

Coast Guard Operations Specialists Get Their Wings

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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- A day in the life of an ordinary Coast Guard Operations Specialist (OS) would normally consist of long hours in the ship's Combat Information Center or at a unit's command center operating the most advanced tactical computer systems the Coast Guard has, incorporating satellite communications, Global Positioning System satellites and electronic charting systems.

However, 23 new OS billets were added to Coast Guard units with C-130 Hercules fixed-wing aircraft. These billets are categorized as 'Aviation Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) Duty' and created to aid Coast Guard Aviation by feeding surface contacts and images to the Common Operational Picture (COP), a geographic display tool that displays operational information for enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

To make this work, OSs are now being asked to take their knowledge of advanced tactical computer systems to the air, and in doing so, are spending a good deal of their work day in the fuselage of a C-130. The newest members of the aviation community are called Aviation Mission Specialist – Tactical Systems Operators or “flying OSs.”

OSs with “wings” are being trained to operate the Over-the-horizon Airborne Sensor Integration System (OASIS) Airborne Tactical Workstation which is the heart and soul of the C-130 Airborne Sensor with Palletized Electronic Reconnaissance (CASPER) system. The CASPER system allows real-time, on-scene information to be uploaded to the COP watchstanders at both the Coast Guard Atlantic and Pacific Area commands for further dissemination to anyone who has access to the Classified Common Operational Picture in every U.S. military branch and throughout the Department of Homeland Security.

Currently, Coast Guard Air Stations Sacramento, in McClellan, Calif., Barbers Point, in Kapolei, Hawaii, Clearwater, Fla., Kodiak, Alaska, and Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., are using the CASPER system with qualified “flying OSs” aboard.



CLEARWATER, Fla. – Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher J. Dziuban, a crewmember at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater and Sensor System Operator, operates the C-130 Airborne Sensor with Palletized Electronic Reconnaissance (CASPER) system onboard one of five Air Station Clearwater's C-130 search planes. Dziuban uses the CASPER system to gather information on a possible target in the water and relays it to the Aviation Mission Specialist- Tactical Systems Operators or “flying OSs.” Coast Guard photograph by PA3 Sondra-Kay Kneen.

The OSs are attached to the communications department at each air station. Each qualified OS has come from a different background -- some from Coast Guard cutters or stations, others straight from 'A' school.



CLEARWATER, Fla. – The C-130 Airborne Sensor with Palletized Electronic Reconnaissance (CASPER) includes three major components: a chin mounted turret, a communications suite and an airborne tactical workstation. The turret houses the Wescam Model 20TS FLIR/EO Sensor. The sensor is equipped with an Electro-Optic Wide color camera, an Electro-Optic Narrow low light camera and a Forward Looking InfraRed camera. Coast Guard photograph by PA3 Sondra-Kay Kneen.

“Each OS is trained in every aspect of their rate,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Michael A. Santiago, a crewmember at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater. “Working aboard the aircraft has given me more knowledge to assist the air crews when they come to me for communication security problems.”

Santiago was the first OS billeted for the “flying OS” positions at Air Station Clearwater. Prior to his assignment at Clearwater, Santiago was stationed aboard the Coast Guard Cutter *Vigorous*, home ported in Cape May, N.J.

“It has been a pretty easy transition from an underway OS to a ‘flying OS’ because the system onboard the C-130 is extremely similar to the system I used on the cutter,” said Santiago.

Prior to becoming a “flying OS”, each OS must first complete a Class II flight physical, the low-pressure chamber simulator, attend a three-day initial Tactical Sensor Operator Course in a simulator and complete the Aviation Mission Specialist syllabus. Long hours of on-the-job training are also required, bringing the total qualification time for “flying OSs” to an average of about four- to six- months.

Lt. Cdr. Gregory S. Wood, the Sensor/C4ISR Tactics, Techniques & Procedures Manager for Coast Guard Aviation and a member of the Office of Aviation Forces, submitted the request for additional OSs to assist in enhancing America’s MDA.

“The additional OSs in Coast Guard Aviation are already paying dividends in that they are bridging the gap between our aviation and intelligence communities and supplementing the Aviation Electronic Technicians in manning the C-130’s Tactical Systems Operators position,” said Wood. “The next step is to transition this success to our newly arriving Integrated Coast Guard System assets.”

The select few that hold the “flying OS” position contribute to the effectiveness of tactical law-enforcement missions and the Coast Guard’s five overall missions of Maritime Safety, Maritime Mobility, Maritime Security, National Defense, and the Protection of Natural Resources by incorporating intelligence, communications, and personnel security