

Thomas Julian (Tom) Eller

Tom peacefully “slipped the surly bonds of earth” on February 21, 2026, with his wife, Anne, by his side. He dedicated his life to Christ, his family, country, community and the advancement of space and astronautics.

Surviving Tom are his loving wife of 63 years, Anne Lafitte Eller; his children, Julie Lafitte (Steve Posey), Elizabeth Byerly (Steve) and Robert (Kristen); his grandchildren, Barrett Schake (Grace), Connor Schake (Deena Tamaroff), Anna Katherine Eller, and Jeremiah Eller; great-grandchildren Luna and Max Schake and his nephews, Walton Conn, Jr. and Joe Ed Conn, among other extended family members. Preceding him in death were his parents, Eugene Robert and Frances Elizabeth Greer Eller, and his sister, Sue Eller Conn.

After a fun and service-oriented childhood in Pickens, South Carolina, Tom attended Furman University before joining the class of 1961 at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). As a cadet, he associated himself with almost every extracurricular activity available, including the Baptist Student Union and the Cadet Chorale. He was Squadron Commander, a Rhodes Scholarship finalist and a letterman on the Rifle Team. He graduated 4th in his class, launching a 20-year active-duty career that was defined by excellence and heroism. As a pilot, he accumulated 3,600 flying hours, including 2,000 hours in the C-130 and 600 hours flying the C-7 Caribou in Vietnam with the Army’s 1st Cavalry Division. His bravery earned him two Distinguished Flying Crosses, seven Air Medals and the Airman’s Medal for heroism in non-combat for leading a team to fight an ammunition-fueled barracks fire at Phu Cat Air Base. Tom was an active member of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society and Order of Daedalians.

Tom earned a master's degree from Purdue University and a Ph.D. in Aeronautics and Astronautics from the University of Texas (UT) and in 2023, a Lifetime Distinguished Graduate award, UT. He returned to the Academy, serving for 13 years in the Department of Astronautics and Computer Science as an instructor, professor and then department head, among other Academy leadership positions. In 2006, Tom returned to the Academy as a civilian professor to teach physics until 2013. His contributions to the field of astrodynamics include co-inventing the GPS Magnetic Momentum Dumping System, a technology still used in space, defense and our daily lives.

His devotion to the Academy extended far beyond his official duties. Tom was a pillar of the Association of Graduates (AOG), serving on the founding committee in 1966 and later as President from 1979–1983. His vision led to the creation of Doolittle Hall and the Class Wall. He served his classmates faithfully as Class Secretary for 45 years and as Class President from 2006 onward. He was the first USAFA graduate to serve on the Board of Trustees of the Falcon Foundation, where he served until his death. In 2015, he was honored as a Distinguished Graduate by the AOG for his substantial and diverse impact at the Academy and beyond.

Tom's civilian career included Lockheed Martin, Kaman Corporation and Titan Technologies –Information Systems. He worked on critical defense and space surveillance projects. Additionally, he was a Fellow of the American Astronautical Society and an Associate Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

Tom supported his community as a long-term member of First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs, serving as an elder and deacon, and as a board member of the Fine Arts Center. Also known as an adventurous cook and gardener, he taught others to make delicious tamales and grow beautiful irises.

But to Tom, everything paled in comparison to his love for people, especially his family. Tom was a wonderful husband, brother, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and uncle. He was humble, charming, loving, caring, hardworking, teaching, encouraging and funny. Tom leaves behind a legacy of integrity, service and excellence that will continue to inspire his family, community and the Long Blue Line.

The family thanks the team from Abode Hospice, caregivers Reika and Lucy, Tara and the staff at MacKenzie Place for their devoted care and support.

A graveside service with full military honors will take place at USAFA on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at 11:30 am.

IMPORTANT: Individuals *without* a DoD ID card (or not riding in the same car as a DoD ID card holder), **must** pre-register more than 48 hours in advance to enter the Academy for the graveside service. To receive an Eller event-specific base access link go to [our request form](#).

If you wish, memorial donations may be made to:

[First Presbyterian Church Missions](https://rock.firstprescos.org/give-now) (<https://rock.firstprescos.org/give-now>) (219 E Bijou St, Colorado Springs, CO 80903) (ref. Egypt Missions in Comment section)

OR [Falcon Foundation Scholarships](https://falconfoundation.org/donate) (<https://falconfoundation.org/donate>) (3116 Academy Drive USAF Academy, CO 80840 (ref. Thomas J. Eller in special notes section).