

## Reunion of Vietnam vets provides time for reflection and healing

By Carole Robinson • Staff Writer - Oct 2, 2019



Tracy Rogers, 1968-1969, and SSgt Rich Krejsa, 1968-1969, flew 138 missions. Rogers & Krejsa served together at Nha Trang and Phu Cat airbases, enjoy pizza, photos and conversation during the 10th annual 6994th Security Squadron Reunion.



Joe Giammichele, 1968-1969, from Elmira, New York flew 112 missions, and Rich Miklaucic, 1968-1969, from Cleveland, Ohio flew 142 missions.

About 70 members of the Vietnam-era U.S. Air Force 6994th Security Squadron — along with their spouses, children and friends — recently came to Franklin to attend their 10th annual reunion.

Sadly, due to health reasons or death, a few members were missing this year, said reunion organizer and Franklin resident Rich Krejsa.

“Two veterans died this year and two widows are attending,” Krejsa added. “Regardless of whether their spouses are alive, (the widows) are family and are free to come to the reunions.”

The group enjoyed sitting in on and participating in a professional recording session, a show at the Grand Ole Opry and a special banquet with presentations and proclamations. But most of all, they enjoyed the familiar camaraderie of men who had similar military experiences.

Singer-songwriter Cory Hayward wrote and with local Indie singer Kristen Bennett invited those who arrived early to attend a recording session at the Welcome to 1979 Recording Studio. She was recording three songs she wrote to honor the 6994th Security Squadron.

“Crazy Ride” is about the squadron as a whole, “Awesome Ride” honors those who were killed in action and “The Ride Continues” remembers those who recently died. Backup was provided by members of the 6994th who attended the session. All members will receive a copy of the CD, called “Epic Ride,” after the finishing touches are completed.

“While Cory was the lead on this project, it couldn’t have been accomplished without her family: Lisa, Randy, Jed and Will,” Krejsa said. “They all took part in making the magic happen.”

The Honor Guard from AMVETS Jerry Reed Music City Post 1776 opened the Saturday evening banquet by posting the colors. County Mayor Rogers Anderson, a Vietnam-era Air Force veteran, and Patrick Sheehan, director of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, welcomed the group. The Old Glory chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution presented 14 members with a 50th anniversary Vietnam War Commemorative pin and 6994th veteran Ed Bendinelli, a member of the Freedom Through Vigilance Association, a group that supports the U.S. Air Force’s Air Intelligence Agency, provided the newly pinned veterans with a certificate of honor from his San Angelo, Texas, chapter. After the pinning, Anderson presented a county proclamation honoring the 6994th and their actions during the Vietnam War.

Before the group disbanded for another year, the veterans gathered for a solemn toast in memory of those killed in action and comrades lost since the war.

### About the 6994th Security Squadron

During the 1962 buildup of U.S. forces in Vietnam, officials of the Army and Air Force saw conventional ground-based systems couldn’t accurately locate the enemy’s low-powered transmitters. Their solution included an airborne system to support ground combat units and the creation of the Air Force 6994th Security Squadron.

The 6994th, 95 percent of which were enlisted men who received special training, was deployed between 1966 and 1974 with the sole mission of locating Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army low-power radio transmissions and passing the information along.

“Our job was to conduct missions that would control events (on the ground),” said Rick Yeh, co-chairman of the 6994th Alumni Association.

Specially trained Air Force Morse radio intercept operators along with linguists, communications analysts and maintenance technicians served with pilots, navigators and flight engineers from three Army squadrons.

“Our training included POW simulations, survival school and water survival school,” Krejsa explained.

“Using radio direction finding equipment, we would fly over enemy territory, pick up radio transmissions, triangulate and create a geographic fix within 500 meters.”

The interceptors flew in electronically retrofitted World War II vintage C-47 aircraft (former transport planes) renamed the EC-47 over South Vietnam, Laos and later Cambodia.

“The EC-47 could fly slow and low,” Yeh said. “During general missions, we would be airborne for seven hours. It was an interesting job.”

The teams listened to NVA and Viet Cong transmissions, identified the unit transmitting, determined the priority and transmitted the information to the direct support unit (DSU), where the information was disseminated and used to direct troop movements.

“We picked up the signal they were transmitting along the Ho Chi Minh trail,” said Sgt. Lewis Foster, who served from 1973 to 1974 and flew 63 missions.

“We knew the enemy units by the call signals,” added Rick Miklaucic, an airborne call finder. He flew 142 missions from 1968 to 1969. “The most important part of our job was finding the enemy so they could be taken out by any means. If we take them out, our guys come home.”

The data they transmitted to ground units was used to direct troop movements, artillery fire, tactical air strikes and B-52 missions.

“Among the 3,000 who served in that squadron, 434 were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, 2,191 received the Air Medal, 19 Bronze Stars were awarded, 49 Air Force Commendations, one Purple Heart plus 17 KIAs who received Purple Hearts,” Yeh added.

In the eight years the squadron was in existence, 17 were killed in action. Since beginning the reunion 1,300 have been located and 344 have since died. Due to their age, fewer are able to travel for the reunion, “but they are not forgotten,” Krejsa said.

It has been estimated that 95 percent of the B-52 strikes conducted in Vietnam were based partially or in full on information provided by the 6994th, according to the 6994th website.

“To a man, we would do it again with no hesitation,” Yeh said. “It gives us a broader sense of responsibility for things in life and the courage to take on things we wouldn’t have done — to step out of our comfort zone.”

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