



Paraglide

‘Booze It And Lose It’ Campaign In Full Swing

by Janice Burton

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September 2002, the Soldiers of the 49th Military Police Detachment were out on a wolfpack patrol. The wolfpack - made up of all the Soldiers in the MP detachment - was seeking drunk drivers. While the pack was on the prowl, a drunk driver found one of their own.

“I’ve always had a pet peeve against drunk drivers,” said Spc. Eric Jaekel, traffic accident investigator, 49th MP Det., who was involved in the incident.

The Fort Bragg Military Police are sending this message loudly over the next two weeks as they participate in the annual Booze It and Lose It campaign.

The annual campaign is designed to bring heightened awareness and enforcement of the state’s drinking and driving law. On Fort Bragg, MPs will be setting up random checkpoints and will be going out on wolfpack patrols - saturating the most traveled roads on post.

For Jaekel his mission is even more personal.

“I was doing a routine traffic stop on Bragg Boulevard,” said Spc. Eric Jaekel, traffic accident investigator. “I pulled a guy over for speeding - he was doing 62 mph. I had reached for my door handle, but realized I had dropped my flashlight, so I stopped, and leaned across to pick it up.”

That hesitation most likely saved Jaekel’s life. A drunk driver, exceeding 60 mph, had hit his vehicle. The impact crumpled Jaekel’s patrol car.

“I knew exactly what happened,” said Jaekel. “But I couldn’t get out of my car.”

Another member of the ‘pack’ was on the other side of Bragg Boulevard and raced to his assistance. They called in the jaws of life to pry Jaekel out of his vehicle, and he was taken to Womack Army Medical Center. The driver, an active-duty airman, had blown a .18 on the breathalyzer scale - more than two times the legal driving limit. A look at the driver’s record showed that he already had a driving while impaired charge pending. His accident with Jaekel added another, and two weeks later he received his third.

“We definitely have a problem with drinking and driving on Fort Bragg,” said Spc. Archie Massey, traffic investigator, 42nd MP Det. “From January to the end of November, we had 578 driving while impaired charges against Soldiers.”

That number includes Soldiers who were charged off post by either the Fayetteville Police Department, the Cumberland County Sheriff’s Department or the North Carolina State Highway Patrol. Massey said the on-post average is 25 driving while impaired charges per month.

He said you can’t pinpoint your typical drunk driver because they range in ages and in social standing. “We have everyone from privates to first sergeants to sergeants major and every rank of officer,” said Spc. Kyle Feigum, traffic crash reconstructionist, Traffic Investigations, 42nd MP Det., Traffic Investigations. He did note that there are more males drinking and driving than females, and that there is a slight tendency toward younger Soldiers.

In North Carolina the legal drinking limit is .08. For a routine drinker who weighs approximately 160 lbs., that equates to about four drinks (four beers or four shots of liquor) per hour. But the MPs were quick to point out that the drinking limit is only one aspect of determining whether someone will be charged.

“It’s really about the state of impairment,” said Massey. “You can have two people who weigh the same amount, but one is a drinker and one is a non-drinker. The drinker can drink a six-pack and not appear drunk at all, but the person who doesn’t drink may be stumbling around after two beers and be very intoxicated. Their blood alcohol content level will be the same thing, but their level of impairment is vastly different. If that’s the case, the individual can still be charged”

When a driver is stopped for a suspected DWI, they will be asked to show proper ID. The officers usually ask a couple of questions in order to hear their speech and smell for alcohol. If their speech is slurred or the officers detect the smell of alcohol, they will be asked to step out of their car and asked to perform a field sobriety test. The test includes simple tests to judge the impairment of the individual, including walking a straight line, standing on one foot, saying the alphabet backwards and a horizontal gazing test.

Individuals may also be asked to perform a preliminary breathalyzer to judge their alcohol blood content. If it is determined the individual is impaired, officers will arrange for a the vehicle to be towed or for rides for other passengers. The person is taken to the MP station on suspicion of driving while impaired where a formal test will be given by certified officers. The individual will either be charged or released pending the results of that test.

If charged, and if the individual is an active-duty Soldier, their driving privileges on post will be suspended, and they will be released to the custody of their unit.

In North Carolina a first time offender will have their license suspended for a year and will have to attend alcohol counseling classes prior to getting them back.

“A Soldier gets a double whammy, because not only will they be charged in the civilian court they will also be charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice,” said Massey. That punishment can range from loss of pay, extra duty, loss of rank or a discharge from the Army.

Soldiers under the age of 21 who are caught drinking only have to blow a .01 to be charged with driving while impaired.

Over Labor Day weekend, four Fort Bragg Soldiers died in motor vehicle accidents where alcohol was the contributing factor.

“The Friday before Labor Day we got a 911 call. A group of Soldiers were going a high rate of speed in a Mustang convertible when the driver lost control of the vehicle,” said Massey. “One passenger was conscious and able to call us. When we got there, the driver was talking to us. We thought he’d be fine. He died at the hospital. His blood alcohol level was .16. When he went out that night, he didn’t know he wasn’t going to see another day. He didn’t know that it would be his last night out - he didn’t think it would be him.”