



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS CENTER

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READY ...OR NOT?

Profile of an Army private motor vehicle fatality

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Editor's note: The following is a composite profile based on past private motor vehicle fatalities in the Army's accident database. Victim and leader names are fictional, and any similarities to individuals living or deceased are purely coincidental.

Spc. Rodney Wilson loaded his 2001 Ford Taurus, ready for a long trek up the East Coast to his home in New York.

This was Wilson's first trip home since reporting to his initial duty assignment, and he was anxious to get on the road. He enlisted in the Army only months after high school graduation, but his recent promotion and selection as the unit's Soldier of the Quarter indicated the 21-year-old had a promising career ahead. The Army had been good to him, and he was eager to share the news of his good fortune with his Family.

Following his company's leave and travel policy, Wilson met with his platoon sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Hendrix, who counseled him on his travel plans and inspected his vehicle for any possible safety issues. Hendrix took his job as a leader seriously and walked Wilson through the Travel Risk Planning System worksheet that would be attached to his leave form.

The TRiPS worksheet helped Wilson develop a travel plan that would get him to and from his destination safely. His plan included rest breaks and overnight stops, and if weather became a real concern, he would get off the road and wait it out. Considering the lateness of the day and distance he would have to travel, Wilson determined he should rest and start his trip the following morning.

Hendrix signed off on Wilson's travel plan and made sure he carried with him the unit's list of contact numbers in case of emergency.

Wilson woke early the next morning, ready to hit the road. The weather forecast called for light drizzle and fog, but nothing he felt he could not handle. And just in case he started to doze off, Wilson stocked a six-pack of energy drinks on the passenger floorboard.

Despite a full night's sleep and only eight hours into the trip, Wilson found it hard to keep his eyes open and began drifting side to side. The monotony of driving through rural America was too much — he was getting tired and downed a third and then fourth energy drink. In his haste to get home, he forgot all about his travel plan.

At 1:30 a.m., Wilson's vehicle crossed the median and slammed into an oncoming pickup truck. He wasn't alert enough to react. It was too late.

“Soldiers like Wilson often overlook or discount their limitations,” said Robert Myrick, off-duty motor vehicle safety specialist, Driving Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center. “This scenario is all too common.

“Army accident profiles for private motor vehicles illustrate these findings,” he added. “The majority of these fatalities are junior enlisted Soldiers who are 21 years old, run off the roadway either because of fatigue or driving under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, and aren’t wearing their seat belts. This doesn’t include accidents as a result of mechanical failure, which also could be a contributing factor.”

Myrick recommended Soldiers, leaders and Family members use safety resources available to them through the USACRC website, <https://safety.army.mil>.

“There you’ll find travel tips, online training programs, assessment tools and safety presentations to better ensure not only their safety, but that of their Families as well,” he said. “After all, ensuring Soldier safety is what it’s all about.”