



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Oct. 21, 2021

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Army achieves historic low in on-duty fatalities in FY21

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On-duty fatal ground mishaps dropped to a historic low in FY21, the Army announced today with the release of its end-of-fiscal-year accidental Soldier loss data. The nine on-duty ground fatalities were fewer than any other reporting period on record and a 36% reduction from the previous fiscal year, according to information compiled by the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center.

In total, the Army lost 20 Soldiers to fatal on-duty mishaps in FY21. In addition to the nine Soldiers lost to on-duty ground mishaps, 11 died in aviation mishaps. The on-duty fatality total was also an all-time low, four below any previous year.

Notably, the Army's success in driving down on-duty fatal mishaps occurred during the return of near-normal training tempos following a period of reduced operations in FY20 due to COVID-19. Prior to FY20, which saw 24 Soldiers lost to on-duty mishaps, the lowest total was 26 in both FY18 and FY19.

"Leaders at every echelon should be proud of this accomplishment," said Brig. Gen. Andrew C. Hilmes, Commanding General, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center and Director of Army Safety. "While one Soldier lost to a preventable mishap is one too many, we see in the results that engaged leadership is fundamental to loss prevention."

The Army attributes the reduction in fatal on-duty mishaps to a number of factors — particularly the USACRC's identification of two quarters as times of increased risk for specific operations.

First, a deep-dive analysis of FY15-19 accidental loss data revealed a third-quarter tactical vehicle mishap spike. During this time period, the Army experienced a sharp increase in tactical vehicle mishaps, specifically during May and June, with nearly one-third occurring over just 16% of the fiscal calendar.

The Army's "3rd-Quarter Tactical Vehicle Spike" campaign identified increased operational tempo, personnel turnover and leader rotations as contributing factors to the rise in mishaps and challenged leaders to be extra vigilant during this period. In FY21, there was just one Class A ground tactical vehicle mishap in the third quarter. The previous five years averaged almost six Class A ground tactical vehicle mishaps during those three months.

The second high-risk time period the Army identified was the fourth quarter for aviation operations. During FY15-19, the Army averaged four Class A mishaps per year between July and September. The Army addressed this issue with the "4th-Quarter Aviation Spike" campaign, which revealed

environmental conditions, as well as personnel and leader turnover, as contributing factors to the increase.

Army leaders successfully dealt with the fourth-quarter spike for two consecutive years. In FY20, there was one Class A flight mishap during the fourth quarter, which was bested in FY21, when the Army experienced zero.

Unfortunately, the FY21 mishap data isn't all good news. Off-duty mishaps continue to be the greatest killer of Soldiers, accounting for 87 deaths — a 20% increase from FY20. Army officials partially attribute the increase to off-duty complacency as Soldiers returned to "normal" after nearly a year of COVID-19 restrictions.

"Addressing off-duty risky behaviors in our younger Soldiers, primarily in the 18-24 year age group, remains one of our greatest challenges," said Hilmes. "Getting our junior leaders the tools and information they need to influence those underneath them will be the USACRC's priority in the coming year."

The goal of the Department of Defense and Army is to achieve zero accidental losses. While there is inherent risk in much of what Soldiers do, leaders work hard to mitigate those hazards. The Army studies every Soldier mishap fatality to determine ways to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. It also uses leading indicators such as safety climate surveys to help commanders at all levels in their mishap prevention efforts.

Every Soldier loss is a tragedy and none are acceptable. To that end, the Army will continue to work toward the goal of zero on- and off-duty accidental losses and the preservation of our nation's greatest resource, the men and women who volunteer to serve in the armed forces.

The USACRC will release its FY21 Annual Assessment of the Army Safety Program in late November. The assessment outlines and explains on-duty ground, aviation and off-duty mishap trends during the respective fiscal year.

For more information on Army mishap statistics or the Army Safety and Occupational Health Program, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

