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War vet's traffic death part of worrying trend

By: Susan Nolan on: 16.08.2005 [16:17] (209 reads)

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SOMERSWORTH - An Army reservist's death in a motorcycle crash in Somersworth on Saturday was the third such death since his unit, the 368th Engineer Company, returned from Iraq in 2004.

It is part of an alarming national trend that finds soldiers returning from duty in Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan dying in increasing numbers on the nation's highways.

From October 2003 to September 2004, after the first troops returned from Iraq, there was a 28 percent jump in the deaths of service members in traffic accidents, compared to the previous 12 months, according to a May 2 story in USA Today.

The Army's accident statistics - compiled from the Army Combat Readiness Center at Fort Rucker, Ala. - do not include highway fatalities of former reservists and National Guardsmen who have been deactivated (become civilians) after their return from the war zones. The actual rise in the fatality statistics could be higher than the 28 percent recorded by the Army.

The recent New Hampshire fatality occurred when Brandon McManus, 22, of Lawrence, Mass., lost control of his motorcycle and struck a utility pole along Route 108 in Somersworth around 11:15 a.m. Saturday. He was pronounced dead at Wentworth-Douglass Hospital in Dover.

McManus had returned home in March 2004 after serving for 11 months in Kuwait with the 368th Engineer Company, where he helped build roads.

He was one of 65 soldiers who were to receive Warrior Citizen awards during a ceremony at the battalion's headquarters in Somersworth on Saturday.

None of the battalion's 600 soldiers was injured or killed overseas, said the battalion's commander, Lt. Col. Raymond Prisk.

The stateside deaths of those returning from war zones is a trend.

"It is actually one of the issues that is discussed by the Guard in the re-entry process," said Fred White, a licensed clinical social worker at the Center for Life Management in Salem.

White, the disaster behavioral health liaison for southern New Hampshire, said he is working with the New Hampshire National Guard to create additional programs to help returning veterans.

Weather

Baghdad
TH, 18/08
+46..+48 °C
NW, 6 m/s

Basrah
TH, 18/08
+46..+48 °C
W, 3 m/s

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Today

White said one of the problems is that soldiers in "a war climate ... drive 90 hours an hour in the middle of the road." He said they also do not use turn signals to indicate the direction they are driving in a war zone, methods that are necessary for survival.

"When they return home, those survival skills don't work very well," said White.

There may also be other factors that affect the driving of returning soldiers, he said.

Four of McManus' fellow reservists were traveling with him at the time of the crash, said Lt. Col. Prisk.

"He was an outstanding worker, and he never complained," Prisk said. "He really set himself apart from the other soldiers."

The cause of the crash remained under investigation.

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Article and comments

Well

by Tet on 17.08.2005 [01:35]

If we are to believe the reports from Iraq, they certainly didn't know how to drive in Iraq, so this shouldn't be a surprise. Peace.

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