

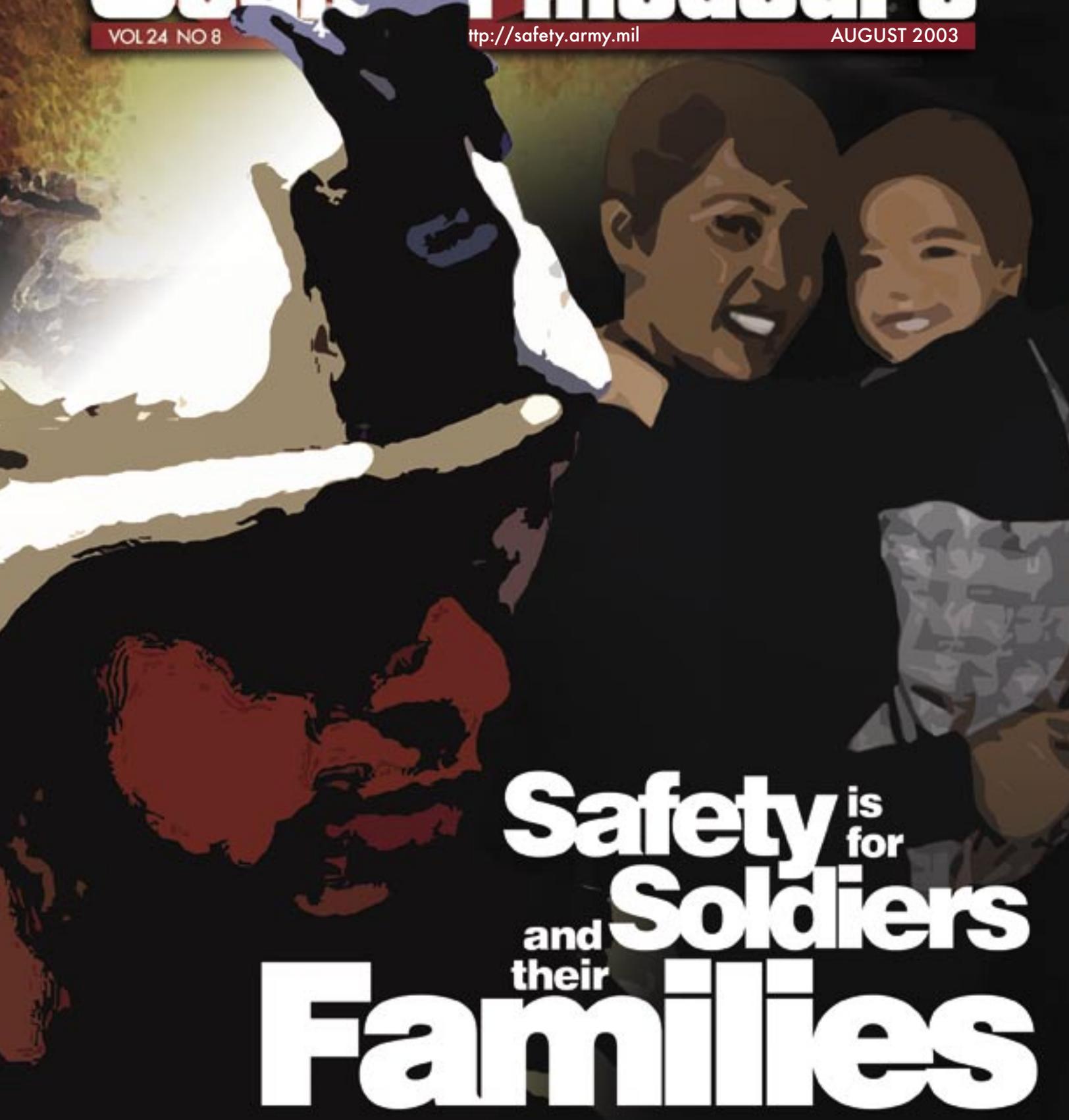
ARMY GROUND RISK-MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

# Countermeasure

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AUGUST 2003



**Safety** is for  
**Soldiers**  
and their  
**Families**

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## Keep Your “Leader Lights” On...

We’re an Army of 228 years of standards-based experience. Today’s leaders understand how to manage risks to protect their soldiers, enforce standards, and demand soldier discipline. These are the foundations of our Army Safety Program.

Although our leaders have made great progress in their safety programs, there is much work to be done. When we look at the accident statistics over the last 10 years, we see that the Army’s rate of accidents and fatalities during recent years mirrors those of a decade ago. The hazards are clear and generally remain the same: 40.6 percent of accidents involve POVs, with military vehicle accidents accounting for just under an additional 20 percent. Sports and off-duty recreational activities caused 17 percent of recent Army fatalities. Tragically, in our current combat theater of operations, we have lost 11 soldiers simply to the negligent discharge of weapons. The statistics tell us that we continue to be our own worst enemy.

Our goal over the next 2 years and the Secretary of Defense’s mandate is that we reduce accidents and fatalities by 50 percent—a tall order, but one within the ability of the world’s greatest Army. Success will require more than standard risk assessments and casual weekend safety briefs—it will require innovative tools to help commanders in the field refine control measures for known hazards. It will require an effective link between the Safety Center’s databases and the Army’s first-line supervisors, giving them information in lieu of experience to properly risk-mitigate. Most importantly, it will require Army leaders to take an open-eyed, proactive approach toward their safety programs. Simply stated, it means that we must all turn our leader lights “on.”

Currently we have large numbers of soldiers preparing to come home and unite with their family and friends after months of successful and stressful operations. Let’s be mindful that these soldiers have not been behind the wheels of their POVs for some time. Take a proactive approach to ensuring they’re not fatigued when they take that first road trip. Visit our Post-Deployment POV Special Update and the updated “Leader’s Guide to POV Accident Prevention” posted on our Web site at <http://safety.army.mil>. These are excellent tools to use when talking to your soldiers regarding the common, and not so common, hazards associated with POVs and re-deployment.

Clearly, this is a challenging time for our Army. The Army Safety Center, your team member, is working hard to develop additional tools and initiatives to assist in protecting your soldiers’ lives and your unit’s readiness. In the meantime, I ask you to keep your leader lights “on” and be the leader who prevents the next accident. ☘

**BG Joseph A. Smith**

# Barbecue 101

**I**t was getting toward late afternoon and the shadows were lengthening as we car-camped alongside a logging road near Lichtenstein, Germany. I was the chef for dinner and could almost taste the spare ribs we had planned for that evening. I had a brand-new fold-up barbecue that I had bought for our camping trips and was ready to get started.

I had the barbecue. I had the matches. I had the briquettes. But I forgot to bring the lighter fluid! No problem. Being a resourceful Army troop, I could “improvise.” So I asked myself, “How can I get these briquettes going? What other flammable liquid do I have available?”

My eyes fell on the gas cap of our German-made Taunus station wagon and the answer came like a bolt out of the blue—“Hmm...there’s plenty of flammable liquid in the gas tank!” And lucky me, I just happened to have a section of

rubber hose in the car.

Not one to waste time, I unscrewed the gas cap and slipped the siphon tube into the tank. This would require skill and delicate timing, as the taste of gasoline tends to ruin the palate before dinner. However, in no time flat, I had filled a small glass bottle my wife had given me. I walked triumphantly to the barbecue, proud that my resourcefulness had once again saved the day.

I liberally dribbled the gas onto the pile of briquettes. Did I say “liberally?” I was now late getting started with my cooking and the logic of it all seemed simple enough. If more gas makes the car run faster, maybe more gas will make the briquettes burn faster. Still, being somewhat cautious, I waited a couple of minutes before striking a wooden match and tossing it onto the barbecue.

“VA-WOOMPF!” Cowabunga, dude!—the

# ng Or How I Almost Burned Down the Forest

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

explosion and fireball were breathtaking! The column of fire erupting from my grill reminded me of an F-15 taking off in full afterburner! I looked up and saw the flames dancing dangerously close to some tree limbs above. When the blaze subsided enough for me to get near my barbecue, I saw the red paint was bubbling and peeling off. I guess I'd exceeded the manufacturer's specifications for cooking temperatures.

Needless to say, that was the last time I used gasoline to start a barbecue. Fortunately, I didn't burn down the forest, but I did learn that gasoline is not a suitable substitute for charcoal lighter fluid. However, I'm neither the first nor the last person to try this. A friend of mine (a full-bird colonel, so it's not just us "grunts") once tried using gasoline to get his smoker started. When he tossed a match onto the gas-soaked coals, the resulting explosion almost sent the lid into orbit!

The good news is that you don't have to make the same mistakes we did. Here are some tips to help you keep from barbecuing more than your dinner.

## Traditional Briquette Grills

- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for your grill.

- Place the grill in an open area out of doors. Keep it away from buildings, shrubbery, and dry vegetation—10 feet is a good measure. Also, make sure it's not in the way of pedestrian traffic.

- Do not use a grill on top of or underneath any surface that will burn, such as a porch or carport. The wooden deck attached to your house is NOT a good place to barbecue.

- Never move a lighted grill indoors, regardless of the weather or your appetite for thick, juicy hamburgers. Opening a window or garage door or using a fan might not reduce carbon monoxide to safe levels.

- Do not build a charcoal fire in an indoor fireplace. The briquettes do not produce a fire hot enough to draw the combustion products up the chimney. As a result, poisonous carbon monoxide can remain in the room.

- Use starter fluids designed for your grill. Place the can and matches away from the grill. NEVER use gasoline to light a grill.

- Never leave a lighted grill unattended.

- Keep children and pets away from a hot grill.

- If the coals start to wane or are slow to catch, fan them or use dry kindling or rolled-up newspaper to give them a boost. Adding liquid fuel could result in a flash fire.

## Gas Grills

- Have your igniter ready when you turn on the grill so the gas doesn't build up and possibly cause a flash burn or explosion.

- If the burner doesn't ignite quickly, shut off the valves, leave the lid open and allow the grill to air out for several minutes before you try to light it again. This will avoid a buildup of explosive gases.

- Store the gas cylinder outside and be sure the gas is turned off at the tank to prevent accidental ignitions. Check the connections frequently for leaks using a soap-and-water mixture. Escaping gas will appear as bubbles. If you see any; tighten the connections or call a professional to repair the grill.

- Clean the metal venturi tubes annually.

- Have the tank filled by a qualified dealer—over-filling can be dangerous. 

**E**ver get the feeling in the pit of your stomach that you're getting into a bad situation? You look around and get clue after clue that things just aren't "quite right." As I learned the hard way, it's often a good idea to pay attention to those clues.

My friend and I had been planning all week to take his 16-foot catamaran sailing on Santa Rosa Sound, FL. After I made the 3-hour trip to his house, he greeted me in his driveway and suggested we get going soon because bad weather was forecast. That should have been my first clue.

As we packed my trunk, my friend frantically searched for his life jackets, which he hadn't seen since last year. He finally decided that they must be with the boat, so we hit the road. When we got to Santa Rosa, where the boat was being kept on another friend's property, I got my first sight of the "vessel." It was sitting on the beach amongst some weeds. This should have been my second clue. It hadn't been on the water in months and my friend probably spent upwards of \$3 a year on maintenance. Even so, the boat looked to be in good shape until I opened one of the watertight compartments and was greeted by an army of carpenter ants. My friend said, "Oh, they do that every year!" I wondered, "Shouldn't a watertight compartment be 'ant-tight' as well?"

We rigged the mast, attached the sails, loaded the cooler, and started to push the catamaran into the water. I asked my friend, "Shouldn't we put something in this drain hole?" He replied, "Oh yeah, I almost forgot!" Then I asked him about the still-missing life jackets. He rummaged through his friend's garage and returned 10 minutes later with a couple of life jackets that looked like something

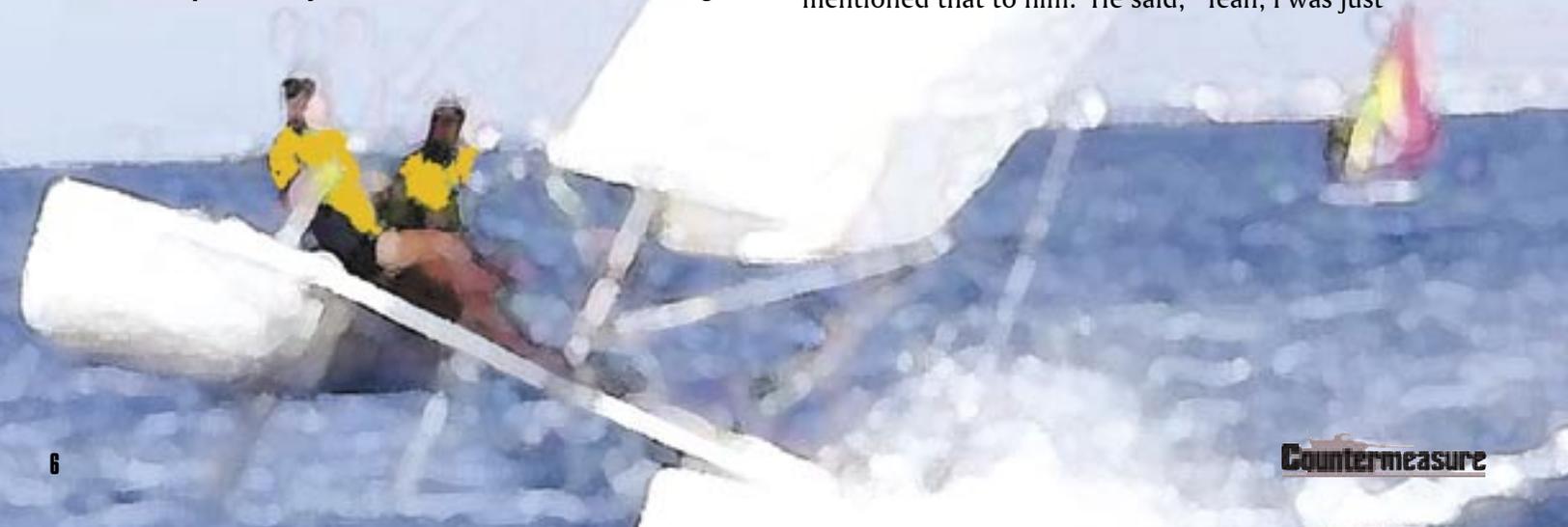
# SHIP OF FOOLS

**CW3 BILL BARFKNECHT**  
Flight Concepts Division  
Fort Eustis, VA

from a 1960s beach party movie. "These will do," he said as we donned the skimpy life jackets and set out on the water. That should have been my third clue.

At first, things went pretty well. We had the wind in our faces, the sun was overhead, and it was turning out to be a great day. When we got to the middle of the sound where the shipping channel cut through, I saw my friend looking around on his "sporty" life jacket. I asked, "What's up?" He said, "I usually bring a whistle so I can get the attention of other vessels if need be. But no big deal, they'll see us." That should have been my fourth clue.

As we sailed, he told me about the time the wind was so calm he just drifted with the current, unable to control where he was going. He'd been stuck for hours a short distance from shore, but couldn't get in because he didn't have a paddle. I looked around and noticed WE didn't have any paddles and mentioned that to him. He said, "Yeah, I was just



thinking that myself. But the wind is blowing today and we're close to shore. We'll be OK." That should have been my fifth clue.

As we tacked (zigzagged) across the water, he told me about the time the wind blew so hard one of the wires supporting the mast broke and the mast fell into the water. He drifted in rough seas until a passing boater saw him and towed him to shore. "Not to worry," he said. He assured me the wires were all new, so that wouldn't happen again.

We'd just cleared the shipping channel and started to tack to get back on course. As we came about, I heard a grinding noise and watched the mast lean over and fall into the water. My friend sat there in disbelief as the sails took on water and started to sink.

This was NOT good. We were drifting near the shipping lane without paddles or signaling devices. I also noticed that we seemed to be settling deeper in the water. Apparently the water had found the same hole the ants used to get into the watertight compartment. At least we had life jackets.

We tried to clean up the mess of ropes and sails as we drifted towards the shore. We finally drifted into waist-deep water and dragged the boat onto the beach. I removed the drain plug and water began pouring out. I was right—we'd been sinking!

What did I learn from this? First, we should have checked the boat over closely before setting sail. The mast fell because a piece of hardware failed. Because of the carpenter ants, the boat nearly sank out from under us. Also, we lacked signaling devices and a paddle, which could have been disastrous if one of us had gotten hurt or the weather turned nasty.

Take a clue from me; use a little risk management when you go boating. Enroll in a boater's safety course through your Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) office or local Coast Guard Auxiliary. Here are some useful safety tips:

- Have your craft inspected annually, and routinely

check the boat yourself. You also can call the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary for a free safety inspection.

- Before setting out, get the latest weather forecast for your area. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration broadcasts reports regularly to keep you updated. Take your radio with you and monitor the forecast.

- Know your boat's handling characteristics and don't go beyond your skills.

- Develop a "float plan" before sailing and tell someone where you will be going.

- Don't drink and boat. The lack of lanes and traffic signals on the water can make boating even more difficult than driving a car.

- In small boats, everyone should remain seated while the boat is in motion. Keep loads spread evenly and as low in the boat as possible.

- Wear your personal flotation device (life jacket) at all times—you may not have time to put it on during a sudden emergency.

- Take a portable communication device for emergencies.

- Carry additional safety equipment such as a paddle or oars, first-aid kit, bailer bucket or scoop, anchor and line, reserve fuel, and tools and spare parts.

- When boating at night, make sure you have a light that can be seen for 2 miles.

- Maintain a clear, unobstructed view ahead at all times. Scan the area ahead on either side for any dangers. 🚤

For more information on boating safety check out the following Web sites:

[www.boatsafe.com](http://www.boatsafe.com)

[www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org)

[www.boatus.org/onlinecourse](http://www.boatus.org/onlinecourse)

Contact the author at (757) 820-1086, or e-mail [b.barfknecht@us.army.mil](mailto:b.barfknecht@us.army.mil).

**"We were drifting near the shipping lane without paddles or signaling devices."**

# This Kid Don't Float!

**BOB VAN ELSBERG**  
Managing Editor

**W**hen I was a kid, my cat and I shared one thing in common—we both hated the water. I didn't want to shower in it, bathe in it, or—worst of all—get into water above my head. I just knew I'd float like a brick, so it wasn't good news when my dad told me I WAS taking swimming lessons. However, dad was twice my size and could flick a fly off the wall with his belt, so my options were, well ... "limited."

The appointed and much-dreaded day came. I found myself at the local pool with a lot of other youngsters also slated to take the swimming class. The instructors assured us there wouldn't be any real danger and that this would be fun. At that moment I would have gladly swapped his idea of fun for getting a filling without Novocain.

With some coaxing, I finally eased into the shallow end of the pool. After much instruction, I tried the butterfly and back floats. While I wasn't exactly graceful, at least I didn't go to the bottom. "Buoyed" by my new-found confidence, I thought, "Maybe I can learn to swim after all!"

Once the entire class had proven they could float, the instructor introduced us to the belly board. "Cool," I thought, "This will keep me on top of the water. If I can kick just right, maybe I'll actually go somewhere."

All of this seemed very reasonable until he took us to the deep end of the pool. I was no mathematical genius, but even I knew that the 6-foot-deep water was well over my head. Deciding I needed lots of time to observe others mastering this task, I made sure I was LAST in line. When my time finally came, I just stood there frozen in place like a statue. The instructor, noticing I was in a cold sweat, told me to take my time and do it when I was ready.

He then turned his attention to the other kids.

Realizing I had to finish this class or go home to dad and explain "why," I hugged the board and jumped into the pool. I might have made it had I not been such an uncoordinated child. Somewhere during my brief flight, I snap rolled 90 degrees to the left and landed sideways in the water.

This was not what I'd had in mind! I'd imagined myself crossing the pool atop the board but instead, the *evil beast* turned on me. Being a better floater than I, the belly board broke the surface first, leaving me hanging beneath like the centerboard of a sailboat. I was embarrassed, but confident an instructor would soon rescue me. I was also glad I had proven to myself that I could hold my breath for almost a minute.

So I hung there and waited ... and waited ... and waited. As my lungs reached the bursting point, I realized that I wasn't going to be rescued. Finally, I couldn't hold my breath any longer. I gasped and felt the water rushing into my throat. Suddenly, nothing mattered anymore. I wasn't in any pain and I was no longer scared. I just relaxed and let go of the board. My last thought was of a cartoon I'd seen earlier that day. Then everything just went black.

I don't know how long I was unconscious. When I woke up I was lying on the concrete next to the pool, spitting up water like a geyser. I could see the instructor kneeling over me with a worried look on his face.

Needless to say, my swimming lessons were over for the day. Fortunately, I survived—which means I have a few lessons I'd like to pass along.

First, if you have a child in the pool that can't swim, you can't afford to be distracted for even a moment. In the time it takes to answer



the phone or go to the refrigerator for a soda, a child can get into serious trouble.

Second, belly boards, inflatable toys, and plastic tubes are no substitute for being able to swim. Just because they float doesn't mean they'll keep your child safe.

Having experienced what it is like to drown, I can tell you that it is a helpless and terrifying feeling. It's something you never want to happen to someone you love. To help protect you, your family, and your friends, here are some useful suggestions:

- Keep a cordless telephone at poolside so it will be there if you have an emergency. Also, you won't have to leave the pool to answer a call.
- Keep the deck clean and free of debris.
- Don't allow electrical appliances that aren't protected by a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) anywhere in the pool area.
- The water's depth should be marked clearly on the pool deck and, if possible, on the side of the pool above water level.
- Install a fence around the pool that meets local code and will keep small children from squeezing through and getting into the pool area.
- To help prevent cuts, avoid using plates or cups made from breakable materials such as glass, ceramic or plastic.
- Cut out the horseplay. Pools are for swimming, not wrestling and tumbling.
- Use a float line to indicate the break between the shallow and deep areas of the pool.
- Don't swim if you're tired, on medication, or intoxicated.
- Before getting into the water, completely remove all pool covers so that swimmers can't accidentally get trapped beneath them.
- Dive only from the diving board, not the side of the pool. Diving from the side increases the risk of hitting the bottom of the pool or the opposite wall.
- Never swim alone or allow others to.
- Learn CPR! 🚑

**This article was adapted from one the author originally wrote for the spring 2000 issue of *Road & Rec* magazine. Contact the author at (334) 255-2688, DSN 558-2688, or e-mail [robert.vanelsberg@safetycenter.army.mil](mailto:robert.vanelsberg@safetycenter.army.mil).**

# Child Safe

## Goes With

**JANET DOROTHY** and **JULIE SHELLEY**  
CP-12 Intern and Editor

It was a dreary, rainy day in March 1978, and I had spent most of the day at a laundromat 9 miles from home. My 2-year-old daughter was not on her best behavior. She did not understand that we were about to leave our home to live in a foreign country.

We had been at the laundromat that day to help prepare for our permanent change of station move to Belgium. When we returned home nearly 4 hours later, I discovered I'd left several

loads of laundry at the laundromat. I put my daughter back into the car and we got on the highway again. The rain was coming down hard, but I was in a hurry

and ignored safety.

As we were driving, a flash flood suddenly rushed down the side of a hill, bringing with it a branch that caught my car just behind my left front tire. I lost control and realized I was going to crash. Instinctively, I grabbed my daughter, who was not in a child safety seat, and pulled her from the backseat onto the front seat. Then I covered her body with mine in the hopes that she would survive.

The car crashed into a grove of sugar maple saplings. We flipped and bounced for what seemed like a half an hour. The car finally came to a stop on the side of road, sitting on four flat tires. Thankfully, we survived with only some bumps and bruises.

In 1978, the law didn't require the use of child safety seats and I didn't use one. As a result, I endangered my child's life, something of which I am ashamed to this day. I now have two granddaughters and make every effort



# ety You

to ensure they are strapped into their safety seats properly. People with small children must take the time to ensure their children are buckled up safely and correctly. I know—from experience.

Note: Ms. Dorothy, a CP-12 intern currently assigned to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) in Fort Polk, LA, learned her lesson in child safety seat awareness the hard way. Fortunately, both she and her daughter lived to tell this story, but many children do not. An estimated 1,471 kids died in vehicle accidents in 2000. Of those fatalities, 52 percent were unrestrained, 18 percent were incorrectly restrained, and 35 percent were in the front seat of the vehicle

when it crashed. A child safety seat works only if it is used properly and installed correctly. The following information is derived from the “One Minute Safety Seat Checklist” found on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) Web site ([www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)). The site also provides other excellent information on child safety seats, including a recently released safety standards grading card for infant, convertible and booster seats, as well as safety seat recall information. 🚗

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## Child Safety Facts on the Go

### Always check to be sure:

- All children age 12 and under are properly restrained in the backseat.
- A child is not placed in a rear-facing child safety seat in the front seat where a dash-mounted passenger air bag is present.
- You’ve read the child safety seat use and installation instruction manual.
- You’ve read the section in your vehicle owner’s manual on seatbelts and child safety seat installation.

### Are you using the proper child safety seat?

- Infants from birth to age 1 who weigh at least 20 pounds should ride in the backseat in a rear-facing safety seat.
  - Harness straps should be at or below the infant’s shoulders.
  - Harness straps should fit snugly and lie in a relatively straight line.

– The harness chest clip should be placed at the infant’s armpit level to keep the harness straps positioned properly on the child’s shoulders.

- Infants less than 1 year old who weigh 20 pounds or more should ride in a rear-facing convertible child safety seat rated for heavier infants (some convertible seats are rated up to 30 to 35 pounds when used rear-facing).

- Children older than 1 year who weigh at least 20 pounds may ride on the backseat in a forward-facing child safety seat. Children should ride in a safety seat with a full harness until they weigh about 40 pounds.

- Harness straps should be at or above the child’s shoulders.
- In most cases the harness straps should be threaded through the top slots.
- The harness straps should fit snugly and lie in a relatively straight line.

– The harness chest clip should be at the child’s armpit level to help keep the harness straps positioned properly on the child’s shoulders.

- Children less than 4’9” tall who have outgrown child safety seats should be restrained properly in booster seats until they are at least 8 years old.

– When using belt-position booster seats, make sure the shoulder and lap belts go across the child. The shoulder belt should be snug against the child’s chest, resting across the collarbone. The lap belt should lay low across the child’s upper thigh area.

– Booster seats should be used as “interim” safety devices for children weighing over 40 pounds that have outgrown a forward-facing child safety seat.

– Booster seats should be used until children can sit with their backs against the vehicle’s backseat back cushion, their knees bent over the seat cushion edge and their feet on the floor. This normally requires the child to be approximately 4’9” tall.

– State child safety seat laws may vary. Be sure you understand and follow your state’s requirements.

“**C**all 911! Get an ambulance over here now!” I yelled as I saw my buddy sitting in his chair unconscious and vomiting all over himself. What a way to end 18 holes of golf.

Although it had been a beautiful Saturday morning when we'd teed up, thunderstorms were predicted for the afternoon and it was going to be 90° F and humid.

We took practice swings while waiting for our fourth player, Jim, to show up. Ten minutes before our 0740 tee time, he arrived. “Hey Jim,” I said, “I hope you brought plenty of water with you today. It's going to be a scorcher.”

“No, I didn't,” he replied, as he began hitting a few practice balls.

I ran back to the clubhouse to get a score card and buy Jim a 16-ounce bottle of water. That way he would have something to drink and a container to fill with more water as we walked the course and carried our heavy bags.

Throughout the 18 holes, we kept warning Jim that he needed to drink lots of water. During all of the times I had golfed with Jim, he never seemed to drink enough. He always took small sips, and on this day I never once saw him fill his container. Near the end of the round—with the temperature and humidity really high—I asked him if he wanted a cold drink from one of the machines. He said “No,” that he had his water.

We finished the round at noon and, as always, went straight to the 19<sup>th</sup> Hole for refreshments. We were

arrived, they checked Jim's vital signs and asked us what had happened. They then asked Jim what he'd had to eat and drink that day. That's when we found out that he hadn't had any breakfast—only a cup of coffee. He also hadn't finished the water in the bottle I'd given him when we started the round.

Jim didn't have a clue what had happened to him. He was still pale and weak, so the paramedics put him on oxygen. That seemed to do the trick. Within minutes, Jim was acting like his old self again. I drove him home, and called later to make sure he was OK.

Jim was like a lot of us. We think that if we are in good shape, we should be able to do almost anything. After all, what is so tough about walking around a golf course for 18 holes with a golf bag on your back—regardless of the heat?

Jim was fortunate to have gotten through those 18 holes and made it to the 19<sup>th</sup> Hole before he passed out. What would have happened if he had collapsed on the golf course—away from cold compresses, water, or a phone to call for help? If we hadn't been able to get his core temperature down rapidly, he might have suffered brain damage or even died.

Drinking plenty of water during hot weather is a must whether you are exercising, working in your yard or doing military training. Just because you are young and in good shape doesn't mean you can ignore the need to keep properly hydrated. And don't wait until you are thirsty because, by then, it may be too late. They don't call water the “elixir of life” for nothing. 🍷

# Flameout at the 19th Hole

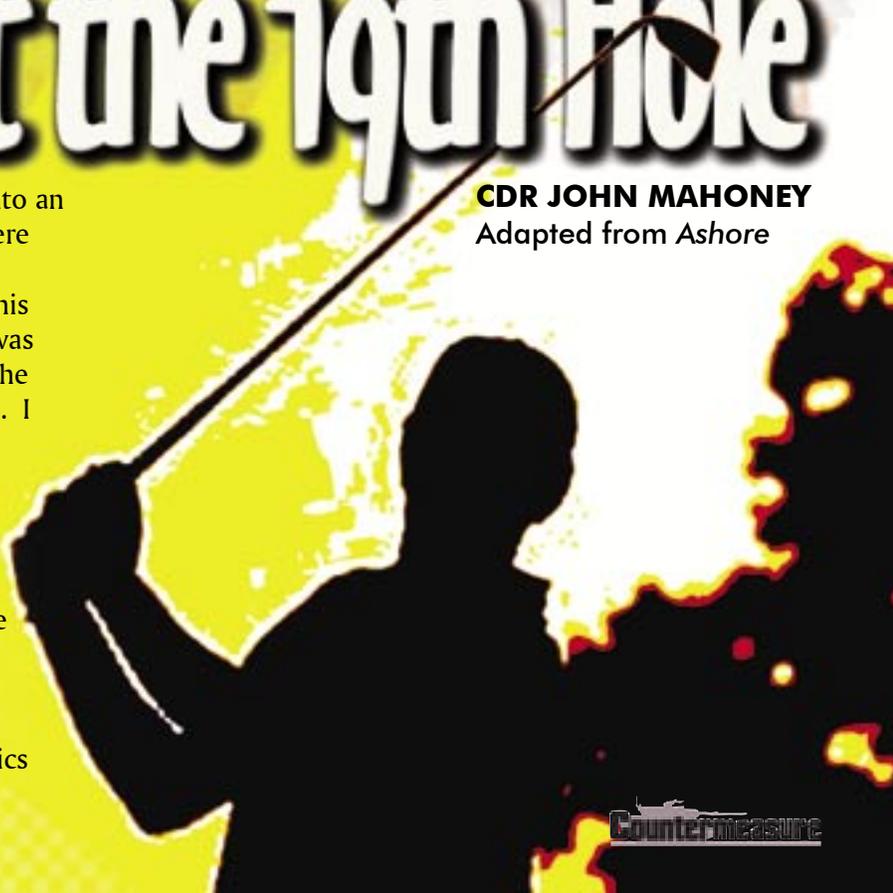
**CDR JOHN MAHONEY**  
Adapted from *Ashore*

all hot. It was a relief to get out of the sun and into an air-conditioned room. A few minutes later, we were seated around a table enjoying a cold one.

By that time, Jim wasn't looking or acting like his usual self. I asked him if he was OK. He said he was just hot and tired. I told him that he looked as if he needed some water, and I went to get him a glass. I also got a cold, wet rag to put on his neck.

When I returned to the table, Jim was unconscious and vomiting. According to one of the other golfers, while I was gone Jim's eyes rolled to the back of his head and he passed out. While we tried to revive him, I yelled for someone to call 911. After a few moments, Jim came to.

As we waited for the paramedics to arrive, we put cold compresses on the back of Jim's neck and gave him water to drink. When the paramedics





## The Accident Sequence

The soldier was being given driver's orientation training on the newly installed anti-lock braking system (ABS) in an M925A1 5-ton truck. He was accompanied by a civilian contractor driving instructor as he drove down a straight section of roadway at an estimated 55 mph (5 mph over the speed limit). As he drove down the road, the soldier pushed hard on the brakes to slow the truck. However, the ABS was not operating and the truck reverted to normal braking, which caused the vehicle to go into a skid. As the truck skidded it rotated counterclockwise, went off the side of the road, and slid sideways down a shallow embankment. As the truck slid, the tires dug into the gravel and hard-packed dirt, causing the truck to roll 1¼ times until it came to rest on the passenger's side. Although the driver and instructor were

# Sliding Into Disaster!

**MAJ DONALD GRAHAM**  
Chief, Combat Service  
Support Branch  
U.S. Army Safety Center

wearing their seatbelts, both were fatally injured.

There were several factors that contributed to this accident. Those factors included the driver being unlicensed (therefore, inexperienced with the equipment), excessive speed, unit leadership, and failure to properly use personal protective equipment (PPE). In addition, the investigators noted that the ABS BYPASS (failure) light was in a location where it was hard to see on the vehicle's dash. We will now look more closely at each of these issues:

### Why the Accident Happened

- The driver had not been trained or licensed by his unit to drive the M925A1 truck. As a result, he didn't know how to handle the emergency situation created when the ABS failed and the vehicle reverted to the old braking system.
- The unit made an improper choice by sending a soldier who was not licensed to drive the M925A1 to attend this training.
- The driver did not follow posted speed limits. While the section of roadway where the accident occurred was posted for 50 mph, prior to that point the speed limit was 30 mph. Because the vehicle skid marks began only 1½ feet into the 50-mph zone, the driver had accelerated to approximately 55 mph while still driving in the 30-mph zone.
- Neither the soldier nor the instructor properly used the PPE available. Although the driver's two-point retractable seatbelt worked as designed, he

was not wearing his Kevlar helmet, a requirement his unit had for soldiers driving tactical vehicles. The civilian passenger did not properly adjust his two-point seatbelt, leaving it loose around his waist. As a result, the seatbelt didn't properly restrain him during the accident.

- Because the ABS BYPASS light is difficult to see, neither the driver nor the instructor may have noticed that it was illuminated.

### Recommendations

- Unit driver's training programs must ensure soldiers are trained and licensed before sending them to receive advanced training on a vehicle. Unit leaders must thoroughly know their soldiers' capabilities to avoid sending them to training for which they are not qualified.
- Speed limits are designed with safety in mind. Soldiers must follow the posted speed limits to protect themselves, their passengers, and other vehicles on the road.
- PPE, when properly used, is designed to protect wearers from injury. Not wearing PPE, or using it improperly, limits or negates its ability to protect wearers. That can often mean the difference between life and death. 

For more information contact Ground Systems and Accident Investigation Division, DSN 558-9525, (334) 255-9525.

# CATOPDCA

## Safely Riding the 'Gator'

**SFC RAYMOND HAMILTON**  
U.S. Army Safety Center

**S**oldiers deployed in Southwest Asia probably have grown accustomed to seeing something a little unusual in the desert, something that might even remind them a little of home: an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) made by John Deere called the M-Gator.

The six-wheeled M-Gator is the military version of the commercial Gator family of utility vehicles, generally used for landscaping and other heavy projects. However, unlike the commercial Gators, the M-Gator was designed exclusively for and is available only to military organizations, with the Army being a primary customer. M-Gators can be found scattered throughout Army units and have been used extensively in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom for several basic missions, including transporting supplies. The M-Gator has supported airborne operations and drop zone recovery with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C., and served on the front lines supporting the XVIII Airborne Corps' artillery. And, apparently, this piece of equipment is here to stay: the House Armed Services Committee recently appropriated \$2.5 million to buy more M-Gators for the military.

Besides its rugged durability, the M-Gator has many useful functions. Just ask any soldier who has had to move bulky equipment over a long distance without a HMMWV or the sergeant tasked with the command sergeant major's or first sergeant's police detail. The M-Gator is certified for airdrop and is transportable in most fixed- and rotary-wing utility aircraft. It also can be carried as an external sling load on some helicopters. The M-Gator's 3-cylinder, liquid-cooled 18-horsepower diesel engine can use either diesel or JP-8 fuel and has a continuously variable transmission that eliminates shifting. The M-Gator seats two, has a payload capacity of 1,400 pounds—including

a 200-pound driver and a 200-pound passenger—and comes equipped with a multi-position, heavy-duty cargo box with fold-down sides and tailgate and a power lift. The vehicle can reach speeds up to 18 mph and its low-pressure tires help soldiers get where they need to go.

With all of its good points, the M-Gator can still be dangerous if not used correctly. M-Gators have been purchased through the General Services Administration (GSA) catalog and the Army has yet to publish guidance on restrictions regarding occupants, speed, load, and towing limits. The U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) recently released Safety of Use Message (SOUM) 03-006. This SOUM warns of the danger of serious injury or severe vehicle damage if drivers ignore the warnings in the commercial off-the-shelf John Deere technical manual(s). In accordance with the SOUM, M-Gator users should adhere to the following limitations:

- The M-Gator shouldn't be used to evacuate litters or carry casualties. In the event of a rollover, soldiers in litters are likely to be crushed.
- At no time should more than two riders (the driver and one passenger) be on the M-Gator. The cargo load limit of 1,000 pounds must be followed, and the driver and passenger must wear helmets and eye protection while the vehicle is in motion.
- All loads over 50 pounds must be strapped





securely to the rear cargo tie-downs or to the cargo shelf in the front of the vehicle.

- The M-Gator is not towable—doing so will damage the chain drive, transaxle, and tires. In addition, the M-Gator has not been evaluated for its towing ability, so operators should not attempt to tow trailers behind the M-Gator.

- To ensure the vehicle is safe to operate after an airdrop, drivers should inspect the M-Gator for damaged or loose components and for fluid leaks prior to operating.

- Ammunition must be placed on a pallet and strapped securely in the rear cargo area.

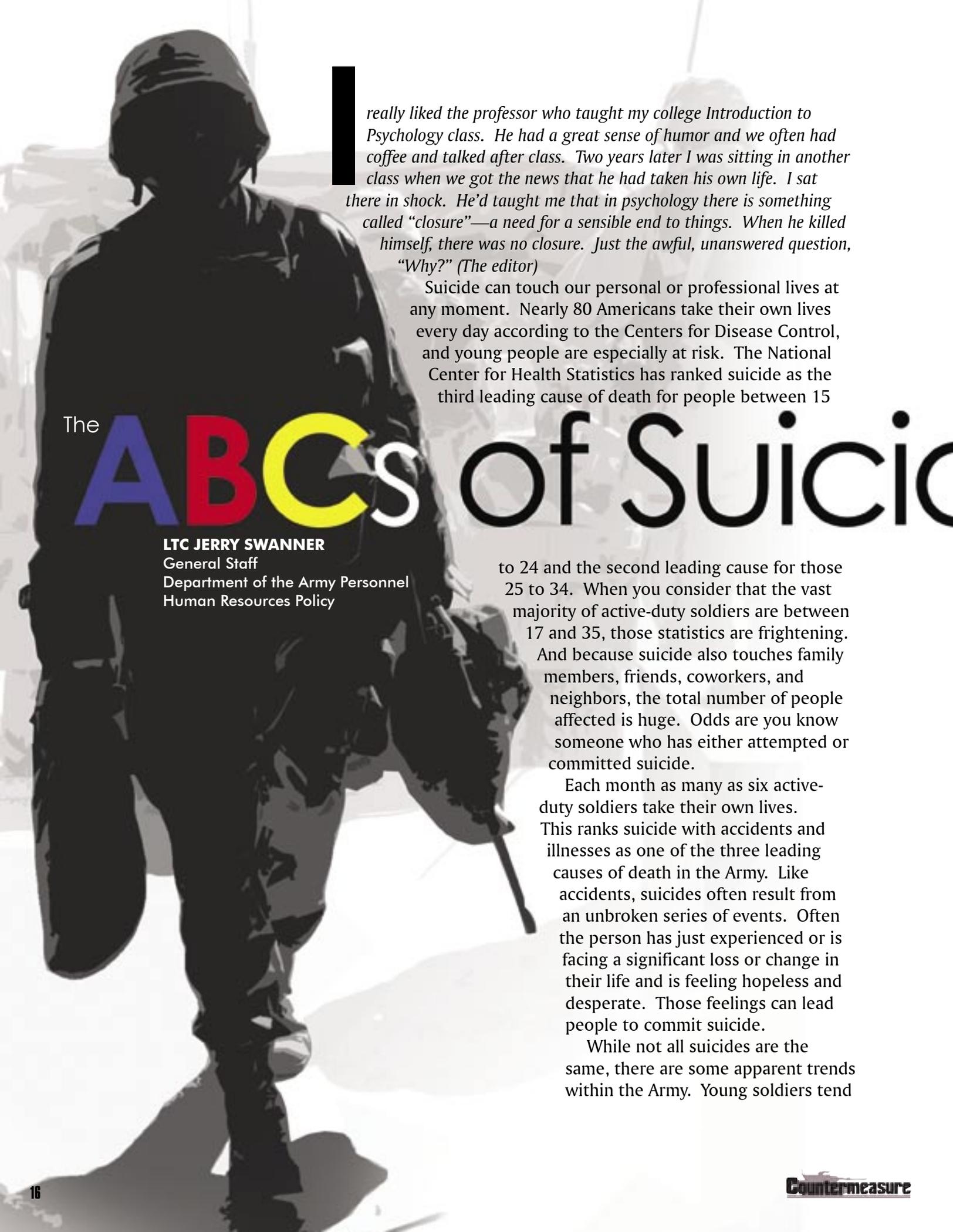
- The M-Gator meets neither DoD nor Army Regulation 385-55 safety standards for use on public roads. M-Gators should not be operated on public roadways—except when crossing over them—and then only at designated crossing

points or with road guards.

Some Army organizations have conducted their own risk assessments and set risk reduction measures in place for the M-Gator. An example of this is the XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg Memo 25-50, Master Policy No. 73, *Fort Bragg Safety Policy on Utilization of the Utility Vehicle M-Gator*. This policy states that passengers may not ride in or on the vehicle's cargo areas, and that drivers must be licensed and have their qualifications to drive the M-Gator annotated on an OF 348. There are many other good directives listed in Policy No. 73.

The next time your first sergeant asks you if you have seen the unit's M-Gator, you will now know which piece of equipment he or she is talking about. 🐊

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**L**really liked the professor who taught my college Introduction to Psychology class. He had a great sense of humor and we often had coffee and talked after class. Two years later I was sitting in another class when we got the news that he had taken his own life. I sat there in shock. He'd taught me that in psychology there is something called "closure"—a need for a sensible end to things. When he killed himself, there was no closure. Just the awful, unanswered question, "Why?" (The editor)

Suicide can touch our personal or professional lives at any moment. Nearly 80 Americans take their own lives every day according to the Centers for Disease Control, and young people are especially at risk. The National Center for Health Statistics has ranked suicide as the third leading cause of death for people between 15

The

# ABCs

**LTC JERRY SWANNER**

General Staff

Department of the Army Personnel  
Human Resources Policy

# of Suicide

to 24 and the second leading cause for those 25 to 34. When you consider that the vast majority of active-duty soldiers are between 17 and 35, those statistics are frightening. And because suicide also touches family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors, the total number of people affected is huge. Odds are you know someone who has either attempted or committed suicide.

Each month as many as six active-duty soldiers take their own lives. This ranks suicide with accidents and illnesses as one of the three leading causes of death in the Army. Like accidents, suicides often result from an unbroken series of events. Often the person has just experienced or is facing a significant loss or change in their life and is feeling hopeless and desperate. Those feelings can lead people to commit suicide.

While not all suicides are the same, there are some apparent trends within the Army. Young soldiers tend

to act very impulsively, often committing suicide within minutes of facing a crisis. Soldiers with impulsive personalities and easy access to lethal means (such as a firearm) are at much greater risk. Older soldiers tend to plan their deaths; making arrangements and placing their personal affairs in order.

Complicating the matter, soldiers who commit suicide rarely seek help through their chain of command, chaplain, or available helping agencies. In fact, only 20 percent previously sought help at an Army Behavioral Health facility. Adding to the challenge, few soldiers display the classic suicide warning

signs while they're with their fellow soldiers. Instead, they typically act when they are alone and choose a very lethal means, effectively preventing any chance of rescue, according to Dr. David Orman, psychiatry consultant to the Army Surgeon General.

Many units and installations have taken action to successfully lower the suicide risk for their soldiers. The common denominator in these programs has been the personal involvement of leaders, from the installation commander and command sergeants major down to squad and team leaders. Effective installation suicide prevention committees and task forces emphasize leadership and training and follow the ABCs of successful intervention. Those ABCs are:

- **Awareness**
- **Becoming Involved**
- **Compassion**

### **Awareness**

Suicide prevention begins with peers, "battle buddies," first-line supervisors, and leaders knowing what's happening in the lives of their soldiers, family members, and civilian employees. In most cases, suicides are triggered by the loss of an intimate relationship such as a divorce, separation, break-up of a romantic relationship, the death of a loved one, or a child custody battle. In addition, financial difficulties, facing charges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or a pending separation from the service can trigger a suicide. In some cases, the loss may

be internal, making the cause of the suicide less apparent. Such things include the loss of one's self-esteem (humiliation), or the loss of social acceptance (being ostracized). Also, an unwanted permanent change of station or deployment can trigger a suicide.

### **Becoming Involved**

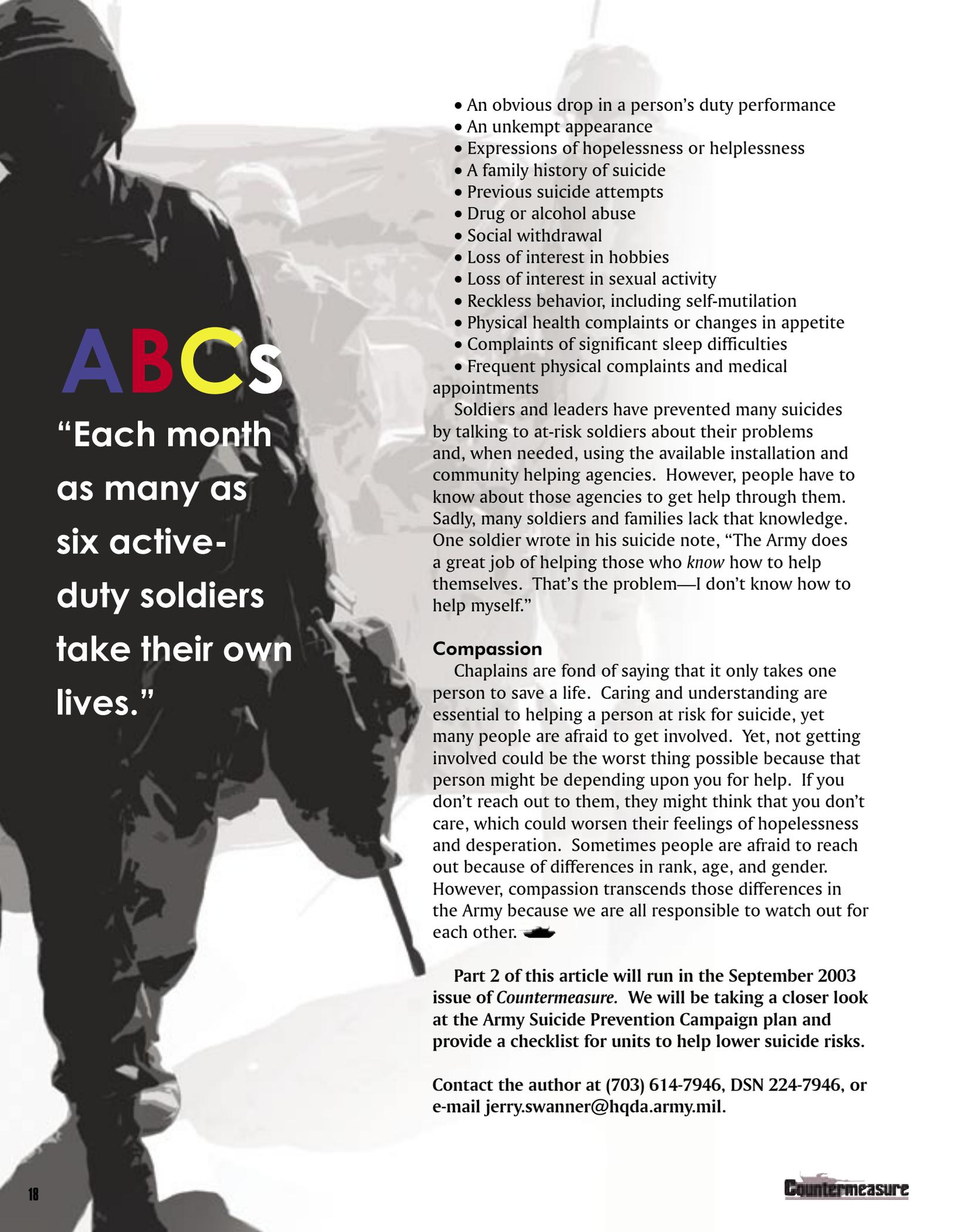
If you know someone is facing a particular crisis, you need to act before the problem becomes so bad the person considers suicide. It's important for you to recognize the danger signs and reach out to that person, because they might be close to acting. Be concerned when you see a person who:

- Talks or hints about suicide
- Makes a plan and acquires the means to commit suicide
- Has a desire to die
- Is obsessed with death, including sad music, poetry or art
- Writes about death in letters or notes
- Finalizes their personal affairs
- Gives away their personal possessions

**Other warning signs include:**

# de Prevention

part 1



# ABCs

“Each month as many as six active-duty soldiers take their own lives.”

- An obvious drop in a person’s duty performance
- An unkempt appearance
- Expressions of hopelessness or helplessness
- A family history of suicide
- Previous suicide attempts
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Loss of interest in sexual activity
- Reckless behavior, including self-mutilation
- Physical health complaints or changes in appetite
- Complaints of significant sleep difficulties
- Frequent physical complaints and medical appointments

Soldiers and leaders have prevented many suicides by talking to at-risk soldiers about their problems and, when needed, using the available installation and community helping agencies. However, people have to know about those agencies to get help through them. Sadly, many soldiers and families lack that knowledge. One soldier wrote in his suicide note, “The Army does a great job of helping those who *know* how to help themselves. That’s the problem—I don’t know how to help myself.”

## Compassion

Chaplains are fond of saying that it only takes one person to save a life. Caring and understanding are essential to helping a person at risk for suicide, yet many people are afraid to get involved. Yet, not getting involved could be the worst thing possible because that person might be depending upon you for help. If you don’t reach out to them, they might think that you don’t care, which could worsen their feelings of hopelessness and desperation. Sometimes people are afraid to reach out because of differences in rank, age, and gender. However, compassion transcends those differences in the Army because we are all responsible to watch out for each other. 🐾

Part 2 of this article will run in the September 2003 issue of *Countermeasure*. We will be taking a closer look at the Army Suicide Prevention Campaign plan and provide a checklist for units to help lower suicide risks.

Contact the author at (703) 614-7946, DSN 224-7946, or e-mail [jerry.swanner@hqda.army.mil](mailto:jerry.swanner@hqda.army.mil).



**Class A**

- A soldier was killed when the HMMWV he was operating as part of an escort mission struck a curb and overturned.

- Three soldiers were killed when the LMTV they were riding in as part of a convoy overturned. The driver of the LMTV reportedly lost control of the vehicle, resulting in fatal injuries to himself and two passengers.

- A soldier and a civilian contractor suffered fatal injuries when their 5-ton truck rolled over. The civilian contractor was conducting driver's training for the soldier on the vehicle's recently installed anti-lock brake system MWO. The soldier was operating the truck at the time of the accident.



**Class A**

- A soldier was operating an M113 when she was steering and apparently lost control of the vehicle, causing it to roll over. The soldier's upper body was pinned underneath the vehicle and she suffered fatal injuries.



**Class A**

- Two soldiers were killed while mountain climbing. The ice bridge they were crossing collapsed, causing them to fall 250 to 300 meters and resulting in fatal injuries to both.

- A soldier drowned after he jumped into a 7-foot-deep aqueduct. The soldier was pronounced dead by medical

personnel en route to the hospital.

- A soldier was killed when his main chute became entangled with another soldier's chute during a parachute landing fall (PLF). The deceased soldier's main chute reportedly collapsed and his reserve chute did not deploy, causing fatal injuries upon landing.

- A soldier was pronounced dead at a local hospital after he was found unresponsive in a swimming pool.

- A soldier and his son were found dead 2 days after they disappeared while kayaking on a private body of water.

**Class B**

- Two soldiers who had stopped to render assistance at an automobile accident were struck by an oncoming vehicle. One soldier received injuries to his leg, back, and skull and suffered internal bleeding. The other soldier suffered chest injuries and fractured ribs. The accident occurred during a sandstorm.

- A soldier suffered a permanent partial disability when his left-hand fingers made contact with the shears of a cardboard bailer he was operating, resulting in amputation.

- A soldier suffered a permanent partial disability when he fell off the back of an LMTV, hitting his head on the pavement. The soldier had been conducting routine maintenance on the LMTV at the time of the accident.



**Class A**

- A soldier was killed when he

lost control of his POV, ran off the roadway and struck a telephone pole.

- A soldier was killed when the POV he was driving ran off the roadway and overturned.

- A soldier was killed when her POV was struck by another vehicle. The soldier, her daughter and sister were traveling west when an eastbound vehicle jumped the median and struck them. The soldier's sister also was killed in the accident.

- A soldier suffered fatal injuries after his POV was involved in a head-on collision with another vehicle. The civilian driver of the other vehicle was not injured.

- A soldier was killed when he lost control of his POV and his vehicle ran off the roadway and struck several trees. The soldier was not wearing his seatbelt and was ejected from the vehicle.

- A soldier was found dead on an interstate access road after he apparently was struck by a POV.

- A soldier suffered fatal injuries when his POV was involved in a multiple-car pileup.

**Class C**

- A soldier suffered fractures to his neck after he was hit by a truck at an intersection. The soldier was riding a bicycle and crossing the intersection at night when the truck hit him. The soldier had purchased the bicycle from a retailer and did not realize the manufacturer had not installed reflectors on it. In addition to the missing reflectors, the soldier also was not wearing a helmet and reflective vest.

# Chock → → → → Shock! ← ← ← ←



**What's wrong with this picture?**

NOPE, WE DIDN'T GET THIS FROM THE 'FAR SIDE', IT REALLY HAPPENED! HINT-IF YOU WERE PARKING UPHILL, WHERE WOULD YOU PUT THE WHEEL CHOCK?

