We never knew what was happening out side. We would occasionally hear the woof of an incoming rocket, but for the most part we ignored it and kept busy with our assignments. I always suspected that the crypto gear was equipped with some sort of destructive device in case the comm center was ever over-run.

Enough for now, maybe next I'll write about some of my experiences off duty at Tan Son Nhut.



Signs in the parking lot in front of MACV headquarters across from Gen Abrams house, 1970.



Our Crypto Shop on Tan Son Nhut  
By Andy Csordas

Our Crypto repair group in Vietnam had people stationed all over the country, from the Delta to the DMZ as they used to say. Our Battalion level HQ was located at Long Binh. Some of our troops were located out in the field at base camps, typically one guy working out of the back of a 2 ½ ton truck. It was basic repairs, swapping circuit boards, etc.

Our group on Tan Son Nhut was a depot level repair shop where we repaired equipment down to individual components, such as resistors, diodes, capacitors, chips, etc. Because of that we were staffed at a higher level than most of our units around the country. We had slightly over 20 men assigned when I arrived in early June 1970 but our unit strength was continually reduced to about 8-9 men when I left for home at the end of December 1970. We actually lived in the shop building as well.

We repaired sophisticated voice and teletype crypto units for our troops and other allies' armies including the Aussies. But our primary work load in the Saigon area was for the ARVN's. They did not get to use the up to date sophisticated crypto gear. We supplied the ARVN's with a standalone encryption device that the US had used during the Korean War. A unit named KL-7 pictured here. →

The KL-7 was powered by 24 volts from a vehicle. It had vacuum tubes located behind the rotor cage for the circuitry. There were no solid state components or circuit boards. There was a huge wiring harness under the base plate with the wiring soldered directly to rows of posts and with components like resistors, etc. also soldered to the posts to make up the circuitry.

Essentially the KL-7 was very similar to the Enigma Machine used by the Germans in WWII, but more sophisticated than their WWII units. It used 8 rotors, like the one pictured below, that could be set to a specific code by rotating the white ring to a designated place on the black ring. Every time you pushed a key one of the rotors would step. The circuit would go through all of the rotors and arrive at an encrypted character. The internal wiring of the rotors did not go straight through so the electrical circuit would change with each new setting and each stepping of the rotors.



If you look at the black part on the left side of the KL-7 picture above you will see a small paper tape sticking out of the printer. Motor speed of the printer was critical. The print wheel would spin at a constant speed and the hammer would strike the paper as the designated encrypted character was speeding by.

An encrypted message might look something like this on the paper tape, five characters and a space.

AXLKR OEDPW XUNST GAMET ZOTRS IGNPT

If you typed the above encrypted text into the KL-7 with the rotors set in the same positions the message would print out in clear unencrypted text on the paper tape.

Since we were a direct support unit for the ARVN's we received the ARVN Signal Award. It is pictured on Page 9, attached to my uniform. We affectionately called it the electronic chicken. We shared our office space (not what you would call office space anywhere else) with a few ARVN troops including a Major. They were never allowed in the actual shop because they did not have



access to the sophisticated crypto gear we used for our own troops.

Repairing the KL-7 could be difficult at times due to cold solder joints caused by rough handling. Sometimes we just had to re-solder all of the several hundred posts to repair the units. At one point we had well over 100 KL-7's waiting for backordered parts. When the parts did arrive, it was 7 days a week 12-14 hours or more each day for weeks to get them out the door and back to the ARVN's.

The picture on Page 8 does not show the external composition case used by the unit. It was quite durable since these things got handled roughly in the field. And as an added bonus they usually came in covered in dirt and Agent Orange.



Special COMSEC Support Detachment Shop, located within the perimeter of the H-3 Heliport on Tan Son Nhut. The H-3 hanger is the large building to the right of the shop.



A taxi on the base, 1970

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**Penryn PA 17564**

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Five Year Membership: \$80.00  
Life Membership: \$180.00

I was stationed at Tan Son Nhut from January 25th, 1967 till after TET February 9, 1968.  
I was held over for about 10 days because no flights coming in due to TET.  
I was a Courier and flew with the Aussies in C-7A Caribou's all over South Vietnam delivering secret orders.  
I worked out of the little white sided bldg.

**Randall W Brown**  
**President-TSNA**



### RANDALL BROWN PHOTOS



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