

# Protective Gear Proves Itself Again and Again

By Cpl Shawn C. Rhodes

**C**amp Mahmudiyah, Iraq (April 17, 2004) — It's heavy, hot and cumbersome. It also saves lives. Protective gear Marines wear in Iraq is performing as advertised. Helmets, Interceptor vests with the small-arms protective inserts, and even goggles are keeping Marines alive and in the fight in Iraq.

Marines from 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, assigned to the 1st Marine Division, are eyewitnesses to the effectiveness of the gear.

"We had been ordered to escort an explosive ordnance team to an improvised explosive device (IED), and we were en route when the bomb exploded," said SSgt Jason R. Williams, platoon sergeant for Combined Anti-Armor Team Red at the battalion.

The Snellville, Ga., Marine was in his vehicle when he saw the explosion ahead of him take the Marines near the blast right off their feet. "The engineers were putting up security around their vehicles while they waited to

link up with another unit, and a few of the Marines were right in front of the blast when it happened."

The engineers were caught off guard when the IED exploded near their position, but they

quickly regained control of the situation.

"I saw it when the blast went off," said Sgt Peter E. Porter, a combat engineer at the scene. "The Marine nearest it disappeared in a cloud of smoke, and I ran to him. When the smoke cleared, I saw him on the ground, and I helped him get up and move to a safe position in case another attack happened."

In addition to the Marine nearest the blast, Porter, also spotted a Marine lying farther away from the blast.

"The Marine was on his back, and I saw him holding up his hand for help," said the Copperopolis, Calif, Marine. "Some of the shrapnel had hit his leg and his helmet. The shrapnel would have gone straight through him if he hadn't been wearing that helmet."

Marines with CAAT Red were posting security around the site in case of another attack, while engineers tended to the wounded.

"I had my goggles over my eyes when the IED went off," explained LCpl James R. Yakubsin. I was thrown against my radio in the vehicle, and some shrapnel hit my goggles.

"If I hadn't been wearing those, I wouldn't have my eyesight now," added the Gainesville, Fla., Marine.

It isn't the first time Marines in the unit credited their protective gear with saving them from blasts.

"At least a dozen Marines would be dead if not for their protective gear," said LtCol Giles Kyser, 2nd Battalion's commanding officer. "It's proven itself many times.

The Dumfries, Va., Marine added it stands as a good testament to the leadership of the battalion who ensure the Marines are always wearing their gear correctly.

The protective gear the Marines wear stop bullets and large pieces of shrapnel that crack the ballistic-plate inserts. The only wounds treated are those incurred to the extremities, an area where Marines do not wear as much protection.

"Wearing their gear is keeping the focus on saving lives—keeping their fingers on the trigger," Kyser said. **GW**

*Cpl Rhodes is deployed with 1st Marine Division.*

Photo by Sgt Matt Preston

