



13 May 2004



SAFETY ALERT
POV Crash—Soldier Killed
Leader-Soldier Communication

1. A young Soldier was killed in a POV crash early last Friday while making a 360-mile, round-trip journey in bad weather after a full day of work. The accident is under investigation. It appears, however, that the Soldier, who was traveling alone, had driven many hours to take care of personal business and was trying to return before the start of the next duty day.

2. This death could have been prevented. Any of the risk factors involved—darkness, fatigue, bad weather, traveling alone, unrealistic time schedule—should have raised a red flag for the Soldier; but apparently the individual made the tragic mistake of assuming the benefits of the trip outweighed the risks. Communication between leaders and their Soldiers helps prevent Soldiers from taking unnecessary risks such as this.

3. Leaders at all levels must use the tools they have at their disposal to prevent needless deaths like this. One of those tools is an inherent leadership responsibility: the need to talk to subordinates who are planning trips or other off-duty activities. That being said, communication is a two-way street. Soldiers must discuss their travel plans with their squad-level / first-line supervisor NCOs and jointly assess the risks involved. My Memorial Day Weekend memorandum, which is available on the USAREUR homepage, calls this process “meeting under the oak tree.” This meeting requires Soldiers to voice specific measures they plan on taking when traveling, based on the risk assessment they and their leaders determine together.

4. Leaders bear an enormous responsibility for the welfare of their Soldiers. This special trust in the lives of our Soldiers is not a day-job; it applies around the clock, 365 days a year. Soldiers also have a special responsibility to their leaders, to their comrades, and to themselves by considering their own safety. I expect leaders to talk to their Soldiers, but I also expect Soldiers to seek out their leaders to discuss travel plans and other off-duty activities. These “meetings under the oak tree” are not optional; on the contrary, they are essential to upholding the concept of Soldier hard, Soldier safe, and to ensuring that we continue to execute with excellence, Any Mission, Anywhere.

B. B. BELL
General, USA
Commanding

ANY MISSION, ANYWHERE!

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