



National Commission on Military Aviation Safety Releases Report

Today the National Commission on Military Aviation Safety released the results of its two-year study into the rising rates and causes of military aviation mishaps from FY2013 to FY2018. The Commission conducted a comprehensive review of 6,079 non-combat mishaps that resulted in 198 lives lost, 167 aircraft destroyed, and \$9.41B in damages.

Seven highly qualified Commissioners were selected by Congress and the President for their extensive aviation and government experience. To hear directly about the challenges and safety concerns faced by servicemembers, the Commission visited more than 200 aviation organizations. They met with aircrews, maintainers, logisticians, and safety experts across the Services and across the country, benefitting from their willing participation and candid comments. “We came away from our visits impressed with the patriotism, dedication, and level of effort we observed throughout the ranks of America’s military,” said GEN Dick Cody, chairman of the Commission. “But we also came away deeply concerned and troubled by the decline in experience, crushing OPTEMPO and lack of resources.”

The Commission’s report shares valuable perspectives from the flight line, and focuses on the issues shared with the Commissioners during site visits and town hall meetings. The report also contains critical analysis of past mishaps and addresses specific topics in the Commission’s statutory charter, including aviation mishap rates, unexplained physiological episodes, and aviation maintenance delays. The Commission identifies shortcomings, reveals trends, and makes recommendations on how to improve aviation safety and readiness.

Notably, the Commission found flight hours are down and waivers are on the rise, bypassing critical currency and proficiency requirements in order to meet ever increasing demands on the force. The time spent on assignments away from the cockpit is increasing risk, and creating major distractions and delays in developing the best possible aviators. Maintainers are also distracted by career enhancing assignments unrelated to their highly specialized aviation skills. Both aircrews and mechanics are further deluged with voluminous additional duties depriving them of vital training opportunities. The net result is a shortage of mid-grade maintainers and aviators across the Services, and an overall decline in experience levels.

The Commission also found an ineffective sustainment system—from the supply of parts to depot level maintenance—failing to support the needs of operational flying units, leading to greater aircraft cannibalization. Additionally, deteriorating maintenance facilities, and poor transition planning from legacy platforms to new aircraft, are creating maintenance delays, limiting aircraft availability, and reducing operational efficiency.

The Commission further noted that the Department is lacking a centralized organization—one with senior leadership involvement and the authority to coordinate, monitor, and implement safety measures across the aviation community. The Commission also identified numerous data collection and data analysis deficiencies. This lack of senior leadership focus, combined with the inability to effectively process existing mishap data, is denying the Services valuable opportunities to reduce risk, prevent mishaps, and optimize human performance.

Additionally, the Commissioners observed how damaging the lack of consistent, reliable funding is to military aviation safety and readiness. Inconsistent and unpredictable funding has increased both risk to personnel and cost of operations. Often during budget cuts, military aviation suffers disproportionately due to the highly technical and perishable skills it requires.



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Among the Commission's recommendations are calls to increase flight hours, provide better training and career opportunities for maintainers, prioritize safety at senior levels in the Department, provide reliable and consistent funding, and better manage the relentless OPTEMPO that leads to chronic fatigue and unsafe conditions.

All of the Commission's findings, along with detailed, actionable recommendations to address these shortcomings and deficiencies, are amplified in the Commission's Report, which can be found at <https://www.militaryaviationsafety.gov/>

The Commission applauds Congress for recognizing the need for this study, and for its support throughout its duration. The Commission also appreciates the cooperation of the Department and the Military Services, and their continued commitment to the safety of the men and women of aviation.

The Commissioners appeal for swift and complete implementation of their recommendations. Military aviation mishaps have claimed the lives of another 26 servicemembers, and destroyed an additional 29 aircraft, since the study began. The time to act is now.