



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 25-27

## *Tactical Vehicle Mishaps II*

Tactical vehicles have gone through numerous changes over the years, but the one constant is they all have hazards associated with them. From limited visibility to high potential for rolling, each vehicle in our arsenal has risks which need to be respected. The following are some examples of when we didn't heed the risks. Keep these in mind for the next time you drive.

- Foreign Affairs. We'll start our tactical vehicle journey overseas. A two-vehicle convoy composed of a recovery vehicle (*a tactical tow-truck*) towing a disabled vehicle followed by a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) was driving off base. The recovery vehicle attempted to make a left turn but didn't go wide enough to clear the corner. The driver immediately started backing up (*without a ground guide*) to reset the turn. The driver of the JLTV took the cue and also started backing up (*also without a ground guide*). The foreign national in the POV behind him did not take the cue and watched in horror as the big American military vehicle crunched into his car (*there were no injuries fortunately, but this could not have been good for foreign relations*). —*Tactical vehicles don't have back up cameras. It's fairly obvious why it's mandatory to use ground guides. It may make the whole reversing process take a little longer, but it helps avoid situations like this.*



- Failure to Merge. Back in CONUS another convoy of JLTVs was driving off-base on the freeway. The convoy began merging into the right lane. The first three vehicles merged successfully ... the fourth didn't. An unsuspecting POV was in the lane beside the final JLTV and was side swiped (*there were no injuries here either, but again, this doesn't help public image*). —*Many tactical vehicles come with lots of armor. That's great for protection, but not for visibility. This is where that assistant driver (A-driver) comes in handy; they aren't just there for company. A-drivers should be helping the driver maintain awareness through the entire movement, including checking blind spots.*

- Driving Blind(ish). A unit was conducting blackout driving in a training area with its incidental drivers in High Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV). The driver of one Humvee misjudged the lateral position of his vehicle veered off the dirt road and drove into an obscured ditch. The front end of the vehicle dropped, throwing the Marines forward (*sounds like people weren't wearing their seat belts*). Each Marine sustained bruising and one Marine had a mild concussion. The investigation report noted the driver was inexperienced with driving with night vision devices (NVDs). He had participated in minimal blackout driving during his incidental driver's course and hadn't conducted any such training since then (*great! let's throw the new guy in for the hardest task*). —*Getting drivers practice behind the wheel in difficult environments is important, but we have to make sure they're ready for it. A crawl, walk, run approach in more controlled circumstances would've prevented giving a Marine a concussion. Wearing a seatbelt would've helped too.*

- Sleeping at the Wheel. A Marine was slated to participate in multiple convoys during a multi-day training exercise. He completed a night movement at 2300, then went to sleep before the next convoy. He woke up five hours later to prepare for the next drive (*that doesn't seem like a full rest*). Shortly after the convoy began, the Marine's JLTV approached a sharp turn next to an embankment. The A-driver noticed the driver wasn't turning and appeared to be nodding off (*oh dear*) and shouted to alert him. The driver was startled from his micro-sleep and slammed on the gas pedal, driving through the guard rail and down the embankment flipping the vehicle over the hood. The Marines were sent to the hospital for assessment and released shortly after with minor injuries —*Servicemembers are known for going long hours with little sleep. Operating motor vehicles (even more so, tactical vehicles) is one place where this won't work though. MCO 5100.29C specifically mandates drivers will be allotted eight hours for rest in a 24-hour period because we recognize failing to provide vehicle operators with rest results in incidents like this one.*

## Tactical Vehicle Mishaps II



- Not Following Procedure. This incident proves fatal hazards can be present outside of driving. Marines were being picked up from a rifle range by a convoy of Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacements (MTVRs), commonly called 7-Tons. The convoy parked on a hill, facing downhill, instead of flat ground because it was closer to the range. As a Marine was climbing the gate ladder into the first vehicle, the 7-Ton behind it began rolling forward. The Marine was unaware of this and was crushed between the vehicles from his thigh to his neck. The other Marines unpinned the mishap victim and attempted lifesaving procedures, but the Marine's ribs were crushed and he had no vital signs. The mishap

investigation found the parking brake was accidentally disengaged when a Marine loaded a rifle into the door mount. The vehicle's movement would have been prevented, though, if a chock block had been placed on the wheels as required by higher echelon Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Motor Transportation. —*A simple block of wood could have prevented this fatality. Don't allow failure to follow orders to endanger your personnel. The orders aren't there to make life harder; they're there for a reason.*

- Normalization of Deviation. A Marine driving a light-skinned Humvee was following another Humvee on a dirt range road after setting targets up downrange. They were driving five miles over the 30mph limit. The dust from the first vehicle limited the second driver's vision causing him to not see a turn in the road. Due to his speed and limited visibility, he couldn't react in time. He attempted to turn hard, but the sides of the vehicle's tires struck a berm on the side of the road causing the vehicle to roll four times. The doors of the Humvee had been removed, which was permitted by the unit. The Marine wasn't wearing his seat belt and his helmet was placed under his seat instead of on his head. Members of the unit often didn't wear seat belts when serving as exercise controllers to allow for faster adjudications. He wasn't currently in an exercise controller role, though, but the habit persisted. Without the doors and seat belt, the Marine was ejected during the roll and fatally injured. The mishap investigators logically highlighted the safety system usage oversights in their report. They also highlighted the driver's limited training. Upon checking into the unit he attended a three-day licensing course that included classroom instruction and a paved road test, but no off-road practical training. The course was previously five days and included an off-road motor skills test, but the course was shortened, eliminating this portion. —*This unit ultimately didn't respect the hazards associated with tactical vehicle operations. As a result, they put an underprepared driver in a vehicle that allowed the doors to be removed. This driver then didn't use the simple safety features of a seat belt and helmet, which was a unit-wide habit, despite them being required, and then operated the vehicle faster than regulation or road condition allowed. Leaders—do some of that leading stuff. Don't let deviating from the orders/regs become normal. In the aviation world they say "NATOPS is written in blood." Well, so are a lot of these tactical vehicle orders.*

### Key Takeaways

Tactical vehicles are a tool to facilitate logistics, transportation, and firepower – *AND* – they can be a hazard to your own forces. Driving them carefully and smartly is the best way to get where you need to go and get the mission done. Remember these mishaps and keep some simple points in mind:

- 1. Slow down.** They're tactical vehicles, not race cars. Getting to your location safely will save a lot more time than speeding and having to deal with a crash.
- 2. Know your vehicle.** Tactical vehicles have various nuances. Be aware of specific vehicles' blind spots, braking capabilities, turning radius, etc. The right time to learn this stuff isn't with troops in the back or in high-risk training. *Leaders, make sure your training progression makes sense.*
- 3. Know and adhere to safety policies.** Wear the required PPE and seat belts/harnesses. Know your SOPs and immediate actions (*like rollover procedures*) and practice them. Complacency kills, the last two examples are proof of that. *Leaders, make sure your folks know and follow. You are setting the standard.*

***And remember, "Let's be careful out there."***