



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL
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FALLS CHURCH, VA 22041-3258

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DASG-ZA

8 Jan 09

MEMORANDUM FOR LTG THURMAN, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, G-3/5/7, ARMY
PENTAGON, WASHINGTON, DC 20310-0450

SUBJECT: Aeromedical Evacuation Aircraft Utilization

1. I am very concerned to learn that the General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB), 1st Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), 1st Cavalry Division is pursuing painting over the red crosses and installing M240 crew-served weapons on three of their MEDEVAC aircraft in order to utilize them as chase aircraft for their upcoming deployment to OIF. Furthermore, I understand that the Air Ambulance Company has already executed their first aerial gunnery which included flight medics in addition to crew chiefs.

2. Operationally, I understand that the Air Ambulance Companies must be fully integrated in the aviation scheme of maneuver in order to operate safely and with the same standards of our aviation counterparts. However, I do not concur or endorse this utilization due to the strategic implications and misuse of a low density, high demand capability which has already been exacerbated by continued high OPTEMPO requirements. Additionally, given the recent attention on MEDEVAC by the SecDef and the increasing requirements in Afghanistan, the decision to utilize these scarce assets in a non-doctrinal role should be reviewed by HQDA prior to execution. The Army must maintain a standard for doctrine, training and operations that is clearly consistent with the Geneva Convention and not arm MEDEVAC helicopters with crew-served weapons.

3. Key Points.

a. There are significant legal concerns regarding the execution of the concept and the likely problems that will arise from a practical standpoint.


b. Longstanding Army policy and doctrine prohibit the mounting of crew-served weapons on MEDEVAC aircraft and provide detailed guidance on the utilization of the MEDEVAC aircraft, lest the platform lose its protected status under the Geneva Convention.

c. The Hague Convention, Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, specifically prohibits the misuse of the red cross symbol. A misuse would include marked with red crosses for offensive operations (M240 crew-served weapon viewed as offensive) or in self-defense beyond that allowed by Geneva Convention. The arrangement proposed by 1st CAB invites the possibility of a Law of War Violation.

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4. Request that you issue immediate guidance in reference to the utilization of MEDEVAC aircraft. My intent is not to infringe on the Commander's authority nor operational decisions. However, this issue requires HQDA visibility and action due to the low supply and high demand for MEDEVAC and the potential for negative publicity. Underlying some of this concern is that the concept of dedicated MEDEVAC could be eroded. Moreover, the AMEDD responsibilities include policy, doctrine, overall management of an integrated Army-wide health services system, organization design, force structure development, and AMEDD personnel management - the items that are fundamental to the mission set for patient evacuation. I retain visibility over these units as they are a critical linkage in the healthcare continuum. I look forward to engaging this issue with you.


ERIC B. SCHOOMAKER
Lieutenant General
The Surgeon General

CF:
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