



Short Safety Subject

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www.bragg.army.mil/psbc-bm/PubsAndForms/ShortSafetySubjects.htm

Kevlar Helmet Wear It And Live



Ever wonder about the need for wearing a Kevlar helmet in the field? After all, what can happen if it's not worn in a peace-time training environment? Do you think a tree might fall on you? This is exactly what happened during a field training exercise.

A One Station Unit Training (OSUT) company moved into a bivouac site to establish fighting positions and erect two-man tents. Prior to the start of the field exercise, unit cadre had conducted a thorough safety briefing of known hazards, plus monitored weather broadcasts for updates on local conditions.

Two soldiers were tasked to erect an individual tent using their shelter halves. The weather was calm. Both soldiers were facing away from a large pine tree, when suddenly the wind gusted to over 13 knots. Without warning, an upper section of a 14-inch diameter pine tree snapped and fell onto the soldiers. A drill sergeant interviewed later said he heard the tree snap, but there was no time to take evasive action.

One soldier was temporarily dazed after being struck by the tree's branches but otherwise was not hurt. The other soldier sustained potential life-threatening injuries including a fractured skull, fractures to both shins, broken left ankle, lacerated liver, and fractures to the upper vertebrae and neck. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) was performed and the soldiers were evacuated for treatment.

Investigation at the accident site showed the fallen tree did not have telltale indicators that it was rotten; e.g., brown leaves and stripped bark. The tree's outer wood was healthy-looking and solid. However, the inner core area was soft and weakened by insect infestation.

Cadre members had performed a safety briefing for the soldiers covering basic safety in a field environment, but the thought of trees causing personal injury during changing weather conditions was not considered. They also agreed that without the Kevlar helmet the soldier was wearing, the severe blow to the head would surely have proven fatal.

Training area risk assessment and accident risk controls should address environmental hazards appropriate to the local area - like tree and limb fall hazards. Forestry or other staff should routinely inspect bivouac, tactical or high-use training sites to identify suspect trees and take necessary action to prevent tree falls during windy conditions.

This incident confirms the importance of wearing the Kevlar helmet at all times in a field environment. And the good news is the soldier is likely to recover without a permanent disability.