



Tactical Vehicle Mishaps III



File photo, not associated with mishap

The U.S. military has a broad assortment of tactical vehicles at its disposal to fill a variety of mission sets. These vehicles range from massive transportation vehicles like the Logistics Vehicle System Replacement (LVSR) to the smaller mobile Utility Task Vehicles (UTV). Whatever these vehicle sizes, capabilities or uses, one thing remains common between them all, our ability to cause mishaps with them. The following preventable mishaps occurred because personnel didn't respect the risks in tactical vehicle operations.

A Little Too Much Role Play

A unit was conducting a mobile raid exercise during military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) training and using role players to apply realism. A Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) was moving into place as part of a cordon with foot-mobile troops providing security around it. Two role players approached the vehicle from the front driver's side. The foot-mobile security team initiated escalation of force procedures, which escalated to the role players wrestling one of the Marines to the ground. This all occurred unbeknownst to the JLTV driver, who continued to move forward. As the Marine engaged the role players, one of his legs rolled into the path of the JLTV and was run over. The subsequent investigation noted two main faults. Primarily, the role players went "hands on" with participants around moving vehicles, despite this being prohibited by unit SOP. Also, the unit failed to use a ground guide or to provide communication between the JLTV driver and personnel outside the vehicle. – *Evoking realism in a training exercise is important, but so is respecting hazards. The JLTV, like many of our tactical vehicles, has significant close-in blind spots. This is exactly why the unit had a policy about ground guides and physical engagement near vehicles. If this policy isn't adhered to, mishaps like this are bound to happen.*

What Do You Mean the Vehicle isn't a Toy?

A Marine was tasked with moving an Ultra-Light Tactical Vehicle (ULTV) to the communications lot to prep for an upcoming exercise. The Marine asked the dispatcher if he could take the dirt roads to the comm-lot (*because, fun*). The dispatcher denied this request, directing the Marine to stick to the hard ball roads (*because, rational thinking*). Cue the innate, disobedient child-side of the Marine's brain to immediately disregard what he'd been told. He departed the motor pool with his assistant driver (A-driver) and promptly turned onto the training area's dirt road. He then promptly began speeding down the trails. The A-driver stated after the fact that it felt like the driver was trying to drift the ULTV around the turns. Well, this didn't work out very well, because after a few turns the Marines found themselves upside-down. Fortunately, no one was harmed in this event (*though, we can't be certain what happened when he told his supervisor what happened*). – *Yes, some of our tactical vehicles may look like recreational vehicles, but that doesn't mean they should be driven as such. Along with specific guidance this Marine received on where to drive, there are strict guidelines for how fast the vehicles are supposed to be driven. This Marine's disregard for both these factors put himself and his A-driver in danger.*

Please Keep Your Hands and Feet Free of the Door

This next incident demonstrates that hazards aren't only present when driving these vehicles. Marines operating a JLTV incurred a flat tire on the front driver's side and pulled over to deal with the issue. Because the front left tire was deflated, the JLTV was leaning significantly to the left. The turret gunner exited the vehicle from the rear passenger side, then went to close the door, gripping the edge as he did so. The report stated he was fatigued from their training exercise, which may have contributed to him not moving his hand from the edge of the door as it closed. An armored tactical vehicle door is significantly heavier than that of the average car door. The weight of the door, combined with it closing harder than normal due to the vehicle's tilt, caused significant damage to the Marine's ring finger and in the end, it had to be amputated. – *Getting in and out of a vehicle may seem routine, but when you are in*



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a tactical vehicle nothing is routine. Anyone who has exited an armored tactical vehicle can attest to the momentum these doors can carry. You do not want any part of your body in the way when these doors close.

The Few, the Proud, the Mirrorless

A new Motor-T Marine was starting his initial training on the LVSR. He received his safety training brief, then got in the driver's seat. As he made his way down his designated route, he thought an oncoming vehicle was over the lane's yellow dividing line. He veered to the right to make room, not realizing how close he was getting to parked vehicles on his right. The passenger side mirror of the LVSR struck the driver side mirror of a parked Army cargo truck, requiring replacement of both mirrors. – *While some might blame this incident on interservice animosity, it really chalks up to a novice driver not fully appreciating the size of his vehicle. While the driver was able to recognize one oncoming hazard, he let that fixation blind him to other hazards. Drivers must appreciate the size of these vehicles and be completely aware of their surroundings.*

Fast, Furious, and Unrestrained

Three Sailors were using a Polaris 4-seat ATV to move around a MOUT training area to check on different training sites. The driver mounted the vehicle, putting his seat belt on (*alright, good start*). The other two Sailors mounted up but neglected the seat belt part (*oh dear*). On their way to the next site, the driver picked up speed to roughly 30 mph, despite the posted limit being 15 mph (*oh good, another servicemember thinking he's on a joy ride*). The driver entered a roundabout, maintaining his current speed and (*predictably*) lost control of the vehicle. The ATV rolled over ejecting the two passengers, who, in addition to not wearing seat restraints, weren't wearing the helmets mandated by SOP. Both passengers went to the hospital with concussions, with one of them staying in the hospital for an additional four days due to a lung injury. – *We'll repeat the previous mantra. These vehicles aren't toys. Speed limits exist to prevent this exact thing from happening. PPE requirements exist to prevent these exact injuries from happening. It is worth noting the two passengers spent a combined 5 days in the hospital and another combined 60 days SIQ. The driver, who actually wore his seatbelt, walked away with no injuries.*

Key Takeaways

While the damage or injury sustained in most of these examples can be considered minor, there are far too many other mishaps where this isn't true. The tactical vehicles we use have many safeties and hazard mitigations, but they are still large machines that, if not respected, can maim or kill our Marines and Sailors. We must instill in them an appreciation for tactical vehicle hazards and adherence to the regulations and training meant to mitigate these hazards. The following guidance has been used in previous dispatches on this topic and still relates.

- 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 during high-risk training. Leaders, make sure your training progression makes sense.
- 3. Know and adhere to safety policies.** Wear the required PPE, seat belts and harnesses. Know your SOPs and immediate actions (like rollover procedures) and practice them. Complacency kills.

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