

A Game of Leap F

By Capt. Martin Bartlett

It was the sixth bound back to a battalion's defensive position in the desert for a combined anti-armor team riding in HMMWVs. The team had executed what seemed to be an endless number of bounding-over-watch drills in the last four days, and they felt proficient. The drills had become simple and mundane, so a driver decided to add some high-speed excitement—a decision he would live to regret.

The team included four HMMWVs, each with a crew of four Marines. Two of the vehicles had .50-caliber machine guns mounted, while the other two had the TOW missile launchers. The idea behind the drills was for a pair of vehicles to drive forward while the other pair covered their movements from a stationary position. Every 500 meters, they would alternate.

On this bound, a HMMWV accelerated rapidly, chewing up several hundred meters of desert ground in seconds. Because of the desert's vastness, the team maintained a large lateral distance between the vehicles—at least 200 meters. It was tactically smart and safe. The driver of a nearby set HMMWV saw in his mirror something unusual about the accelerating HMMWV. With a large dust cloud behind it, the HMMWV was rapidly approaching their set position. The HMMWV swerved within 15 feet of them, then it

fishtailed to the right. The driver counter-steered, and the vehicle's back end slid left. He counter-steered again, sending the left wheels into the air. The momentum of the vehicle was overpowering, and the driver lost all control.

It rolled several times, shearing the missile launcher off the HMMWV. When the HMMWV rolled, it landed on the gunner, who had sat atop the vehicle. The passenger in the rear seat was ejected and was crawling near the vehicle, complaining about pain in his legs. The staff sergeant team-leader, barely conscious, stumbled out of the front-passenger seat and tried to

The doors won't keep you from being ejected when you don't wear a seatbelt.



Rolling a HMMWV on flat terrain is difficult to do unless it's driven recklessly.

Frog Gone Bad



Our jobs are dangerous enough without horseplay—it's an unnecessary risk.

account for his Marines. His driver ran from the crash, screaming hysterically.

The rest of the section converged on the scene and found the gunner, a lance corporal, face down under several packs, in a pool of blood. A corpsman tried to restart his breathing and heart beat. A helicopter arrived within 10 minutes and evacuated him to a hospital, where he later died.

Here are what investigators found:

- The driver aimed his vehicle directly at the set HMMWV, sped by, and turned sharply for the sole purpose of creating a dust cloud.
- His speed was calculated at 43 mph just before the HMMWV fishtailed. He was driving 18 mph over the speed limit set by the company SOP.

- The section leader, who sat in the front-passenger seat, didn't maintain control of his section. The horseplay of dusting each other had been going on for several days. Earlier that day, he supposedly had told his driver that horseplay was not allowed.

- Everyone was wearing helmets and flak jackets. However, no one was wearing seatbelts. The staff sergeant did not know it was a requirement to wear seatbelts for anything other than administrative movements; he said, "In admin movements, it is the NCO's job to enforce the use of seatbelts." 🍀

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