



# AIRCREW FLIGHT EQUIPMENT AIRCREW LIFE SUPPORT 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.*

### Reporters

Tommy Tompkins, P.O. Box 372, Equality IL 62934  
Allen "Al" Loving, P.O. Box 128, Village Mills, TX 77663  
Bob "Chili" McElwain, 12320 Roadrunner Lane, Victorville CA 92392  
Dave Chitwood, 9792 Corbett Place, Manassas Park, VA 20111

Email: [tombob@shawneelink.net](mailto:tombob@shawneelink.net)  
Email: [aloving@cox.net](mailto:aloving@cox.net)  
Email: [bob.mcelwain@charter.net](mailto:bob.mcelwain@charter.net)  
Email: [pantoum5@gmail.com](mailto:pantoum5@gmail.com)

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

**May 2026 Edition**

### Looking Forward

*By Dave Chitwood*

Greetings! We hope this year is treating you well. We are very excited about our upcoming reunion in Biloxi! If you have ever participated in or instructed; Emergency Egress, Hanging-Harness (PDT), Water Survival, CST, Aircrew CCA Processing and Decontamination, Wild Stallion or Ridge Runner Escape, Evasion and SAREX, you're not going to want to miss our 2026 "America 250" Reunion. We're highlighting those training events and are hoping to have a lot of Wild Stallions and Ridge Runners in attendance!

This newsletter is packed with all the information you need to register and attend all the events we have planned for you.

We'll be staying at the IP Hotel and Casino, just down the road from Keesler AFB. We'll have a hospitality suite for some evening social gatherings, tour some great local area attractions, have a picnic, play golf, and conclude with an awesome banquet featuring some amazing guest speakers! We'll also be announcing our new Board of Directors during the banquet!

### Final Roll Call

On a somber note, just since the last newsletter, we've been notified that we have lost several more of our dear members and friends. It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of these great Americans. Please take a moment to reflect as you read these names. Some of these names hit

especially hard as they were pioneers of the career field and longtime members of our group. Their absence at our reunion will be deeply felt.

Robert (Bob) Blake	Jul 2025
Glenn King	Jul 2025
Berry Denis Bonds	Dec 2025
Dave Nelson	Dec 2025
Mike "Sheffey" Massaro	Jan 2026
Gavin J.M. Snyder	Jan 2026
Simon Martinez III	Jan 2026
James Massengale	Jan 2026
Charles "Skip" Goodman	Mar 2026
Albert "Big Hamp" Hampton	Mar 2026
William Lynn	Mar 2026
Darlene Daspit-Pohl	Apr 2026

We offer our sincere prayers and condolences to the friends and families of our dear departed. As we say goodbye, we say thank you for their dedication and service to this great nation. May God bless, and may they rest in peace.

***Chief's Corner***  
*By CMSgt Daniel Hall III*

First, I want to personally welcome all veterans, retirees, active duty members, Guard, Reserve, civilians, and industry partners to our 29th Annual ALS/AFE Reunion this September. If you have never attended one of these reunions, you are missing something truly special. It is more than a gathering — it is a reminder that once you are part of this career field, you are always part of this family. The stories, the laughter, and even the old shop memories return quickly, and so does the camaraderie.

After nearly three decades in our Air Force, it feels strange to write this knowing the uniform will soon hang in the closet instead of the locker. I joined the Air Force on 26 June 1996 — just one day after the Khobar Towers bombing. At the time I did not fully understand what that meant, but in many ways my career began as our Air Force was entering a different era.

I entered as a young Airman who simply wanted to serve, learn a skill, and be part of something bigger than myself. What I gained instead was a lifelong family.

About a year into my first assignment at Langley Air Force Base, I had an experience that would shape

the rest of my career. I had just started working on the flightline and had performed the 30-day inspection on an F-15 parachute. Shortly afterward, that pilot ejected from the aircraft.

I remember realizing very quickly that this was no longer a checklist or a technical order task. The equipment I had inspected was now the difference between life and death for another human being. That moment stayed with me and permanently changed how I approached what we do.

It wasn't just a job. It was a profession.

Throughout my career I had the opportunity to support multiple airframes — F-15s, A-10s, AWACS, and KC-135s — everything from fighters to heavies. Each platform had different requirements, different aircrew, and different mission sets, but the responsibility was always the same. Whether preparing a fighter pilot stepping to a sortie, a tanker crew launching on a long mission, or an airborne command and control crew, the expectation never changed: our equipment had to work when nothing else did. I even spent a short period supporting rescue forces — just long enough to gain a deep appreciation for what they do and the level of preparation required.

I also had the privilege of deploying — to Prince Sultan Air Base and into Iraq — serving in combat zones and supporting humanitarian operations. I have run to bunkers during incoming alarms, and I have also stood on a flightline helping women carrying babies step off a C-17 to safety. Those moments showed me the full range of what service means. The missions were important, but what stayed with me most were the people. The long shifts, the conversations, the shared stress, and the trust we placed in one another built bonds that only those who served together truly understand. Any success I had in this career was never mine alone; it belonged to the brothers and sisters who stood beside me in the shop and downrange.

When I first joined, Life Support and Survival Equipment were still culturally separate in many ways. Our tools were simpler, our technical orders were printed and worn, and most of our communication happened face-to-face. Training was hands-on and mentorship happened naturally because you worked side-by-side every day. We learned by doing, by making mistakes safely, and by being corrected by NCOs who genuinely cared.

Since then, I have watched the career field evolve into Aircrew Flight Equipment professionals operating in a far more complex Air Force. Technology improved. Equipment advanced. Inspections became more data-driven. Training became standardized and professionalized. Our Airmen today are more educated, more technically capable, and more innovative than ever before. They understand not only how to perform the task, but why it matters to the mission.

But one thing has never changed: our purpose. We are not maintainers of equipment — we are guardians of lives. Our job has always been unique. Most Air Force specialties see the results of their work immediately. Ours is different. We prepare for the day we hope never comes. When everything else fails, our equipment and preparation become the last line between an incident and a tragedy.

Over the years our responsibilities expanded. We advise commanders, support investigations, train aircrew, support operations across the globe, and integrate with new aircraft and systems. The modern AFE professional is technician, instructor, inspector, and problem-solver all at once. Yet the core of the career field remains the same: competence, attention to detail, and pride in doing the job right when no one is watching.

My advice to today's Airmen is simple: Do not chase stripes—chase impact. Learn your craft. Teach someone behind you. Take care of your family as seriously as you take care of the mission. One day you will remove the uniform, and you will realize the equipment, aircraft, and assignments were temporary. The people were permanent.

To the veterans and retirees reading this — stay connected. Your experience still matters to the next generation. To those currently serving — seek out those who wore the uniform before you. The stories you hear and the lessons you learn will shape the leader you become. This career field has always been built on mentorship, and it will continue only if we intentionally maintain those connections.

I leave the Air Force confident in the future of our career field. The next generation is prepared, motivated, and capable. Continue mentoring them. Continue telling the stories. Continue reminding them that their work matters even when no one notices — because the day someone walks away from an ejection, they will understand exactly why it matters.

I sincerely hope to see many of you at the reunion and reconnect in the years ahead. This is not goodbye, but simply a new chapter — one where I now stand beside you as a fellow retiree, still proud to be part of this profession and this family. Aim High — always.

--- CMSgt Daniel Hall III



### **From the Dinosaur Den**

*By Al Loving  
Chief Dinosaur*

Due to a personal conflict in the Chief Dinosaur's June 2026 calendar, the next meeting of the **Order of Life Support System Dinosaurs (OLD) Club** must be deferred to the 2027 SAFE Symposium. **OLD** meetings are held to recognize our new members, recruit new members and network with those who are attending the annual SAFE Symposium.

For those members and symposium attendees who are unable to attend, your feedback regarding the Dino Club can be provided directly to the Chief Dinosaur, Al Loving, at:

Email: [aloving@cox.net](mailto:aloving@cox.net)  
Mobile Phone: (757) 218-8560

I look forward to welcoming you to the 2027 SAFE Symposium and our next OLD meeting at the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno, NV.

### **Chili Sez!**

*By CMSgt (Hon) Bob McElwain*



**FROM OUR READERS:** I asked for it, and below are some of the most appreciated messages I received from some of you. Thanks for responding.

**From Keith A. Mitchell: (702) 596-2613**

It's been a while since I've seen you! I miss you and KB coming out to Nellis AFB to visit; those were good times. Well, since I retired in 2013, I have gone to the East Coast and back to Vegas! I moved to Miami in 2013 to work for Amtrak. I was a Foreman in the Maintenance Mechanical Yard in Hialeah. In 2014, after finding out I was going to be a grandfather, I decided to move back to Vegas and worked at Republic Services as a Route Supervisor. Then in 2016, I started working at Switch LTD. (Data Center) as a Security Supervisor, and now my current role is Safety Manager for the Las Vegas Core Campuses. God has been good to me, placing me in the right places at the right time...I am truly blessed! Hope all is well with you.

\*\*\*\*\*

**From Howard (Sam) Spade, MSgt Life Support:**

I have been doing ok for my age, 87. I have some physical issues, but that's to be expected. I miss going to the reunions, but it's hard to travel right now. I have always tried to find someone who was with me in the 56th Weather Squadron from December 1956 to October 1958. I would like to hear from someone who was with me. My NCOIC was V. E. Cooper, TSGT. Don't have much else to say right now. Bob, if you can help me, I would appreciate it.

\*\*\*\*\*

**From Gale Bradish, CMSgt USAF Retired:**

Hi Bob Just wanted to let you know we are still here in Midland, MI. I finally fully retired from Civil Service and non-Civil Service jobs. We want to get to another reunion if in Vegas, and if health issues don't stop us. Anyone who wants to contact me, call 989-513-1240. Thanks for all your hard work with the reunions.

\*\*\*\*\*

**From Chuck Warren, CMSgt (Ret) but not gone:**

Ann and I are still kicking. We are coming up on our 64<sup>th</sup> year of marriage. Hard to believe those years behind us. I miss the gatherings, but time has taken its toll. I want to thank you for the years spent and the things you've done for the career field to date. I'm pushing 87, and the 42 years I spent in the career field hold a lot of good memories.

You take life easy and give the crew a hello from the original dinosaur. I hope the new generation cares for their work and enjoys the time spent doing it.

**HELP ME DOCUMENT YOUR HISTORY:**

Back in 1996, at our first reunion, I collected the military assignment history of some of the attendees. A few years later, I started building our website and included those assignment files from years ago. I have continued collecting and posting assignment histories, and now I want yours. Help me continue building a history of the military assignments of veteran members of the USAF Personal Equipment (PE), Survival Equipment (SE), Aircrew Life Support (ALS), or Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) Career Field by completing the attached form. If you have not provided this information in the past, now is your chance to submit it. No other career field does this, which adds to the uniqueness of the USAF AFE/ALS Veterans and Retirees organization and our career field.

**RETURNED NEWSLETTERS:**

I mail out over 200 newsletters every time we publish a new newsletter. At least 3 to 5 newsletters are returned every time with no forwarding address. I'm left to think that we've lost that person, or that he/she doesn't care about receiving our newsletters anymore. For those of you to whom the newsletter is mailed, could you or someone in your family let me know if your mailing address has changed or, God forbid, if you have passed on? This will save us money over the years on stamps, or inform us of a lost colleague or friend. Newsletters from the following were returned from our December 2025 mailing: Carl Jones of Paris, TX; James Scott of Arlington, TX; and Jacob Nance of Stanfield, NC. If you are in contact with any of these people, let them know I need their new mailing address.

**OUR ANNUAL REUNION:**

The 29th Annual Aircrew Life Support, Aircrew Flight Equipment Veterans and Retirees Reunion will be held September 21-24, 2026, in Biloxi, Mississippi. The 20th and 25th are travel days. The Reunion will be centered at the Imperial Palace Hotel and Casino, located at 850 Bayview Avenue, just off Interstate 110. Anyone who works or has worked in any profession related to saving or protecting aircrew lives is invited to attend. Just like last year, **an anonymous donor has volunteered to pay the reunion registration and dinner fees for all attendees.** Everyone will still need to complete and submit the reunion registration form before the 15

July 2026 cutoff date. Your transportation and lodging costs are still your responsibility.

This year's event, hosted by the 403<sup>rd</sup> Airlift Wing at Keelsler AFB, promises to be an "Outstanding" get-together. Government and industry reps interested in attending and addressing the group should complete the registration form and notify Steve Wyatt at [spwsango@att.net](mailto:spwsango@att.net) or Bob McElwain at [bob.mcelwain@charter.net](mailto:bob.mcelwain@charter.net) as soon as possible. Active duty, ANG, AFRES, and industry partners are all encouraged to attend this annual event.

**REUNION BADGE:** If you attended one of our previous reunions and were issued a reunion name badge, please bring it with you, or indicate on the reunion registration form that you or your guest needs a badge. New name badges will only be issued to first-time attendees. All reunion attendees must have a name badge. Guest name badges will be issued to anyone who does not have one.

**GOLF TOURNAMENT:** We will have our James Rooney Memorial golf tournament at Bay Breeze Golf Course (Keesler AFB) on Thursday, 24 September. The cost will be \$40 to include cart. Format will be Captains choice scramble (team hits from best ball location). There will be closest to the pin and longest drive contests and lots of fun!

If you plan on playing, please contact Dave Chitwood at [Pantoum5@gmail.com](mailto:Pantoum5@gmail.com) The earlier the better so I can create teesheets and let the course know how many to expect. You can pay during reunion check-in at the hotel, during any of our meetings, or pay me at the course. The most important part is letting me know you want to play!



**SPA DAY:** Mrs. Joan Shepherd, of our reunion welcome committee, has organized a spa day at the hotel for the ladies or for anyone who wants to relax

and be pampered. The cost will be as follows: Massage 25 minutes \$25.00; Massage 50 minutes \$115 – \$ 135; Massage 80 minutes \$165; PEDI \$55- \$ 95, depending on what you want; and MANICURE \$55 – \$ 95, also depending on what you want.

**DOMINOES TOURNAMENT:** A suggested dominoes tournament will be added to the reunion agenda. Anyone attending the reunion who owns a set of dominoes is asked to bring them with you.

**FAREWELL DINNER:** All registered reunion attendees are invited to our Thursday evening dinner. Dress for this affair will be semi-formal, but it is not mandatory. An equivalent uniform is preferred for active-duty military.

**HOTEL RESERVATION:** Our group rates for single or double occupancy are \$84.99 per night, plus a \$12 resort fee per room, per night, for Sunday, September 20, through Thursday, September 24. Be sure to make your reservation under the **Group Code: AIRI26C** or by identifying yourself as a member of the "USAF ALS/AFE Reunion." You can reserve online or by calling the IP Hotel and Casino at (888) 946-2847. Make your reservations **before** August 31, 2026. Reservations must be guaranteed with a major credit card. The first night's room and tax will be charged at the time of reservation. Checks cannot be accepted **at check-in or check-out**. Check-in time begins at 4 pm, and checkout time is by 11 am. Be advised a \$100 security deposit authorization will be immediately placed on your credit card.

**HOTEL CANCELLATION POLICY:** If you need to cancel your reservation, please do so at least twenty-four (24) hours before 4 pm of the arrival date. Otherwise there is a cancellation penalty equal to the first night's room rate plus tax.

**REUNION REGISTRATION:** Complete the registration form and mail it to the address indicated NLT July 15, 2026. To cancel your reservation, contact me, Bob McElwain, NLT August 31, 2026, via email or at 760-684-3790. **REMEMBER, THE REUNION REGISTRATION AND DINNER FEES ARE WAIVED.**

**AIRLINE RESERVATIONS:** Several Airports are available for price comparison. Gulfport/Biloxi, Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans are all relatively short drives. Shopping around could save

“Big Money” on travel-related expenses, but make sure you factor in the cost of getting to and from those airports.

### **In Closing**

*By Dave Chitwood, Newsletter Editor*

As you can see, there’s a tremendous amount of planning and preparation for our reunions. We’ve

got a packed agenda sure to create enduring memories. Please mark your calendars now and join us for the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion 21-24 September 2026. It’s the perfect opportunity to reconnect with old friends or make new lifelong connections.

Attached to this newsletter is the member assignment history form for those who have yet to submit their personal journey to the website. Also you’ll find the all-important reunion registration form!

---

*Please visit our Group website ([www.usafals-afe.net](http://www.usafals-afe.net)), and stay abreast of the latest news!*

- Scroll down to see assignment history and reunion registration forms



# The USAFAircrew Flight Equipment/Aircrew Life Support Reunion

21 – 24 September 2026

Imperial Palace (IP) Casino Resort  
850 Bayview Ave, Biloxi, MS 39530

## Registration Form

The registration fee includes one U.S. Military Active Duty, Veteran, National Guard, or Reserve member and one family member or guest. It also includes one civilian working in any profession related to aircrew survival or protection, and one family member or guest.

YOUR NAME (as you want it on your name tag) \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE NO \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME OF YOUR ATTENDING FAMILY MEMBER/GUEST \_\_\_\_\_  
DO YOU OR YOUR GUEST NEED ONE OF OUR NAME TAGS? NO! \_\_\_\_\_ YES/WHO? \_\_\_\_\_

### HOTEL AND REUNION REGISTRATIONS

**HOTEL REGISTRATION:** Hotel rates for single or double occupancy are \$84.99 per night, plus a \$12 resort fee per room, per night, for Sunday, September 20, through Thursday, September 24. Make your reservations **before** August 31, 2026, by clicking on the following group code: [AIRI26C](#). Or you may call the hotel's reservations department directly at (888) 946-2847, press 1 for reservations, and identify yourself as a member of the "USAF ALS/AFE Reunion," or by using the **Group Code: AIRI26C**.

**WILL YOU BE STAYING AT THE IP HOTEL?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**REUNION REGISTRATION:** Complete this form and mail it to the address indicated below. To cancel your reservation, contact me, Bob McElwain, NLT August 1, 2026, via email or at 760- 684-3790.

**Thanks to an anonymous donor, the reunion registration and dinner fees are free for all attendees.**

You may pay for the tour indicated below by check, money order, or Cash App. Use [bob.mcelwain@charter.net](mailto:bob.mcelwain@charter.net) as the recipient if paying via Cash App.

<b>REUNION REGISTRATION FEE</b> (Covers handouts, the hospitality room & food, & etc.):	<b>\$95.00</b>
<b>BANQUET FEE:</b> \$55.00 per person times _____ the number of people =	<b>\$ N/A</b>
A tour of a Navy ship is planned, and the cost is \$13 per person for ages 12 and up, and \$5 per child ages 6 to 11. Indicate how much you're paying if going on the tour.	<b>\$ _____</b>
Thank you in advance if donating funds. Please indicate how much.	<b>\$ _____</b>
<b>TOTAL ENCLOSED:</b>	<b>\$ _____</b>

**IMPORTANT:** All reunion attendees must complete and send in this form.

**REUNION T-SHIRTS:** A complimentary T-shirt will be included in your welcome bag. Please indicate the size(s) needed. \_\_\_\_\_

Complete this form and email it **NLT 20 July 2026**. If sending via postal mail, address it as indicated below and mail it **NLT 15 July 26**.

Bob McElwain  
PO Box 438  
Victorville, CA 92393

Email: [bob.mcelwain@charter.net](mailto:bob.mcelwain@charter.net)