



20-072



Off-Duty Water-Related Mishap Claims One Soldier's Life

A Specialist assigned to Joint Base Lewis- McChord, Washington, died in an off-duty water-related mishap 15 August 2020 at a lake in the Rainier National Park in Ashford, Washington, at 1900 local. The Soldier was swimming with a group of fellow Soldiers and friends. They tried swimming across the lake and upon the return swim, the Soldier started having trouble swimming. A friend tried swimming out to the Soldier but was unable to reach him before struggling himself. The Soldier was unable to reach the shoreline, went under the water, and did not resurface. Another Soldier notified local authorities. The National Park Rangers responded, established an incident command, and notified the county dive team. Dive teams did not initiate the search until the next morning due to the difficult terrain on the approach to the lake. The National Park Service confirmed recovery of the Soldier's body a couple of days later. The Soldier's body was positively identified by fellow Soldiers from the unit. It was reported that alcohol was not involved. The mishap is under investigation.

Since FY16, the Army has lost an average of eight Soldiers a year to off-duty water-related mishaps. This tragedy was the ninth fatal off-duty water-related mishap of FY20 and below the number of off-duty water-related fatalities from this time last year. Swimming in open water (lakes, rivers, ponds, and the ocean) is more difficult than in a pool. People tire faster and get into trouble more quickly. A person can go under water in a murky lake, making them very hard to find, or be swept away in currents.

PLRs are intended to be used as an engagement tool for leaders to discuss the hazards and trends impacting Soldier safety and readiness. The PLR contains only basic information but provides sufficient background to allow leaders an opportunity to communicate risk at the Soldier level. More detailed information on this and other Army mishaps can be found on the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center website at <https://safety.army.mil/lessonslearned>.

To access current U.S. Army accident statistics and reports, visit <https://safety.army.mil/STATISTICS>.

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Additional U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center PLR resources can be found on the USACRC website at <https://safety.army.mil/PLR>.

