FATALITY

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

AFZF-MD

13 May 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR: SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Caution Using Nutritional Supplements

1. Recently, a Fort Hood and III Corps soldier died tragically during physical training from an apparent fatal cardiac event. He was likely taking a nutritional supplement containing a combination of the herbs Ma Huang and Guarana. Additionally, recently a soldier was treated in the Darnall Emergency Department for a heat related injury during physical training. That soldier was taking a similar supplement.

2. Nutritional supplements marketed as weight loss products, performance enhancers, or "fat burners" may contain potentially dangerous ingredients, that given the right conditions may result in permanent injury or death. Of particular concern is the use of these substances with strenuous exercise.

FATALITY

3. Unfortunately, nutritional supplements are unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Of concern are the supplements containing Ma Huang or Ephedra, which is a naturally occurring form of the drug Ephedrine. Ephedra and Ephedrine are powerful stimulants to the heart, our metabolism and the central nervous system. Guarana, another stimulant, is a naturally occurring caffeine-like substance. Both Ma Huang and Guarana, either alone or in combination, can induce fatal heart rhythms under the right conditions. They have been associated with a number of deaths, including a Fort Hood soldier several years ago. Ephedra also interferes with the body's temperature-regulating mechanism, predisposing users to heat-related injuries. According to the medical journal, *American Family Physician,* the *Journal of the American Medical Association,* and others, clinical studies have shown that this combination significantly increases heart rate, body core temperature, and blood pressure; a potentially dangerous combination.

FATALITY

4. I ask commanders and leaders at all levels to identify their soldiers using these supplements and strongly discourage their use under any circumstances. They absolutely should not be used during strenuous activity, and/or in elevated heat conditions. The combination could be fatal. I encourage you to contact you unit's command surgeon for further information. You may also visit http://familydoctor.org for further information related to supplements. In the end the best approach to physical conditioning is the old fashioned way -- hard and supervised physical readiness training with no -- no -- artificial stimulants / enhancers.

ENSURE WIDEST DISSEMINATION AND POST ON BULLETIN BOARDS

B. B. BELL
LTG, USA
COMMANDING

FATALITY