

Off Life Support

Your January 2012 issue of *Air Force Magazine* did a very nice job of highlighting the great work the airmen and civilians of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base do to support and defend our nation [*"The Strike Eagle's Nest," p. 46*]. However, I would like to correct one of your pictures and captions p. 48, caption 2). It improperly identifies the function as the "life support shop."

As of October 2007, the prior career fields of aircrew life support, under operations, and survival equipment, under maintenance, began merging into a new career field: aircrew flight equipment, with an AFSC of 1P0X1. In 2008, AFSCs 1T1X1 and 2A7X4 were eliminated and merged under the single AFSC of 1P0X1.

Like other career fields going through functional changes/mergers, it is important for AFE to be identified properly by news media as it builds a new career field culture. We often hear, "It's all the same and still life support." I was on active duty when the merger process started and can confirm it was much more than a "name change," and it's not "just life support."

The name change was much more than that and not an attempt to create an OPR/EPR bullet to get someone promoted! In reality, the merger took the unique skills of *both* career fields and merged them into a *new* career field—now under operations. Our AFE airmen now have nearly double the tasks and skills compared to the previous AFSCs, while dealing with the advantages and challenges of merging work concepts and cultures into new ones. All of this had to be done in the midst of establishing new technical school-technician training requirements, supporting two wars, and taking significant manpower cuts as a result of Program Budget Decision 720.

Although not an official motto, I think the mottoes of the two old career fields combined are appropriate: Aircrew Flight Equipment: "Your life is our business—Last to let you down."

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That Was Then, This Is Now

I read with interest the article, "Dual Capable," by Michael C. Sirak in the January 2012 issue of *Air Force Magazine* [p. 32] partly because he includes information about the still-active B-52s, which are striving to maintain a 74 percent mission capable rate. That seems to be an acceptable availability rate in today's economic climate. However, that rate is sharply lower from what the early B-52 aircraft sought to (and did) achieve: 95 percent. I worked in B-52 logistics

from 1959 to 1972, beginning at the B-52 Priority Section, where our mission was to get timely parts support for the most urgently needed components, whose shortages would otherwise ground the airplane—preventing the mission. The difference between then and now is that "then" was the Cold War, and we had all the funding we needed, while "now" the threat is not considered as imminent, and funding is limited. As far as I remember, during the time I worked in that priority section, we did not fall below that 95 percent availability standard. In early March 1961, we actually had 100 percent availability on one notable day—I still have the message from Lieutenant General McKee congratulating our division for that achievement. We used

priority airlift, dedicated truck delivery, and even "pilot pickup," when the requiring unit would send their own airplane to physically fly to get the needed part, wherever it might be.

In today's economic and political climate, it is not likely that enough parts and resources will ever again be made available to enable such a support posture. I can appreciate the efforts of today's logisticians, who are probably working just as hard to keep today's airplanes flying, though in a far different climate.

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Glory Denied

With respect to the article "Encounters in the Tonkin Gulf," on p. 71 of the January

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