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Soldier Stories

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Lessons Noted, or Lessons Learned?

We are an Army at war. We have great pride in our Soldiers, for they are the centerpiece of our formations. They clearly are the “critical component” to our combat readiness. Each and every Soldier is special—a father, son, mother, or daughter. These men and women are expensive to train and important to our success in the Global War on Terrorism.

As a team, we must pay close attention to lessons learned from preventable accidents to protect our fighting ability and win our Nation’s wars. However, if these lessons are noted rather than learned, we’ll continue to pay the price and lose Soldiers unnecessarily.

As your Director of Army Safety, I personally receive an e-mail every time a Soldier is killed in an accident. I find it sobering that rarely is there a new kind of fatal accident, just a different name in the report. We continue to lose Soldiers to the same mistakes over and over: falling asleep while driving, vehicle rollovers caused by speeding, driving without seatbelts, improper handling of unexploded ordnance, negligent discharges and poor muzzle awareness, and improper weapons clearing procedures. On the aviation side, brownouts and poor crew coordination continue to rear their deadly heads.

Knowing these hazards cause 80 percent of all our accident fatalities, one could ask the question, “Are we actively learning from our mistakes and successes, or are we just noting them?” From statistical analysis and visits throughout our Army, I’m concerned that we might be doing too much of the latter. I’ll give an example.

We recently investigated a vehicle rollover in OIF where a Soldier was killed. He wasn’t wearing his seatbelt, and that was a major factor in his death. When we asked why the soldier was not wearing his seatbelt, we found the commander had told his Soldiers they didn’t have to wear them. The commander was concerned his Soldiers would not be able to get out of their vehicles quickly should something unexpected happen. As an Army, we know that the risk of not wearing a seatbelt is much greater than that of not being able to get out of a vehicle quickly. However, that knowledge had not reached this commander in time to make a difference. It had been a lesson noted, NOT a lesson learned.

It’s critical that we share our experiences now more than ever. Over the next 4 months we’ll have more than 250,000 Soldiers on the move, and we’ll conduct a 120,000-Soldier battle handover for OIF-2 alone. Our deployed Soldiers have gained invaluable experience and insight, including the development of standing operating procedures (SOPs) that may have helped prevent vehicle accidents and negligent discharges.

I ask these successful units to consider a couple of questions. Have you put your new SOPs and tactics, techniques, and procedures in writing so they become institutional knowledge? If so, have you provided those documents to your replacing unit AND the Army as a whole so your experiences can be turned into better training for all follow-on units?

Clearly, your transition home will provide different challenges than those you left overseas. What are you doing to transition your risk management thought process? Once

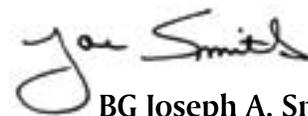
the enemy was the biggest risk, but now it will be privately owned vehicles (POVs). Over the last 10 years, POV fatalities have accounted for 56 percent of accidental deaths in the Army. It's hard to imagine returning home safe from a combat zone only to lose a buddy to a POV accident. Don't be the one to lose your battle buddy.

Here at the Safety Center, we continue to provide you information through our Web-based tools and written publications. Check us out on the Web! You'll be surprised at how easy it is to collect information that applies directly to your unit and location. Try out the ASMIS-1 POV module to help you plan and reduce risk while traveling. Until these tools

are put to use, the Army's detailed knowledge of accidents will be just lessons noted.

Ensure you turn your own experiences into institutional knowledge. If you have a success story or experience the Army can learn from, send it to us at joey@safetycenter.army.mil. Allow us to turn lessons noted into lessons learned. 🇺🇸

Keep your leader lights on!



BG Joseph A. Smith

Lessons Learned?

We continue to lose Soldiers to the same mistakes

OVER & OVER:

- **Falling asleep while driving**
- **Vehicle rollovers caused by speeding**
- **Driving without seatbelts**
- **Improper handling of unexploded ordnance**
- **Negligent discharges due to poor muzzle awareness**
- **Failure to perform proper weapons clearing procedures**
- **Brownouts and poor crew coordination**

Are we actively learning from our mistakes & successes?



HURRY UP AND GET HURT!

This article provides a very detailed report on the injury of a Soldier. As you read this, I ask you to place yourself in the role of an accident investigator and identify what you see as the contributing factors. When you've done that, please e-mail your thoughts to countermeasure@safetycenter.army.mil. We'll be selecting the best, most comprehensive responses to share with our readers in the April issue. We'll also follow up with some comments from CW3 Angel Acevedo, a senior maintenance technician and risk management instructor. CW3 Acevedo recently supervised the 3d Infantry Division, 2d Brigade, 315th Infantry Battalion's drivers' training program.

LTC CHRISTOPHER SHEDD
Florida Army National Guard

It was a typical multiple unit training assembly (MUTA) five drill week end. The unit had planned a battalion field training exercise (FTX) at a training area a little over an hour away. Like most drill weekends, everyone seemed to have too much to do and not enough time to get it all done. At least the weather was clear, even though it was cold.

The training schedule called for the unit to get all the vehicles dispatched, loaded, and marshaled on Friday evening. The first serial of the ground convoy was due to depart early the next morning.

The Class III/V (fuel and ammunition) platoon sergeant wasn't looking forward to this FTX. His platoon leader was new and providing more distractions than leadership. He thought about the lack of qualified personnel in his platoon, especially in the ammunition section. He had more vehicles than any platoon in the company, but he wasn't sure if there were enough drivers to get them all to the field site. He also was concerned about his new ammunition squad leader, SGT

HURRY UP AND GET HURT!

Stevens. SGT Stevens wasn't a bad NCO. He was just inexperienced and had a tendency to procrastinate. "Well," the platoon sergeant thought, "I'll just have to light a fire under him this weekend."

The platoon sergeant met with his squad leaders and briefed them on the tasks they must accomplish that night. He then went over the timeline for the rest of the weekend, stressing the commander's emphasis on making the convoy start time.

The motor pool and armory were beehives of activity that evening. The full-time staff had dispatched many of the vehicles already, but some were left for Saturday's departure. There also was a great deal of equipment to load. Serial commanders received their convoy briefs and prepared themselves to brief their own serial the next morning.

In an area outside the motor pool, SPC Smith was conducting maintenance checks on the 11-ton ammunition trailer he'd be pulling with his HEMTT. SPC Smith loved driving the big truck. The feeling of power

he got from sitting high above the traffic with the roar of the giant diesel behind him was one of the reasons he stayed in the Guard. He was a good driver, and he was proud of his skill in maneuvering the eight-wheeled truck with its long trailer.

SPC Smith carefully went around the trailer and checked the tires. The left-rear tire looked a little low. He thought about the time it would take to get an air compressor—the whole battalion was running around in the motor pool! He decided the tire was low because of the cold weather. His car tires sometimes looked low on cold mornings, and they were always fine. “It’ll be OK,” SPC Smith thought as he finished the checks.

After formation the next morning, SGT Stevens briefed his squad on the updated timeline he’d just received. The ammunition section would be departing in about two hours, so he told everyone to recheck their vehicles and pick up their MREs for the day. SGT Stevens wanted to be sure his squad left on time. The platoon sergeant had made it clear that to be late was a really bad thing.

SPC Smith went to his truck and did a quick walk-around to ensure all the air hoses were installed correctly. As he walked around the trailer, he noticed the left-rear tire was completely flat. He silently hoped the motor pool still had the air compressor out where he could use it. As SPC Smith looked closely, however, he saw something he’d missed the night before—a bolt head sticking out of the tire.

He was in trouble now! There wasn’t much time, and he was going to have to mount the spare. SGT Stevens was going to kill him! He looked around and saw PFC Williams driving the platoon’s 4K rough terrain forklift, carrying a pallet of fuel hoses to a 5-ton truck. “That’s it,” SPC Smith thought. “I’ll get PFC Williams to lift the corner of the trailer with the forklift while I change the tire.” Using the forklift would allow him to change it quickly and without having to use the cumbersome jack.

SPC Smith called PFC Williams over, and they soon had the forklift positioned. SGT Stevens walked over and asked what they were doing. He was livid that SPC Smith had not dealt with the problem tire the night before, but he knew

they were running out of time. When SPC Smith explained how he could change the tire using the forklift, SGT Stevens knew it wasn’t the right way to do it. But what could it hurt? The forklift easily could lift the weight. SGT Stevens told them to get the tire changed, but for heaven’s sake be safe doing it. He walked away to look over the rest of the squad.

SPC Smith ground-guided PFC Williams so he’d place the forks under the trailer evenly. The forks kept hanging on something under the trailer, so SPC Smith yelled for PFC Williams to stop. SPC Smith climbed between the forklift and the trailer to see what was catching the forks. As SPC Smith stood between the forks, PFC Williams’ foot slipped off the forklift’s clutch, killing the engine as the forklift lurched forward. In that instant SPC Smith screamed. The forklift had pinned him between the trailer and the forks at hip level. As PFC Williams restarted the engine and backed away, SPC Smith passed out and fell to the ground. The local fire and rescue unit carried SPC Smith to the emergency room. He was lucky. The impact chipped only a small piece of bone from his hip, and other than some serious bruising, he had no other injuries.

The unit learned a lot from this incident. A good Soldier did something he knew wasn’t right to get the job done quickly. His squad leader, who also knew the correct way to change the tire, condoned the shortcut to meet the timeline. Shortcuts provide positive reinforcement because people usually aren’t hurt when they use them. How many times do you speed in traffic to save a little time? Do you have an accident every time you speed? No, and that makes you feel the shortcut is worth the risk. Not following proper procedures will not cause an accident every time, but are you willing to risk your Soldiers’ lives to save a few minutes? Soldiering is a very dangerous profession; shortcuts and not following the standards make it even more so. If you are a leader, demand that your subordinates follow and learn the proper procedures for their jobs. Watching your Soldiers work safely is a truly uplifting experience. 🚚

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In Danger's Lane

JULIE SHELLEY
Staff Editor

Forklifts don't have a lot of the bells and whistles found on a HMMWV or tank, so you might think they're easy to drive. Think again! As the related story "Hurry Up and Get Hurt" illustrates, Army forklifts can and do cause injury—sometimes even death.

In the past 6 months alone, one Soldier and one civilian have been killed by forklifts on military installations. In those accidents, both victims were struck by a forklift during loading operations. And, personnel injury isn't the only problem. Valuable Army equipment has been damaged up to the Class A level during the past 2 years in forklift accidents.

Whether you've been assigned temporary duty involving forklifts or work around them all day, take steps to protect yourself. Here are some tips:

- Make sure all forklift operators—you included—are well trained, tested, and licensed.
- Conduct preventive maintenance checks and services daily on each forklift. Also, test and inspect all forklifts according to Technical Bulletin 43-0142.
- Wear your seatbelt. Many forklift fatalities are the result of the driver being crushed by the forklift's overhead roll bar. If your forklift begins to overturn, don't jump from it! Stay with the truck, hold on firmly, and lean in the opposite direction of the roll.

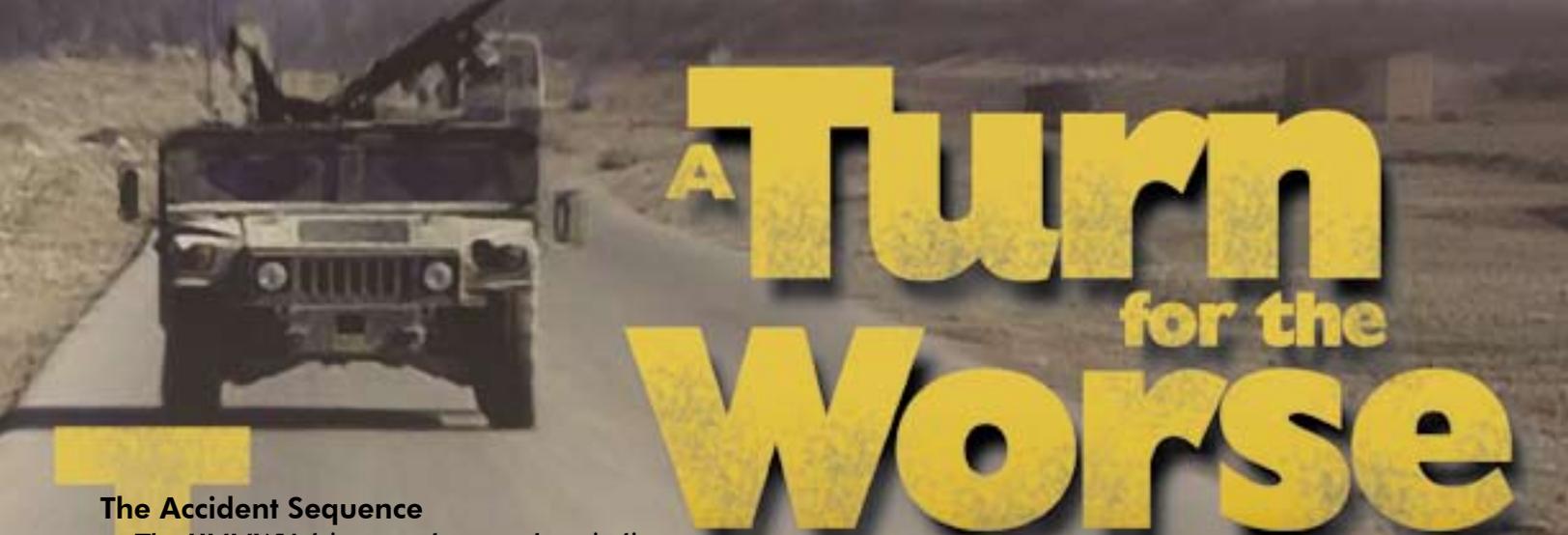
- Chock the vehicle being loaded or unloaded, especially if the forklift is driving on and off the vehicle. Unchocked vehicles can roll away from loading docks, causing the forklift to drop.
- Use loading dock protective rails, ground guides, or lane markers for loading dock operations.

"IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS ALONE, ONE SOLDIER AND ONE CIVILIAN HAVE BEEN KILLED BY FORKLIFTS ON MILITARY INSTALLATIONS."

- Use extreme caution on grades and ramps. If driving on a graded surface, tilt the load back and raise it only as high as needed to clear the roadway. If high loads block your vision, drive backwards or use ground guides or lane marking pylons. Travel with the load within 4 to 6 feet from the floor whenever possible.
- Drive slowly into and out of warehouses. Going from bright daylight into a darkened warehouse will blind drivers just long enough to run into someone or something.
- Slow down and sound the horn at cross aisles and other locations where vision is obstructed.

- Look toward your travel path and keep a clear view of it.
- Don't drive up to anyone standing in front of a bench or other fixed object.
- Don't use forklifts for lifting personnel to an elevated level. Forklifts are not designed or approved to lift personnel.
- Ensure loads are balanced, and keep ground guides away from cargo fall zones. Unstable loads are dangerous—ground guides and load spotters have been crushed by falling cargo.
- Don't raise or lower the tines while the forklift is moving.
- Don't handle loads that are heavier than the forklift's weight capacity.
- Operate the forklift at a speed that will permit it to be stopped safely.
- Don't allow passengers to ride on the forklift unless a seat is provided, and make sure all passengers wear their seatbelts.
- When dismounting the forklift, set the parking brake, lower the forks or lifting carriage, and neutralize the controls. 🛑

Article compiled from material found on the U.S. Army Safety Center Web site, <http://safety.army.mil>, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Web site, www.cdc.gov/niosh. Contact the author at (334) 255-1218, DSN 558-1218, or e-mail shelleyj@safetycenter.army.mil.



A Turn for the Worse

The Accident Sequence

The HMMWV driver sped up on the winding desert road, trying to catch up to the convoy he was escorting. His senior occupant (TC), who'd earlier decided to stand in the gunner's hatch to get a better view, yelled at him to "slow down! But it was too late—the HMMWV hit a dip in the road and the driver lost control. The TC yelled "rollover!" and then dropped into the gunner's hatch, grabbing the nearby straps.

The driver tried to stay on the road by steering hard to the left—but he turned too hard. The HMMWV veered across the road to the left shoulder and hit a 16-inch-high dirt edge left by a road grader. The HMMWV straddled the dirt edge for 40 feet as the driver steered hard to the right, trying to get back onto the road. The front tires finally got a bite and the HMMWV veered sharply to the right. The driver's side front tire bounced over the 16-inch-high dirt edge and both front tires left the ground. The HMMWV then rolled over repeatedly and landed facing backwards on the road. The driver, who was not wearing his Kevlar or seatbelt, was thrown from the vehicle and died from head injuries. The TC, who was wearing his Kevlar, was thrown from the gunner's hatch and landed behind the vehicle. He suffered a fractured jaw and arm.

Why the Accident Happened

- Conducting a daytime convoy is a routine mission. The leaders were complacent in their planning and did not identify the hazards or develop and implement control measures.

- The driver did not conduct by-the-book "before" preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) with his TC supervising. The TC, under the direction of the convoy commander, checked the fluid levels, the condition of the tires, and ensured the vehicle had extra water. However, neither he nor the driver checked the steering,

which had excessive play.

- The TC chose to ride in the gunner's hatch even though the vehicle's crew-served weapon was not mounted. The TC wanted to place himself in a higher position so he could observe the convoy. He was not in the passenger's seat, which would have allowed him to better supervise the driver.

- The driver drove too fast. Skid marks showed the driver was going over 50 mph on a sandy road with a 20 mph posted speed limit.

Why the Severity of the Injury?

- The driver did not fasten his seatbelt. Because the TC was standing in the gunner's hatch, he was not in a position to ensure the driver fastened his seatbelt.

- The driver was not wearing his Kevlar. The desert conditions were hot and dusty. The TC earlier observed the driver walking outside of the HMMWV without his Kevlar, but did not correct him. Because the TC was standing in the gunner's hatch, he was not in a position to ensure the driver wore his Kevlar as he drove.

Recommendations

- When planning missions, commanders and leaders must allow time for Soldiers to conduct PMCS and rehearse convoy control procedures.

- Senior occupants must ride in a position where they can supervise drivers and ensure they drive the proper speed, fasten their seatbelts, and wear their Kevlar. 

POC: Ground Systems and Accident Investigation Division, DSN 558-3562, (334) 255-3562.



The Gunner Got Gassed

It was around 1300 on an August afternoon and the Bradley crew had been on the road for more than an hour, driving from the motor pool to the training assembly area. As they were driving the gunner fell asleep in his hatch, only to be awakened later by a gust of cool wind. When he awoke, he told the crew that he knew why he'd fallen asleep—he'd smelled exhaust smoke! However, because this was common during road marches, the crew ignored the gunner's complaint.

Just before arriving at the training assembly area, the gunner complained he'd fallen asleep

again and had trouble waking up. The crew brought him into the assembly area, where he was transported to the unit aid station and then air evacuated to the post medical facility. He was treated and, having recuperated, was released to his unit.

The gunner had been treated for suspected carbon monoxide exposure. However, because the doctor didn't have the gunner's blood gasses checked, exposure to carbon monoxide couldn't be verified. The safety specialist working the incident asked the unit to hold the Bradley for

MR. EDWARD BENNETT
Armor Branch Safety Office
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further investigation. He then asked preventive medicine personnel to test it for carbon monoxide.

The tests found the carbon monoxide level at the driver's station was 1 to 2 parts per million (ppm). The reading on the troop compartment floor was 4 ppm and, at the open overhead troop hatch, it was 5 ppm.

The industrial hygienist suspected the 5 ppm level was probably caused by the wind blowing exhaust gasses back into the hatch. The investigation found that the gunner had been riding half-in and half-out of the hatch, where the highest concentration was found. Also, the gunner was a smoker. This meant he might already have had an elevated level of carbon monoxide in his system. The carbon monoxide levels in the Bradley were well below the Occupational Safety and Health Agency maximum of 25 ppm.



During the investigation it was learned that the driver had done preventive maintenance checks and services and noticed the seal was crimped on the engine panel. However, it wasn't recognized as a problem at that time.

During testing on the Bradley, the crew chief again noted the seal on the engine panel had been damaged and that "blow-by" had left a visible black streak. However, because the carbon monoxide levels were not exceptionally high, the crew chief was told the vehicle could be returned to service after the seal was repaired.

After reviewing the findings, the vehicle went through a maintenance inspection before being put back in use. A motor pool mechanic found the coupling between the engine and exhaust was loose. This allowed exhaust gasses to escape, which could have contributed to the problem.

There are a number of lessons learned from this mishap:

- During preventive maintenance checks and services, don't ignore seals that have been pinched, twisted, or have gaps in them.
- Smokers can be impaired by even low levels of carbon monoxide.
- Take it seriously when a crewmember complains about passing out or having difficulty staying awake. 

Contact the author at (502) 624-4303, DSN 464-4303, or e-mail edward.bennett@knox.army.mil

MSG Robert Spaulding and Mr. George Greenauer of the U.S. Army Safety Center's Risk Management Integration Division offered the following insights:

- Had the twisted seal been identified on a DA Form 2404 during preventive maintenance checks and services before the mission? It is the operator's responsibility to identify these deficiencies and bring them to the attention of organizational maintenance.
- There was no mention of operator-level maintenance. Tightening the coupling, repairing the seal, and reporting these deficiencies are operator-level maintenance items.

HERE'S JOEY!



Editor's Note: The first of the "Joey Mails" this month relates the story of a negligent discharge more than 30 years ago in Vietnam. There are rarely any new types of accidents, and the Army is experiencing an alarming number of negligent discharges even today. This column will feature stories from those who have seen first-hand the devastation negligent discharges can bring.

I was serving as a platoon leader in my military police company at An Khe, Republic of Vietnam. I was on a routine patrol when I heard automatic weapons fire coming from a "hooch." I pulled my jeep beside the hooch and entered from the back. I heard a lot of commotion and screaming, and smelled the acrid odor of burnt gunpowder. I saw one Soldier standing over several others that were either dead or severely wounded. The Soldier still had his weapon, a CAR-15, in his hand. I ordered the Soldier to put his weapon down. He didn't respond, but I didn't feel he was a threat to me. He was in an almost trancelike state.

The commanding officer and first sergeant arrived quickly and assisted me in detaining the Soldier. They then began tending to the wounded Soldiers until medical help arrived. The local criminal investigation division secured the scene, and I was able to transport the Soldier for medical care. I felt he could become suicidal and a hospital environment would be better for him than a jail cell. The doctors agreed; he was MEDEVACed a few hours later.

This Soldier had fallen victim to his own excitement. He'd just returned from an extraction after being chased by a North Vietnamese Army patrol for several miles in the mountains. Glad to be safe and eager to tell his friends about the adventure, he forgot to clear his weapon when he boarded the helicopter to

come back to the base camp. He was excitedly explaining the events to his buddies and still holding onto his weapon when he inadvertently pulled the trigger.

That day several irreplaceable lives were taken, and another was ruined forever. In the adrenaline rush after combat, it's easy to forget the little things—like clearing your weapon—that can have a huge impact on your life and others. Safety is just as important in a war zone as a training area, if not more so.

CW4 John M. Whitney Jr., Headquarters, 3d Brigade, 87th Division (TS), Camp Shelby, MS, john.whitney@usarc-emh2.army.mil

I was assigned as a platoon leader and arms room officer in Germany when my unit experienced an accidental discharge. Following law enforcement duty in a military community, Soldiers began to filter into the unit arms room to turn in their issued M9 service pistols. The trouble began when the patrol supervisor didn't maintain proper accountability following his shift. That wasn't his only failure; he also didn't supervise his Soldiers during weapons clearing procedures before they entered the arms room.

A private just out of initial entry-level training bypassed the clearing barrel outside the arms room and went to turn in his weapon. The

soldier handed the pistol, live rounds still in the magazine, to the unit armorer. The armorer was accustomed to clearing weapons for the second time and didn't remove the magazine or check the chamber. He took the weapon from the Soldier, unwittingly chambered a round, and thinking he was dry-firing the weapon, pulled the trigger. It wasn't a dry fire, though, because the pistol fired! The round missed the clearing barrel inside the arms room and ricocheted off the concrete floor, a wall, and the ceiling before finally stopping in an M249's buttstock. A 15-6 investigation following the incident revealed:

- The patrol supervisor failed to properly

supervise newly assigned Soldiers working in law enforcement.

- The patrol supervisor failed to properly supervise clearing procedures.
- The unit armorer failed to use proper clearing procedures (complacency).

Fortunately no Soldiers were injured by the stray bullet. However, the incident taught leaders at all levels the importance of proper clearing procedures and the dangers of complacency. Treat every weapon as though it's loaded. You'll be glad you did!

Anonymous



**CAN YOU GUESS
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?**

Can you guess what happened here? Instructions are made to be followed and sometimes if you don't, you can literally "shoot yourself in the foot." The foreign national trainee in the photos above didn't keep his weapon on safe or his finger off the trigger as he'd been instructed. When his weapon fired accidentally, he used the time-worn excuse of "I thought it was on 'Safe'—somebody must have switched it to 'Fire.'"

The result was a lot of pain and suffering, but at least he could still count to 10 on his toes. If the muzzle had been pointing just another 1/2 inch to the left, the blast would have blown off his big toe instead of just causing a flesh wound. 🐷

LTC Roman Bilynsky, 4th Forward Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Tikrit, Iraq, roman.bilynsky@us.army.mil

Mail Call

I just read the article “Accidental or Negligent Discharge?” in the December 2003 issue of *Countermeasure*.

It was a great article, and I thought I would kick in with my experience on the subject.

Negligent discharges are near and dear to my heart. I had a “religious experience” when a Colt .45 Government Model went full auto on me and a 200-grain lead semi-wadcutter bullet put a crease in my forehead. Fortunately, I was wearing 3 mm thick safety sport goggles. The bullet penetrated my goggles, but was deflected just enough that it didn’t enter my eye socket. Instead, the bullet hit my eyebrow and continued straight up my forehead.

I ended up with 13 stitches, 2 nights in the hospital, a large ambulance bill, and a concussion. The \$8.65 I spent for those goggles saved my life. I’m certain of that.

Was this an accidental or negligent discharge? It was 100 percent negligence on my part, and I’m guilty on the following counts:

- I never knew this type of pistol could malfunction and go full-auto.
- I’d never had professional instruction on the operating principles and maintenance of the Colt .45 automatic.
- I didn’t know how to perform the standard safety checks for a 1911-style pistol.

- I didn’t know some of the parts would need to be replaced after the gun had been fired extensively over several years.

- I ignored the warning signs that appeared during previous shooting sessions. I didn’t know they indicated a serious mechanical failure was about to occur.

- I did not clean my pistol properly or often enough.

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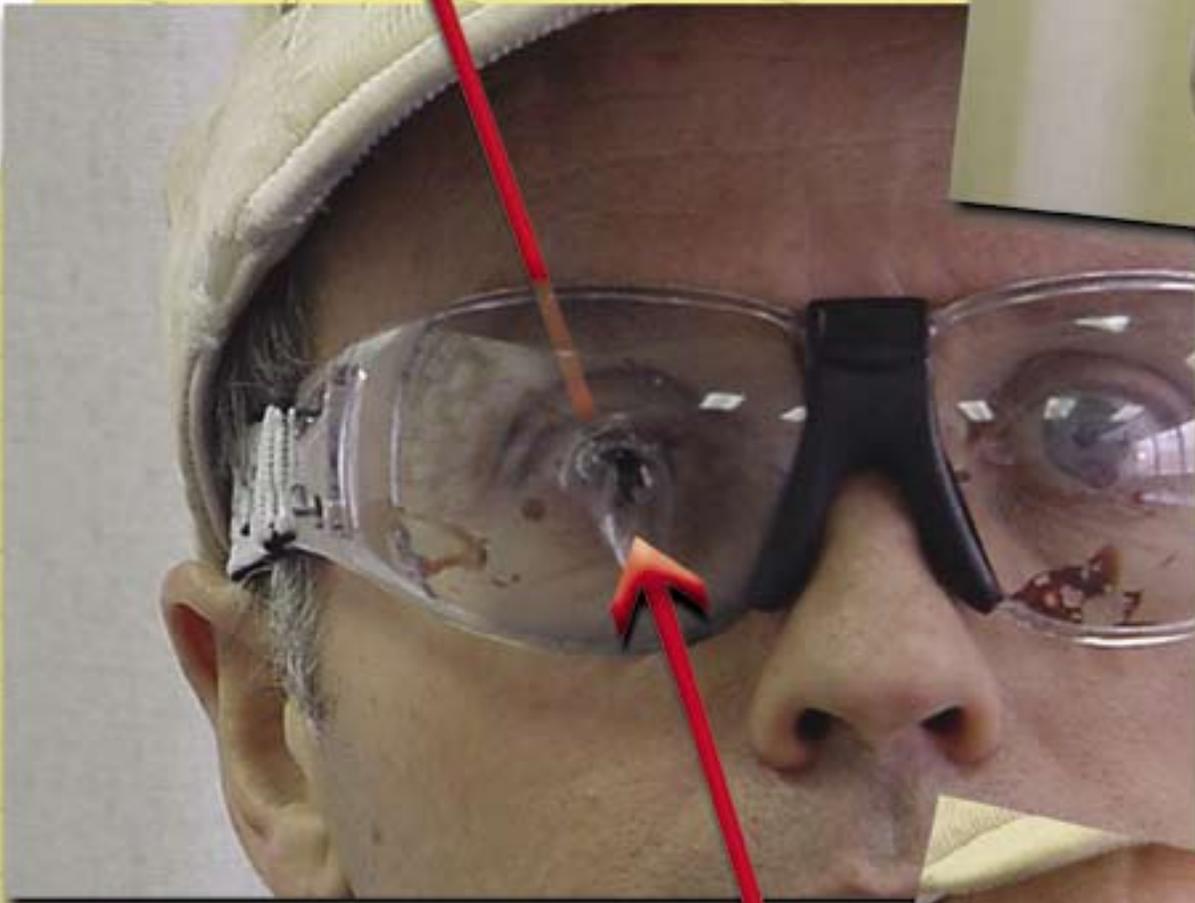
Editor’s Note: Having read Mr. Dito’s e-mail, I called him to find out more details about this accident. I’ll share them below:

- The weapon was pointing downward at a 45-degree angle when it malfunctioned. Caught unawares, Mr. Dito’s arms and hands were relaxed, preventing him from controlling the recoil as the muzzle swept upward toward his head.

- The pistol went full-auto when the slide was released to chamber a round from the magazine. The trigger was never pulled.

- The warning signs included “doubling”—firing two shots when the trigger was pulled—and the hammer falling from the full cock to the safety notch position. These are signs of sear problems.

- Mr. Dito rarely cleaned the inside of the frame where the



The .45 caliber pierced the right lens of the safety glasses, gouged a path along Mr. Dito's forehead, and then went out through his shooting cap.

trigger bow, disconnect, and sear are housed. Accumulated grit in these areas may have contributed to the problem.

- Personal protective equipment, in this case shatter-proof eye protection, does make a difference. While not intended to stop bullets, in this case it deflected a bullet enough to save a person's life. 🚧



Safety Messages are Serious Business

Safety messages are important because they inform us how to safely operate our equipment, vehicles and weapons systems. Commanders must ensure they and their subordinate leaders are familiar with the safety messages that pertain to their unit's equipment. Two fatalities occurred in 2003 when the chain of command was unaware of safety messages that were issued years before the accidents.

Safety messages are written and published in different formats. There are approximately 182 safety of use messages (SOUMs), 209 ground precautionary messages (GPMs), 264 maintenance advisory messages (MAMs), 64 safety advisory messages (SAMs), and 113 field advisory messages for a total of over 830 ground safety messages. There are also 452 aviation safety action messages and 231 safety of flight messages for a total of over 680 aviation safety messages.

The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4 is responsible for managing and distributing safety messages. These messages can be viewed on the Army Materiel Command (AMC) Web site at <http://aeprs.ria.army.mil/>. Reviewing the messages is easy: once Soldiers enter the website, they click on the Army Electronic Product Support (AEPS) logo. This is a restricted area, so Soldiers must insert their smart card (ID card) into the computer and type the card's password to enter the AEPS Web site. Soldiers then

MAJ JOSEPH MILLER
Ground Accident Investigator
U.S. Army Safety Center

scroll down 27 categories in the "Popular Applications" column and click on "Safety Messages." Soldiers can then click on the different types of safety messages and select the vehicle, weapons system, or equipment they use. For example, if Soldiers clicked on SOUMs and selected the M88 Recovery Vehicle, they would see six SOUMs that apply to that vehicle.

The regulations governing safety messages are Army Regulation (AR) 750-6, Ground Safety Notification System, and AR 95-1, Flight Regulations. G-4 is currently revising these regulations and combining them into one document.

Safety messages are an ideal subject for a young NCO or officer to teach in the unit's noncommissioned officer professional development or officer professional development classes. Commanders should not wait until an accident happens to review safety messages. There is no reason why Soldiers should not be knowledgeable about the safety messages that apply to their equipment, vehicles, and weapons systems. 

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Eyes of Fire

CW2 CRAIG LAURENSEN
Fort Drum, NY

I was working in the motor pool at Fort Hood, Texas, when I heard people yelling and running toward the gate. I was curious, so I went to see what was happening.

When I got to the gate, I couldn't tell what had happened but later found out that a sergeant in my company had burned his eyes. Apparently he'd been working on a HMMWV battery when it exploded and sent battery acid into his face. After this incident we were all briefed about wearing our personal protective equipment (PPE).

As it turned out, the sergeant was OK and his eyes weren't permanently damaged. However, he did say that they burned like nothing he had ever felt before. I took this in, but figured "this could never happen to me." Well, let me tell you my story.

It was 6 years later and I was stationed at Fort Drum, NY. I was working on my car battery and never gave a thought to wearing any PPE. I always wear PPE to protect my eyes and ears when I mow the lawn or work with power tools. But hey, this was just my car. No loud noises, no big deal. By then I'd forgotten about the incident at Fort Hood.

I was standing in the driveway trying to pry a battery cap off when the cap suddenly broke free. I didn't turn my head in time and got battery acid in my eye. It burned like you would not believe! I couldn't see, so I felt and bumped my way through the garage to the door into the house. I stumbled inside, where my wife told me to flush my eye for 15 to 20 minutes. That was bad enough, but later I had to go to the doctor's office where they

put dye in my eye and used a black light to check for any scrapes. I was lucky—my eye wasn't scratched. The doctor said that flushing my eye right away had been a good thing and probably helped prevent a more serious injury.

I could not believe this happened to me! When it did, I thought about the incident at Fort Hood. I now make it a point to wear eye protection whenever I work on a vehicle battery. (And the funny part was I was getting my car ready for the drive to Fort Rucker, AL, to take the Aviation Safety Officer Course!)

When someone tells you to wear your PPE, listen up and do it! They're not speaking just to hear themselves talk. They're trying to protect you.

Battery Safety Tips

- Always wear eye protection.
- Wear rubber gloves to protect your hands.
- If you handle batteries often, wear prescription glasses, not contacts.
- Do not smoke, have open flames, or make sparks around a battery. Batteries emit an explosive gas.
- Make sure the vent holes in the vent caps are open to prevent a dangerous buildup of gasses. 

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WILLIAM S. DEL SOLAR
CP-12 Safety Intern

When I got into a friend's car for a trip to a restaurant I immediately felt uncomfortable. Why? My friend's 1990 Volkswagen Golf had no lap belts—it only had shoulder belts, and that felt weird. You don't miss something until it's gone, and I missed the support and comfort of having a lap belt.

We made the trip safely, but what would've happened if we'd had a crash? Everybody knows you shouldn't wear your shoulder belt without also wearing your lap belt. But there I was with only a shoulder belt. I could see the headlines—"Safety Professional Strangled by Seatbelt in Accident." Not good.

I was curious and did some research. From 1990 through 1992, some Volkswagen Jettas and Golfs were sold in the United States with "knee bumpers" rather than lap belts. The knee bumpers met the government requirement for passive restraints. The logic was they would prevent drivers and front seat passengers from moving forward during a crash, so lap belts weren't necessary.

Remember the motorized shoulder belts that were attached to the door frame and automatically wrapped around your upper body

when you closed the door? Because the shoulder belt was automatic, some people either forgot or chose not to wear their lap belt. In an accident, these people often "submarined" beneath the belt or sometimes "jackknifed" over it. The resulting injuries included decapitation, strangulation, paraplegia, and liver lacerations.

If you have one of those cars where the lap and shoulder belts are separate, make sure you wear both. In the case of my friend's Golf, the knee bumpers might help somewhat, but not like a complete three-point system. The funny thing was the car had all the lap belt mounting points! If you have one of these cars go by a dealership and get the lap belt installed. Now for

those of you who have but choose not to use the lap belt, I know several good lawyers for referral to your next-of-kin. 🚗

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Editor's Note: Got an idea on how to make the seatbelts in your Army vehicle more user-friendly, comfortable, and effective? Now is the time to make your opinion count. Please take a few minutes and fill out the U.S. Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory's Seatbelt Questionnaire. You can find it online at www.usaarl.army.mil/seatbelt/seatbelt.htm. Your comments will be anonymous.

Saved BY THE Belt

Nailed at an Intersection

WILLIAM COX

CP-12 Safety Intern

It was a nice summer Sunday afternoon and my cousin and I were riding to the lake in my brother's new car. As the miles went by we were having a good time, but that was about to change.

As we approached an intersection, a car ran the stop sign and hit our car. Although the speed limit was only 45 miles per hour, he hit us so hard our car spun around 180 degrees and went several hundred feet in our original direction. After coming to a stop, we all looked at each other to see if anyone was hurt. Fortunately for us, everyone was wearing a seatbelt. We then got out to check on the car that hit us.

The 16-year-old driver was still in his car, but shaken. He also was wearing a seatbelt and we found out he'd just gotten his driver's license the week before. He told us he was changing the radio station as he approached the intersection and just didn't see the stop sign. He also told us he was glad his parents had trained him to always put on his seatbelt before starting the car.

This crash shows just how fast an accident can happen. Although both cars were badly damaged, no one was injured. Everyone involved had been trained to use a seatbelt and had followed that training. Had we not listened, I might be writing about how someone died or suffered serious injuries in this accident. And that, of course, is assuming I was still here to write this story! Believe me, seatbelts work! 🚗

Contact the author at william.f.cox@us.army.mil

Seatbelts Work Going Backwards Too!

WILLIAM S. DEL SOLAR

CP-12 Safety Intern

The weather in northern New York is rather variable. The summers are great—not too hot and with cool evenings. However, the winters are a different story. When the Canadians come south to Fort Drum for winter training, you know the weather has to be cold!

It was the middle of December and my wife was on her way to work in our 1992 Ford Explorer. The road conditions ranged from bare pavement to icy patches, but it didn't seem bad enough for my wife to stop and put the Explorer into four-wheel drive. As she was going up a small hill she hit a slippery spot and the Explorer swapped ends, sliding across the center line and into the path of a tractor-trailer coming down the hill. The tractor-trailer slammed into the back of the Explorer, pushing it across the road and into a ditch.

The truck was from the company where my wife worked. The owner was a couple of car lengths behind the tractor-trailer and saw the whole thing. He pulled over and stopped to help my wife.

And what was the result of all of this? Our Explorer was totaled, but my wife, while bruised, was OK. Her seatbelt had saved her.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that seatbelt usage has increased in some states to as much as 85 percent. But my own "surveys" of drivers in Alabama and New York run more in the 60-to-70 percent range.

The Army supports the national "Click It or Ticket" campaign because seatbelts save lives—yours and your families.' Take the time to buckle up whenever you get in the car, not just when you drive on post. 🚗

Saved by the Helmet

There I was, flying through the air inverted with limited visibility! Does this

MAJ RICHARD A. ROLLER, MC, USA
Naval Air Station Pensacola, FL

sound like the beginning of an aviator's yarn? Not quite, but the story is true. Let me back up.

It was July, 1972, and a typical hot and muggy Sunday morning in my hometown of Little Rock, AR. I was the 16-year-old proud owner of a somewhat used (but brand-new to me) Honda motorcycle. My father had bought the bike as a gift for me the previous year, and I had been riding it since then. I considered myself a fairly proficient and careful rider, and I wasn't prone to taking risks.

On this particular day I planned to ride over to visit a friend who was also a motorcycle enthusiast. I ate a quick breakfast, slipped out the back door, rolled out of the garage, and headed down the driveway. Suddenly, my father stepped out from behind the house and motioned for me to stop. In his right hand he held my shiny red motorcycle helmet, which I probably had worn a total of 10 times in the past year. My father was a retired E6 who'd served in three wars and wasn't exactly the type of individual you said "no" to. While I did not think of myself as a rebellious youth, I did have a strong opinion about that helmet. I simply did not like wearing it. It was hot, it was confining, and I thought it looked "stupid." My father, on the other hand, felt strongly about safety and insisted I wear the helmet "or else!" So, I took off with my cranium snugly secure in my ugly helmet.

It had rained the previous night and the air was foggy and the streets were still wet. I wasn't speeding, but I probably was going too fast for the conditions. As I rounded a corner, I hit a patch of wet leaves and lost control. I skidded and "caught" a parked car with my bike's left crash bar. That's when I became airborne.

When I came to I was lying on my back, looking up into the face of the car owner. I was lucky. I had only a few deep abrasions on my legs and right shoulder. The left leg of my jeans was ripped away. When I took off my helmet I

noticed a 4-inch wide strip missing from the top. I'd apparently slid across the pavement on my head and literally ground down my helmet. Were it not for the helmet I would've been missing a sizable portion of my scalp (and possibly worse). In addition, the crash bar saved my left leg from being crushed. My bike had several hundred dollars of damage and I had to do some serious explaining for my father (who actually seemed more relieved than angry).

I learned a valuable lesson that day about helmets, one that's been reinforced several times as I've worked in emergency rooms. Helmets save lives—the evidence is concrete. 🏍️

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POV
UPDATE

FY04
through
January 2004

Class A-C
accidents/soldiers killed

☐ Cars	35/23
☐ Vans	0/0
☐ Trucks	9/3
☐ Motorcycles	10/2
☐ Other*	3/1

*Includes tractor trailers, unknown POVs, and bicycles

Total POV
Fatalities

29

FY03

31

3-Yr
Avg

31

UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL:

Almost a Soldier

WILLIAM S. DEL SOLAR
CP-12 Safety Intern

The summer weather was perfect for a day at the beach: sunny, temperature in the mid-80s, and not too humid. Beach 11, located at the end of Presque Isle State Park on the southern shores of Lake Erie, PA, is a family beach. With its gently sloping bottom and few waves, many families take “mini-vacations” at Beach 11 during the summer months.

On this particular day, some swimmers in an unguarded area near Beach 11 reported that a friend had gone underwater, but didn't come back up. Lifeguards and Coast Guard personnel found the missing swimmer about 45 minutes later only a short distance away, in about 12 feet of water.

The young man was playing Frisbee with his friends. He was a non-swimmer, so he stayed in what he thought was shallow water. He didn't know the lake bottom at Beach 11 ripples in a series of gentle ridges parallel to the shore and drops off several feet with each ridge. He was standing in chest-deep water when he dove to retrieve a Frisbee thrown just beyond his reach. Diving out to get the Frisbee, he accidentally got in over his head.

You almost knew this young man. He was a Soldier-to-be in the Delayed Entry Program. He was supposed to leave for basic training at the end of the summer. He could have been your best buddy. But he chose to swim in an unguarded area and paid for that decision with his life. I spent 30 minutes diving to that murky bottom, looking for him in vain. I still remember how heavy his body was as I carried the stretcher off the beach.

Don't let the same thing happen to you. Don't swim in unguarded areas. Don't be someone else's burden. 🛶

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ACV

Class A

■ An M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle suffered Class A damage when it caught fire. A mechanic replaced the fuel line after the crew reported smelling fuel, but on the way to their forward operating base the vehicle stalled and made a popping sound. The driver was treated for injuries suffered in the accident.

Class B

■ Soldier's left index finger was amputated after the gunner's hatch on an M113 Armored Personnel Carrier slammed on his hand.

Class B (Damage)

■ A Patriot radar system mounted on a HEMTT trailer suffered Class B damage when it hit the corner of a garage. The Soldier driving the HEMTT was attempting to exit the garage when the accident occurred.

Class A



AMV

■ Soldier drowned when the HMMWV he was driving ran off the roadway and into a canal. The Soldier was pinned underwater in the vehicle.

■ Two Soldiers were killed when their HMMWV was struck by an M1. The tank and HMMWV were approaching from opposite directions when the M1 hit the HMMWV on the driver's side.

■ Soldier suffered fatal injuries when the non-tactical,

Army-owned SUV he was riding in was hit by a civilian tractor-trailer. The SUV's driver, also a Soldier, reportedly was trying to pass a slower vehicle just before the accident. The driver was not injured.

Class C

■ Two Soldiers suffered minor injuries when their HMMWV overturned. The Soldiers were test-driving the HMMWV on a dirt road when the rear end slid to the right on a hill. The right-rear tire went into a shallow ditch on the roadside, causing the vehicle to overturn. The Soldiers were wearing their seatbelts and Kevlar helmets, and were able to exit the vehicle and get help from military police patrolling the area.

■ Soldier suffered second- and third-degree burns to his chest, arms, and legs when a HMMWV hose assembly line burst. The Soldier was conducting PT when he realized the HMMWV parked nearby had a runaway engine. After he stopped to help, the Soldier reached over to kill the solenoid fuel cell when the hose assembly line burst. Hot fluid sprayed over the Soldier's body, causing the burns.



Personnel Injury

Class A

■ Soldier collapsed and died while running during PT.

■ Soldier died after falling down the stairs in his quarters. The Soldier had consumed an unknown number of alcoholic

drinks before going downstairs to get something to eat. The Soldier suffered severe head trauma during the fall.

■ One Soldier died and another was injured after being electrocuted. The Soldiers were installing a radio antenna when it touched a power line.

■ Soldier died from a non-hostile gunshot wound. No other details were provided.

■ Soldier died 6 days after being burned over 65 percent of his body. The Soldier was improving the area around an ammunition bunker with an M9 Armored Combat Earthmover when the ammunition point caught fire.

■ Soldier was killed when another Soldier's M16 accidentally fired at a checkpoint. The round struck the deceased Soldier in the head.

■ One Soldier suffered a permanent total disability and another was injured when they were struck by a vehicle at a foreign intersection.

■ Soldier died from a non-hostile gunshot wound to his chest. Another Soldier was firing his M16 when a round accidentally struck the Soldier.

■ Soldier died 3 weeks after suffering a fall during PT. The Soldier was running when she fell and fractured her leg, causing fatal complications.

Class B

■ Soldier suffered a gunshot

wound to his leg, resulting in a permanent partial disability, when the M2 50-caliber weapon he was stowing in a HMMWV discharged.

- Soldier's fingers were amputated when the C4 explosive he was emplacing detonated. The Soldier also suffered a fractured ankle, and two other Soldiers suffered injuries including burns, cuts, and a ruptured eardrum. The Soldiers were attempting to destroy captured ammunition at the time of the accident.

Class C

- Soldier suffered a heat stroke during PT. The Soldier was taking a PT test and had completed the first two portions when he collapsed and lost consciousness during the 2-mile run.

- Soldier suffered fractures to her leg during the 2-mile run portion of the APFT. The Soldier had been on profile for various injuries to her lower leg prior to the accident, but was cleared at the time of the test.



Class A

- One Soldier was killed and two others were injured when their vehicle ran off the roadway and overturned. The degree of injury to the two surviving Soldiers was not reported.

- Soldier suffered fatal injuries when he was ejected from his vehicle. The Soldier was on convalescent leave for foot surgery and had

been drinking alcohol at his girlfriend's apartment just before the accident. He and a friend had left the apartment to get food and were on their way back when their vehicle slammed into the rear of a parked tractor trailer. The vehicle was estimated to be traveling 50 to 60 mph in a 25 mph zone at the time of impact. Although he was revived twice on the way to the hospital, the Soldier was pronounced brain dead and died the next morning. The passenger, who was wearing his seatbelt, was treated for minor injuries.

- Soldier died when his vehicle struck a bridge. The driver was speeding at the time of the accident.

- Soldier died when his vehicle was rear-ended by another vehicle. No other details were provided.

- Soldier suffered fatal injuries when his vehicle ran off the roadway and struck several trees. The Soldier was ejected from the vehicle.

- Soldier died after his vehicle overturned. The Soldier was home on pass for Thanksgiving when the accident occurred.

- Soldier died when the vehicle she was riding in was rear-ended and spun out of control, and then struck on the side by two other vehicles.

Class B

- Three Soldiers suffered extensive injuries, including broken bones and head injuries, when their vehicle overturned

several times. The Soldier driving the vehicle fell asleep at the wheel after leaving a nightclub.

- Soldier suffered a permanent partial disability when he was ejected from his vehicle. The Soldier's vehicle crossed the median and struck another vehicle driven by a civilian.

- Three Soldiers suffered back injuries when their rental vehicle was rear-ended by a utility truck. The Soldiers were stopped at a red light behind two other cars when the utility truck, traveling about 30 mph, hit their vehicle. The impact caused the rental vehicle to hit the cars in front of it.

- Soldier suffered a compound fracture to his ankle when a civilian vehicle pulled out in front of his motorcycle. The Soldier turned his motorcycle in an attempt to put the motorcycle between him and the other vehicle, as he was taught in the Motorcycle Defensive Driving Course. The injury was caused when his ankle caught between the motorcycle and the car. The Soldier was wearing personal protective equipment. 

**This nugget is worth
its weight in gold, so**

**KEEP IT
COVERED!**

Be Safe!



U.S. ARMY SAFETY CENTER