

ARMY AVIATION

and the **AVIATION SAFETY OFFICER**

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Photo by CPT Briana McFarland



THE ROLE OF AN AVIATION SAFETY OFFICER (ASO) IN ARMY AVIATION SHOULD BE REDEFINED FOR CLARITY AND GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF RESPONSIBILITIES.


The ASO fills a vital role in each echelon of Army Aviation, and as such, the ASO position has the potential to be a game-changer in every unit. The ASO's initial training should include a block on fundamentals of instruction and increased involvement in rated and non-rated crew member (RCM/NRCM) training. The ASO position should shift from performing an occupational safety manager role to performing in an ASO-focused role.

The responsibility to ensure the completion of required training set forth as per Army Regulation 385-10 (Department of

the Army [DA], 2017) falls on the ASO. In most units, the ASO will instruct the safety program training. These safety classes are conducted in a small group, platoon/company level, or battalion level during a safety stand-down day. Is the ASO equipped to instruct a course that is mandated by an Army Regulation (AR) or per 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1960 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1996)? Instructor pilots (IP) and Aviation Mission Survivability Officers (AMSO) each receive a block of instruction on fundamentals of instruction (FOI) during their specific track training. Aviation

Safety Officers are expected to instruct classes without this foundation. Therefore, I believe it is vital to incorporate FOI into the ASO Course (ASOC). Without this foundation, the result is a battalion safety stand-down day with an ASO reading a PowerPoint presentation to a formation.

The ASO's involvement in the progression and annual training of RCM/NRCM is nonexistent. Aircrew coordination training (ACT) is a requirement for every aviator. Each aviator usually completes this training annually within their



APART window. Per Army Training Circular (TC) 3-04.11, “An analysis of accidents revealed that a significant percentage from one or more aircrew coordination errors committed during and even before the flight” (DA, 2016a). The TC authorizes the standardization personnel (SP/IP/IE/FI/IO/SO) to conduct the training as ACT instructors (DA, 2016b, section 6-34, p. 6-5). The aviation accident subject matter expert (SME) in any unit is the ASO. Why would you not tap into the one resource who is the SME in the prevention of accidents? The ASO should be able to instruct RCM/NRCM ACT. One of the ASO’s many responsibilities is to prevent accidents. The ASO should be considered as more than just a pilot-in-command or as just a “primary trainer.” The ASO is the SME on accident prevention, flight or ground. Exclusion of the ASO in this training is a disservice not only to the ASO, but also to the aircrews.

Additionally, the duties of the ASO are not clearly stated. A search for the words ASO in AR 385-10 (DA, 2017) will give you two results. Chapter 1 glosses over appointing and rating the ASO. The glossary is the second location. Army Regulation 95-1 (DA, 2014a) gives a few more results but still not a clear concise description of responsibilities. Army Regulation 95-1 (DA, 2014a) does define a responsibility of an ASO to monitor all aviation activities for the Commander to ensure proper use of protective clothing and aviation life support equipment (ALSE). Without the regulatory guidance, the ASO’s responsibilities appear to Commanders and peers to fall solely into occupational safety manager func-

tion. Are all ASOs also qualified ALSE technicians?

For the execution of an operation (training or combat), the Army uses the Department of Defense (DoD) Form 2977 (DoD, 2014) to document the risk management (RM) steps (DA, 2014b). This deliberate risk assessment worksheet (RAW) allows the officer-in-charge (OIC) identify the risks systematically and logically. The ASOs are the link between the preparer and the Commander. The OIC should prepare the form, and the ASO should review the form prior to the Commander review. The ASO is essentially the “mission briefing officer” (DA, 2014a). The ASO should never prepare the form unless they are integrated into every facet of the operation. The reality is that the ASO is assigned to complete the DD Form 2977 (DoD, 2014). Using this logic, the ASO should complete every aviation RAW for every flight.

In a general support Aviation battalion, the safety officer is a CH-47- or UH-60-rated aviator. Supporting Operation Enduring Freedom 12-13, Task Force (TF) Shadow’s ASO was an OH-58 aviator. The Eagle Assault TF was comprised of UH-60, AH-64, and HH-60 aircraft during the 2015 deployment to Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The ASO was a UH-60 aviator. The safety officer is expected to provide safety recommendations to the Commander. How is the ASO supposed to provide this information without first-hand knowledge of the aircraft? The ASO would be able to advise the Commander more accurately if the ASO participated in an orientation flight

(an orientation flight with access to the flight controls). Army Regulation 95-1 (DA, 2014a) reserves this privilege to the battalion Commander and the battalion standardization pilot. The knowledge gained from an orientation flight would allow the ASOs to customize/improve the crew endurance program. Additionally, incorporating the master gunner course into the ASOC would allow the ASO to be fully integrated into the unit’s gunnery program.

The ASO is more than an occupational safety manager. Their duties include ground safety but their responsibilities should encompass much more. The foundation of the ASO needs to begin during the ASOC and build through experience. The addition of FOI will improve the quality of instruction. Instruction from the ASO during ACT is paramount in the prevention of future accidents. Army Regulation 95-1 (DA, 2014a), TC 3-04.11 (DA, 2016a), and AR 385-10 (DA, 2017) should be amended to define the roles and responsibilities of an ASO. With the employment of the above-mentioned changes, the Commander’s safety program would drastically improve.



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