

The First Life Support Patch? I don't think so!



You asked about the origin of the LS Patch. Here is my recollection. In 1976 when Chief Richie was at 13th AF he and then SMSgt Llewellyn were busy developing a LS shield to be used on “going away” plaques. Every time Llewellyn returned to Hickam from one of his frequent trips to Clark, I was asked for an opinion on the latest version of the plaque. Some were better than others and eventually the shield on the plaques evolved into a flight shut patch. I have two patches slightly different from each other and a plaque with a third version.

Col (Ret) Bob Fessler

Thanks for sending this in Col Fessler!

Below are my thoughts on this.

The first thing you notice about the patches above is that the raft, parachute canopy and the clouds are missing! My guess is that someone was trying to copy the first patch that I recall ever seeing, the one below.



This patch was worn by many life supporters during the Viet Nam era, including yours truly. I wore it in the late 1960s while stationed at an ADC base (Perrin AFB, TX) and again in 1971 while stationed on Guam. This is the patch that most of us remember as it is the one with the raft on the pilot's right hand side. The placement of the raft on the right side is viewed by a lot of life supporters as being technically incorrect as they believe the raft should have been on the left side.

The truth is, the raft can be on either side! That's because in the 1960s the B-52 and T-38 survival kits (drop in kits) had their deployed raft connected on the **right hand side**. I'm not sure about the MD-1 or MB-2 kits, but the ML-4 kit also had its raft on the right side. How about this, back in the mid to late 1970s the F-15 kit had its drop lanyard on the right side vice in the middle as it is today. Many other survival kits however, had their raft drop down lanyard on the **left hand side**! This includes the F-101, F-102, F-104, F-105, F-106, A-1E, F-4, OV-10, SR-71, and the U-2. I know this for a fact because as you all know I collect old life support data, and in my collection are several old survival kit technical orders. Today's B-52 and T-38 kits have their drop lanyards on the left side as well. It's strange that no one ever addressed this in our CDCs or the SKT! Since the

early survival kits had the drop lanyard on the right side, I believe the original patch was designed by someone in a B-52 or T-38 unit back in the 1960's.

The patch below was cleaned up by a good friend of mine in the aerial photography business. Notice that I had the color of the life raft changed to black and the drop lanyard put on the left side. I started using this image on our identification badges at the first reunion in 1996. I also use it in the banner at the top of our newsletters and on this web site. This image is now widely used throughout the life support community.



If you dispute anything written here or know who designed the original patch please share it with us.

Bob