
Army Aviation — Above the Best!

Now Let's Train Together

CPT DANIEL VORSKY

We live in trying times, and technology has facilitated the dissemination of doctrinal, tactical, and intellectual enhancements to the profession of arms. Not all changes are to our advantage, however, but as we adapt our tactics, techniques, and procedures to meeting the challenges posed by former near-peer adversaries we learn more about them as well. Army Aviation is a valuable adjunct to the combined arms team, and we need to learn how we can combine our capabilities to overcome the challenges posed by the enemy.

The overall purpose of this article is to assist Infantry leaders with tools and tips to accomplish training objectives and build a better rapport with aviation assets, and most importantly, remove misconceptions surrounding the Army Aviation Branch. In my short decade in the Army, I've been blessed to do and experience quite a bit. I've learned how to fly helicopters and planes and train with the finest Soldiers the world has ever seen. With that being said, Army Aviation's sole purpose is to support the ground force commander and support ground forces as a whole. Consequently, I am left to wonder why the majority of aviation training missions are flown without the ground force on board and why most of the submitted mission requests from ground forces aren't supported. The following are some tips, tricks, and a general and informal guide to working with Army Aviation. Hopefully, this article will give ground forces a better understanding of how aviation units operate and the best ways of getting your training requirements and mission requests accomplished.

Understanding

No, we cannot take an aircraft out whenever we want to. Yes, we do have other requirements outside the cockpit. Yes, we wear different uniforms. Yes, crew rest is a REAL thing.

Now that I have addressed some common stereotypes about aviators, let's get down to discussing how you can maximize your opportunities to get a ride from us. After spending almost 10 years in the branch, I'd like to stress that Army Aviation and aviators are NOT better; we're different — the same way the Infantry is different from Armor and every other branch. Please understand that we WANT to help you, we WANT to fly, and we ARE going to do pretty much everything within our power to accomplish the task and get the blades spinning to get off the ground. Aviators have flight requirements and regulations that have to be followed. If we don't have crew rest, good weather, realistic expectations, and shared understanding, the mission is simply not going to happen. Like with any other branch, aviators have training

outside of the cockpit that must be accomplished, and unfortunately, this removes us from the cockpit, which reduces the number of people we have able to achieve the mission. With other tasks comes the start of the duty day. Please understand that crew rest is for everyone's safety, as I've lost more friends than I'd like to admit due to pilot error tracing back to pilot fatigue or pushing the envelope too far to complete the mission for the client.

Weather

No, we cannot just take off if there's terrible weather. No, we cannot just hover at 6,000 feet and lower ourselves vertically to the ground. No, the weather has not changed in the five minutes since you called last. No, we cannot easily or quickly shift the mission 10 hours to the right because the weather might be better, requiring another crew.

While this might seem simple, there is a lack of understanding of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and Army Regulation 95-1, *Flight Regulations*. To put things simply in regards to weather, if we have to take off under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR), we are more than likely taking off and flying point to point. In other words, we'll be flying airport to airport, and we won't be able to land at a random field in the middle of a training area. To put it in perspective, IFR flying is like driving a car, only looking at your dashboard and never looking outside. Aviators operating under IFR conditions are essentially flying blind, relying on their airframe's instruments to provide the necessary information to fly. IFR flying makes special requests and many training requirements impossible to accomplish. After all this is said, follow the go/no-go times. I can honestly say there is nothing worse than having a client set a go/no-go time and not follow it. When the timeline gets pushed to the right, the arrival time most likely doesn't change, so all it means is all things have to move quicker and faster, which generally creates a hazardous situation and will most likely not get approved by the pilot's briefer. The last major factor with weather is we are NOT allowed to shop for the weather. Shopping for weather is when pilots call different weather briefers to get more favorable conditions for the exact same weather outside; again, it ends with an aircraft crashing.

Realistic Requests

No, we cannot do auto-rotations with an entire cabin of passengers. No, we cannot land wherever we want. We most likely cannot land in that tiny area that would barely fit our aircraft but would be more convenient.

Just like anything else, be reasonable with your requests

for aviation support. We cannot drop everything to make a mission happen just because the “good idea fairy” struck at the last minute. Aviation operations require pilots, crews, ground crews, flight operations, and permission, often necessary from outside our battalions and brigades. Come with several courses of action on where you’d like us to land or options on how to accomplish your requirements. To the extent possible, know the aircraft limits of what you’re requesting: A UH-60 Black Hawk cannot lift the same as a CH-47 Chinook helicopter, and a CH-47 cannot land in the same area as a UH-60. Each airframe is different and brings something different to the table, and to that end, if you are given less aircraft than you wanted, please don’t scrap the mission because things aren’t exactly what you wanted. Ask to see the unit’s risk common operational picture (R-COP) and the Department of the Army (DA) Form 5484-R, as these documents are what all aviators use to get their missions not only approved but see the risk level of what is being requested. If the request comes in as high risk, drop it — no training mission is worth the loss of life. Chances are high that if you tell us what you need to be accomplished, we can suggest modifications to your plan to lower the risk and still achieve your training objectives.

Forge a Bond

Yes, most of us have great hair (not including myself). Yes, we say clear right and clear left when driving cars. No, the flight vest isn’t going anywhere and not all of us wear aviator sunglasses.

We are all Soldiers in the Army and want to help. Come visit the airfield. The best way for your missions and requests to be accomplished is to know your aviation unit. I’ve never met an aviation unit that didn’t want to show off their aircraft, talk capabilities, and have a reason to spin blades. I honestly cannot stress this enough: We WANT to fly your mission, make the client happy, and WANT your mission/training to succeed. All of these driving factors start with the communication between the client and the aviation unit. Let us know what

you’d like and what you’d settle for, so we can come up with a plan to accomplish the task at hand. Most importantly, be the unit that aviators want to work with. In other words, don’t insult or belittle the pilots when weather or operational constraints don’t work in your favor; nothing kills the bond between aviators and ground forces faster than that.

Conclusion

“Above the Best” is the Aviation Corps’ motto as we know the clients we serve are the best in the world. We want a reason to fly and want YOU to give us a reason to get the birds off the ground. Everything stated in this article is from events I have personally encountered and/or seen in my 10 years in Army Aviation. Hopefully, this article provides some insights that can aid ground forces as they seek to work with aviation more frequently. As the adage goes: the more we sweat together in peace, the less we bleed in war. When the military is focusing on preparing for large-scale combat operations, ensuring that a smooth working relationship exists between aviation and ground forces could not be more critical, and training is where this all begins.

CPT Dan Vorsky currently attends the Military Intelligence Captains Career Course at Fort Huachuca, AZ. He has served as a pilot in command and air mission commander (UH-60A/L). His assignments include serving as commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 12th Aviation Battalion, The Army Aviation Brigade (TAAB), Fort Belvoir, VA; executive officer (XO) for Bravo Company, 12th Aviation Battalion, TAAB; XO for Foxtrot Company, 3-2 General Support Aviation Battalion, Camp Humphrey, South Korea; and platoon leader in A Company, 1-150 Assault Helicopter Battalion, Joint Base McGuire-Dix, Lakehurst, NJ. He earned a bachelor’s degree in maritime studies and a master’s degree in international transportation management from SUNY Maritime College, and is pursuing a doctoral degree in strategic leadership with Liberty University.

Soldiers in the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) supported by rotary wing assets from 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division conduct air assault operations during a field training exercise at Fort Knox, KY, on 2 December 2018.

Photo by CPT Justin Wright

