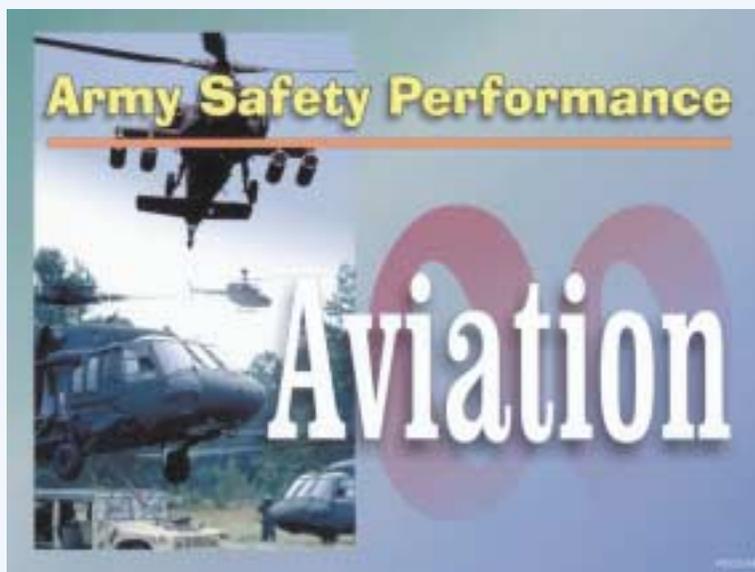


AVIATION SAFETY PERFORMANCE:

Back on Track and Moving in the

Right Direction



By Brig. Gen. Gene M. LaCoste

Proactive leadership, great teamwork and a five-step process called "risk management" helped the Army reach a significant milestone in aviation safety performance in fiscal year 1995. For the first time ever, we broke the 1.0 mark and closed out the year with a Class A flight accident rate of 0.83 per 100,000 flying hours. Sustaining the momentum in FY 96, we set another new record with a world-class aviation safety Class A flight accident rate of 0.74. But even as we celebrated our successes, warning signs loomed on the horizon: accelerating operational tempo (OPTEMPO) through continuous deployments, multiple taskings, declining experience base, reduced resources, failure to follow and enforce standards, and a lack of discipline.

The negative cumulative effect began to take its toll in FY 97 with our Class A flight accident rate rising to 1.26. The upturn highlighted that three major factors - a systematic process for developing aviation training, the disciplined development of leaders, and the introduction of system safety design principles into aviation materiel systems - had possibly reached their maximum effect. Without a defined course of action to halt the upward climb in

accident rates and improve our safety performance, a further decline in safety was imminent.

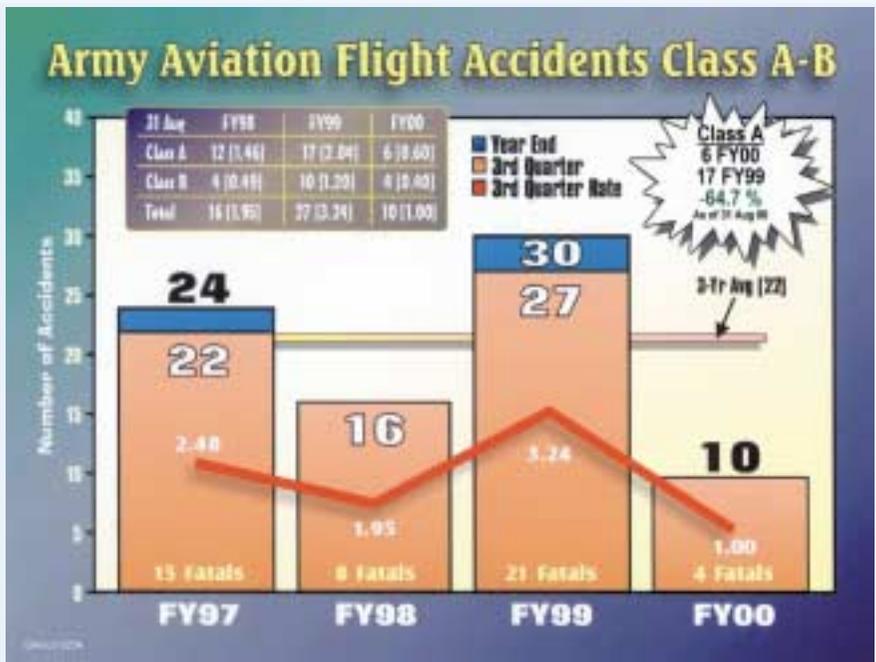
By the end of FY 99 Army aviation had experienced its worst safety performance since operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. With 18 Class A aviation flight accidents, the red flags were impossible to ignore. The bottom line was that soldiers were dying and we were destroying costly equipment at a rate that was unacceptable. Leaders who understood and accepted responsibility

stepped up to the plate to solve this Armywide problem.

Armywide Short-Term Initiatives

The aviation community didn't find any silver bullets to solve its problems. There are none. We did, however, quickly recognize that we could reverse the negative safety performance trends and potentially continue to reap modest gains using proven techniques: leadership involvement at all levels, effective risk management, discipline and strict adherence to stan-





dards. Other initiatives included:

- Increasing the flying-hour program and fencing the funds allocated to the program.
- Increasing promotion opportunities for warrant officers.
- Increasing the fill of crew chiefs within units.
- Improving the flight-training program (Flight School XXI).
- Establishing a recapitalization program for all aircraft.

These initiatives have produced commendable results this fiscal year. With one month left to go in FY00, we are currently at the best ever aviation Class A accident rate: 0.60 accidents per 100,000 flying hours. Our Class A-B rate of 1.00 is the best in recorded aviation history. The most remarkable and by far the most important fact is that we have had four fatalities this fiscal year compared to 21 at this same point last year. This is the best record since 1972, when the Safety Center began collecting data in our current database. That year the fatalities reached 91.

For the short term, leader involvement, informed risk-management decisions being made at the appropriate level, and enforcement of standards and discipline, have helped us stabilize and improve our aviation safety performance. We've regained some lost ground in safety performance and pushed forward to

make a new mark. But we have to remember that the environment is fragile and that a longer-term strategy for sustainment and continued improvement is critical.

Armywide Long-Term Initiatives

In March 1999 the Army's leaders directed an Aviation Safety Investment Strategy Team (ASIST) to chart a path toward breakthrough gains in aviation safety. The ASIST is the first-ever initiative in Army aviation using a risk-based, aviation system-wide analysis leading to Armywide decisions or controls.

Specifically, they were chartered to define measurable accident prevention goals and identify the most important Armywide investments needed to achieve them. The means to achieve the Army goals will be the integration of accident-prevention and risk-management requirements into the aviation planning, programming and budgeting system.

An in-depth analysis of accident experience involving all force-modernized aircraft during the last five years has been completed. The ASIST is currently prioritizing and validating requirements in various areas of doctrine, training, leader development, organization, materiel and soldier performance.

Implemented as a mutual initiative of the commanding generals of the U.S. Army Aviation Center and the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, the Program Executive Officer-Aviation and the Director of Army Safety, ASIST will be an ongoing process that will continue to take a long-term view of aviation safety. Continued reductions in casualties, accident rates, and cost - and a resultant increase in readiness - can only be realized through an increase in funding to support the prioritized investments recommended by the ASIST.

Safety Center Initiatives

Safety is a commander's program; however, we at the Safety Center

Proactive Safety Initiatives

- NCO Professional Development
- Mobile Training Team
- Assistance Visits
- Junior Officer Professional Development



fully recognize that commanders' plates are full and that they are challenged on every front. To assist commanders in making decisions on where to focus their limited time and resources, the Safety Center has developed three new risk-management tools commanders can use to attack safety concerns.

stays with the commander. The exception is when an issue beyond the commander's control can be resolved at higher levels through the Safety Center's intervention.

- Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Course.

The intent of this training is to teach safety to NCOs, not to pro-

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- Assistance Visit Program.

This program is conducted by Safety Center personnel trained in risk-management techniques. It offers commanders an outside look and information packages tailored to the unit. This is not an inspection; it is a means to look at ways to identify and mitigate or eliminate hazards to soldiers. The team looks at trends. From the analysis, we provide commanders direct feedback on how effective their safety programs are in accomplishing the mission, how to improve the safety environment, and how to integrate risk management into all unit operations. Everything found in the unit

duce safety NCOs. NCOs are the leaders on the ground "where the rubber meets the road" and are most likely to have a direct impact on accident prevention. Therefore, the Safety Center has designed a 45-hour course focused on hazard identification and risk management. The target audience is sergeants and staff sergeants, the first-line supervisors who will be able to integrate risk management into both the planning and execution phases of training and operational missions by speaking up when something doesn't "look right." An additional benefit of this training includes a positive habit transfer in which risk-management

skills learned on duty will help soldiers become better risk managers off duty as well.

- Junior Officer Professional Development Course.

A majority of critiques from soldiers attending the NCO professional-development course strongly recommend that their supervisors - company-grade officers - get some badly needed risk-management training as well. As a result of these recommendations, we have developed a special three-day course focused on hazard identification, application of risk management, and leader responsibilities for integration of risk management into both the planning and execution phases of training and operational missions. This program is specifically targeted to young lieutenants, captains and warrant officers.

The Way Ahead

The Army's leaders are committed to holding the high ground in aviation safety performance we've worked so hard to achieve. The ASIST will continue its work to ensure that appropriate support is secured to provide additional resources to fund the identified and prioritized investments. And the Safety Center team will continue to help commanders through our Assistance Visit Program and to train soldiers in risk-management techniques through our NCOPD and JOPD programs.

While all of the initiatives are important, ultimately it will be leadership, discipline and standards that save lives. I firmly believe that a disciplined force trained to standard produces a combat-ready force that executes the mission safely. In all of our operational and training missions, we must enforce standards and strive to make informed risk-management decisions. Risk management is the bedrock of our safety program. From crew chief to general officer, each of us has a responsibility for using it effectively to ensure that an even safer future lies ahead for Army aviation.

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