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SCORING HIGH IS A BAD IDEA WHEN IT COMES TO DRIVING IN GERMANY

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HEIDELBERG, Germany -- While the process of getting a driver's license in Germany is far different for U.S. Army Europe personnel than for German citizens, both must obey the same traffic laws -- and face the same consequences for failing to obey them.

"Driver's training, for residents of Germany, is longer in duration and much more in-depth than driver's training in the States," said Claus Hensley, traffic clerk for the Heidelberg Provost Marshall's Office. "Here, they (drivers) invest a lot more money into their driver's license, and rarely take it for granted."

German drivers are also subject to a system that rates traffic violations and assesses points against their licenses for offenses, said Hensley. "Certain points are added to your driving record and accumulate over time, showing what kind of driver you really are," continued Hensley.

But some people may not be aware that the point system applies to USAREUR drivers as well.

"The German motor vehicle registration office keeps track of our (USAREUR drivers') point totals, too, and informs the garrison of people who are approaching or have exceeded their point limit, so that we may take the proper action," said Tom Lorenzini of the USAREUR Registry of Motor Vehicles.

"The point system is really very simple: the worse the offense, the more points are added," he said. For example, a speeding violation of less than 20 kilometers per hour over the limit would bring with it a two-point penalty and a 25 to 35 Euro fine.

A more hazardous traffic violation, such as running a red light, comes with a penalty of 6 points or more and a heavier fine. While the point system follows a certain pattern, more points and heavier fines may be imposed, depending upon the severity of the violation.

If an individual reaches 12 points in a year or 18 points in a two-year period the license is automatically suspended, said Hensley

While the German law dictates that the penalty for going over the point limit of a license is 180 days, the unit chain of command may assess penalties that would suspend the license for up to a year, said Lorenzini.

Drivers whose licenses are suspended are also required to complete a remedial driver's training course before their licenses can be returned, said Lorenzini.

"I like the system; it shows how people really deal with the responsibility of having a vehicle," said Hensley, noting that he has even seen drivers exceed the point total as the result of an accumulation of parking violations.

"It may be one offense that puts a driver over the limit, but it's all the offenses before it that got (him) there," he said.

Hensley also pointed out that the database at the PMO is linked to the German directorate of motor vehicles, and any points on a license may be confirmed through that system.

When a driver accumulates six points, a notice to his chain of command so the driver can be counseled about his driving habits, said Lorenzini.

"We will know when you get close to the limit, and your (chain of command) will get a red flag about your driving," he said. "The bottom line is: pay attention and drive the right way and there won't be any points to worry about."

