



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0916

May 27, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper:

I am writing on behalf of my constituent, Kimberly Weaver. Mrs. Weaver's son, SPC Nicholas Panipinto, of Bradenton, Florida, died tragically in a November 6, 2019, training accident at Camp Humphreys in South Korea. While 20-year-old SPC Panipinto died, two other soldiers were injured when a M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle overturned during a road-test.

A recent investigation revealed several training and response concerns that we would like to be addressed in order to reduce the number of fatalities suffered in future military training accidents.

Current regulations require three days of classroom instruction and two days of hands-on driving experience, with an instructor, before military personnel are given licenses to drive M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

According to Mrs. Weaver, SPC Panipinto did not have a license, had only six hours of hands on driver training and zero classroom instruction when he was ordered to road-test a M2A3.

Also, not all of the CVC headsets in the four M2A3s that day were properly functioning. As a result, all crew members could not communicate with each other. Furthermore, the safety pin in the driver's hatch of SPC Panipinto's M2A3 failed.

During the road-test, the right-hand side tread of SPC Panipinto's M2A3 came off, which caused his vehicle to roll over. In a different M2A3 that day, another hatch was not functioning properly. Consequently, a soldier in that vehicle did not see SPC Panipinto's M2A3 roll over because he was holding the broken hatch open for another crew member.

Once the training accident happened, a series of events subsequently transpired that were both very alarming and harmful to SPC Panipinto's dire medical condition.

On that day, Camp Humphreys did not have an on-campus hospital or even a military ambulance available to quickly transport SPC Panipinto to a medical facility for emergency medical treatment. A civilian ambulance responded to the accident scene, but its medical supplies were sorely lacking. For example, it had an insufficient oxygen supply, its suction equipment stopped

functioning, it didn't have a blood transfusion supply, and the instruments needed to treat SPC Panipinto were unavailable.

In addition, that day, the first on-base MedEvac helicopter dispatched to the accident scene got lost. A second MedEvac helicopter could not start at all. Eventually, the first MedEvac helicopter got to the accident scene, 80 minutes after the accident.

By the time that SPC Panipinto arrived at a hospital, two hours after the accident, he needed nine pints of blood and five pints of plasma transfused. Unfortunately, he passed away later that day from the severe injuries he sustained in the accident and the prolonged delay in getting him to a hospital for emergency medical treatment.

As a result of these events, I am writing to request that the U.S. Department of Defense seriously consider implementing the following common-sense reforms and improvements so that future military personnel don't suffer the same fate.

1. Take steps to strengthen and enhance current requirements for training and licensing of military drivers.
2. Add a simulation training requirement to existing requirements to help ensure that new military drivers are fully ready for their driving responsibilities.
3. Strengthen existing regulations governing the safe and proper working conditions of all military equipment used in training exercises.
4. Take steps to make sure that there is a hospital or an emergency medical facility on-campus at every U.S. military base on foreign soil.
5. Take steps to ensure that all U.S. military bases on foreign soil have properly functioning MedEvac helicopters and military ambulances, with appropriate emergency medical supplies available, to promptly transport and treat injured U.S. military personnel.

If the Defense Department can implement a comprehensive series of such improvements, military personnel all over the world will benefit by being able to train much more safely.

The highest tribute that can be paid to the life of SPC Panipinto is that the Defense Department will make sure that future military personnel who are injured during training exercises can quickly receive high-quality medical treatment that might help save their lives.

Thank you very much for your attention to this very important topic. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress