Fourth-Quarter Aviation Spike
Leader Talking Points

The Problem

- The fourth quarter (July-September) of each fiscal year has historically shown an increase in aviation mishaps.
- FY15-19: 40% of the Army's aviation accidents occurred during the fourth quarter despite flying only 27% of flight hours. However, August consumes the largest number of flight hours during the year and accounts for about 50% of fourth-quarter mishaps.
- Consistent with this trend, the only fourth-quarter mishap during FY20 occurred in August, which again logged the highest total flight hours. The fourth quarter of FY20 consumed 28% of the annual flight hour program.
- Overall, the cause of this spike is a myriad of factors that combine to produce a complex, challenging flight environment, including leadership turnover from nonrated crewmembers (NRCMs) through all levels of command due to the summer permanent change of station (PCS) season; extremely harsh environmental factors that degrade both crew and aircraft performance; and extended daylight/fewer dark hours, creating a large shift in crew duty days/limited training time.
- During FY20, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center (USACRC) implemented a fourth-quarter spike communications campaign. By the end of the fiscal year, Army Aviation saw a significant decrease in mishaps during the fourth quarter and recorded its lowest annual mishap rate ever. Commanders in the field engaged their leaders and adjusted their approach to risk management during the fourth quarter, which contributed to the decrease in mishaps.

The Causal Factors

- **PCS season**: Approximately 50,000-60,000 Soldiers report to new duty stations between April-September annually, with PCS season beginning in earnest in June. These moves transition personnel in key aviation positions: instructor pilots, maintenance test pilots, aviation safety officers, aviation mission survivability officers, platoon sergeants, nonrated flight instructors, quality control inspectors, etc.
- **Increased OPTEMPO**: The fourth quarter is when many aviation units execute pre-deployment training that culminates in combat training center or real-world deployments during the "high, hot and heavy" season.
- **Crew mix**: Crew mix becomes problematic during the fourth quarter as experienced personnel with higher flight hours rotate into the unit, but have not flown the unit mission task or arrive from a school or non-flight position.
- **Environment**: Environmental conditions during the fourth quarter are an increased operational hazard. Without an effective environmental training program addressing the high, hot and heavy season, units will find themselves operating in challenging performance conditions (for both crews and aircraft) and possibly for the first time (e.g., National Training Center: mountainous terrain, dust landings, aircraft at performance limits).
- **Inadequate risk management/mission briefer training**: Mission briefing officers must be trained to understand the typical hazards associated with new missions and geographic locations to properly apply controls and manage risk.

The Help

- The USACRC launched a fourth-quarter spike communications campaign in March 2020 to alert leaders to this issue. Experience has shown that when leaders are aware of potential issues, they apply greater command emphasis to minimize risk.
- Leaders at every level must have the authority to correct unsafe behaviors and be knowledgeable in the practice of dynamic risk management, which is simply reassessing and mitigating risk as conditions change in the mission profile. Leaders must make risk management part of every real-time decision.
- The modular Aviation Safety Brief, Army Readiness Assessment Program, Small Unit Leader Cards, and FlightFax and Risk Management magazines, all available at https://safety.army.mil, can help leaders tackle the fourth-quarter spike.

Theme 1: Personnel Transition Turbulence

- The fourth quarter is typically a time of high personnel turnover and commander/leader changes.
- Place constraints on mission briefing officers for a period of time so they can learn and understand the unit mission and idiosyncrasies.
- New personnel with more experience and/or flight hours might not be the right aviator or NRCM for higher-risk mission tasks.
- Effectively managing PCS season requires that leadership teams communicate with and mentor young leaders to ensure they understand the hazards associated with key personnel transitions.

Theme 2: Performance Planning

- Always conduct performance planning during the mission planning step.
- Use the -10 or an approved performance planning software.
- Understand power requirements for the mission and geographic location.
- Train under high, hot and heavy conditions at every opportunity.
- Load the aircraft to maximum gross weight and train at performance limits.
- Utilize external fuel tanks and internal weights/armament to train in realistic power-limited conditions.

Theme 3: Crew Selection

- Utilize the five-step risk management process to determine the proper crew and crew mix.
- Utilize the R-COP to assist in the crew selection decision process.
- The R-COP is a tool, not a decision-maker. LEADERS ARE DECISION-MAKERS.
- The highest flight time pilots will not always be the best crew mix.
- Many human and environmental factors influence the crew selection decision process.

Theme 4: Environmental Training

- Units should have a continually executed environmental training program based on the upcoming quarter's flight/mission conditions.
- Training should include academics and simulator training scenarios, culminating in hands-on task performance in the aircraft.
- When local conditions do not support the environment to be encountered during a training

rotation or deployment, increase simulator training scenarios and, if possible, relocate to train in actual conditions in the aircraft (High-Altitude Army National Guard Aviation Training Site).

Theme 5: Risk Management/Mission Briefing Officer Training

- Operational Risk Management
  - Risk management training should be in accordance with the Commander's Aviation Training and Standardization Program:
    - Leader training and certification, leader positioning
    - Progressive training (crawl, walk, run), maintaining shared understanding through the mission command philosophy
    - Rigorous pilot in command, flight lead, and air mission commander programs
    - Maintaining unit discipline to ensure standards are known and adhered to
  - Applying the 5-step risk management process:
    - Identify the hazards
    - Assess the hazards
    - Develop controls
    - Make risk decisions
    - Implement controls, supervise and evaluate
- Army Regulation 95-1, Flight Regulations
  - Mission briefing officers will, at minimum, review and assess the following key areas in the mission planning process:
    - The flight is in support of an operational unit mission and has obtained initial mission approval (paragraph 2–14b(1))
    - The crew thoroughly understands all tactical, technical and administrative mission details
    - Assigned crews are allocated adequate pre-mission planning time and the mission is adequately planned, to include performance planning, notices to airmen, instrument flight procedures (paragraph 5–1b), and coordination with supported units
    - Crews are qualified and current for the mission in accordance with this regulation and the commander's flight crew qualification and selection program (paragraph 4–18), to include current aviation life support equipment, aircrew reading file currency, and crew experience appropriate for the mission
    - Forecast weather conditions for the mission, including departure, en route, and arrival weather, meet regulation requirements and local directives (paragraph 5–2c)
    - Crews meet unit crew endurance requirements
    - Complete commander's risk management program procedures and risk mitigated to the lowest level possible
    - Required special mission equipment is operational
    - Review ground and/or strip alert mission analyses and risk reduction procedures
    - Mitigate operational security risks for sensitive or classified aviation operations when the aircraft is assigned a unique address code and/or the location is broadcast by Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast, Mode S Transponders, or personal electronic devices (http://www.usaasa.tradoc.army.mil/)
  - Unit SOPs should address the mission briefing officer training program.
  - Units should develop a mission briefing officer standardized mentoring program.

- Train mission briefing officers on what questions the commander expects asked during the mission brief (i.e., critical mission elements: “Let me see your DD Form 175-1 Weather Briefing,” “What date did you last fly under night vision goggles?”).

Theme 6: Training Management

- Training Circular 3-04.11, Commander’s Aviation Training and Standardization Program
  - Helps aviation leaders, trainers and evaluators at all levels develop, manage and administer a comprehensive commander’s aviation training and standardization program by providing requirements for aviation units to improve and sustain proficiency and readiness in aviation skills; also provides approved standardized practices and procedures that allow units in the field to manage and execute a standardized aviation training program
- Integrate training support packages into the unit standardization program.
- Train and apply the Emergency Response Methodology into the aviation training program.
- Integrate hard, realistic training scenarios for execution in the simulator for higher-risk mission tasks prohibited in the aircraft.
- The first time a crew encounters an environment or mission task should not be during an operational mission (brownout landing, medevac hoist, battle handover).