

Interceptor

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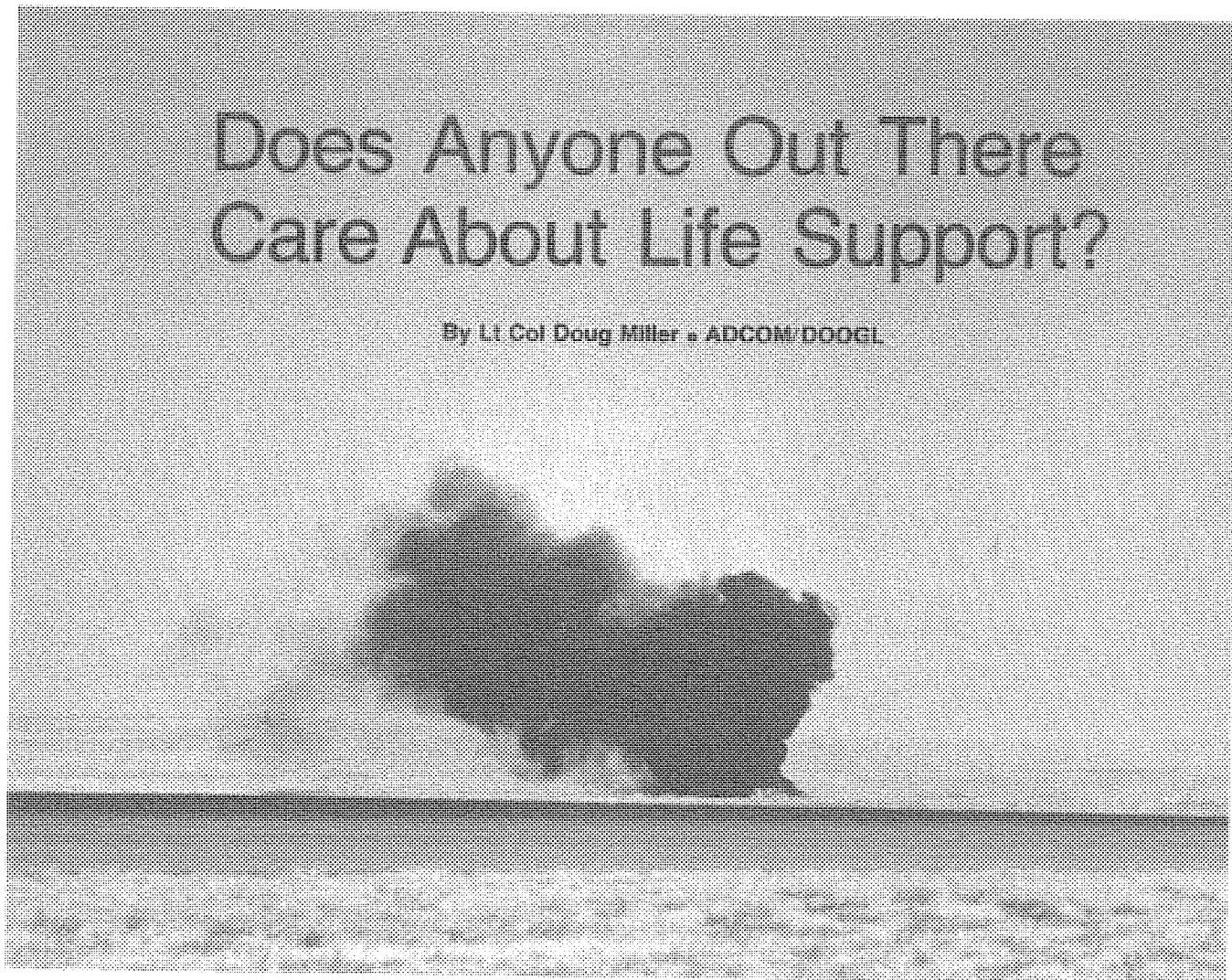


SOME WAR STORY

see page 5

Does Anyone Out There Care About Life Support?

By Lt Col Doug Miller • ADCOM/DOOGL



Certainly every professional ADCOM pilot who flies cares about life support. After all, if it were not for life support, you would not have a vest full of gadgets and goodies to show off at open houses and static displays. To a youngster, your aging aerospace vehicle may have little more interest than a repository for bubble gum, but for the oldsters who fly, the old equipment must be kept as good as new.

Well, believe it or not there are some rumors going around hinting that all is not going well in my life support empire. When you are the ADCOM Chief of Life Support, some of these rumors filter up and down to you, even though your hand-picked

inner circle of protectors is highly paid to insulate you from such unpleasanties.

Since there have been breakdowns in my protective shell, I thought I would pass along some of the things I have heard and let you think about them and what consequences they could have. Let me stress that it is not my intent to embarrass anyone or any unit, air dirty laundry, point fingers, or in any way hurt anybody's feelings. With that in mind, here goes.

Newer fire retardant flying clothing has been out for some time: aramid underwear and cold weather flying jackets for over two years. A summer flying jacket and a detach-

able fur-lined hood for almost a year. Yet I hear pilots have asked other pilots who were wearing the nomenclature aramid underwear, "What's that funny looking stuff you're wearing?" It sounds like some people are not even aware that this equipment is available — much less that they are required to wear it when the weather turns cool. Concerning the jackets, hear some folks are reluctant to let their aircrews order them because they cost too much money. These pieces of apparel have been developed to protect you. Your aerospace vehicle carries a lot of JP-4 which is prone to burn during a ground mishap. Melting, burning nylon can raise havoc with your

complexion. Penny-wise and pound-foolish? Do you care?

Flight gloves get the same treatment, except they have been around a lot longer. Still, I hear of aircrew members not wearing gloves when they fly. How many General Spruances will it take to convince you? How many testimonies of pilots who have been involved in a fire and were not wearing their gloves will you have to hear? It's awfully hard to fly an airplane when your fingers are fused together.

Some time ago some good buddies of mine were out on an over-water target mission. The water temperature was such that anti-exposure suits were required. They had theirs but said there were some other crew members who flew the mission without this gear. Let me remind you that AFR 60-16 gives the basic guidance concerning over-water survival gear. Specifically, when over water and not within gliding distance of land, flotation gear is required. When the water temperature is 50 degrees Fahrenheit or less, anti-exposure suits are required. ADCOM slightly increases the water temperature at which anti-exposure suits are required. Many people believe the "gliding distance to land" part is unrealistic as many emergencies will not allow you to glide back to terra firma. On the one hand we have people who think the regulation is not restrictive enough and on the other, people who must think it is too restrictive since they disregard the reg and wear what they want. Do you think if you had to eject over your IP into 45 to 50 degree water without an anti-exposure suit that you could hold on to your life long enough to be rescued by that slow moving helicopter? I have reviewed some ejection episodes from past decades and we have been incredi-

bly lucky. For example, a crew ejected into the cold Atlantic with no anti-exposure suits. They landed near a lobster boat and were picked up almost immediately. To you who choose to fly without the proper equipment, do you have that kind of luck? You may need it.

About winter and arctic clothing combinations — our life support reg defines winter and arctic conditions and what to wear during these conditions. These restrictions are the product of our flying unit inputs. To my way of thinking they are very liberal. Yet I hear the simple, common sense practice of putting on more layers of clothing when it gets cold is being neglected. It's comfy to snuggle up next to a statistic that says 90-some-odd percent of the aircrew members who eject are rescued in three hours or less. To you who think that flying with warm weather gear regardless of the temperature is "cool," I hope you can find that statistic when you have to punch out of your T-bird somewhere north of Moose Jaw on a cold winter's night.

What about life support training? Some years ago because of an aircraft mishap, it was recommended that we require our aircrews to attend some type of centralized life support training on a periodic basis. "Too expensive, our units replied, "and besides we can do the job as well or better ourselves." If we are doing the job so well, how come we are making the same mistakes over and over again? Many pilots complain life support training is dull and boring and the instructors know less about the equipment than the pilots do. Practice bleeding is sometimes thrown in too. I realize not all of our instructors are dynamic and personable, telling the latest jokes to capture your attention, nor can they challenge your incredibly high level of intelligence. But maybe it's a

two-way street. Put yourself in their shoes. Empathy is the word. Picture yourself as an instructor when in walks the typical fighter aircrews. They look at the display of life support equipment you are presumably going to talk about and say, "Oh, not the bleeping radio again, cripes I learned about that last year," or "The flares (expletive deleted), what could you possibly teach me about the flares I don't already know? Mirror, matches, whistle? Hey, man, don't insult my intelligence. After all I'm a college grad." How would you feel if you were confronted with that type of attitude? Probably like getting the session over as quickly as possible, retreating to the life support shop, and swabbing out the subjects' oxygen masks with something other than isopropyl alcohol.

If you who criticize life support training are so smart, how come, in mishap after mishap, the same dumb things happen? I won't elaborate on those dumb things because that may point fingers. But the book on mishaps was written a long time ago and very few new chapters have been added. It reads, "Same stupid accident — different name."

Our life support reg is, by and large, a product of evolution. Recommendations from accidents and your suggestions and inputs are considered, put out for coordination, and if agreed upon, incorporated into the reg. If you choose to improvise, you are neglecting the lessons learned by those who have gone before you. Some of those lessons have been very painful. We do not want you to become a statistic because what you were wearing only kept you alive for 2 + 59 and your chopper showed up at 3 + 00. Do you care about life support? Think about it. Remember, the airplane you fly may be older than you. ★