

Changing the Current Attitude

Enabling a culture of safety to flourish

by GySgt Esther B. Wade

No one wants to talk about safety until an injury or fatality occurs and questions have to be answered. The Marine Corps has over 725 large-scale (division/brigade/group/regiment/battalion, etc.) units and each of those units is comprised of two or more smaller-scale units. According to the same chapter of *MCO 5100.29B, Marine Corps Safety Program*, published in July 2011, major- and colonel-level commanders are responsible for establishing a safety office. Additionally, the ground safety officer (GSO) or ground safety manager (GSM) shall be appropriately trained within 90 days of assignment.

The required training that is being referenced is the Ground Safety for Marines (GSM) Course. Hypothetically, if only the 725 large-scale units are calculated, that is a total of 1,450 personnel that must be trained by instructors at the GSM Course nearly every year. There are currently six locations that offer the GSM Course: Camp Pendleton, CA; Okinawa, JA; Camp Lejeune, NC; Quantico, VA; Kaneohe Bay, HI; and New Orleans, LA. Each course location has the capacity to train approximately 30 personnel per class. Additionally, each location offers four classes a year with the exception of five offered at Camp Pendleton. This is a total of approximately 750 personnel trained per year. This is just over half of the required quotas needed to keep all units in compliance with the order. Classes are largely taught by civilian employees from each installation's Safety Center as part of their extra duties on top of deployments, unit inspections, and running safety programs as directed

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Ground Safety for Marines courses provide OSHA training for personnel assigned duties in ground safety. (Photo by Cpl Jessica Collins.)

by HQMC and the Safety Division. If the numbers already do not seem to match up, you have been reading between the lines diligently.

Next, consider the Commandant's *Safety Action Campaign, ALMAR 016/18*, signed May 2018. The Commandant's overall challenge is to reduce mishap-related fatalities by 50 percent by the end of fiscal year 2019 (FY19). Sadly, five months into FY19, the Marine Corps had suffered a third of the total number of fatalities in FY19 as was

the total from FY18. What contributed to this? What different direction should be explored to keep our Marines alive? Can we place the blame completely upon "fate" or "bad luck?" We could apathetically rationalize this, but the reality is that there is usually something that could have prevented the death from happening in the first place. Unfortunately, safety is typically a secondary consideration in the Marine Corps.

The GSM Course is an MOS producing course. After successful comple-

tion of the required two-week training, the Marine is granted the additional MOS of 8012. The Marine is then ordered back to his unit to either stand up or maintain a safety program within their unit. What is overlooked (not for lack of knowledge of the issue) is that the GSO and the GSM are not usually tasked with *just* the safety program. In a wing unit, the GSO still has to fly, attend briefs, and attend training that keeps him qualified to fly. In a ground unit, the GSM is often tasked with the safety program in addition to some other duties, such as substance abuse control officer or Equal Opportunity representative. Additionally, it is possible for a newly trained officer or SNCO to receive orders or get reassigned within his unit within months of attending the required training, thereby forcing the unit to send yet another person to the GSM course for training. This constant fluctuation in responsible safety personnel adds to the overall lack of good safety practices in each unit.

When looked at with a thoughtful eye, a pattern becomes clear: mission first and safety always—but secondary. If safety is so important, and if we are to achieve a 50 percent reduction in fatalities by the end of FY19, why is it that safety is an afterthought? Instead of being a primary MOS, it is an additional MOS. Instead of having one or two people completely dedicated to developing a safety program and promoting a safety culture in a unit, the

personnel tasked with this monstrous task are not focused entirely on safety. They are struggling to develop a safety program while trying to fly, conduct other operations, or perform other duties at the same time. In a perfect world, or perhaps in a world with a PMOS of 8012, a unit's safety representative would not have other collateral duties; clearly, current reality does not allow this.

How do we fix this problem? How do we provide continuity to the safety program in all Marine Corps units? How can we encourage and develop a good and lasting safety culture within each and every unit in the Marine Corps? How do we achieve a 50 percent reduction in fatalities through good safety practices and training?

There is an answer. The Marine Corps, through the Total Force Structure Division, could make the 8012 a lateral move PMOS for enlisted personnel. Although it may not be realistic to make it a PMOS for officers, it will be an invaluable maneuver for the entire Marine Corps to have dedicated personnel laterally move into a safety PMOS to provide continuity to the forces. Yes, the amount of work this requires will be vast; however, this is always the case when creating new MOSs. The hardest part of any successful maneuver is getting started. Consider the benefits of SNCOs who are properly trained, (possibly through the Army's Safety and Occupational Health training pro-

gram: Career Program 12, the GSM Course, and other applicable Occupational Safety & Health Administration courses) joining units to establish solid safety programs. Each newly trained 8012 SNCO will have a firm understanding of safety and how to start or maintain model safety programs where the safety of each member of the unit as his priority. Continuity will be built as each Marine will be in the position for two to three years before executing orders to another unit. Through an open line of communications with the unit commander, the safety SNCO can place all of his focus on building a safety culture in the unit, without collateral duty distractions.

The Commandant's goal is achievable, but it is a challenge because our culture is not developed and supported to accomplish the mission we are tasked with. The safety of our Marines is still an afterthought; an unpleasant barrier to mission accomplishment. This mentality is what continues to place our Marines' lives in danger. It does not have to be this way. It is possible to make safety practices part of our culture through the acceptance and implementation of change; change in the form of making the 8012 MOS a lateral move PMOS, instead of just an afterthought. Change can happen; will we choose to make it happen?

