



31 January 2003



Deployment Safety

1. Commanders, leaders, soldiers and civilians, this "Bell Sends" message is not "pro forma", but a laydown of my thoughts on an imminent life and limb danger to our force – Accidents During Deployment Operations. I want everyone to know and take aboard my intent on this subject: Bring each and every soldier home safely, with no one killed due to accidents. From experience, we know that accidents killed more soldiers than the Iraqi forces during Desert Shield / Desert Storm. In all this, human error was the single leading factor. I know that each accident was avoidable. I need you to ensure that the chain of command, down to and especially the first line NCO, knows my intent and what must be done to achieve the end state. Understand what is at stake; American families have entrusted their most precious asset to us – their sons and daughters. We must do everything we can to prevent senseless loss of life or limb as we face current and potential deployments.

2. There is a tendency by some to think that when we deploy in a crisis or wartime environment that the rules go out the window. Wrong answer! It's during these times that the rules are more important than ever. We train to standard for good reason. Failure to follow the standard and failure to enforce the standard repeatedly surface as the culprit in fatal accidents. We need the commitment of commanders and leaders at every level to ensure our soldiers execute to standard throughout these challenging times.

3. There are five deployment areas that require your special and concentrated effort.

a. Rail operations. This includes railhead loading/unloading teams, supercargoes enroute, and guard details from start to finish. Those overhead electrical lines demand the utmost respect; keep two meters clearance between power lines and soldiers! With heavy equipment and limited maneuvering room, there's no margin for error. Use the certification and verification program.

b. Convoy operations. There's nothing more dangerous than a lost driver, preoccupied with getting back on track, or a driver blinded by documents stuck on his windshield. Drivers must be properly equipped and trained for night vision operations. You can't operate a vehicle while holding goggles with one hand and driving with the other. Perhaps most importantly, drivers and vehicles commanders must adhere to a deliberate and enforced rest and sleep plan. It's our best hard chargers who just keep charging and charging, only to fall asleep at the wheel.

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ANY MISSION, ANYWHERE!

c. Unintended weapon discharges. If your soldiers are not shooting at something they intend to hit, we have a problem – a big problem. Unintended weapon discharges are a frequent and often tragic reality when large numbers of soldiers begin carrying weapons with ammunition in a contingency environment. It is in this environment where leaders must ensure that the only ammunition expended is ammunition headed toward the enemy.

e. Aviation operations. Take the time to do it right. Get checked out in the new environment. Fly at an altitude and airspeed appropriate to the mission and threat at all times. Loss of visual reference in a desert landscape is a real threat. Maintain by the book and use your checklist religiously. Historically in combat, night operations produce the most fatal accidents.

f. Port operations (sea and air). Don't task a soldier to operate a piece of equipment unless he's licensed, experienced and supervised. If you've never been involved in this kind of operation, imagine putting a convoy in the third underground level of a German parking garage. Sea ports are extremely busy and amazingly crowded. Commercial operations will probably occur right along side military. I need you to maintain enhanced situational awareness in all axes in these tight conditions.

4. Leaders – Corporals thru Generals – You are the ones who will bring our soldiers home. Be there for them. You are responsible and empowered to do what it takes to make it happen. Our soldiers are willing to die for their country – It's up to us to ensure they don't!



B. B. BELL
General, USA
Commanding

