

Unit Introduction

When an accident/incident occurs, stories continue to be generated after the initial release. Often stories are generated for days. It is almost guaranteed that what you thought to be true in the beginning changes with time. Details get updated. The condition of people who were hurt changes. New facts are brought to light. And the media continue to thirst for these "updated" stories. Although you, as the PAO, must always be concerned about SAPP and the privacy of our military members and their families, you still must facilitate the flow of accurate and timely information. This unit provides you a formula for doing that.

Unit Objective

- Write a follow-up release

Unit Overview

- The lead
- The bridge
- The body
 - How to identify the dead and injured

The Lead

Accident and incident stories usually take time to play out to their conclusion. From the time the accident or incident takes place conditions change, new facts emerge, investigations are launched, etc. Each of these events generate new story information and thus spawn a need for a follow-up story. When doing the follow-up story, it is important to ensure the numbers change or match what was reported in the original story, depending on the developments that took place between the releases.

The **lead** of an accident follow-up story must be a summary lead of 30 words or less, just like all the other hard news leads you've written. Impersonal who rules are similar to those of other releases as well.

But the lead of an accident follow-up release also has a very strictly controlled lead emphasis. It must also contain a **tie-back** to the original story, because you can't be sure the readers all saw the initial story. Therefore, it's important for you to give at least the main details of the initial story before moving into the bridge and body.

The Lead

The purpose of the **lead emphasis** of a follow-up accident release is to update the reader/listener on the status of the accident or incident. Start your follow-up story with a summary lead that emphasizes the **latest development** in the continuing story. The lead should contain a tie-back to the original story to serve as a refresher to the reader of what the basic story is about.

Remember to use the impersonal who for all people or groups unless prominence demands the use of names.

Example:

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. -- **A broadcast student at the Defense Information School here was charged with reckless driving here today (*latest development*) in connection with a three-car accident that killed two other students and injured a third here Monday (*tie-back information*).**

Note: This lead and the following examples all go with the same story.



The Bridge

Keep WAITS in mind! In the **bridge**, you must expand on the most important details found in the lead -- usually the latest development. **Your bridge should attempt to answer the why or how if that information is available.** Remember, your bridge is one sentence of approximately 30 words.

Example:

Marine Corps Sgt. Terrence P. Osten was driving a sports car that veered into oncoming traffic and ran two other vehicles off the road near the post exchange, said Maj. Michael X. VanPelt, post provost marshal.

Note: The individual who was charged is identified immediately in the bridge.



The body: identifying the dead

When you have dead and injured to identify for the first time in the body, use this specific format.

Two separate consecutive paragraphs are devoted to each person who died: one for identification and one for medical information. *Keep in mind that the names of the dead can not be released until 24 hours after notification of next of kin.*

The identification paragraph should contain the following:

- Branch of service (if applicable and different from the service issuing the accident news release)
- Rank
- Full name (with middle initial)
- Age
- Job description
- Organization of assignment
- Hometown
- Surviving immediate family (with permission)

The medical paragraph should contain the following. Some of this information WILL be repeated from the initial release; it is not considered redundant.

- Cause of death (remember, people die **OF** things, not from them)
- Place of death
- Time of death (be specific)
- Always attribute medical information. Attribution in the follow-up release should contain the full identification of the source.

The body: identifying the dead

If there is only one death, the identification sentence begins with "Dead is".

Dead is Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Sharon L. Stone, 26, a Salem, Ore., native, who was a journalism student at the Defense Information School. She is survived by her husband, Jack T. Stone, who lives in Laurel.

Stone died of internal bleeding and was pronounced dead on arrival at 1:15 p.m. Monday at Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center here, said Col. James P. Smith, Kimbrough's chief medical officer.

The body: identifying the dead

If there is more than one death, begin the identifications with a separate two-word paragraph: "**Dead are:**".
Always list deaths alphabetically by last name.

Dead are:

Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Sharon L. Stone, 26, a Salem, Ore., native, who was a journalism student at the Defense Information School. She is survived by her husband, Jack T. Stone, who lives in Laurel.

Stone died of internal bleeding and was pronounced dead on arrival at 1:15 p.m. Monday at Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center here, said Col. James P. Smith, Kimbrough's chief medical officer.

Sgt. Harold H. Yaper, 25, a Pittsburgh native, who was a broadcast student at DINFOS. Yaper was the son of Stephen F. and Mary L. Austin of Dallas.

Yaper died of a broken neck at 12:32 p.m. in the crash, said Smith.

Note how, when there is a list of individuals beginning with "Dead are:", the first sentence of each person's identification paragraph is not a complete sentence by itself. That's because "Dead are:" is meant to be the beginning of each identification sentence in the list.

The body: identifying the injured

Rules for identifying the injured are similar to those for identifying the dead.

Do not release the names of the injured until 24 hours after notification of the next of kin.

Each injured person receives two paragraphs: one for identification and a second for attributed medical information.

If there is more than one injured, they are listed alphabetically by last name after deaths.

When reporting on the injured, do not release next-of-kin information, age, hometown, etc. Other general guidelines include:

- Use only "good," "fair," "stable," etc. to describe condition
- Specific injuries are NOT releasable, e.g. "broken leg," "cuts and bruises," etc.
- Use past-tense verbs (was/were, not is/are)

Some of this information WILL be repeated from the initial release; it is not considered redundant.

The body: identifying the injured

If there is just one injury, begin the identification sentence with "**Injured was**".

Injured was Marine Cpl. Samuel T. Spade, a video equipment repair student at the Defense Information School.

Spade was listed in stable condition today at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., said Maj. Alice P. Cooper, WRAMC attending physician.

The body: identifying the injured

If there is more than one injured person, the list begins with the two-word paragraph "**Injured were:**".

Injured were:

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Annette. G. Hauser, a broadcasting student at the Defense Information School.

Hauser was listed in good condition today at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., said Maj. Alice P. Cooper, WRAMC attending physician.

Marine Cpl. Samuel T. Spade, a video equipment repair student at the school.

Spade was listed in stable condition today at WRAMC, said Cooper.

The body: the rest of the story

Once any deaths and/or injuries have been fully reported upon, the main purpose of the body of the story is to **report all new releasable information.**

The story will contain previously reported details about the accident/incident as needed to make new information more clear. ***This is not considered to be redundant.***

Once a charged individual has been fully identified and connected with charges in the lead/bridge, do not use that person's name to identify him or her in the body of the story. Use other nouns, e.g. **the driver of the sedan, the technical sergeant, the woman, the co-pilot**, etc. This helps protect the individual from being unfairly maligned in the press before trial; remember, all charged persons are considered innocent until proven guilty. Part of your responsibility as a PAO is to ensure that what you release is not unduly prejudicial.

Wherever possible, attribute all information that is not common knowledge, and be careful when using "eyewitness" accounts - they are not always reliable.

If the investigation has not yet been completed, use the investigation statement at the end again.

The body: the rest of the story:

Example

The investigation determined that the accident occurred when the driver of the sports car dropped a lit cigarette in his lap as he was driving down Mapes Road near the commissary. The car veered into oncoming traffic as the driver tried to locate the cigarette, VanPelt said.

Stone was driving a sedan, which the sports car forced off the road and into a utility pole. A pickup truck, driven by Yoder and carrying Spade, also ran off the road and overturned, according to VanPelt.

Note how the charged person is not identified by name in the body, but by a description: "the driver of the sports car."

Also note how the roles of every individual are identified. We know the sports car driver was the one who dropped the cigarette and veered into oncoming traffic, Stone was driving a sedan, Yoder was driving a pickup, and Spade was a passenger in the pickup.

Unit Summary

From the time of the accident/incident to when the last story is filed, you serve two masters. You must get the information out, but you must follow the guidelines for releasing information. But if you know the rules and you make an honest effort to provide timely and accurate information, you can be successful. Success, when it comes to accidents/incidents, is defined as a story with a short shelf life.