



Naval Safety Command

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 22-20

MARINE CORPS MARTIAL ARTS PROGRAM MISHAPS

The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) has been in place for 20 years as of 2022. This program is responsible for increasing the lethality of our Marines by teaching combat-oriented martial arts techniques. It has also been responsible for more than 1,700 injuries to our Marines over these 20 years. Incidents will happen when fighting each other in training, but many injuries could have been avoided. The following examples (*and we had many to choose from*) should serve as lessons to prevent future injuries in your unit.



- Don't break the Corpsman, they are the ones we need to treat injuries. While conducting MCMAP training on a Marine expeditionary unit, a corpsman and Marine were ground fighting. Perhaps there was a little much inter-service rivalry in this match-up because, during the bout, the Corpsman received a strike to the hand, leaving him with enough pain to require a trip to medical. He was diagnosed with a broken hand, requiring a cast. *The report stated they had the requisite non-participating safety corpsman and safety equipment, but also highlighted the importance of these procedures due to the combative nature of MCMAP having a higher potential for injury, ya think?*
- Also, don't break the PFCs, it sets a bad example. In this case, a fresh Private First Class (PFC) was paired with a maybe too motivated corporal. During weekly MCMAP, they practiced the counter to the round punch, in which the defender blocks against the inside arm of the aggressor, then grabs the aggressor's neck and executes a follow-on strike — a knee strike to the face. The PFC performed the round punch, and the corporal blocked the punch and was supposed to simulate the knee strikes. He must have gotten a little too into it because his knee made contact with the PFC's forehead causing a laceration and mild concussion. This corporal might need some coaching on Marine mentorship. *The primary recommendations of this incident were to emphasize the level of force to use and ensure senior Marines are supervising junior Marines, not breaking them.*
- A not David and Goliath story. In this event, the little guy certainly did not win. The mishap occurred while a unit was grappling during a grey belt course. One Marine was paired with another, who was noted to be four inches taller and about 30 pounds heavier. The direct quote from the narrative states, "within a minute, said named Marine (the smaller one) was on the ground and the other Marine was standing." This very one-sided defeat left our figurative David want-to-be with a fractured fibula, as his foot remained immobile while he was bent backward by the larger Marine. *Maybe he should have brought his sling to the fight. The report noted two Marines of the same size could cause the same injury, but a considerable body size difference can be a risk in and of itself, especially with non-proficient fighters. We recommend pairing Marines of similar sizes. If that's not possible, uneven match-ups like this should be monitored more closely by the instructor.*
- DOUBLE KILL! In this incident, a Marine managed to take out two people at once. Multiple Marines were apparently grappling in close vicinity to one another, a little too close. The report simply states while the two mishap victims were locked in a choke hold, a pair of Marines grappling next to them

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attempted to transition from one move to another when the two victims “received a boot to the face.” This errant flailing kick, or whatever move this other Marine was trying to execute, was done with enough force to break one Marine’s nose and give both victims a minor concussion. You must give the guy credit for not only taking out two people but two people he wasn’t even fighting. *The report acknowledged the groups were grappling too close together, but the recommendations simply stated the Marines need to be more aware of their surroundings and provide additional instructors for oversight. We can get behind having more instructors if possible, but we also recommend ensuring there is adequate space for participants to execute the training safely.*



- Horseplay Mishap. A silly intro would be inappropriate for this incident as it is a grave example of why MCMAP is supposed to be a supervised event. Two Marines were trying to pass the time in a warehouse while waiting for a delivery to unload. As is often the case with Marines, their boredom turned to roughhousing. One Marine put the other in a headlock. This Marine then tried to break the headlock by using a MCMAP throw. He intended only to lift the other Marine, but not actually throw him since they were on a hard surface. In the process, he lost his balance and dropped the other Marine on the concrete. The victim suffered a fractured vertebra and paralysis from the neck down. *We must*

remember MCMAP is combat martial arts. These techniques are designed to cause injury and should not be employed lightly. That is not to say Marines shouldn’t grapple or fight one another. Marines are an aggressive breed by nature, and that aggression should never be diminished, and for that reason, we must execute MCMAP in a controlled environment to reduce injury.

Key Takeaways

MCMAP is an important tool to help develop a combat mindset, but when executed poorly or without the right amount of risk mitigation, we run the risk of increased injury which only serves to limit our combat ability. We encourage you to learn from the mishaps listed above and consider the following.

1. **Keep training consistent.** MCMAP, like any other skill, is one that must be honed regularly. If we don’t keep up to practice, we increase the chance of injury from incorrectly executing a technique. Many Marines can probably relate to the unit that does a massive belting up push right before promotion season, then doesn’t touch MCMAP again for months. Avoid this complacency. Put your MCMAP instructors to use and conduct MCMAP at least on a monthly, if not weekly basis.
2. **Have the requisite safety structure on hand.** There is specific guidance (NAVMC 3500.41C) as to the safety equipment and training conditions to be used for each event, it’s there for a reason. As the scenarios listed above prove, there is a higher chance of injury when conducting MCMAP training. Having the right equipment can limit the severity of these injuries and having the right safety personnel will allow units to adequately respond to them.
3. **Ensure adequate oversight.** Make sure there are the appropriate instructor to student ratios. An instructor might not be able to stop every incident or injury from happening, but a sure fire way to make it even harder for instructors is to not have enough.

And remember, “Let’s be careful out there”