

Leading By Example Prevents Accidents

by A. Ann Worrell, USAARMC System Safety Engineer

Why are experienced soldiers needlessly dying in accidents? Why are leaders violating standards and killing themselves and others? Why are serious accident rates increasing while the overall number of accidents decreased by almost 50 percent?

These are the questions we need to answer as we look at armor branch accident statistics over the past five years. The armor branch has done a great job of reducing the number of Class A through C on-duty, non-POV related accidents (Fig. 1). However, the number of Class A accidents as a percentage of total accidents is on the rise (Fig. 2). Accidents are classified as follows:

- **Class A Accident**

- \$1,000,000 or more property damage
- Fatality or permanent disabling injury/illness

- **Class B Accident**

- \$200,000 to \$1,000,000 property damage
- Permanent partial disabling injury/illness
- 3 persons or more hospitalized

- **Class C Accident**

- \$20,000 to \$200,000 property damage
- Lost work day injury

There are some good reasons for the decrease in overall accident rates:

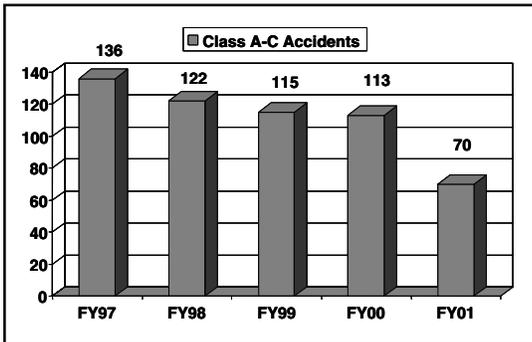


Figure 1. Armor branch Class A-C accidents, on-duty, non-POV

better education, command emphasis on safety, good leaders, and individual responsibility. But, there doesn't appear to be any reason for the increase in the number of serious accidents as a percentage of accidents.

In FY01, we lost four armor soldiers to needless on-duty accidents. For example, an Abrams tank commander didn't use available mechanical interlocks and was crushed between the breech and the turret. In another, a Bradley commander ordered his driver to move into a rain-swollen creek without adequately assessing the hazard. The water was above the limitations of the Bradley; the driver drowned. Both of these were clear violations of accepted standards and, as a result, lives were lost.

After reviewing all of the armor accidents over the past five years, the only common thread in a large number of accidents is that soldiers are violating standards and people are getting hurt. It is estimated that as many as 80 percent of Army accidents, both in peacetime and combat, involve human error. These accidents cause more losses in soldiers and equipment than the enemy does. Yet, no matter what we do, we will never eliminate all accidents. But the majority of accidents are preventable if you follow the standards and procedures in the manuals.

It is the leader's responsibility to set the example for his troops. Most leaders are doing a good job of this because the accident rates are decreasing. However, there is a rise in the number of leaders breaking rules or

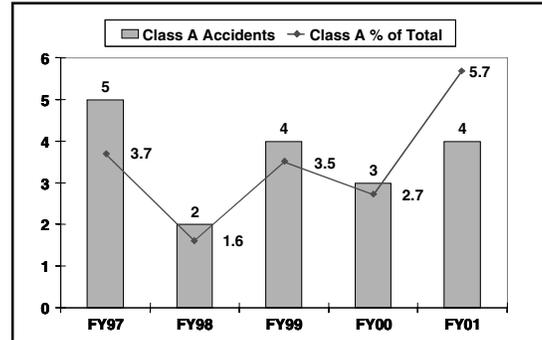


Figure 2. Armor branch Class A accidents as percentage of total A-C accidents, on-duty, non-POV

violating standards, causing harm to themselves and others.

If a leader sets the example by violating standards, his troops will do the same and accidents will occur. It may only be a bruise or a bump, but eventually someone will be seriously injured. You must never become so confident that you take your equipment for granted or so busy that you can't take time to use the safety interlocks on the equipment. As MG Whitcomb states in his January-February 2002 Commander's Hatch article, these safety precautions are "written in blood."

It is the leader's responsibility to be a role model and ensure soldiers meet the standards and prevent accidents. We must focus on doing the job correctly, safely, and by the book. We must use safety devices and pay attention to warnings. We must provide leadership that focuses on a safe environment and train our subordinates to do the same. We must lead by example.

A. Ann Worrell is a systems safety engineer with the Armor Branch Safety Office at Fort Knox, Ky. Data for this article came from the U.S. Army Safety Center database and is current as of 1 October 2001. Mrs. Worrell can be reached at (502) 624-4726 (DSN prefix 464) or by email at Aurelie.Worrell@knox.army.mil.