



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2266
<https://safety.army.mil>

I knew better, but there I was

ART POWELL
Strategic Communication Directorate
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
Fort Rucker, Ala.

If you're driving slowly past the big rigs parked alongside the interstate because of snow and ice, you know you're in a situation.

There I was, creeping along near Chattanooga, Tenn., on a cold and stormy night and all I could think about was how it had happened to me. It wasn't even officially winter yet, but you'd never know it by looking at the weather. Maybe it was still autumn somewhere, but not here.

Yes, I had checked the latest online weather forecast before leaving Fort Rucker, Ala., and even though it showed a chance of snow near Chattanooga, I thought I could make it to my destination in East Tennessee.

Not a plan.

Things were fine until I neared Chattanooga, but they became hazardous as snow and ice packed the road, with only one lane of traffic creeping or stopped. I felt good that I had food, a cellphone, water and blankets in the trunk. But seeing the parked trucks reminded me that I might soon have to join them and call it a night — on the road.

I was a victim of "get-home-itis," a malady marked by overconfidence, a wink and nod to the facts, and a strong reason to make it to a destination. In my case, it was literally home with family waiting.

Patience eventually paid off, and I drove through the snowline and broke into rain to complete my trip.

I didn't need my emergency supplies, but knowing I had them was a warm feeling on a cold night. Something I hadn't considered was fuel management. I knew I had sufficient fuel to reach my destination on a normal trip, but since I spent almost two extra hours of unexpected creep and crawl driving in the snow zone, I began to worry about fuel. Thanks to a little luck and my large fuel tank, I made it.

Travel planning and preparation is a good idea for any trip at any time. Soldiers are required to complete a Travel Risk Planning System assessment, an automated trip planning tool that incorporates the principles of risk management and facilitates a dialogue between supervisor and subordinate prior to POV travel. In addition, many travel planning guides and checklists are available for download to computers and smartphones. They can be found by using a simple Internet search engine.

Rest is perhaps the most important part of trip planning.

According to the National Safety Council, the drivers at highest risk from drowsy driving are third shift workers, people who drive a substantial number of miles each day, those with unrecognized sleep disorders, and those

prescribed medication with sedatives. If you're tired but determined to make it to your destination, you may add yourself to the list.

Know the signs of fatigue and be prepared to stop and rest. Having another competent driver to assist with driving duties helps too.

Whenever you travel, plan, plan, plan. The things that can get you into trouble are those unexpected events and circumstances. Don't get yourself and/or your Family into a "there I was ..." situation!

For more information on TRiPS and driving safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.