FATALITY

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS III CORPS AND FORT HOOD
FORT HOOD, TEXAS 76544-5056

AFZF-GA-SAFE

3 June 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Head-On Collisions Kill Two Soldiers in the Same Day -- Fatality Memo 02-12

1. Last Saturday, after 55 days without a Fort Hood POV fatality, we unfortunately had to reset to zero the POV Safety display signs at the gates that show the "Number of Days Since Last Fatality." We also had to change the green blinking light to red. The families and friends of two III Corps soldiers received the terrible news last Saturday that their loved ones and friends were killed in POV accidents. The two soldiers died in horrific head-on crashes that occurred only eight hours apart from one another. One of the accidents occurred on post in the middle of the day when a POV, with three soldiers, struck another soldier's POV, resulting in one fatality and three injuries – one very serious. The other head-on crash happened during early morning hours in a neighboring city, only 35 miles from post. In this second incident, two soldiers collided with a car in which a mother and her four children were riding. One soldier was killed, the other soldier and the mother and four children were injured. These two incidents caused a great deal of unnecessary trauma and grief. Both accidents are still under investigation and the factors/causes are not known yet. However, the fact that both crashes were head-on collisions makes us surmise that fatigue and/or unobservant driving were involved. Tragically, we have now "caught up" with the 19 Corps-wide accidental fatalities that we experienced for the same period last fiscal year.

2. These two back-to-back fatalities during a regular (albeit payday) two-day weekend should make us wonder what conditions were different from the past long Memorial Day weekend. We did superbly then when we "survived" that long weekend without an accidental death. We are exceptional in putting special emphasis on pre-holiday, long weekend safety training before releasing our troops for four full days. But, the cold fact is that our leaders apparently are not fully successful in emphasizing and achieving safety with our troops all the time, not just long holiday weekends.

3. As with most accidental injuries/fatalities, there are usually some visible behavioral indicators. Examples are aggressive behavior, abnormal mood swings, recent loss of a loved one, divorce, depression, suicide ideations, etc. Combine these with alcohol and fatigue, or just a lot of free time, and tragedy may be just around the corner. We know that one of the soldiers who was killed last Saturday had recently gone through a divorce and had just came back from a lengthy deployment. What I see here is a divorced soldier, who had just returned from a lengthy exercise, was now on leave, probably had minimal supervision from a split-base unit, and had some time on his hands. Commanders must ensure that their leadership (particularly first line supervisors) are totally engaged in identifying these types of soldiers and providing appropriate one-on-one coaching, mentoring and guidance. We can save lives. Right now we are not being successful and the carnage continues. I ask every commander and leader at every echelon to recommit and rededicate efforts to positively impact on soldier automobile driving behavior. We can win this very tough war!

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B. B. BELL
Lieutenant General, USA
Commanding

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