

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Honorable
Dave Durenberger, U.S. Senate

July 1992

MILITARY TRAINING

DOD Training Fatalities for Fiscal Years 1988 Through 1991





United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-248513.1

July 22, 1992

The Honorable Dave Durenberger
United States Senate

Dear Senator Durenberger:

To prepare units for combat missions, some training entails activities that pose risk to the safety and well-being of the participants. As a result, mishaps involving injuries and deaths occur. As agreed with your staff, we are providing information on the number and types of training fatalities occurring in the four military services between fiscal years 1988 and 1991. We are conducting a separate review to analyze selected fatality investigations from each service to determine how well the mishaps were investigated and identify any resulting training safety improvements.

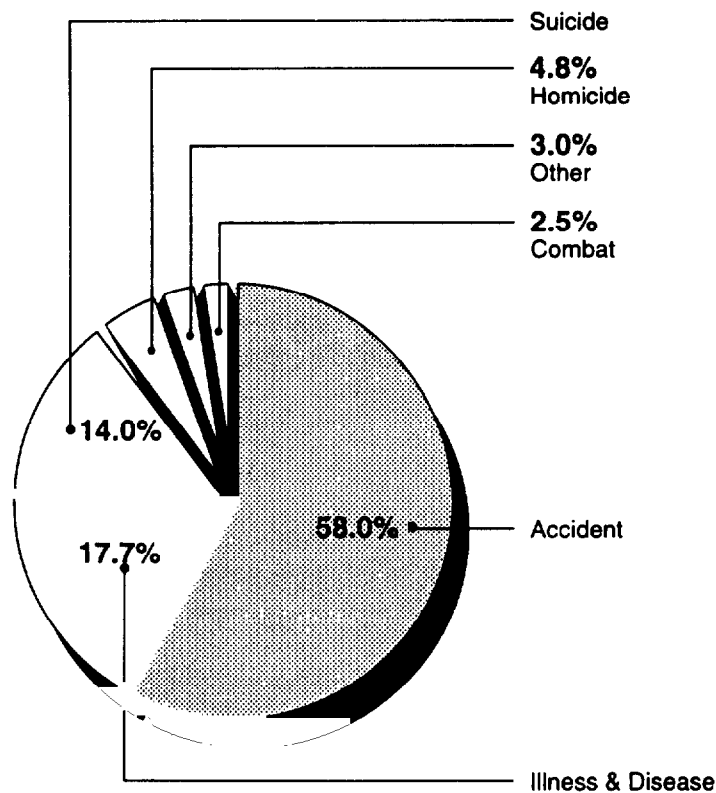
Results in Brief

Our analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) and military service data shows that 752 active duty military personnel died while engaging in peacetime training during fiscal years 1988 through 1991. These fatalities, representing 19 percent of all accidental deaths in the services during those years, resulted from various circumstances; however, 484 (about 64 percent of the training deaths) were related to aviation mishaps.

Number and Types of Training Deaths

DOD does not track training fatalities as a separate category. Rather, they are included among the deaths DOD classifies as accidental. During fiscal years 1988 through 1991, DOD reported 6,833 deaths of active duty military personnel, including those who died during Operation Desert Storm. Of this total, 3,941 deaths were classified as accidental. These included 1,524 Army, 654 Air Force, 1,223 Navy, and 540 Marine Corps accidental deaths. The 2,892 deaths not classified as accidental were due to illness, suicide, homicide, combat, and other causes. Figure 1 shows the distribution of causes of death in the active armed services for the 4-year period.

Figure 1: Active Duty Fatalities by Cause, Fiscal Years 1988-91



We determined from data provided by DOD and the military services that 752, or 19 percent, of the 3,941 accidental deaths occurred as a result of military training activities. These training deaths occurred in 397 separate training mishaps. Examples of training mishaps include the following:

- In 1991, an Army tank commander was killed when his tank drove over an embankment during night training maneuvers. He received first aid at the scene but died en route to the hospital.
- In 1990, two Air Force F-15C aircraft collided during a large combat training exercise. The two pilots were unaware of each other's location, which violated minimum altitude separation requirements, until shortly before impact. The mishap killed one of the pilots.
- In 1989, a Navy student pilot crashed his training jet into an aircraft carrier control tower as he attempted to land. The crash killed 5 persons, including the student, and injured 20 others.
- In 1991, a Marine Corps recruit drowned during combat swim training when his drill instructor forced him to continue swimming after he became exhausted. He received cardiopulmonary resuscitation and other cardiac life support at the scene but could not be revived.

Table 1 shows the distribution of training deaths and mishaps among the military services.

Table 1: Distribution of Training Deaths Among the Military Services, Fiscal Years 1988-91

Fiscal year	Army		Air Force		Navy		Marine Corps		All services	
	Mishaps	Deaths	Mishaps	Deaths	Mishaps	Deaths	Mishaps	Deaths	Mishaps	Deaths
1988	40	71	17	32	31	50	20	31	108	184
1989	43	75	21	33	26	88	23	73	113	269
1990	46	71	19	28	17	33	15	17	97	149
1991	28	33	9	14	24	75	18	28	79	150
Total	157	250	66	107	98	246	76	149	397	752

Source: GAO analysis of service data.

These deaths were related to various types of mishaps, the majority of which were aviation training mishaps. Table 2 shows the causes of training deaths for the four services.

Table 2: Training Deaths by Major Cause, Fiscal Years 1988-91

Activity	Army	Air Force	Navy	Marine Corps	Total	Percent
Aviation or aviation-related	119	107	156	102	484	64
Explosions/fires	0	0	64	0	64	9
Parachute	20	0	2	3	25	3
Live fire/weapons	21	0	1	10	32	4
Drowning	10	0	10	5	22	3
Physical training	5	0	7	16	28	4
Combat vehicle	26	0	0	5	31	4
Government vehicle (other than combat vehicle)	39	0	0	5	44	6
Other	10	0	6	3	19	3
Total	250	107	246	149	752	100

Source: GAO analysis of service data

Scope and Methodology

We identified the number and types of active duty training fatalities occurring during fiscal years 1988 through 1991 from data provided by DOD's Directorate for Information Operations and Reports and the military services' casualty offices⁶ and safety centers. We did not verify the accuracy of this data.

We performed our review from January 1991 through May 1992 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As requested, we did not obtain written agency comments on a draft of this report. However, we discussed its contents with responsible DOD and military service officials and considered their comments in preparing this report.

Unless you announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 15 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy, and to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Copies will be made available to others on request.

Please contact me at (202) 275-3990 if you or your staff have any questions. Major contributors to this fact sheet are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,



Paul L. Jones
Director,
Defense Force Management Issues

⁶Each service has a casualty office which compiles and certifies data on deaths.

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