



2009 has been quite a year! Throughout the year the U.S. Army has showcased the NCO story for both the Army and the American people in order to honor their sacrifices and to celebrate the contributions of the NCO Corps during the "Year of the NCO." As noted by Sergeant Major of the Army, Kenneth O. Preston, Army Chief of Staff, General George W. Casey, and former Secretary of the Army Pete Geren in their letter announcing the Year of the NCO:

"Today's NCO operates autonomously, with confidence and competence. We empower and trust our NCOs like no other army in the world. In fact, many of the world's armies are looking at our NCO Corps as a model for their own as they recognize the vital role NCOs play in our Army."

High but well deserved praise from the senior leadership of the world's most powerful Army. In fact, the NCO Corps has had much praise heaped upon it over the course of 2009. As we prepare to enter 2010, I expect all of our NCOs to remain focused upon maintaining the high standards and leadership responsibilities that earned all of the accolades and acknowledgments.

The close of the year also marks the beginning of the holiday season – hopefully a time of much happiness and joy for all of the USASMDC/ARSTRAT family. Sadly, we will see mishaps, accidents, and mistakes during this period of joy and celebration. Some of these accidents will be preventable, some will not.

We've already encountered our first holiday related mishap. A member of the USASMDC/ARSTRAT family recently fell through the ceiling trying to retrieve holiday decorations from the attic. Thankfully this individual is recovering and is home with his family for the holidays.

Even the most routine tasks can have dangerous consequences – especially during the holiday season and throughout the winter. According to an article on MSNBC, more than 13,000 people were injured last holiday season while putting up or because of holiday decorations. I urge each of you to make every effort to avoid holiday mishaps through careful attention and by not placing yourselves in dangerous situations.

I also again caution each of you against drinking and driving during the holidays or at any other time. It is just not worth it!!! If you're caught, the consequences can be severe both personally and professionally. If you cause an accident, the consequences can be tragic. If you're attending a party and plan to drink, have a plan for getting home safely as well. Go with a designated driver, or take a cab to and from the event.

If you see a fellow Soldier attempting to drive after drinking, intercede. Help the Soldier find alternative means of transportation. Don't let him or her behind the wheel.

Finally, there are 263,100 Soldiers deployed around the world with some 152,420 in harm's way supporting Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom – some of them are members of the SMDC / ARSTRAT family. I ask that you keep our deployed Soldiers and Civilians in your thoughts and prayers this holiday season. Please remember their families as well.

Please enjoy a safe and happy holiday season. You are all valued members of the SMDC / ARSTRAT team, and we very much look forward to your return in the New Year. On behalf of me and my family, and the rest of the command team, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

*SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!*