US Military Police Narrowly Avoid Injury in Mine Strike (Afghanistan)

Kandahar (Afghanistan) - Four 118th Military Police Company (Airborne) soldiers narrowly avoided serious injury late April 1 when the armored HMMWV they were riding on patrol struck an anti-tank landmine, an incident that could have turned out much worse.

The three MPs and one combat medic from the 118th Military Police Company (Airborne) were on an area security patrol several miles outside Kandahar Air Field when they ran over a TC-6 anti-tank landmine, launching the armored vehicle four meters in the air and directly over a second nearby TC-6 mine rigged with a flechette anti-personnel round. The second mine, fortunately, wasn't triggered.

Though the Army has written off the armored HMMWV as a complete loss, amazingly enough the four occupants - Sgt. Brian Githens, team leader; Sgt. Shawn Brown, combat medic; Pfc. David Templeton, .50-caliber gunner; and Pfc. Justin Tester, driver - suffered nothing more than minor cuts and bruises.

“We were just driving along (the road) and it happened so fast, we didn’t know what happened,” Tester said. Unsure whether they were under ambush and hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, or hit by a land mine, the team quickly scrambled down a ditch off the road while the other two vehicles in the patrol provided front and rear perimeter defense over the wrecked vehicle, launching a parachute flare and white star cluster to see if the mine strike was the opening move in an ambush.

“We just stood by and waited for movement with the rest of the patrol,” Templeton said. “We were all deafened.” Githen’s team was in the second vehicle in a three-team security convoy. Covering 20-30 miles a day, sometimes twice or three times a day, the patrols are meant to keep a secure buffer zone around the base housing Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps service members.

According to Templeton, the convoy had driven by the site of the two land mines as recently as an hour and a half prior. But because of the heavily rutted roads, the convoy missed the mines on the way out, and the first vehicle in the convoy missed them on the way back.

“The roads have been traveled so much, it was impossible to follow directly behind the vehicle in front of you,” he said. The second mine was rigged by anti-coalition forces with an anti-personnel flechette round, which contain hundreds of little steel darts. Where anti-tank mines are designed to knock out tank tracks or penetrate armored hulls, flechettes are singularly made to penetrate body armor and Kevlar helmets.

According to Staff Sgt. Baylin Oswalt, the 731st Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company team leader dispatched to the site, it’s likely the second mine wouldn’t have succeeded where the first mine failed, though there would have been a lot more damage. “Would it have penetrated? I don’t think so,” he said. “The flechettes would have damaged the exterior more, but the mine probably wouldn’t have penetrated the armor.” The first land mine, located six feet away from the second one, left a crater 32 inches in diameter and two feet deep.

When the HMMWV was thrown in the air, it landed straddling the second, rigged, mine. That mine was blown up in place by the EOD team. “At the time, our adrenaline was running so fast that we weren’t worried,” Githen said of their reactions immediately after the mine strike. Brown agreed, saying they were cracking jokes at the time. “Yeah, I told Tester that my wife was going to cuss him out for his driving,” Templeton said. None of the four were hospitalized after the mine strike, and all reported back to duty two days later.

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