

Tales From the Fighting Hole

Sleeping Bag Negligence

By Capt Edwards

An NCO in Iraq had good intentions when he decided to keep his weapon in his sleeping bag at night. As a young Marine, he had been instructed to sleep with his rifle. He had heard stories of Marines in Korea being killed with their own rifles, so putting his M16A2 in his sleeping bag could keep the weapon secure and clean from the elements. Sand in the chamber and muzzle easily could jam his weapon.

However, one night, he was awakened by a shot—one that went through his foot. The round was from his M16A2. The Marine did not know the condition of his weapon while it was in his sleeping bag, nor did he have positive control of it. If the M16 had been in condition four, with a magazine at the ready, this incident never would have occurred. It's fortunate he was sleeping with the muzzle pointed toward his feet.

The Marine succeeded in keeping his rifle clean and secure. However his MEDEVAC left a clean and secure M16 without a Marine to shoot it.

A Turn for the Worse

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Sometimes we even can learn lessons from our brothers in arms. The following is about a U.S. Army incident.

The Mishap Sequence

The HMMWV driver sped up on the winding desert road, trying to catch up to the convoy he was escorting. His senior occupant (VC, vehicle commander), who'd earlier decided to stand in the gunner's hatch to get a better view, yelled at him to "slow down!" But it was too late—the HMMWV hit a dip in the road, and the driver lost control. The VC yelled, "Rollover!" and then dropped into the gunner's hatch, grabbing the nearby straps.

The driver tried to stay on the road by steering hard to the left, but he turned too hard. The HMMWV veered across the road to the left shoulder and hit a 16-inch-high dirt edge left by a road grader. The HMMWV straddled the dirt edge for 40 feet as the driver steered hard to the right, trying to get back onto the road. The front tires finally got a bite, and the HMMWV veered sharply to the right.

The driver's-side front tire bounced over the 16-inch-high dirt edge, and both front tires left the ground. The HMMWV then rolled over repeatedly and landed facing backward on the road. The driver, who was not wearing his Kevlar or seatbelt, was thrown from the vehicle and died from head injuries. The VC, who was wearing his Kevlar, was thrown from the gunner's hatch and landed behind the vehicle. He suffered a fractured jaw and arm.

Why the Mishap Happened

- Conducting a daytime convoy is a routine mission. The leaders were complacent in their planning and did not identify the hazards or develop and implement control measures.
- The VC chose to ride in the gunner's hatch, even though the vehicle's crew-served weapon was not mounted. The VC wanted to place himself in a higher position so he could observe the convoy. He was not in the passenger's seat, which would have allowed him to better supervise the driver.
- The driver drove too fast. Skid marks showed the driver was going over 50 mph on a sandy road, with a 20-mph, posted speed limit.

Why the Severity of the Injury?

- The driver did not fasten his seatbelt. Because the VC was standing in the gunner's hatch, he was not in a position to ensure the driver fastened his seatbelt.
- The driver was not wearing his Kevlar. The desert conditions were hot and dusty. The VC earlier had observed the driver walking outside the HMMWV without his Kevlar but did not correct him. Because the VC was standing in the gunner's hatch, he was not in a position to ensure the driver wore his Kevlar as he drove. **GW**

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