

Tales From the Fighting Hole

OIF Motor-Vehicle Mishaps

By GySgt Mariano Seguin, 1st. Marine Division, Safety

Moving-vehicle mishaps (MVMs) during Operation Iraqi Freedom I and II have caused many injuries to Marines. To date, three MVMs have cost the lives of six Marines. Four Marines were lost when a HMMWV rolled over into a canal. HMMWVs are involved in most of the MVMs.

Every Marine on a mobile combat patrol or a convoy mission uses speed as a tactical means to avoid contact with an IED. There is no way to prove if this tactic actually works, but the IED triggerman has a difficult time targeting vehicles moving fast. What really matters is that Marines use this tactic while being situationally aware at all times. Seatbelt use cannot be overemphasized. If there is a mishap, injuries and fatalities increase when Marines are ejected from the vehicle.

The terrain in Iraq is very treacherous and unforgiving for the Marine driver and his passengers. All hard-ball, dirt, and side roads taken at the speed our mobile combat patrols and convoys are moving become even more dangerous at night. Twenty-two MVMs occurred at night.

It isn't known if night-vision goggles (NVGs) were used, or, if they were used, whether they were a causal factor. The known depth-perception problems that drivers have with these nighttime visual-enhancing devices may increase the probability of a mishap.

The following page has causal factors that have been identified through various reporting sources:



Note: The photos of a HMMWV rolled over and completely submerged in a canal is not the vehicle in which the four Marines lost their lives. All riders in this HMMWV escaped safely.

Air-Conditioning Electrocutation

By Staff Writer

To provide some comfort and distraction from the heat and stress in Iraq, Marines and Soldiers are installing air-conditioning units and other electronics. Tents and buildings are equipped with air conditioners, VCRs, DVD players, televisions, and video-games systems. They all have one thing in common: electricity.

As Americans, we take electricity for granted. After all, we have enough safe outlets and federally approved electrical devices here in the states.

Marines in Iraq, though, must remember they're working on haphazardly constructed circuits that may pose a hazard to those untrained in the field of electrical engineering. Recently, a young, untrained Marine was tasked to repair an air-conditioning unit. He was found sometime later, lying near the unit, unconscious.

It is unknown exactly how the Marine was killed, but he was not using any of the prescribed personal protective equipment (PPE): rubber gloves, boots, or grounding equipment. The Marine also did not have any supervision. It's obvious that ORM was not even considered to reduce the hazards.

As Marines, we need to recognize the power of electricity in an unregulated environment. As leaders, we need to ensure individuals are trained properly and have adequate supervision. Marines will find a way to accomplish the mission, but leaders must be careful not to set them up for failure. **GW**

Operator Factors:

- Driver qualified but had minimum experience operating vehicle at time of mishap
- Sleep deprivation
- Reckless operation of vehicle
- Speeding-not for the purpose of the mission
- Lack of A-Driver or passengers intervention to stop or prevent chain of events leading to mishap

PPE Factors:

- Vehicle or personnel restraining devices (seatbelts and troop straps) not employed.
- PPE not used as designed (unfastened helmet, or helmet straps worn loosely under the chin)

Environmental Factors:

- Mishap occurred during hours of darkness.
- Adverse weather conditions existed at time of mishap.
- Unpredictable road, ground and terrain conditions existed at time of mishap.

Operational Factors:

- Operated vehicle with missing SL-3 safety equipment (missing troop strap)
- Operational speed limits not established by area commander
- NVGs worked as designed, but their capabilities were limited due to existing environmental conditions at time of mishap.
- Unfamiliar with route traveled.

If you have witnessed or were a part of a mishap or near-mishap, submit your lessons learned to Safe-GroundWarrior@navy.mil.—Ed

