



THE CHAIN OF SURVIVAL CONTINUES

Responding to critically ill patients across Ireland, the Emergency Aeromedical Service has completed almost 3,000 missions since it initially took off as a pilot project in 2012. The Air Corps recently hosted a family day in Casement Aerodrome to reconnect those chains of survival and to meet patients who have benefitted from the service. Report by Captain Seán McCarthy, Air Corps Press Officer.

The Air Corps has a proud tradition of providing for the people of Ireland. No. 3 Operations Wing, in particular, has introduced a number of significant capabilities to the state, including the first inter-hospital air ambulance service, search and rescue, and night vision operations. In 2012 the unit embarked on its next legacy project, the Emergency Aeromedical Service.

Now a permanent facility, the success of the Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS) is hinged on collaboration between Defence Forces, the Departments of Defence and Health, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the National Ambulance Service (NAS).

The EAS is a joint project between the Air Corps and the National Ambulance Service (NAS), which was designed to deliver advanced medical care to remote locations and rapid transport for seriously ill or injured patients to the most appropriate hospital.

It is the first such service in the state and combines the speed of the AW139 helicopter, cruising at almost 300 kph, with the high level of care provided by a NAS advanced paramedic.



The EAS aircrew, advanced paramedic and ground crew are based in Custume Barracks, Athlone.



MYRIAD OF SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

Behind the helicopter and four-person crew are a myriad of supporting functions required to ensure that the aircraft can respond.

The Departments of Defence and Health generate the policies governing the operation of the service, while the Air Corps provides the technical, logistical and operational support needed to keep a state-of-the-art aircraft fit to respond at a moment's notice, while the '2 Brigade' provides the life support for the EAS in Custume Barracks in Athlone, Co. Westmeath – the geographical centre of Ireland.

The National Ambulance Service (NAS), through its Aeromedical Dispatch Service (AMDS) in Tallaght, manages the asset in adherence to protocols, which are designed to ensure the aircraft responds to patients that would benefit most from the service, and they provide the vital flight-following function ensuring safety for the crew.

Within the military and in aviation circles routine is very important and every day the EAS begins in the same way, with a morning brief. The aircraft and medical equipment is thoroughly examined and the crew checks in with the AMDS controller.

Once this routine is finished, no two days are the same. The average duration of an EAS task is two hours and the service responds to an average of two calls per day, although it has responded to six tasks in a single day, covering hundreds of kilometres.

CONSTANT STATE OF READINESS

The crew are at a constant state of readiness, to respond at a moment's notice. When the phone rings, the crew initially receives details limited to the location of the patient, to isolate the crew's decision from any emotional interference.

Once the aircraft commander decides to accept the mission, depending on multiple factors, each of the crew members goes about their individual tasks; starting the aircraft, planning the route, identifying the landing site. This normally takes less than seven minutes.

The speed of the AW139 allows the EAS to reach and make a positive impact on every community in the country and the aircraft's range allows the crew to respond to multiple calls without the need to refuel. The EAS has completed almost 3,000 missions, responding to the most critically ill patients across the country, connecting the chain of survival for thousands of people.

EAS FAMILY DAY

On 25 August 2017 the Air Corps hosted an EAS family day in Casement Aerodrome, to reconnect those chains of survival and to meet patients who have benefitted from the service.

The day also allowed the crews that keep the aircraft in the air on a daily basis, but who do not get to interact with the patients on board, to see the importance of the work they do. It was a moving day, full of smiles and stories of recovery.

As the service enters its sixth year the Air Corps has gained a greater understanding of, and competency in, the medevac role. Capitalising on the lessons learned from the EAS and the other aeromedical services provided by the Air Corps since 1963, efforts continue to ensure a military advantage is also gained.



IMPORTANT MEDEVAC ROLE

Under the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Planning and Review Process, the Air Corps is committed to develop, with support of the Medical Corps, an organic and potentially deployable medevac capability, be it fixed or rotary wing.

We are only too aware that not every EAS mission ends with a positive outcome for the patient and their families, but the ambition of everybody involved in the Emergency Aeromedical Service is to provide the best response for citizens of Ireland experiencing one of the worst days of their lives

It is this synergy and unity of purpose within multiple agencies, as well as the feeling of making a difference to communities, that makes working on the EAS such an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

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