

Just Say No to Dump Trucks

By GySgt. Greg Alleyne

There's a saying around Washington, D.C., "If you commute to work (as most do) and make it through a tour without a motor-vehicle accident, you've accomplished a major feat." Considering I had only two days left (of a three-year tour) before heading to Okinawa, Japan, I felt myself blessed—and one of the chosen.

Traffic in the Washington D.C. area is like a young Mike Tyson in the ring—crowding, menacing, with the potential for a catastrophe to strike any second (come to think of it, that describes Tyson outside the ring, as well). Whether you blame the congestion on the large number of people from other states who live here or the growing number of foreign-born immigrants, the day-to-day bumper-to-bumper traffic in and out of D.C. requires the patience of Job.

I thought I had several things in my favor for continuing my accident-free tour. First, it was Sunday, when traffic along Interstate 95 usually isn't too bad, depending on your timing and direction of travel. On this day, I was returning with my daughter and future wife, Diane, from saying goodbye to family and friends in New York City, some 250 miles away.

We had decided to get on the road by 0800 because traffic along the I-95 corridor usually is good if you travel early. It was a gorgeous day: The sun was high in the sky, and I must admit we looked good cruising in my midnight blue, recently waxed, and highly buffed 1989 Porsche 944. We had been on the road four hours and had just dropped off my daughter at her friends. Diane and I had stopped for some food and now were proceeding home on Route 1 for some serious down time. My

accident-free record was looking better every mile.

The second thing in my favor was the fact my "baby" (read P-O-R-S-C-H-E) was going into storage the next day for the year I would be stationed in Japan. I had paid the storage fees, and I had purchased a car cover and jack stands. Things were looking pretty good, but, as you've

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probably heard, most accidents occur within five miles of your home. Little did I know we were going to confirm that saying.

About a mile and a half from home, we were at a stop light, discussing our trip and how much we had enjoyed the visit. Route 1 has four lanes (two in each direction) and parallels Interstate 95. Speed limits range from 35 to 50 mph. We and another vehicle to our right had moved off the line together as the light changed when a dump truck suddenly appeared out of nowhere. I'm told it came from our right, down a hill, and through the red light.

In the blink of an eye, we felt and heard the thunderous collision, followed by the sound of twisting metal. We then saw a huge structure pass in front of us, and rain started falling hard. With the dim sunlight coming through the windshield, I could see rocks and dirt pum-

melting our car. I remember thinking the ground must have opened up and swallowed us; we must be falling into a sinkhole in the road.

Moments later, I glanced to my right to see if Diane was OK—she wasn't. She was fading in and out of consciousness; at the moment, she was out. I heard people around us, calling out so I took a second to get my

immediately turned their attention to Diane, while I got my first look at the accident scene. My “baby” now was a convertible, even though it hadn't been when I bought it.

Emergency medical technicians managed to stabilize Diane, and she was conscious when fire and rescue personnel cut her from the car. Her injuries included a slight concussion and a laceration on her knuckle. I walked



bearings. We were still above ground, I felt no pain, and Diane was unconscious and covered with glass. I could also see that the right side of the car was crushed into her. After I repeatedly had called her, she briefly opened her eyes and spoke to me, then passed out again.

Several people approached the car. I opened the door, and a woman came to my side. She asked if we were OK and said she was a nurse. I told her I was fine, but my passenger was unconscious. She leaned over me and was able to get Diane to start talking. She then told me to keep her talking, and I did.

Within minutes, emergency medical personnel were on the scene, and, after waiving liability for myself so they would treat Diane first, I exited the vehicle. They

away, uninjured and “baby”-less but definitely fortunate and blessed not to have lost something—more specifically, someone irreplaceable. Porches come and go, and so much for an accident-free tour. I attribute both of our lives to seat-belt usage. The vehicle to our right (in which no one was injured) took some of the steam out of the speeding dump truck. Without that fact and my car's German engineering, this incident could have ended much worse. I believe in seat belts, and I have a photo to their value. My new mantra, simply put, is, “Say no to dump trucks, and say yes to seat belts.”

As for Okinawa, I went as scheduled. I probably could have delayed my orders for a couple of weeks, but I'm a gung-ho Devil Dog! Err! 