

Pre Block Leave Safety Brief

The purpose of this briefing is to remind you of important personal risks that can be associated with European leave. It is a review for experienced individuals, and a lesson to be learned for those new to the region.

Risk Management -- Sound risk management is as important off duty as it is on – identify hazards, assess risks, identify controls and make risk decisions, implement, and *continuously reevaluate*.

Driving -- European driving has different rules and different signs than the US. Remember back to the Driving in Europe video you viewed earlier.

- ✓ The European community has its own set of signs. Many are critical to your safety and do not exist in the US. If you need a review, see Army in Europe PAM 190-35, which is available at <https://www.aeaim.hqusareur.army.mil/library/pam/pdf/aep190-34.pdf>.
- ✓ You must understand the "right of way" rules.
 - Simply put, if there are no traffic controls at the intersection, then the person on the street to your right has the right of way. For example, you are driving straight ahead on a city street. There is a car entering from a side street on the right. Even though he is on a smaller street, he will not stop even though you are approaching. He has the right of way.
 - Buses and streetcars pulling away from a stop also have right of way.
- ✓ Priority roads are the exception. If the road is posted as a priority road, then all other traffic must yield to traffic on that road. But watch out. Priority roads frequently change directions in an intersection. If you lapse in situational awareness, you may find yourself in a serious confrontation!
- ✓ Speed limits also change depending on the type of road and whether or not you are inside a built up area. An actual speed limit sign will only be posted if it is different from the assumed speed.

- **Germany.** There is no speed limit on the federal Autobahns, except where posted (a recommended speed limit of 130 kph/80 MPH). Off the Autobahn and outside built up areas, the assumed speed limit is 100kph/63 MPH. Inside built up areas (designated by a yellow sign with the town name), the assumed speed limit is 50 kph/30 MPH. Fines for exceeding the speed limit, especially in construction zones, are very high. Cameras are in wide use and the police collect fines on the spot.

- **Italy.** The traffic system in congested parts of Italy may easily overwhelm a newcomer. Italian drivers take full advantage of the rules of the road and tend to plug every possible space at whatever speed traffic will allow. You must be able to maintain situational awareness in every axis, think quickly and clearly, and know the rules of the road. If you interfere with your awareness by being over tired, hung over, or under the influence, your risk goes way up. Italian assumed speed limits are 130 kph on the autostrada, 90 kph/56 MPH off the autostrada and outside built up areas, and 50 kph inside built up areas. Enforcement is similar to Germany.

- **Other European countries** have speed limits similar to Italy. Details will be posted at the border.

- ✓ Secondary roads. In many places, secondary roads are winding and hilly, with a substantial amount of truck and farm traffic. That combination frequently results in traffic moving slower than you would like. The best advice is to be patient, relax and enjoy the beautiful scenery. Head-on collisions and accidents while avoiding head-on collisions are all too frequent. Traffic coming at you may be traveling at 100 kph, which is US interstate speed. It will require a very long distance for you to accelerate and complete a pass. Add a lack of shoulders in many places, and you have a very dangerous situation. You must be able to see the whole clear zone or you are literally betting your life that nobody is coming.

- ✓ Given the high speeds on the federal highways, slower traffic, sharp exits, and traffic jams present very serious risks, especially in Germany. After traveling for a while, you loose your sense of how fast you are going. Stay focused or you will find yourself closing

quickly on a situation without much time or space to react. Drive defensively. If you find yourself in a line of traffic constantly braking and accelerating, then move over to a slower lane and blend in until things clear up. Above all, maintain control of the situation.

- ✓ Seat belts are mandatory. Local police enforce the rule, especially for children. US Forces have instituted the Click It or Ticket program, which results in the driver's loss of license for any unrestrained individual in the vehicle. Experience shows that severe injury and loss of life can be significantly reduced when seatbelts are properly worn.
- ✓ Drinking and driving. Although one might think of Europe as the land of free-flowing beer, schnapps and wine, there are severe penalties for driving under the influence. The threshold is also very low – 0.5 mg pro mille (0.05%). If you refuse a test, it's an automatic suspension. A level of 0.8 mg pro mille is a criminal penalty. Don't drink and drive. US Forces are enforcing the Booze It and Lose It campaign. There's a lot more to lose than a license if you are caught driving under the influence. Use a designated driver, or take public transportation. For example, you can easily take the train to Munich or to beautiful towns throughout the vineyard regions. Many people speak English; so don't hesitate to try it. It's great for traveling as a group.
- ✓ So how strong is a European beer? It depends on where you buy it. A standard American bottled beer is about 5% alcohol by volume. It's the same with standard German bottled beers, which usually range from 4.8 to 5.5% by volume. But beware the Belgian beers, the specialty beers like Bock, and those fresh out of a brewery tap. They can range from 7.5 to 12.5%. That's more than twice the alcohol, and they routinely come in a larger size (half or full liter vs. a third). So if you're used to drinking 3 American beers with dinner, you could be consuming much more alcohol during the same period. Also, if you've abstained from alcohol for an extended period, expect a faster and greater affect than you remember. So take it slow and easy.
- ✓ Long distances. When you consider the size of the United States, Europe really isn't that big. Given all the historic and entertainment sites, it's tempting to try to do a lot in a short period of time. Once you have the idea, then plan the route and be conservative about driving time. Then sit back and assess the risks. Do I get enough

rest? Am I already beat before I start the trip? What's the weather along the route? How much do I need to travel in the dark? How good are my directions? Do I have a co-driver and what is his status? Is my car up to the trip? What do I do in an emergency? Can I do it another way, such as the train or a tour? Who knows where I'll be and when I'm expected back?

- ✓ Weather. Snow and ice are obvious winter driving hazards. Snow tires, chains (mandatory in some locations, especially in the mountains), proper acceleration, braking and cornering technique, increasing following distance, and slowing down are all good countermeasures. But there are two more weather features that must be considered.
 - Central Europe is perfect for fog. Thick, almost zero visibility fog can occur day or night. European cars are equipped with fog lights and a bright rear red fog light. If you rent, get checked out on operating all the lights before leaving the rental office. When fog becomes thick, or rain or snow become heavy, use the rear red fog light to avoid rear end collisions. You will see what looks like a single brake light long before you can see the actual vehicle.
 - The possibility for deep contrasting low and high-pressure areas can create hurricane force winds, sometimes without much warning. If you are driving, there is a strong possibility for trees and large branches falling into the road. If you are in the woods, there is the potential for injury and possibly death from falling debris.
 - Maintain situational awareness by following the weather for the area. AFN stations provide the weather from the Air Force (<http://ows.public.sembach.af.mil/>) and road conditions can be viewed through the USAREUR web site (<http://www.hqusareur.army.mil>). Well known international news websites also provide major city information.

Electric Trains and Streetcars -- Electric trains and streetcars are very common and present a unique risk set.

- ✓ They are quiet, giving little or no approach warning.

- ✓ The overhead power lines do not need to be touched to electrocute an individual.
- ✓ For some reason, alcohol causes individuals to do stupid things around trains. Two things regularly kill off-duty people – walking on the tracks and climbing on top of rail cars.
- ✓ Respect the power and speed of a train. Keep away from the right of way (fines are quite possible for walking on or across tracks) and away from the edge of the station platform. Fast moving non-stop trains can literally suck you into them if you stand inside the warning lines.

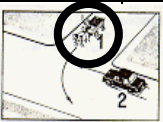














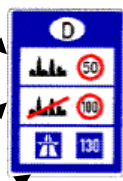

Sports -- Europe presents an incredible opportunity for new sports. Wind surfing, skydiving, ice climbing and skiing to name a few. Minimize risks by taking a lesson from a certified instructor, even if you have experience. The review and new tips are worth the time. Wear the right equipment and check it carefully against industry standard. Know the weather and practice cold weather injury prevention. Obey the signs and don't take shortcuts. For example, it will cost you a bundle of money for helicopter retrieval from a closed mountain section.

Other extra curricular activities – Like a posted speed limit, just because it's "legal" doesn't mean it meets sound personal risk management, or the Army's idea of an authorized activity. Drugs and prostitution are two good examples. Use common sense and protect yourself.

Force Protection – Europeans are wonderful people, but not everybody loves us. Maintain situational awareness. Assess the environment and the people around you. Keep your identification and your valuables protected and hidden. Use a hotel safe where you can. Lock and bolt your room door and be careful of whom you let in. Pickpockets are prospering in major cities. When you go out at night, have a plan, have a buddy, and know the areas to avoid. Know how to contact the local American Consulate for help.

WRAP-UP – This concludes the briefing. Summarizing in a few words, while you're on leave, use risk management just like you should on the job. Are there any questions?

Table 1. Selected European Traffic Signs for Briefer Reference.

Right of Way Signs				
	In absence of any other sign, car 2 must yield to vehicle on the right, regardless of the relative size of the roads			
	"Priority Road" You have right of way		You have right of way at THIS INTERSECTION ONLY	
	"Priority Road" will change direction at this intersection (heavy line)		You must YIELD to all traffic at this intersection	
	"Priority Road" ENDS HERE. Return to vehicle on right has right of way		NO RIGHT ON RED except at this green arrow sign; but you must yield to all traffic	
Speed Limit Signs				
	Mandatory speed limit sign		"Implied" mandatory speed limit for built up area applies (50 kph in Germany and Italy)	
	"Implied" mandatory speed limit for outside built up area applies (100 kph in Germany, 90 kph in Italy)		Autobahn speed limit ends. Apply "implied" speed limit for outside built up area	
	Mandatory speed limit ends, return to "implied" speed limit	  		Sign at the border specifying "implied" speed limits
	Autobahn implied speed limit (unlimited in Germany but 130 kph suggested, 130 kph in Italy)			