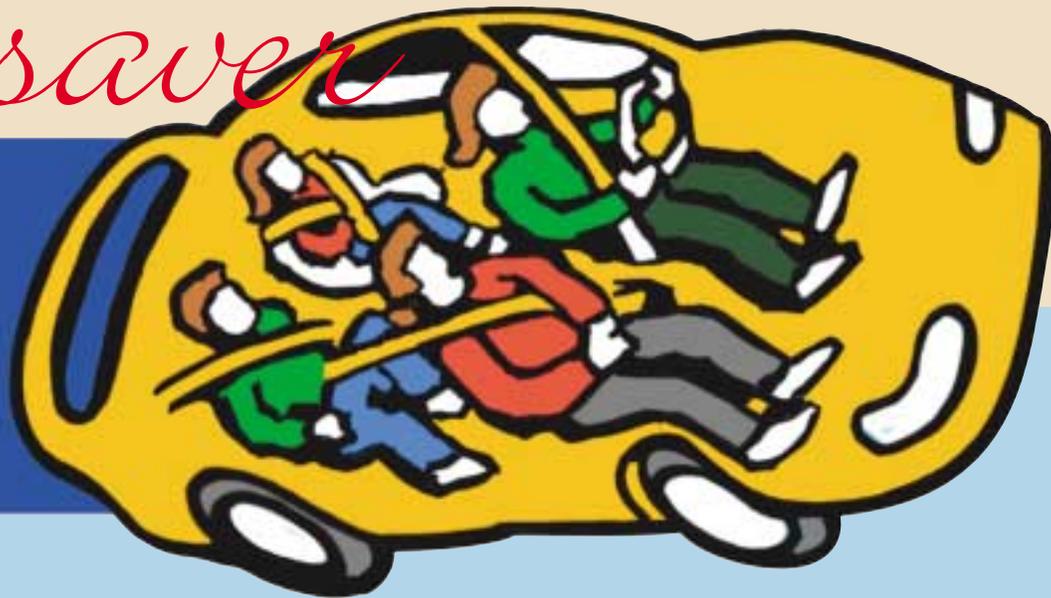


The **THREE-SECOND** Lifesaver



By Lynn Blevins

Two Marines are in a car wreck. One dies, the other survives. Why the difference? A seat belt.

Since the start of FY98, we've lost 59 Marines—more than a platoon's worth. They weren't killed by enemy action or lost at sea. They were driving their cars and trucks and decided not to wear their seat belts.

Driving unbuckled is a habit, and though it takes only seconds to buckle up, Marines seem to value saving those few seconds more than they value their lives. Patterns and habits are hard to break, and many Marines pay for this habit with their lives.

At the Naval Safety Center, we get the mishap reports about Marines in traffic crashes that result in one or more lost workdays. Many of these deaths and serious injuries could have been prevented if only Marines had used their heads and buckled up. Instead, they used their heads to smash out windshields.

Last fall, two Marines drove from the barracks to a convenience store for a pack of cigarettes—a 10-minute drive, tops. The roads were dry, and it was just after dark. The driver wore on his belt; the

passenger didn't. As they sped through a series of curves along an isolated road to the barracks, the driver lost control, swerved and hit a 3-foot-high dirt mound on the shoulder. The vehicle bounced off the ground and flipped over. The driver was treated at a local hospital and released; the passenger flew from the car and died at the scene. If he had buckled up, he probably would have survived.

Why don't Marines wear seat belts? You hear excuses like, "It doesn't look cool while I'm driving my sports car," or "I'm just running to the store, I'll be back in a five minutes," or "I don't want to mess up my pressed cammies." However, these excuses don't make much sense when you consider the number killed in auto crashes. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the vast majority of crashes occur close to home. You should strap on a seat belt whether you drive across country or across town. How "cool" you look isn't an issue, given the risk. Increase your odds for living past your next birthday. Buckle up! 🍀