



# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AVIATION

## LIFE SUPPORT OFFICER IN ARMY AVIATION

By CW3 Emilio Natalio

**A**rmey Aviation does not consider aviation life support equipment (ALSE) a priority. One could argue that Army Aviation does prioritize ALSE with a dedicated chapter in Army Regulation (AR) 95-1 (Department of the Army [DA], 2014a) and an Army Training Circular (ATC), but it definitely falls short amongst and compared to our sister Services. In the Army, the aviation life support officer (ALSO) is considered an additional duty; many of the ALSOs throughout the Army are recent graduates of flight school or have limited experience in aviation. The training requirements prescribed by Army regulations are mostly unfulfilled. The ALSO should be a separate military occupational specialty (MOS). Another option in prioritizing the ALSO would be to create a fifth Warrant Officer tracking option or absorb aviation life support systems (ALSSs) into one of the existing tracks.

Photo by SSG Natasha Stannard

Much like the Army weight control program manager or the key control custodian, the ALSO is considered an additional duty. Each additional duty in the Army serves a particular purpose, but very few additional duties can save a life in an aviation accident. For example, the night vision goggle (NVG) custodian is responsible for ensuring that all goggles are functional and inspections are up-to-date. If a set of NVGs is faulty, the NVG custodian does not actually perform the repairs, they turn the NVGs in for repair. The ALSO, on the other hand, will (in most cases) perform the work or inspect the work performed on the equipment. Many times, the ALSO is an aviator medically unable to fly or an aviator who attended the ALSE course en route to their duty location. The "ALSO will be appointed on orders to assist, advise and represent the commander on all matters pertaining to aviation life support systems (ALSS)" (DA, 2014b, section 8-1(i), p. 43). A Warrant Officer track on ALSS will allow personnel to specialize in ALSS, where they will develop into a bona fide (AFE) subject matter expert.

The United States Air Force (USAF), the United States Navy (USN), and the United States Coast Guard each have a specific rating or Air Force specialty code (AFSC) for aviation survival equipment technicians. A rating or AFSC is equivalent to the Army's MOS. The USCG Aviation Survival Technician inspects life rafts, vest and survival kits, and all aircrew flight apparel (Aviation Survival Technician, 2004). In the USAF, after graduating from Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas, the AFE Specialist (1POX1) will be able to manage the inspection, maintenance, and adjustment of assigned AFE (USAF, n.d.). The USAF explains the impor-

tance of the AFE Specialists skill set by stating, "the attention to detail provided by these professionals could mean the difference between life and death" (USAF, n.d.). Our sister Services specialize their ALS technicians. Specializing allows for a better understanding on how each system operates and allows the specialist to train all aircrew members on ALSE.

The ALSO is responsible for the training of all aircrew personnel (DA, 2014a). Training rated and nonrated crew members is a required annual task for all aviation units. Aviator academics or hands-on training is an excellent way of completing all the required annual training. An ALSO who is not a pilot-in-command or who is a recent flight school graduate does not add any validity to the training. A Warrant Officer or a Soldier who specializes solely in ALSS would validate the training. In every aviator academics I have attended in previous units, an untracked/pilot CW2 instructed the battalion. Their topics normally focus on the proper use of flight clothing or survival vests. They instruct on topics with limited practical knowledge of the equipment. Survival training and survival transmitters/receivers also fall into their purview of training. This training is either usually overlooked, or the Aviation Mission Survivability Officer (AMSO) conducts the training.

Creating a new Warrant Officer track or an MOS is not the only option. Absorbing the ALSS program into one of the other tracks is also a viable option. The aviation safety officer (ASO) monitors the ALSS program (DA, 2014a). Understandably, the ASO is responsible for use of personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout the unit. The aircrews

don clothing and equipment that could be labeled as PPE; however, it could also fall into the category of aviation mission survivability equipment. The AMSO is responsible for the training of personal recovery (PR). The AMSO is designated as the unit's personal recovery officer (PRO). "Personal recovery is a critical component to all operational planning. Programs that reside under the umbrella term of PR include survival, evasion, and resistance and escape" (SERE) (DA, 2015). The responsibilities of the ALSO include survival training; thus, why not absorb the ALSO training with AMSO training?

Army Aviation should focus its perspective on specializing the ALSO in order for validity to be added to this important duty. The addition of a specific MOS would improve the ALSS program by leaps and bounds, and adding the ALSS as a fifth track would specialize aviators. Absorbing the ALSE program entirely into one of the existing tracks would also take the guesswork out of who "owns" the program. Appointing a newly assigned aviator as the ALSO is an injustice to the aviator, the ALSS program, and the unit's aircrew members.




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