

Army strives to 'brake' accident trends

By David Crozier

While privately-owned vehicle accidents make up more than 40 percent of all Army non-combat related fatalities (104 in FY03), add in Army motor vehicle and Army combat vehicle accidents and that fatality rate exceeds 60 percent. And the trend continues to go up, according to officials at U.S. Army Safety Center, Ft. Rucker, Ala.

"We are an Army at war and it is a fast moving train with more than a quarter of a million Soldiers moving in one direction or another," said Brig. Gen. Joe Smith, director of Army Safety. "In this fight every Soldier and piece of equipment counts. [Unfortunately] fatalities continue to rise and we have two enemies in this war: the hostile human enemy and accidents."

Smith explained that since World War I more than half of the Army's losses during war time were due to accidents, not the enemy.

"As professionals we study the art of war in great detail, but with a large percentage of our combat power being lost to accidents we must expand our understanding of warfare and fight both enemies," Smith said. "The strategic message is clear: the main weapon against our accidental losses must be leader involvement and accountability across the force. Each of us must commit to the fight and get the message down to the first-line leaders and the individual Soldiers."

Smith continued stating that commanders continue to do an awesome job with their main objective, but the challenge lies within the small operations involving junior leadership.

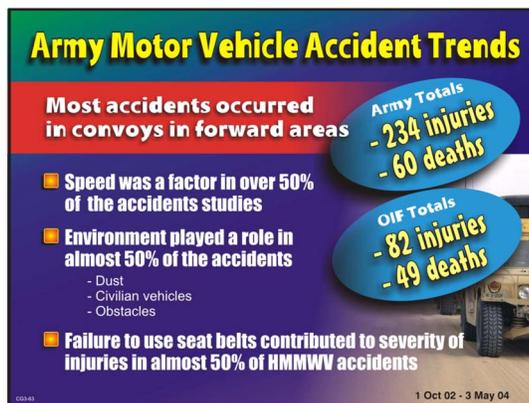
The latest statistics from the Safety Center show in Fiscal Year 2003 the major causes of Army motor vehicle and Army combat vehicle accidents were speed, rollovers and failure to follow procedures. Most accidents occurred in convoys in forward areas and speed was a factor in more than 50 percent of all



U.S. Army photo

Fiscal Year 2004 Army accident statistics show an increase over recent years and have accounted for 157 Army fatalities. Of that, Army motor vehicle and Army combat vehicle accidents account for 40 of those deaths.

accidents studied. The environment (obstacles, dust and civilian vehicles) also played a role in more than 50 percent of all accidents studies. And finally, failure to wear seatbelts contributed to the severity of injuries in almost 50 percent of all HMMWV accidents.



Graphic courtesy Army Safety Center

Failure to follow procedures and cutting corners are major contributors to the above statistics, according to U.S. Army Safety Center investigators.

"Even if we did nothing else but got every commander to enforce speed and seatbelt discipline, we would cut our driving fatalities by half," Smith said. "In combat, you are more likely to die from not wearing your seatbelt, than by not being able to get out of the vehicle as quickly due to wearing your seatbelt."

Smith said this year's statistics for Army motor vehicles and Army combat vehicles show there is an increase in both fatalities and severe injuries. As of June 23, the Army reported 340 Army Motor Vehicle accidents with 33 being Class A (damages exceeding \$1 million), up

22 percent from FY03. Out of those accidents, 34 Soldiers died and 105 Soldiers were injured. Total costs including damage to equipment, injuries to Soldiers and loss to the Army has surpassed \$11 million. For Army combat vehicle accidents, the Army recorded another 52 accidents with 10 deaths and 24 injuries at a cost of more than \$9 million in losses.

In a recent "Safety Sends" message developed by Smith this year, he noted that the analysis they are getting at the Safety Center appears to be on track with what he is finding on visits to the field.

"It is true that many of our accidents are caused by junior leaders cutting corners and not enforcing standards," Smith wrote. "It is also true that we are not giving them adequate time for pre-mission planning and troop leading procedures."

Smith said that supervision is getting "lip service" because of the high operations tempo and that junior leaders are assuming more responsibility in combat than they are trained for.

"If [junior leaders] are going to be responsible for risk management in combat, then we should hold them to standard while training," Smith said. "We are not training as we fight. The Chief of Staff of the Army has directed our risk management training be changed to focus on an Army at war. It's a tall order but we must capture the full magnitude of this and reinforce it in the school houses, during home-station training and at combat training centers."

Given the fact that most Army vehicle accidents occur in convoys in forward areas, Master Sgt. Robert Fisher, Ground Safety Accident Investigator, U.S. Army Safety Center, said there are many references junior leaders can use to ensure safe convoy operations.

"FM 100-14, *Risk Management*, states that Army operations, especially combat operations, are demanding and complex. Managing risks related to these operations requires educated judgment and professional competence," he said. "Using the Risk Management process allows junior leaders to make informed, conscious decisions to accept risks at acceptable levels."

Fisher said junior leaders can look to AR 385-55 and 600-55, FM 21-305 and 55-30, and TC 21-305-1 through 11 and TC 21-305-100 for guidance in preparing for convoy operations.

Can concertina wire really destroy a HMMWV?

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There is nothing like being deployed to a theater of war to experience all the "normal" things war can bring: rain, cold, dust, wind, storms and the occasional enemy troop. One thing most of us probably wouldn't think about is concertina wire—that pesky, really sharp stuff used to section off critical areas. One of the worst places to encounter it is on a narrow road where vehicles, pedestrians, flying dust, and high winds make for an already precarious situation.

On one particular mission, I was driving a HMMWV on a main road when I came to a highly congested area. The dust was blowing, there were Soldiers waiting to go to sick call at a local hospital, and several vehicles were waiting to pass a detail putting concertina wire around a perimeter. I had to wait with everyone else for my turn to pass.

Once the area was clear I drove through the bottleneck, but failed to notice a huge strand of concertina wire in my path. I knew I had driven over something, but I just kept going. After all, a HMMWV can run over *anything* and not be fazed, right?

It wasn't long before I heard a metallic sound coming from underneath the truck. I stopped to check the noise and found concertina wire wrapped around the front drive axle. "No big deal," I said to myself. "I'll get it fixed as soon as I finish the mission."

Unfortunately, I never finished the mission. The wire punctured both front tires, flattening the right front. The wire also destroyed the left and right front constant velocity (CV) boots and ruined the right-front



Photo by Pfc. Michael J. Carden

Concertina wire can do a lot more than just keep the enemy out. It can also cause major damage to Army vehicles when they run over it.

CV joint. Although it sounded like a lot of damage, the motor pool personnel originally *thought* it would be a simple fix. That is, until they got the HMMWV up on jack stands. Before it was over, mechanics had to use bolt cutters to remove the concertina wire and also replace both CV boots and the damaged CV joint.

I was foolish in thinking my HMMWV was indestructible. Sure, HMMWVs are tough, but so is concertina wire. I should have never driven over something I couldn't recognize. Luckily it wasn't something worse and I'm here to tell this story. However, those motor pool guys probably won't forget me anytime soon.

Be careful when you're in an operational environment, especially when you're deployed overseas. There are many hazards on foreign roads, and nothing is indestructible — not even a HMMWV.

Editor's note: This article is reprinted courtesy of the U.S. Army Safety Center and Countermeasures Magazine.



The Army's five-year average shows the number of fatalities for FY 04 to be on the rise, a trend U.S. Army Safety Center officials hope to "brake."

Failures in pre-mission planning, pre-convoy inspections, mission rehearsal and lack of basic standard operating procedures were the cause of three Soldiers losing their lives in a recent tactical combat movement, according to Smith.

"A platoon experienced two fatal rollovers during the same operation when the vehicles rolled over into a canal resulting in the death of three soldiers and injury to another," Smith said. "When we peeled the onion skin back on this accident we found that pre-combat checks were not conducted to standard. One vehicle had a padlock on the primary access door which prevented it from being used for egress. One driver could not use the escape tunnel because of improper load planning."

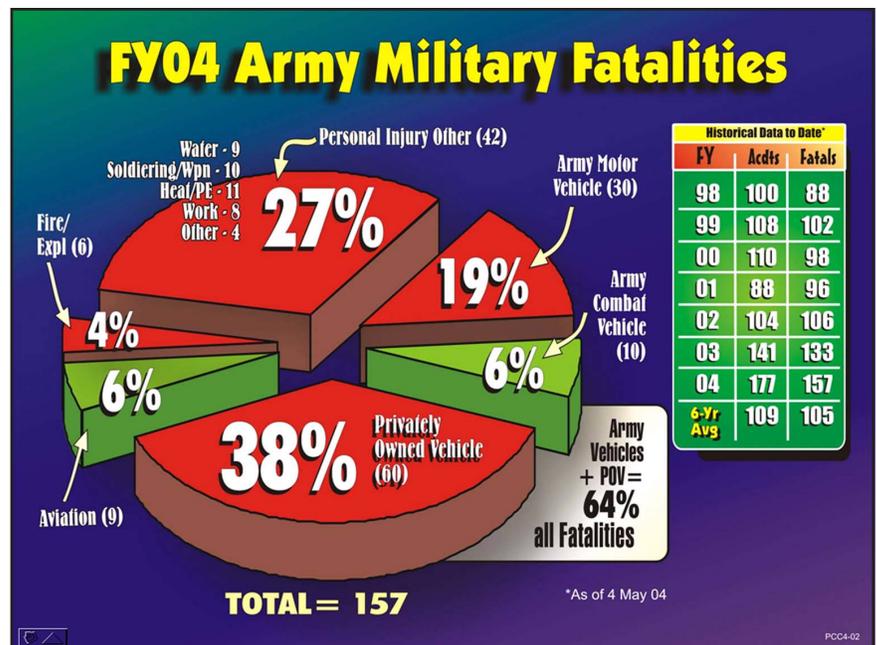
Smith said the investigation found that rollovers were discussed in planning, but never rehearsed and that every Soldier and leader knew the action on the objective, but little attention was given to actions during convoy movement. Additionally, Smith noted, there was no standard operating procedure for transition to night-vision device operations and crews attempted to transition while on the move which resulted in a loss of situational awareness and the subsequent rollover of the two vehicles into the canal.

"The message to our junior leaders: doing the basics right is our most powerful control measure," Smith said. "Safety is a combat multiplier, not a constraint."

want to share what we know about recent accidents, the current perceptions of our Soldiers and new best practices to mitigate risks and meet the Secretary's goal of reducing accidents by at least 50 percent."

Last year the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, challenged the Army to "reduce the number of mishaps and accident rates by at least 50 percent in the next two years." To that end Acting Secretary of the Army, Les Brownlee, directed the Army to develop a new Army Safety Campaign Plan that he approved in April of this year. The campaign tagged, "Be Safe!" provides a framework for attacking the leading factors and indicators that contribute to Army accidents and fatalities; establishes measurable and specific objectives within new and existing programs; develops implementation timelines; and serves to increase accountability. The plan can be found on the AKO Web site and on the Safety Center Web site at <https://safety.army.mil/home.html> or <https://besafe.army.mil/>.

"The goal of the safety campaign plan is to encourage our Army to be safe and bring [them] all home wherever they are," Smith said. We at the Safety Center



The Secretary of Defense has challenged the entire Department of Defense to "reduce the number of mishaps and accident rates by at least 50 percent in the next two years." The Army's response to that challenge is the Army Safety Campaign -- Be Safe! To learn more about the campaign visit <https://besafe.army.mil>.