

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

**GENERAL JOSEPH M. MARTIN
VICE CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY**

BEFORE THE

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ON LEARNING FROM AND PREVENTING FUTURE TRAINING MISHAPS

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Introduction

Chairman Garamendi, Ranking Member Lamborn, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Readiness, thank you for this opportunity to discuss how the Army has learned from past training mishaps and our various initiatives to prevent them in the future. As evidenced by your decision to hold this hearing, it is clear that you have the best interest of our brave men and women at heart and I appreciate your shared concern for their safety and well-being. On behalf of the Acting Secretary of the Army, the Honorable John Whitley, and the Chief of Staff of the Army, General James McConville, thank you for your steadfast support to our Soldiers, and for the invitation to join you today. I look forward to a productive discussion.

People

Soldiers are the Army's number one priority and our most precious resource, on loan from the American people. Placing our people first means ensuring their safety during the conduct of realistic training. While realistic training is necessary to best prepare our Soldiers to perform their jobs in combat, it includes inherent risks we strive to mitigate. The Army takes seriously any event which places our Soldiers in danger, causes them harm, or results in fatalities. Although we have made progress and have seen a significant reduction in Class A accidents over the past few years, we are not, and will not, be satisfied until all of our Soldiers are able to return home to their families after the conduct of their training. The Army owns each and every training mishap and assumes full responsibility for the prevention of future mishaps.

Aviation Mishaps

The Army has made important progress over the past few years toward ensuring the safety of our Soldiers during training. For FY20, Army aviation mishaps sat at a ten-year low and FY20 was the safest year in Army Aviation history in both the total number of Class A mishaps (6) and the Class A mishap rate per 100K flying hours (0.63). The FY20 Class A-C mishap rate per 100K flying hours (5.95) is well below the five-year average (7.29), but slightly above FY19 (5.62). Despite COVID-19 restrictions, the Army flew approximately 90% of planned flying hours in FY20. FY16 to FY20 is the safest five-year period in Army Aviation history with an average Class A mishap rate of 0.93 per 100K flying hours. Simultaneously, our Combat Aviation Brigades are reporting the highest overall readiness levels, and our active duty operational fleet remains at or above an 80% operational readiness rate.

While Army mishaps are caused by either human error, materiel failure, or environmental factors, most accidents are attributable to human error. Six of six Class A aviation mishaps in FY20 were attributed to human error. From FY16-21, manned aviation mishaps were caused by human error 86% of the time, with materiel failure identified as the cause of 14%. This historical norm is 81% human error. For example, mishaps from FY20 which resulted in fatalities include an AH-64 Apache controlled flight into rising terrain causing two fatalities, a UH-60A Black Hawk crew failing to initiate proper procedures during a maintenance test flight resulting in three fatalities, and an MH-60M Black Hawk instructor pilot incorrectly executing a diving fire maneuver resulting in two fatalities and injuries.

Ground Mishaps

Total Army on-duty tactical vehicle fatalities have averaged 11.8 annually from FY16 to FY20, which is the lowest five-year average since record keeping began in 1972. In FY20, 11 Soldiers were fatally injured in tactical vehicle mishaps, compared with 13 in FY19.

On-duty ground mishaps investigated by the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center (USACRC) are nearly 100% due to human error. Of those mishaps assessed as due to human error, most identify a deviation from a standard as a contributing factor. Examples include speeding, not adhering to operator's manuals, poorly executed technical procedures, improper route or terrain reconnaissance, inadequate mission and crew rehearsals, failure to adhere to prescribed vehicle load plans, failure to identify hazards such as water crossings, bridges, or complex terrain, poor crew coordination, and insufficient pre-combat checks and inspections.

Prevention

Although the majority of mishaps result from human error, this does not mean we are placing the blame squarely on our Soldiers and operators. The leadership of the Army and the Army as an organization take full responsibility. As stated above, we own each and every incident.

What does "fully owning" each accident mean to us? First, it means acknowledging the organizational characteristics that may have unintentionally and indirectly contributed to the cause of mishaps. This includes an excessive operational tempo (OPTEMPO) which negatively affected home station training programs. Second,

it means the Army is committed to the conduct of thorough and unhindered investigations into each accident, leaving no stone unturned, to fully understand the causes of each mishap. Following that, we will expeditiously implement the recommendations developed during each investigation and by our subject matter experts in the field. Finally, we are committed to holding ourselves accountable and ensuring systems are in place to enforce training standards and procedures across the board.

Philosophy

Last year, the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Army announced that our People are the Army's number one priority. This philosophy has permeated the entirety of our organization and resulted in several initiatives. The first is our emphasis on individual- and crew-level training. In the past, we've paid for readiness at higher echelons by sacrificing lower echelon training proficiency to a degree, but we have since shifted our focus to ensuring that our organization, at every level, is highly trained, disciplined, and fit. This mindset has enabled our Army Staff to develop several initiatives to reduce the OPTEMPO on our units, effectively giving time back to commanders and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) to train their Soldiers to a higher level of individual and crew proficiency.

Operational Tempo (OPTEMPO)

One initiative aimed to reduce unit OPTEMPO is the implementation of the Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM). ReARMM is our

new framework for integrating and synchronizing requirements that are balanced to provide predictability for our training and modernization efforts, which we believe will reduce the OPTEMPO challenges straining our organizations and people. This model allows units to plan predictable and mission-tailored training, implementing regionally focused activities into unit training plans. As a result, commanders and NCOs will have more time to train their Soldiers on the proper operation of tactical vehicles and to plan and rehearse missions to a high standard.

In addition to ReARMM, the Army has taken action to reduce the stress of OPTEMPO on our Combat Aviation Brigades (CAB). We determined continuous rotations to the Combat Training Centers (CTCs) and the deployment requirements associated with them were reducing the individual and crew proficiency of our aviators. To remedy this, new CTC business rules limit CAB participation to no more than two rotations per year. This policy will create more time for needed individual and crew level training at home station and reduce the time preparing for and executing deployment operations.

Talent Retention

The Army is taking several other steps to increase the overall level of proficiency among our flight crews. Retaining our best talent is critical. We are offering our best talent targeted retention bonuses, and Aviation Incentive Pay is now at the maximum congressionally authorized levels. Quality of life for our pilots and families is another focus and we are working on longer assignment stability incentives for aircrew members. We are also investing in our people through five central Quality of Life

priorities: (1) housing, both family and barracks; (2) transforming healthcare; (3) improving and adequately resourcing Child and Youth Services; (4) improving spouse employment opportunities; and (5) minimizing the impact of Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves.

Recent Policy

To improve the safety of our Soldiers as they operate tactical vehicles, the Army published the Army Driver and Operator Standardization Program (Army Regulation 600-55) in September 2019, directing significant changes in driver certification, trainer certification, and commander involvement. This standardized program requires both written and hands-on exams.

Safety Investigations

The Army is a learning organization and is committed to conducting thorough and in-depth investigations into each mishap, with the goal of fully understanding the circumstances surrounding the event. The USACRC is dedicated to preserving Army readiness through analysis, training, and the development of systems that prevent accidental loss of our people and resources. The investigation processes used by the USACRC is second to none and exists to find out why a mishap occurred and to provide timely recommendations to prevent similar mishaps from occurring again.

This process begins with the selection, training, and certification of mishap investigators. The training and certification process is a rigorous six-month program, culminating with the successful investigation of a Class A mishap under the supervision

of a certified instructor. This process ensures the USACRC can field five certified teams simultaneously, anywhere in the world, to conduct investigations regardless of the complexity or location. When the Army experiences a significant mishap, the USACRC will send two certified investigators to serve as the Board President and Board Recorder of a Centralized Accident Investigation (CAI). The team will quickly establish a Safety Investigation Board (SIB), consisting of a team of subject matter experts from various agencies that ensures the proper expertise is available. The Board President oversees a deliberative process as outlined in DA PAM 385-40, and typically requires 21 days to complete the process and deliver findings and recommendations. Recommendations are directed at multiple layers of unit leadership at all echelons in the Army. Commands involved are required by AR 385-10 to immediately acknowledge recommendations.

Accountability and Compliance

Accountability is of the utmost importance to ensure recommendations stemming from the conduct of investigations are implemented. The Army must continue ensuring we hold ourselves accountable to the policies and standards in place. To assist commanders and the USACRC with accountability, we fielded the first two of five applications of the Army Safety Management Information System 2.0 (ASMIS-2.0), the Mishap & Near Miss Reporting, and the Audits, Surveys & Inspections modules. When completely fielded, ASMIS 2.0 will provide commanders and safety professionals across the Army with unprecedented analytic capability and access to Safety and Occupational Health (SOH) data. ASMIS 2.0, as a family of systems, will shift the paradigm toward greater reliance on leading indicators, while the legacy ASMIS-R relied solely upon

lagging indicators (after the fact). A benefit of this system is the greater ability to leverage leading indicators and get to the predictive analysis needed to assist commanders in mitigating mishaps before they happen and preserving readiness

To ensure compliance with Army ground vehicle maintenance and driver training regulations, the U.S. Army Forces Command developed and implemented the Ground Readiness Evaluation, Assessment, and Training (GREAT) inspection program. These inspections occur at the Brigade Combat Team to battalion and company levels. These inspections include thorough review of each unit driver's training program to ensure compliance with Army policies.

Administrative Investigations

For Class A accidents, including those resulting in fatalities, an Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 administrative (or command) investigation is conducted in addition to the safety investigation described above. The two investigations operate independent of each other, but share all factual information and evidence available. The AR 15-6 investigation may result in the recommendation of disciplinary actions where appropriate and is an important tool to enforcing accountability and adherence to policy. Both investigations are reviewed up the chain of command and often to the Chief of Staff of the Army when appropriate.

Conclusion

To reiterate, although we've seen progress, we will not rest until all of our Soldiers return home safely to their families from their training. The Army is taking

concrete steps to improve the safety of our Soldiers as they operate aircraft and ground tactical vehicles through organizational measures to improve how we care for our people, by shifting focus to individual and crew training to build cohesive teams that are highly trained, disciplined, and fit, by improving how we conduct investigations and risk mitigation, and by holding ourselves accountable to standards and policies.