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V CORPS SAFETY OFFICIALS AIM TO SHOW SOLDIERS THEY 'CARE' ABOUT TROOPS' VIEWS ON ACCIDENT PREVENTION

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HEIDELBERG, Germany — Soldiers from the V Corps headquarters and the corps' subordinate units gathered here September 14 to take part in a new program that encourages them to speak their minds about accident prevention in their units.

The initiative, called V Corps Accident Reduction Emphasis, or CARE, is aimed at improving existing safety policies and programs by getting young soldiers to share their thoughts and ideas about how their units can help keep them safe on and off duty.

CARE is the brainchild of Chief Warrant Officer 4 Darrel "D" Smith from the corps' safety office. After learning that a Soldier died in a car accident, Smith says, he wanted to create a program that lets Soldiers and leaders tell safety experts openly and directly how they can help prevent accidents. While the first CARE meeting focused on reducing vehicle accidents, Smith said corps safety officials plan to address other safety topics in future sessions.

"The purpose of this first meeting was to target younger Soldiers between ages 18 and 27," said Smith. "They are an untapped resource, because nobody has sat them all down away from their units and asked them what they think."

The roundtable discussions started by giving the Soldiers real accident scenarios and then discussing why each accident happened and how it might have been prevented. The scenarios illustrated what safety officials say are the major causes of vehicle accidents – speed, fatigue and alcohol – and gave the troops at the roundtable an opportunity to see and discuss how drivers could have made "safer choices" in those scenarios to change their outcome.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Paul Morabito, who represented the corps' 12th Aviation Brigade at the roundtable, said the event was a good reminder to make those safe choices. "Everybody in every unit knows what the right and safe thing to do is, and it takes something like this to trigger them to do it," he said.

Roundtable participants also talked about things they do to help keep themselves and their fellow Soldiers safe on the road, such as designating one member of a group to be a designated driver when they "go out on the town." That discussion carried over into an examination of how the participants' units help prevent vehicle accidents.

One safety-related issue on which all the Soldiers at the roundtable seemed to agree, is that Soldier safety is sometimes hindered by a widely held stereotype that pictures troops as hard-fighting, hard-drinking GIs. Even though their units give frequent safety briefings about drinking and driving, they added, they felt a fixed speech given during a unit formation is not enough to counter stereotypes or get the

attention of younger troops. They suggested that briefings could include videos showing the possible outcomes of unsafe driving or be made more personal by having Soldiers or leaders share their real-life experiences.

Smith further proposed that units could standardize their designated driver programs to give a Soldier "points" each time he volunteers to be a designated driver, then reward him with a three-day pass when he accrues a set amount of points.

Smith called the meeting a huge success, saying it was profitable for the corps safety program because each Soldier spoke in candid detail about the dynamics of his own unit, giving safety officials new perspectives about how corps organizations deal with accident prevention issues. He said he hopes the program will help Soldiers' voices to be heard.

"Hopefully, through the CARE program we will be able to take the perspectives and ideas from these Soldiers and enhance V Corps safety policies," he said.

"This kind of meeting really helps to break the ice and gets the discussion going in a productive way," said Sgt. Dorothy Roper of the corps' 18th Military Police Brigade.

