

A HMMWV in the Wrong Hands

By GySgt. Brian McGeorge

When Marines think of the HMMWV, they think of a rugged, 4-wheel-drive vehicle with great stability, traction, reliability, and power. When you add a .50 cal. or TOW, it becomes a deadly weapons platform. In the right hands, the vehicle is a combat multiplier. In the wrong hands... well, here's an example.

While assigned to the area guard force as the corporal of the guard, a Marine was responsible for posting and relieving sentries. He often did so, using the guard force's HMMWV since the posts were far apart. On this occasion, he decided to drive the vehicle himself.

The corporal left the guard shack and went to one of the posts with two sentry reliefs. As soon as they got on the road, the driver began speeding. When they reached an intersection and tried to turn left, the vehicle skidded around the corner.

After the corporal posted and relieved two of the sentries, he returned with two off-going sentries. The corporal didn't waste any time and began speeding again. They were traveling on a dirt road at 50 mph when the corporal began rounding a left curve. The right tires slid onto the right shoulder of the road, rotating the vehicle 45 degrees counterclockwise. He wrestled the vehicle back onto the road but then went off the left shoulder. Again, he got the vehicle back onto the road, only to flip one-and-a-half times, ejecting all the Marines. The vehicle came to rest on its roof in a ditch.

Immediately after the wreck, the corporal of the guard ran back to one of the posts and contacted the sergeant of the guard, who dialed 911. An ambulance arrived and took the injured Marines to a naval hospital. One of the privates had a dislocated hip. The other had massive head trauma and died days later.

The investigation revealed these facts:

✓ The corporal of the guard was neither trained nor licensed to operate the HMMWV, nor was he assigned to operate it.

✓ The duty driver, a PFC, was assigned as the driver of the HMMWV and knew the corporal had taken the vehicle that night but didn't do or say anything. In fact, the PFC verified that the corporal had taken the HMMWV four other times.

✓ None of the Marines were wearing their seat belts.

✓ While the corporal shouldn't have driven the HMMWV in the first place, he exceeded the posted speed limits and operated the vehicle recklessly.

Over the years, many people have speculated on what might be the primary contributing factor to HMMWV rollovers. Is it the tires? Is there a design flaw? Blaming the equipment is always easy but, most often, is not the cause. As we review every HMMWV rollover mishap since 1994, we find that the driver's actions were considered the primary cause 81 percent of the time. Speeding around curves on dirt roads is how most of the mishaps occur.

Ask yourself these two questions:

First, are you and your Marines following the guidelines (TM, SOP, and orders) when operating tactical vehicles?

Second, when was the last time you briefed your Marines on the do's and don'ts of operating HMMWVs and other trucks? 🍀*

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