



It sounds simple: Screw the CO₂ cartridge into the inflator assembly.



But a misguided maintainer missed this obvious step. The gear he worked on was recalled.

Saving Lives

With Life

Preservers

By PR2(AW/SW) Daniel Brodhead

On the first day of PR “A” school, we learn that the “P” and the “R” are the first two letters in pride and professionalism. I never fully understood the meaning until June 22, 2001.

The light clicked on during a summer deployment onboard the USS *Kearsarge*, when my fellow AIMD PRs and I made a very uncommon discovery about a life-threatening problem with a life preserver. Beginning what should have been a routine test and check on an LPU-21 life preserver, we were amazed to find it had been packed carelessly. The CO₂ cartridges used to inflate the preserver were not even screwed into their actuators!

After reporting the situation to QA, I decided to recall all the life preservers onboard the ship with the same inspector’s stamp number. As our investigation continued, I was shocked to find that four of seven LPUs had been packed and inspected incorrectly. As a PR, I know one mistake with a piece of survival equipment could cost a life.

Once we finished our investigation, the preservers were repacked, re-inspected and returned to the SAR det to which they belonged. We then sent a message to ComNavAirLant in Norfolk regarding the carelessly inspected gear. They made sure a technical directive (TD) was issued to the fleet to recall, repackage and reinspect any ALSS equipment with that specific CDQAR stamp number.

Two days after the TD was received, the same SAR det lost an H-46 during a training mission. Three crew members on the *Sea Knight* were wearing LPU-21 life preservers we had repacked during our investigation. They made it out of the aircraft and back to the ship without significant injury. What would have happened had we not recalled and corrected those discrepancies? I believe there’s a good chance the pilot and crew would have died.

Being a PR and CDQAR, I know the importance of every maintenance task, the care and concern required for every piece of equipment, and the high standards necessary to ensure success. I learned there is no room for error and no time for bad judgment in this field. Our job is to save lives, and the equipment we inspect is the last resort for every pilot and crew member. 

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