



THE LIFE SUPPORT/ FLIGHT EQUIPMENT NEWSLETTER

News for the men and women who served in the USAF or civilians who work in Government or industry in the Aircrew Life Support/Flight Equipment business. The views expressed herein are that of the individual mentioned and do not represent the views of the entire retired, active duty, or veteran members of the Aircrew Life Support/Flight Equipment career field.

Reporters: Tommy Tompkins PO Box 372 Equality, IL 62934 Email: tombob@shawneelink.com

Bob McElwain 17149 Forest Hills Dr Victorville, CA 92395 Email: bob.mcelwain@charter.net

Visit our web site at <http://usafals.net>

May 2009 Issue

Congratulations to the new Senior Master Sergeants promoted this cycle. William Baze, Darnell Burton, George Calloway, Mario Corpening, Matthew Freeman, Jack Gargis, Dale Lawrence, Garry Ledford, Alec Rehms and Randy Taylor. We will be looking for all of you on the Chiefs List!

We had two retirements since the last newsletter, Chief Steve Wyatt and Chief Retired Jerry Walker. In addition MSgt Bill Ricketts is planning his retirement for this coming July! Bill just got back from a TDY to Poland bringing their Life Supporters up to date on aircrew flight and emergency equipment. Some of us are now thinking, POLAND! Wow who would have ever thought that would come to pass!

Jerry retired again from the US Army ALSE operation at Fort Rucker and headed back to Andulusa one more time. Below are some comments from John Patti regarding Jerry's retirement.



After working in the Aircrew Life Support arena for over 30 years Gerald Walker decided it was time to hang it up and enjoy time at home with his family. The Aviation Life Support Supervisors gave Gerald a send off on 30 Dec 08. Gerald joined the Air Force in 1965 and served over 23 years on active duty in the Life Support career field. Upon retirement he worked in security in Miami, Fl until his return home to Andalusia. He hired on as an ALSE Supervisor in 2001 at Shell AAF, and was the first contract life support for flight operations at Fort Rucker. Shell field had been closed for several years, so he built the ALSE program from the ground up. Over the years Gerald and his team have received many accolades for the outstanding work performed in ALSE and we will miss him. However, we also know that Helen has a long list of jobs to keep Gerald busy. We would like to wish Gerald many great years of retirement and thank him for his outstanding work here at Fort Rucker; he made a lot of aviators safer, and smarter about the capabilities of their life support equipment.

I along with Retired Chief Tracy Donohoo had the opportunity to attend Steve Wyatt's Retirement Ceremony. It was exceptional and quite a lot of the active Chiefs were present to send Steve off. Particularly impressive was the Flag Folding Ceremony performed by the Chiefs. Chief Jeff Bingman read the presentation and Chief Ted Poe and Retired Chief Mike Freebury performed the folding. It is quite an impressive

ceremony and if you ever have a chance to view one please do so! After Chief Rod Welch presented the flag to Steve, Steve in turn presented it to his Father. Ted Poe then followed up with a presentation to Steve's dad of an impressive box to display the flag. Others in attendance were Chief Guzman, Chief Jean, Chief Roberts, Chief Reams and Major Dopslaf. Special thanks to MSgt Bowman, MSgt Ledford and MSgt Long from the AMC AFE Staff. And extra special thanks to MSgt Long who headed up the retirement. There are photos of the retirement ceremony posted on the web www.usafals.net. In addition, we asked Steve to provide the AFE comments for this newsletter and his comments are below.

CHIEF'S CORNER

Greetings Colleagues and Friends, On the eve of my retirement from Active Duty service, I was asked by Chili and Chief Tommy if I could comment briefly on how our duties have changed as a community over the last 30 years and; in particular, how I view the Career Field merger 3 years into the making and implementation phase as directed by the USAF Chief of Staff.

First, I believe it's safe to say this isn't the same occupational specialty I found when I entered the Air Force in 1979. For example, the F-16A was the premiere modern day F-22. While I worked a flightline full of F-4s conducting 10/14 day inspections, others in the fighter business experienced a "labor of love" with A-7s, A-37s F-5s and F-15s. Century series fighters to include the F-105, F-106 and F-111 were still being operationally flown by active, ANG and AF reserve units. MAC troops

of the day were either roasting or freezing their butts off depending on location with critical uploads and downloads of aircraft like the venerable C-141. SAC trained killers on the other hand were earning their keep tending to B-52 and KC-135s in a nuclear deterrent role for us all! While some things from yesteryear change, others remain static like the upload and down loads for transport and bomber aircraft. Anyone who ever experienced life in an Airlift or Bomber Wing will tell you with enthusiasm they earned every red cent of their paycheck! I would have to agree!

Like me, many of you shake your heads at 21st century technology. When I first enlisted it wasn't uncommon for an Airman working next to you to not have a high school diploma while washing 5/P face forms in pHisoHex solution. Today, many AFE enlistees entering service for the first time have advanced degrees in another area of interest. They use that advance education effectively to bolster their learning and training experience on the job. Society at large marvels at some of our advanced Aircrew Flight Equipment technologies currently in use and respond with a simple Wow. Pilots who use to fly in darkness once a quarter to maintain currency now literally own the night sky. Night Vision Devices have become common-place. Smart Radios like the PRC-112 and CSEL are extremely complex and require our technicians to be very well versed in inspection and operating procedures when compared to the OJT I received on an URC-64 or PRC-90. Again, it's all because of advancing technology and lessons learned over the last few decades. Even in our day to day personal lives we now have GPS, cell phone and Blackberry

technology. All of these would have been considered Buck Rogers stuff just a few short years ago. I'm still trying to figure out what Twitters all about!

When the decision was made recently to reduce end strength by 40,000 airmen something had to give. The maintenance community was looking to consolidate and merge like specialties and approached the Operations world to see if once and for all we could merge Survival Equipment and Aircrew Life Support. I was a participant in numerous meetings and Integrated Process Team workshops to help pave the way forward. I can assure you this wasn't done in haste and every active duty Chief Master Sergeant took the undertaking very seriously to ensure we did so in a smart and efficient manner. However, the success of this merger will take more than the active duty Chief's. Every MAJCOM, every contractor, every civilian, every retiree... everyone! It will require each of us working in synergy to ensure those airmen following in our footsteps see a seamless integrated career field. A merger of infrastructure only or solely on paper will fail. It must be aggressive and will take experience, blood, sweat, tears and total dedication to ensure it works. Training in like tasks at both the Technical Training Center and shop level must be well planned, active and coordinated for the 2A7/1T1 "specialty" lines to fade away. I'm positive our union will work as other services have proven this to an effective reality. Yes, it will take time, patience and support from each of us. We can do this!

Of course we had great times in our prior specialties and it doesn't mean we have to deny or give up our identity, history

or heritage. Not only did we work extremely hard, we had fun doing so. Who can ever forget crud matches with war rules, doofer books, chilled Jeremiah Weed on a Friday night and someone yelling out “Dead Bug” in the Squadron bar during a callsign naming event? While time may change some things, it can never rob us of those special memories and bonds we made with colleagues and friends. I’m certain everyone has their own “There I Was” story they can relate too and personally, I look forward to hearing some of those stories soon.

As I close this chapter of my life, I do so with great admiration for each of you. It

was my pleasure to serve with so many great Aircrew Life Supporter, Survival Equipment Specialists and Aircrew Flight Equipment personnel over the years. Thank you for your unwavering support of this wonderful nation we call home. I look forward to future “Aircrew Flight Equipment” reunions and some good old-fashioned GI storytelling under a blue Nevada sky soon!

I bid you all farewell.

Best Wishes,
Chief Master Sergeant Stephen P. Wyatt
Chief, Command Aircrew Flight
Equipment
HQ AM





CHILI SEZ

OK, we've collected your life support assignment history and tech school photos, now it's time to get some other info from you. Remember back in the December 07 newsletter when Maj (Ret) Looper Meyer suggested that we send in stories about our military experience? Here is a reminder that we still want all former personal equipment, life supporters and flight equipment members to do that. Our web site is centered on the history of the people who have been in this career field; now let's add to it by sending in those stories before they become lost forever. As the Major suggested, a narrative of what we did, how we did it, what we changed, things we saw, or just war stories would be great!

Let's pass on to the next generation of flight equipment technicians stories like when we started tying survival items into the survival kit/vest and why we did it. Why is waxed cord used on parachutes and oxygen mask straps? Why and when did we start taping the spare survival radio battery to the radio? Why and when did we start installing a sponge in the survival kit? Does anybody know why all that hardware comes with a new chin and nape strap? No! It's not solely because we need it to attach the strap to the helmet, there is another reason. I know the answer to all these questions, but I don't think there is anything in print on any of this. These are examples of things that my generation changed or saw that should be documented. So, if you can't think of anything to write about yourself (or don't want to write about yourself), then write about changes you saw and why they

changed. The problem with technical order and regulation changes is that there is seldom if any documented rationale for the change! Let's pass on what we remember about the changes we saw during our career or just some war stories.

Your service to our country and the career field made history, share some of your stories by e-mailing them to us so that they can be put on our website for all to see. They may someday be put in print for historical purposes. The AF Enlisted Heritage Research Institute is also requesting stories from former AF members; however, they put a limit on how many words can be in your story. We don't care how long or short your input is, just get it to us! Attached to this newsletter are examples of what we want (my narrative and a story from Ray Blanchette).

REUNION

Our annual Life Support/Flight Equipment Reunion will be held at the Aquarius Casino Resort in Laughlin, NV from 5 thru 8 Oct 2009.

Monday, 5 Oct and Friday, 9 Oct. are travel days. Our golf tournament and picnic are scheduled for Wednesday, 7 Oct. We will also have our usual pinochle tournament on a day to be determined. If you plan on participating in the golf tournament please contact Ed MacKenzie via email at 2macks@hughes.net or by phone at 702-682-6485. Ed needs a \$50 golf fee for each participant NLT 15 Sept 09. As always, we are accepting prizes for our banquet raffle and tournaments from all who wish to donate. Golf prizes should be sent to Ed MacKenzie as indicated below. Other prizes can be sent to Frank Provenzano as

indicated below. Frank's home phone number is 702-453-1627.

Aquarius Casino Resort
Attn: Ed MacKenzie or Frank Provenzano
(As appropriate)
1900 S. Casino Dr
Laughlin, NV 89029

All former, retired, active duty, guard, reserve, and civilian personnel working in the Aircrew Life Support/Flight Equipment business, and their families are invited to attend. To register you must send in the attached registration form to KB Kinchen by the date indicated on the form.

IF YOU ATTENDED LAST YEAR'S REUNION, DON'T FORGET TO BRING YOUR NAME TAG! NEW NAME TAGS WILL BE MADE UP AND ISSUED TO FIRST TIME ATTENDEES. GUESTS NAME TAGS WILL BE ISSUED TO ANYONE WHO FORGETS TO BRING THEIRS.

The following information is provided for all who are attending for the first time:

- Laughlin is located 90 miles south of Las Vegas and is easily accessible via car or RV.
- Air travelers can fly directly into the Laughlin/Bullhead City Airport on many major airlines, commuter flights or private charters.
- Reservation cannot be made with hotel personnel (unless you are attending on official military orders). They must be made with KB!
- Confirmation of your reservation will not be mailed out unless asked for.

- Rooms will not be available for check-in until 3 PM, Monday 5 Oct, Early check-in is allowed if your room is ready.
- A special area will be set-up in the hotel lobby from 2PM - 5PM for reunion attendees to sign-in.
- After checking in, don't forget to stop by our hospitality room after 5PM for some food and drinks.

COMMENTS FROM THE FIELD

*Just went to the site again, it's great. I was surprised at how many of the old ALS people are still not mentioned anywhere on the sight. MSgt Douglas Juno died in a plane crash. I think it was on a tanker taking off at Keesler around the time I was stationed at Chanute AFB, 1992 or so. He was the NCOIC at 4950th Test Wing for several years. CMSgt Joe Diamond was missing as well. I could go on and on. But I love the site. I was the Last Life Support troop stationed at Chanute, at the time I was working as a Resource Advisor for the 3330 Technical Training Wing, I helped load them Up and ship the school. I stayed behind and finished moving all the other schools. Closing the base was a big job. I was very saddened to see the pictures of the old building looking, seems like just yesterday I was walking down the halls of P-3 with my taps on my shoes.
William (Bill) Collins, MSgt (Ret)*

I attended tech school in Oct and Nov 1979. I saw the pictures of the old school house, it's a shame that the history of that building and all who passed through those doors is just tossed aside. Seeing them did bring back some found memories.

James McNier, TSgt (Ret)

I found out about the website from CMSgt (Ret) George Fuller. He and I were at Takhli Thailand at the same time, 1965 – 1966. He was the egress NCOIC and I was in charge of the 354 TFS Life Support shop. I joined the AF 23 Aug 62 and started tech school in Oct 62. I caught pneumonia and was in the hospital for 2 weeks...then back to school and then they said I had TB so, back into the hospital for 6 weeks, then home for Christmas, then back in the hospital and then air evac'd to Scott AFB for a month. Finally, I went back to tech school finishing in early Mar 63. Made TSgt in Apr 71 and took over as NCOIC of the 91TFS at Bentwaters, England. Started wondering what I would do when I retire and tried to cross train into Air Traffic Control, but they wouldn't send me back to the states for tech school. So, I cross trained into club management and retired as a SMSgt 1 Jul 83. I retired from AF Civil service Sep 03 as a GM-13 and was the Deputy Service Director. Life support memories are all fond...we had a very important job and most of the aircrews respected what we did for them. Look forward to hearing from other life support troops.

*Bob Wiley, SMSgt (Ret)
573-286-0160
Fishing9209@aol.com*

My wife and I are in Brandon, Florida just six miles from Tampa. We have 5 grand kids from our two daughters. Our daughter Heather is married to a guy who is in the Air Force at Nellis AFB flying with the 66th rescue squadron. My daughter Sarah lives

in the UAE, her husband (former Army) works in Abu-Dhabi for a contractor working on helicopters. I have been in the staffing industry for about nine years now. Things are going well. August 07 I had cancer in my right kidney but caught it at an early stage so the doc was able to get it out along with 1/4 of my kidney. I feel great and get checked every 6-months.

Ray Uris, MSgt (Ret)

TAPS

The son of retired CMSgt Al Webb notified us that his father passed away in mid December 08. Chief Webb was the former 12AF Life Support Chief back in the late 80's.

A letter from Charles Leichliter wife stated that he passed away 10 Apr 08. Charles enlisted in Des Moines, IA in 1957. He was stationed at Homestead AFB, had tours in Africa, Otis AFB, Vietnam, Norton AFB, Clark AFB, Loring AFB and Guam.

The mother of Chris Goodman reported to us that he died 31 Aug 08 unexpectedly of cardiac arrest in his sleep. She indicated that it was a great shock as Chris was thought to be in perfect health.

An e-mail from SMSgt (Ret) Roger Wade reported that retired TSgt Kenneth Harris passed away 3 May 09 at the age of 71. Ken retired around 1980 from Columbus AFB, MS and later worked in survival equipment as a parachute rigger.

Keep those suggestions and e-mails coming and don't forget to tell your life support buddies who live in your area about us. See you at the reunion!

Chili

USAF Life Support/Flight Equipment Career Narratives and Stories

Narratives

SMSgt Bob McElwain, USAF (Ret)

Victorville, CA

Conflicts Served: The Cold War, Vietnam Era and Desert Storm

My life support career started in 1968 when I was given the opportunity to cross-train, and a choice of assignments. I was offered air traffic control or life support. I preferred air traffic control, but chose life support because the school was in a better location (Illinois versus Mississippi!). There was no way as an African America that I was going to Mississippi during the civil rights era!

My training began with a three month tour to Chanute AFB, IL where I learned the basics of the career field. As for my first impression of life support, I was scared! I realized that I had been placed with a great deal of responsibility and had people's lives in my hands! My first supervisor, Cesare Bruno had me so afraid of killing somebody if I didn't put their helmet or mask back together correctly that I literally replaced anything that didn't functioned properly. I didn't repair anything except for those white chin and nape straps that we were constantly washing. It was remove and replace, if an oxygen mask valve started sticking it went straight into the trash! I was stationed at Perrin AFB, TX during this time and worked in two different shops, the 81 ADS and the 82 ADS. I was also fortunate enough to work at the local ADC Water Survival School. Being able to work at a MAJCOM survival school was a unique experience not all life supporters got to experience.

After finishing my two year stint in Texas, I was assigned to Andersen AFB, Guam, which is the closest I got to the war in Viet Nam. I worked on B-52's, Tankers, C-130's, and Helicopters. My memories of the Viet Nam War were the sight of a lot of scared aircrew members getting on and off of those B-52s. I remember being shocked at how young some of the tail gunners looked. There was close to 200 B-52D and G models on the island to support the bombing campaign over Viet Nam. Sixty-Six sorties were flown each day. What we didn't understand was why did all those B-52s come to Guam from bases like Barksdale, Robins, Seymour Johnson, Westover, Carswell, Minot, Loring and March without PLDs installed on the parachutes? Each aircraft had about 8 or 12 chutes that we had to download and configure right there on the ramp with lowering devices. I'll never forget all the pain we had in our fingers from sewing on PLDs! Besides that, we worked our buns off loading, unloading and pre-fighting life support equipment on every B-52 scheduled to fly plus spares night after night. That's right; it was 12 hours a day, 7 days a week of constant work!

With over 200 aircrafts and I don't know how many vehicles on the flight-line at any given time, it was inevitable that somebody was going to run into something. It almost happened to us one night. Our truck with about 10 life supporters onboard died in the middle of the runway as a B-52 was taxiing towards us. I thought we could get it started in time, but were unable. The bomb rack, loaded to the gills with bombs scraped the top of the truck as it taxied by. I thought my life was about to end that night, but luckily nothing happened and we didn't tell anybody about it. As I recall, Sid Perry was on the truck with us that night.

Another incident that I remember was a time when a B-52's bomb bay doors opened on takeoff and spilled out a bunch of propaganda money (counterfeit North Vietnamese currency that was used to load in the aircraft with hopes of discouraging the enemy and disrupting the economy). Everyone on the truck stuffed their pockets full of the money. I left Guam three months after the last official battle, called the 11 day war or more popularly known as the "Christmas Bombing" of 1972. After returning to the states I gave all my propaganda money away except one bill.

I was transferred to McGuire AFB in 1972 and worked on C-141's for a year under Joe Lee and Jim Rooney. I then went overseas again to Ubon RTAB in Thailand, but only stayed for two weeks. The war/conflict was over and all of the aircraft were being transferred out, so I was reassigned to Kadena AB in Okinawa, Japan where I worked on F-4s. For some reason the F-4 was identified as a specialized aircraft for our career field so I had to go back to Chanute for F-4 Life Support training. While stationed on Kadena I was also assigned to temporary assignments in Korea and Taiwan.

Finally, in 1975 I came back to the United States and was assigned to the 49 TFW at Holloman AFB NM. At Holloman I worked for and eventually replaced my mentor, John Shields in the 465 TTS where I worked on T-38s. I had six people working for me and we had one squadron, but we eventually developed into a wing and had four squadrons increasing to around forty people. I continued to be shop supervisor for about six months, then someone who out ranked me (Frank Birkenseher) took over.

In 1979 I got the assignment I enjoyed the most out of my twenty-six year career in the Air Force. I went to Langley AFB, Virginia to the Tactical Air Command Headquarters and was assigned to help oversee and manage the life support programs of all the Air Force bases in TAC. I assisted Lt Col Al Schneider, Chief John Weir, and later my mentor, Chief John Shields in establishing policies and procedures for all the units in the command. I was also responsible for the suggestion and AFTO 22 programs and the distribution of newly developed equipment such as the HGU -55/P helmet and the MBU-12/P Mask. As I recall, it was I along with Chief Tommy Tompkins, SMSgt Jerry White and a representative from another MAJCOM who wrote the first T.O. for the 12/P mask. I also helped write the first technical order for the 55/P helmet while at TAC HQ. I thoroughly enjoyed this assignment because I got see the career field from a different prospective.

My final assignment in the Air Force was to the 35 TTW at George AFB, CA where I was the Life Support Superintendent. I retired from active duty on 1 Sep 1991 and thought I'd miss the

good friends I met along the way who made the career as special as it is. It turns out I haven't missed a thing as I have continued my career as a "NASA Life Support Aerospace Engineer" meeting with active duty AF Life Support/Flight Equipment personnel once a year at the SAFE Symposium and retired and former life supporters at our annual reunions.

Aircrew Life Support/Flight Equipment Stories

Once upon a time there were four Chiefs, one MAC, one TAC, one SAC and one ATC. They all gathered at ATC's most remote and God forsaken location, Chanute AFB. III one cold spring day in 1983 or four I really can't recall, I just know it was cold as Mars. We were there to resolve a great Life Support crisis, and that I can't recall either. What I do remember is that the stolen vehicle was a rental car in the control of the richest command, TAC and a Chief called Johnny Nevada whose cowboy boots accentuated his highwater AF blue trousers and faded blue jacket.

Johnny had led this Junior Chief and the other two veteran Chiefs to the old cafeteria across from the B-36 near the end of the flight line. There he encouraged us to imbibe in some of the wonderful green beer that we all remembered fondly flowing from a tap of the same color, to refresh the memories of our roots. All but the SAC Chief imbibed with thirst quenching delight, to the point of Air Force exhilaration. The SAC Chief bought a 12 pound box of Oreos and a gallon of milk for the road. The emboldened TAC Chief made a comment about departure and we all departed the fix, quite joyously I might add, having restored the fond memory of our roots.

On our way back the Dorm, (yes, that is where ATC kept the Chief's quarters a guarded secret), blue lights blossomed behind us and beckoned us to stop. Here lies the truth, as we were approached by the young two striper SP.

Airman: Chief, may I see your license and registration?

TAC Chief: Sure. This is a beautiful base you have here.

SAC Chief: First spewing of milk and Oreos. (apparently not in agreement). Airman: Where you from Chief?

TAC Chief: I'm the leader of the most forward looking Life Support program in the world, the TAC Life Support Program.

SAC Chief: Second spewing of milk and Oreos. (apparently still not in agreement).

MAC Chief: I'm the leader of the biggest looking Life Support program in the world, the MAC Life Support Program.

SAC Chief: Third spewing of milk and Oreos. (You guessed it, he didn't agree).

ATC Chief: I'm the leader of the quietest Life Support program in the world, the ATC Life Support program.

SAC Chief: No reaction.

Airman to SAC Chief: I'll bet you are the leader of the most destructive Life Support program in the world, the SAC Life Support Program.

SAC Chief responds indignantly: Why would you say that?

Airman: Chief you've destroyed the front of your Blues with those milk and cookies.

As the fumes from the green beer overwhelmed the young Airman, he called the SP Sergeant on the duty desk and asked for advice, to which the audible response was,

"You'd better let them go!"

The airman gave Johnny Nevada back his documents and Johnny responded courteously. He was also heard to be mumbling "three drunks and a cookie eater and why wasn't the cookie eater driving?"

To the best of my recollection these are the facts, and this should put all rumors to rest forever. I can still hear Johnny Nevada saying "Milk and Oreos, Don, why weren't you driving.

We dodged a bullet that night on Chanute."

CMSgt Ray Blanchette, USAF (Ret)