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## **Aviation safety: the “big three”**

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Despite safety successes in recent years, Army aviation accident rates are rising this year and our Army is missing opportunities to prevent these accidents. As of June 14, 2012, we have experienced 13 Class A manned aircraft accidents with nine fatalities. In comparison to 2011’s entire year of 15 Class A manned aircraft accidents and 11 fatalities, it becomes clear this year’s trend is one we need to reverse. Current accident trends include breakdowns in standards, discipline and maintenance, with human error cited as a contributing factor in every manned aircraft Class A.

Where do these breakdowns occur? Indiscipline among crewmembers, poor quality mission briefings and lack of coordination between maintenance shifts and maintainers all have been revealed during recent investigations. These trends are reversible, but we must address them now before the next catastrophic accident happens. Three critical issues are of the utmost importance, and it is incumbent upon commanders, Leaders and trainers to emphasize these concerns within their formations.

First, aviation Leaders must reinforce a command climate of accountability. Violations of regulations and procedures must never be tolerated, no matter how popular a crewmember or maintainer is within the unit or chain of command. Observations from recently deployed units reveal that engaged leadership works, and units that aggressively attack the causes of minor incidents find it a profoundly effective mitigation strategy for reducing major accidents. Safety is a mindset that must permeate the organization, and when on-the-spot corrections are occurring at the squad or section level, the team is safer. Every individual must do what is right, even when no one is looking.

Second, individual leaders should review their unit’s three-step mission approval process. Investigations from this fiscal year show repeated breakdowns in step two, specifically regarding mission planning and briefing. Interaction between the crew and their mission briefing officer is paramount to identify, assess and mitigate risk for a specific flight or mission. A disturbing trend revealed in several mishap investigations is that even on a medium risk mission, the mission briefing officer had not conducted a face-to-face and/or over-the-shoulder briefing. Ensuring missions are thoroughly briefed and detailed throughout the approval process makes a difference in saving lives and protecting our combat power. Command and control of attached units in a dispersed area of operations is a challenge; it is imperative that the mission approval

process is robust and include commanders who make the tough calls on crew mix, mission assignment and accepting the risk inherent in any mission.

Finally, maintainers both on and off the flight line are as important as the pilots executing the mission. Aviation maintenance not only generates, but also preserves, combat power when managed by the book. Specifically, when transitioning a prescribed load list and an aviation stock list from one unit to another during the relief in place period, properly handling and documenting maintenance on parts is essential to avoiding the installation of a bad part on an aircraft. With around-the-clock maintenance, proper documentation of maintenance actions and a thorough handover between shifts, maintainers can be sure their tasks are conducted to standard.

For risk mitigation suggestions and strategies specific to Army aviation, visit the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center Aviation Directorate web page at <https://safety.army.mil/atf/Home/tabid/1565/Default.aspx>. Tools hosted on the site include recently updated crash rescue posters and videos, Flightfax magazine, and the Safety Awareness Program – Aviation, an initiative to develop and implement an anonymous aviation hazard reporting system.

More information on Army Safety may be found at <https://safety.army.mil>.

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