



## ***AIRCREW LIFE SUPPORT/ AIRCREW FLIGHT EQUIPMENT VETERANS AND RETIREES NEWSLETTER***

*News for the men and women who served (civilian, government or industry) in the Personal Equipment (PE), Aircrew Life Support (ALS) or Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) professions. The views expressed herein are that of the individual mentioned and do not represent the views of the retired, active duty, ANG, Reserves, or veteran members of the PE, ALS, or AFE career fields.*

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Visit our web site at [www.usafals-afe.net](http://www.usafals-afe.net)

December 2014 Edition

### **Looking Forward**

*(by Al Loving, Group President)*

It has been several years in the making, but we now have a formal name, the USAF Aircrew Life Support/Aircrew Flight Equipment Veterans and Retirees Group, and an elected Board of Directors! During the September 2014 reunion in San Antonio, Texas, members voted to formalize the Group and our first ever officers were elected. The following members were elected to two-year terms:

Allen "Al" Loving - President  
Stephen "Steve" Wyatt - Vice President  
Bob "Chili" McElwain - Secretary/Treasurer

As your newly elected President, I would first like to offer my sincere appreciation and thanks to

those that had the vision and foresight to establish the group, offer their time and services to stimulate and maintain the camaraderie among the uniformed, veteran and retired Aircrew Life Support (ALS) and Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) community. We owe our "founders" a huge debt of gratitude and a hardy "Thank You"! Our efforts for the coming year's business and reunion will seek to build on their accomplishments and lessons learned these many years.

As we enter a new year and a new phase in the future of the group, we are well aware of all the critical parts of our group. The Board is extremely grateful to our brothers and sisters in uniform, our corporate and individual supporters, and those dedicated veterans and retirees of our community that, year after year, never fail to contribute to the success of the group and our annual reunion.

Each of you is truly the heart of the group and we could not exist without your dedication, volunteerism, and financial sustainment.

The work to manage and grow our group has more challenges today than ever. Your honest input and feedback is always welcome in this regard and will be most helpful in determining member satisfaction and future Board actions. Equally important is your involvement in spreading the word to eligible veterans and retirees to join the group.

One of the biggest efforts planned this coming year is, of course, our annual reunion. The Reunion Committee Chairperson, Bob McElwain, is already in planning mode for our 20<sup>th</sup> annual reunion in Las Vegas, Nevada, September 21-25, 2015.

The Website Committee, also headed by Bob McElwain, has launched the new and improved website. With the expert assistance of Mike Kelly the site has a fresh new look and feel to help improve communications with our members and open new avenues to broaden our exposure.

Again, your feedback is important; your continued assistance and support is needed and will be much appreciated. Please let us hear from you. We are all ambassadors of the group. If you value your experience with us please encourage others to join.

Together we can continue to promote camaraderie within the community and grow the group for future generations of Aircrew Flight Equipment professionals.

### **From The Field**

We want to acknowledge and congratulate the following Aircrew Flight Equipment Senior Master Sergeants recently selected for promotion to Chief Master Sergeant:

Troy Bauerbach  
Anthony Duplechain  
Joseph Shelton

We congratulate all of the AFE uniformed and civilian professionals who have been selected for promotion since the last newsletter.

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CMSgt Jim Crites, Beale AFB, CA, writes: I will out-process from the Air Force in January 2015. That's when I will start my terminal leave and, when it's all said and done, I will have completed 30 years and 6 days in the Air Force. The first 26 years I served in Aircrew Life Support (ALS) and Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE). My last 4 years I have been the Operation Group Chief here at Beale AFB.

I joined the Air Force in 1985 in California. My first duty station was McChord AFB, WA, followed by Guam, the Philippines, Germany, Korea, Japan, Iceland, Edwards AFB, CA, Brooks City Base, TX, and finally Beale AFB, CA. I started in California and I will retire and live here as well.

I have seen the AFE career field go through some remarkable changes over the years. Of course, like the rest of the Air Force, our numbers have slimmed down to about half of what they were when I joined, but through all the force-shaping AFE continued to innovate and excel. Advances in technology have increased aircrew protection across the board and along with those advances AFE Airmen have been right there testing, fielding and providing feedback and ideas towards these new technologies.

During the time of the merger I was managing AFE and Physiology Technicians in the U-2 program at the Physiological Support Squadron, also known as PSPTS or PSD. The merger opened the door for Airmen with a fabrication background to come and work in the full pressure suit program. I have to say that I was absolutely impressed with the high caliber of the Airmen that we received!

As I wrap this up, I want to express how important ALS and AFE have been to me - important for what I learned, but even more important are the lasting friendships that I have made. While I regret that I did not serve as an AFE MAJCOM Functional Manager, the principles I learned in AFE made me a successful Operations Group

Superintendent and that opened the door for me to deploy as the Mission Support Group Superintendent to Kandahar last year. So, while the path I took was different than what I had planned, it was great journey nevertheless.

As I transition into the civilian sector I look forward to getting involved with the ALS/AFE Veterans and Retirees Group.

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CMSgt Patrick "Pat" Schell, Air Force Reserve Command AFE Functional Manager, will retire on January 22, 2015, following 37 years and 6 months of military service. Pat recently prepared for his post retirement career by completing a commercial truck driving training curriculum and secured his DOT certification for driving the big rigs. Pat and Beverly have not yet finalized their plans regarding a retirement homestead but are considering relocating to Alabama. We wish Pat and Beverly all the best in the next chapter of their lives.

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CMSgt Darrell D. Sanderson, AMC AFE Functional Manager, retired from active duty in September 2014. We wish the Chief and his family all the best in retirement.

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CMSgt Jean Fontenot, AETC AFE Functional Manager, writes: It was a true honor to brief the ALS/AFE retirees on the state of the 1P0 career field. In addition, I was amazed at how interested the attendees were in relation to how the career field has developed over the years. Being able to interact and talk to the retirees was indeed an eye-opening experience. They asked numerous questions concerning equipment our aircrew are wearing and how things have changed over the years. Also, I was able to spend some time before and after the briefing interacting with the AFE retirees group and I was very impressed with the history they were able to provide.

Additionally, this was the first ALS/AFE reunion I had the privilege to attend and must admit there was very little active duty involvement. Colonel Redanz, AETC/A3O, opened the reunion with some comments as he was an AFEO and aircrew member for many years. He talked about the history and legacy of the career field and it hit

home with many of the attendees. The 149<sup>th</sup> FW AFE operation at Lackland AFB hosted a show-and-tell tour for the reunion attendees. I was also impressed with the numerous briefings that took place during the reunion.

Lastly, I can assure you if you attend the next reunion that I believe will take place in Vegas you will not be disappointed.

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To those who will soon or have retired from the military or civil service since the last newsletter, please accept our sincere thanks for your dedicated service to this Great Nation and the United States Air Force.

### **Stand-Up of New Website**

If you are not already aware, we have a new ALS/AFE Veterans and Retirees website. The site is located at **[www.usafals-afe.net](http://www.usafals-afe.net)**. In the last few weeks the site administrators have been working feverishly to fix a problem with the speed of the site. In an attempt to gain a little more speed a significant amount of user profile information was lost and is not recoverable. As a result, we need all electronic (computer) users of the site to go back to the site and re-enter their profile information. You can do this by following these directions:

Attempt to login and fill out your Profile information again. Login on this page <http://usafals-afe.net/login/> If you cannot login this means your entire profile has been lost. Please re-register if this is the case on this page [www.usafals-afe.net/register/](http://www.usafals-afe.net/register/). If you have forgotten the password for the page just email Bob McElwain at **[bob.mcelwain@charter.net](mailto:bob.mcelwain@charter.net)** for assistance.

We apologize for the inconvenience and have extended the original December 31, 2014, deadline to register to January 31, 2015.

Again, if you get stuck, please contact Mike Kelly at **[lubyg@live.com](mailto:lubyg@live.com)** or Bob McElwain at **[bob.mcelwain@charter.net](mailto:bob.mcelwain@charter.net)**.

**Problems Registering On the Website?** Many of the original members have sent in requests to register, but have yet to complete the registration. They may have had issues coming up with a strong password, or trouble trying to register while using a government computer. If this is you, try using a home computer and strengthen your password by doubling it. For example, if your password is, survive14 and the system indicates it is not strong enough, type in the word survive14survive14 as your password and it will be accepted.

We want to remind everyone that the member's address roster that was on the old website will not be maintained after January 31, 2015. To search for contact information on registered members after that date, you'll need to look for it on the website under the tab "Search for Members". Anyone on the old roster who has not re-registered by the January 31, 2015, deadline will no longer be considered a member and will not have a profile page on the new website.

Hopefully, all those folks will go back to the website and register before the deadline. Please remember too that the profiles on the website are of members that have an email address. Those that don't have an email address will be listed on the site in a protected address list file. So, with all that in mind, do not report changes to your contact information to us if you have registered. Instead, make the change yourself to your profile page on the website.

**If you have not registered due to not having a computer** there's no need for worry. Your information will be entered manually. However, if your mailing address is not up to date and we receive returned mail, you will be deleted from the mailing list until an updated mailing address is provided to Bob McElwain and entered into the database. Bob's mailing address is on page one of this newsletter under "Reporters".

### Checking In

Others who "Checked In" since the last newsletter included:

- James Craft
- Joe Muklevicz
- Al Cricks
- Paul Olson
- Greg Dean
- Paul Parent
- Alexander "Skip" Clawson

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Hugh Byrne is looking for information regarding the following individuals that were Personal Equipment (PE) instructors and/or staff members at Chanute in 1961 and upon his return to Chanute in 1963 for additional training:

- AIC Donald Franklin
- SSgt Sam Morse
- SSgt Miller (who had been an aerial machine gunner in the Korean War and who told us lots of stories about his time there)
- MSgt Kramer (had been a major, but I think it was a battlefield commission)
- TSgt Petric
- AIC Shacklford (from Kentucky)
- A2C Carpenter
- SSgt Morse
- TSgt Tomlinson
- SSgt Stewart

If you have any information for Hugh, please contact him via email at [hsbstingray@yahoo.com](mailto:hsbstingray@yahoo.com).

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MSgt (Ret) Richard "Bing" Bingaman is looking to reconnect with old friends. Bing started his career in Supply until he was asked to stand up the 512<sup>th</sup> Fighter Day Squadron PE Shop in 1953. He retired as a Life Supporter 24 years later. Bing would like to hear from his old friends via mail. His home mailing address is:

Richard Bingaman  
33 Salem Manor Ct  
Selinsgrove, PA 17870

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**An update on Chief Don Yager from Alberta Yager:** The Chief is "stable". His seizures continue off and on. It's difficult to know when they are going to occur; however, he seems to come out of them each time but with a little more regression of the Alzheimer's Dementia disease.

He continues to receive very good one-on-one care at the Vet Home here in Bellevue.

## **2014 Reunion Recap**

*(By Steve Wyatt)*

The 19th Annual Personal Equipment, Aircrew Life Support, Survival Equipment, and Aircrew Flight Equipment Veterans and Retirees Reunion was held under sunny San Antonio skies September 8-12, 2014. Reunion central was at the Drury Inn and Suites downtown and located on the Riverwalk. CMSgt (Ret) Jim Rooney was the moderator for the first day's events and CMSgt (Ret) Dave Chitwood MC'd for the farewell banquet on Thursday evening. For those of you who were unable to attend, you missed a truly spectacular career field get-together with colleagues and friends. Ask anyone who attended this year, and you'll understand what we mean.

Numerous individuals and industry partners assisted in event planning and pulled out all stops to ensure each attendee was properly registered, comfortable and cared for so they could enjoy the reunion festivities. Essex Industries personnel "staffed" the hospitality room each night to ensure snacks and beverages were available to attendees. Many individual and companies provided generous financial support to off-set high costs in the San Antonio area, covering everything from transportation to picnic needs.

Before going any further, please make sure to mark your calendars now for the 20th Annual PE/ALS/SE/AFE Reunion that will be held September 21-25, 2015 (**21 and 25 Sep are travel days**), at the Tuscany Suites Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Tuscany's proximity to Nellis AFB and the USAF Air Warfare Center makes it an ideal spot for golfing, outdoor activities and visiting on-base facilities. Your newly elected and recently seated Board of Directors has already begun preparing for what is sure to be another great reunion in 2015. This year's reunion totaled around 90 attendees. We have set a community goal and challenge for at least 200 attendees at our 20th annual reunion in Las Vegas next year. We encourage your

support in attaining this goal and respectfully solicit more participation from AFRC, ANG and active duty member participation. This is your career field, and with over 2000 friends on our various Facebook pages, we should certainly be able to increase reunion attendance. Highlight your calendar today!

The 19th reunion opened with the Posting of the Colors by the 433rd AMW Honor Guard from Lackland AFB and the playing of our National Anthem. CMSgt (Ret) Ray Blanchette then followed with the opening invocation. CMSgt (Ret) Jim Rooney welcomed all attendees and provided his perspective and remarks on the importance of the Aircrew Flight Equipment Career Field. Attendees were also welcomed by letter from the USAF Chief of Staff, General Mark Welsh III, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Chief James Cody and the USAF Aircrew Flight Equipment Career Field Manager, Chief Mike Lightner.

The first day of the reunion was a business meeting and participating industry partners (many of which were ALS/AFE retirees) presented information which members found enlightening. This also gave attendees up-to-date information on the latest program developments and equipment issues currently affecting the field.

Speakers and presenters included, Colonel Robert Redanz, HQ AETC/A30, CMSgt Jean Fontenot the MAJCOM Functional Manager, HQ AETC from Randolph AFB who provided an exceptional "State of the Career Field" briefing, MSgt Jason Fisch from the 415th FLTF at Randolph with both a Safety and Parachute briefing, CMSgt (Ret) Al Loving representing East/West Industries, Inc., SMSgt (Ret) James Warrick from DRIFIRE and Mr. Tim Bannister from Essex Industries, Inc. providing an EPOS overview.

The Drury Management Staff provided excellent service to us each evening with a manager's reception from 5:30 to 7: PM. Essex followed this by hosting a hospitality suite every evening for attendees.

Finally, rounding out the weeks activities was a trip to Lackland AFB for a public affairs tour, AFE shop and flight line tour of the 433th AMW, and tours of the C-5 fuel barn and an aircraft. Our pinochle tournament was held in the hospitality suite on Wednesday afternoon.

We concluded the reunion with our golf tournament at Randolph AFB on Thursday morning and our traditional farewell banquet on Thursday evening at the host hotel. Again, Dave Chitwood was the Master of Ceremonies for the evening with special video presentations by Bob McElwain. Lt Col Michael "Snap" Nelson provided our keynote address by sharing with us how much our career field meant to him personally as a fighter pilot who has used the "system". Colonel Nelson experienced an ejection from an F-16 in Turkey and he took time from his busy schedule to visit with us and share his experience as an ejectionee. The hotel and restaurant staff did a remarkable job with catering our banquet and ensured even the smallest of details was attended to.

The 2014 Reunion Committee wishes to thank everyone who attended and played a key role in orchestrating the 2014 reunion. We look forward to another excellent event in 2015 in Las Vegas. Again, please mark your calendars now and plan on joining dear friends and colleagues "on the strip" for our 20th annual reunion September 21-25, 2015.

We look forward to welcoming each of you under a blue Nevada sky next September.

### **Odds & Ends**

**New TRICARE Website:** In July 2014, TRICARE.mil unveiled a new design to give TRICARE's 9.6 million beneficiaries clear and easy access to benefit information. Users now have more ways to browse the site with easier navigation, a login button for quicker access to partner's secure services, and a section on the homepage dedicated to life-changing events. They've also streamlined and reorganized the content. Visit [www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil)

**2015 Military Retirement/VA Disability Payments COLA to be 1.7 Percent:** The Bureau of Labor Statistics has released the 2014 third quarter Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures. That tells us that, compared to the third quarter of 2013, the national inflation rate has increased by 1.7 percent. Therefore, that will be the December 2014 (first payable in January 2015) cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for military and federal retirees, Social Security recipients, and those who receive benefit checks from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**The IRS Forms 1099-R for the 2014 tax year** will become available online in mid-December when retirees and annuitants will be able to access their forms on myPay. Retirees and annuitants who have not created a myPay account, or rely on hard-copy versions of the 1099-R, may not receive their forms until mid-January. The 1099-R's are not automatically issued for deceased retirees and annuitants and must be requested. To make this request, or for more information regarding a 1099-R for a deceased retiree or annuitant, contact the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) using one of the methods described on the DFAS website at [www.dfas.mil/dfas/retiredmilitary/about/aboutus/customer-service.html](http://www.dfas.mil/dfas/retiredmilitary/about/aboutus/customer-service.html), or call 800-321-1080.

**VA Health Care "Choice Cards" Mailed Out:** The Department of Veterans Affairs has mailed its first medical "Choice Cards," with letters explaining how to use them, to 320,000 VA-enrolled veterans who reside more than 40 miles from any type of VA medical facility. By late November, another 370,000 vets, those facing waits longer than 30 days for VA appointments, were to be the second group to get the cards.

**A Note from the Goldfish Club Social Secretary, Stuart Clay:** I am social secretary of the Goldfish Club which some of you may have heard of. We didn't ask to join the club but events caused this to happen.

The Goldfish Club was formed in 1942 for "Aviators Rescued from the Sea". It was founded

by Mr. C.A. Robertson who worked at P B Cow Rubber Company designing dinghies and other survival equipment. "Robbie" Robertson, with the financial backing of Mr. P. B. Cow, formed the club after meeting downed aircrew, hearing their stories and discussing their experiences.

During WWII club membership reached over 9000 allied aircrew but since then our numbers have declined and we now number around 450 worldwide. We are particularly proud of our remaining WWII members including our first female member Nora Anderson who qualified in 1942. She was a communications technician who had volunteered to carry out an airborne check of the radio in a Walrus aircraft when to her great surprise she found herself in the water off the coast of Scotland. It is with great pleasure we welcome her and the other WWII veterans to our annual reunion dinner.

Our members are mainly serving or ex-serving military with an increasing number of civilians. Qualification is simple. You have to have ditched into open water from an aircraft, helicopter, balloon, glider or any form of flying machine. Parachuting from a stricken flying machine into open water also counts. It is not just for pilots but any operating crew member of the aircraft. I joined in 1995 when the Nimrod Electronic Reconnaissance aircraft I was in ditched following a double engine fire. I am glad to say that my survival vest and MS10 Dinghy worked perfectly.

Unfortunately in the early 1950's many of our club records were destroyed and we lost contact with a great number of members especially those from the USA. We would be particularly pleased to hear from any members we have lost touch with or their immediate families as we have always regarded them as associate members of the club. We have an annual reunion weekend somewhere in the UK where members not only from the UK but from the US and further afield gather to meet up with old comrades and to swap stories. We

also produce a magazine 3 times per year and have our own website where you can find out more about the club, our members and why we are called the Goldfish Club. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who is qualified for membership or knows of anyone that does qualify.

Finally on behalf of all the members of The Goldfish Club, may I say thank you to all the survival and safety equipment personnel whose skills maintained and who provided the equipment to enable our members to survive the ordeal of ditching in open water. Our Club website is [www.thegoldfishclub.co.uk](http://www.thegoldfishclub.co.uk)

### **Final Roll Call**

We have been advised that the following "family" members have made their Final Roll Call:

- Colonel (Ret) James "Jake" Yacobi
- CMSgt (Ret) John McGarvey
- CMSgt (Ret) Roger May
- CMSgt (Ret) Jim Karas
- SMSgt (Ret) Frederic John Conway
- MSgt (Ret) Bob Duren
- MSgt (Ret) William E. (Bill) Abbott
- MSgt (Ret) Calvin King Fogg
- MSgt (Ret) Dave Bartlett
- TSgt (Ret) Jerald G. "Jerry" Messerschmidt
- Former SSgt John Green

### **In Closing**

We wish each and every one a very happy holiday season and a healthy and prosperous 2015! Please mark your calendars now for the 20th Annual PE/ALS/SE/AFE Reunion that will be held September 21-25, 2015, at the Tuscany Suites Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. Spread the word! See you in September in Vegas!

***LAS VEGAS OR BUST IN 2015!***