



Photograph by Sgt. B. E. Vancise

# Where

Rainbow Canyon and didn't waste time getting settled; they knew they would be back in the attack before dawn.

With the next day's plan set, the group began establishing their bivouac. They positioned their AAVC on the side of a hill to have better communications with the alpha command group and regiment. The SNCOIC of the group, who was a staff sergeant, set up the security plan for their position. The staff sergeant took the first watch and told a PFC radioman that he would stand post as a sentinel at 2200. The PFC retrieved his gear and bedded down five meters behind the AAV.

At 2200, the staff sergeant went to post the PFC but couldn't find him. Instead, he posted another Marine. Three hours later, at 0100, the fuel truck arrived at the group's position. The AAV commander, who was a sergeant, got the call over the radio to

*By Capt. Joe Cleary*

"Sleep where I can find you." That's what a staff sergeant told his PFC before he bedded down.

"Aye, aye, Staff Sergeant," replied the PFC.

Unfortunately, those were the last words the staff sergeant and PFC would exchange. Here's why:

During a combined-arms exercise in Twentynine Palms, the bravo command group of an infantry battalion was riding in an AAVC<sup>1</sup>. It was 2100, and they had been in the attack all day; they were exhausted. Higher authority ordered them to stop and rest. They halted in

meet the fuel truck on the road to refuel. With another sergeant, the AAV commander carefully searched the area around the AAV with flashlights. After they determined the area was clear, they gave an OK to the driver to move the AAV 100 meters down the hill to the road. At a crawling pace, while maneuvering around boulders and through brush, the two sergeants guided the driver down the hill.

By 0200, the AAV had finished refueling and was moved back to its original position. Fifteen minutes later, a Marine climbed out the AAV's rear hatch and

# Should I Sleep?

was on his way to make a head call when he stumbled over something. It was a sleeping bag obscured by brush. A closer look revealed the bag contained the missing PFC. His body was under one of the AAV's tracks; he had been crushed.

The group commander, who was a major, and the SNCOIC never designated a sleeping area, nor did they post a guard to protect sleeping Marines when tracked vehicles were operating nearby.

When the AAV commander informed the major that he needed to move the AAV to refuel it, the major ordered him to use four ground guides: forward, aft, port, and starboard. But the sergeant didn't follow his orders.

A corporal, who was part of the group, saw the PFC bed down where he was not supposed to be. But he didn't say anything to the PFC or his leaders.

The bravo command group was a hodgepodge of personnel from different units. It was clear to investigators that the chain of command within the group was disorganized.

If you or your Marines have to work with tracked vehicles, you should follow these steps:

1. First, get familiarity training. Ask the AAV Commander to brief you and your Marines on the hazards of working in and around tracked vehicles. Every AAV unit has written SOPs covering the do's and don'ts; ask for them.

2. Rehearse the basics of embarking the vehicle, deploying as dismounted troops and performing emergency actions. Seasoned Marines need to revisit the basics as much as a new Marine needs to learn them.

3. Designate and mark troop-sleeping areas. Post a guard to protect the troops. Knowing where your Marines are is critical when working with tracked vehicles.

4. The troop commander always should coordinate the movements of the AAV with the vehicle commander.

5. At minimum, AAV crews should use a front and rear ground guide when moving vehicles in restrictive terrain and when dismounted troops are close by. If

visibility is poor, then the AAV and troop commander should implement control measures (e.g. increased supervision, lights, and signal device) to lessen the risks before movement.

6. Keep up your guard around tracked vehicles. Assuming that an AAV driver can see you and won't run over you can be a grave mistake. Because of the vehicle's size and the driver's sunken position, an AAV driver has blind spots where he can't see dismounted troops. Operating in conditions of reduced visibility (darkness, dense vegetation and urban terrain) amplifies the risks. Furthermore, the engine's noise makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to hear dismounted troops. 🦋

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<sup>1</sup>AAVC is the command variant of the AAV. With its many radios, the battalion staff uses the AAVC as a mobile command post.

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