Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3 (VMU-3)

Policy on Safety and Force Preservation

15 April 2016

Safety. What we do as Marines is inherently dangerous. Safety is not a buzzword to counter danger. Safety is a combination of a well thought out plan, leadership, and supervision. A tactically sound plan is inherently safe. This is true on and off duty. A well thought out plan does not eliminate all risk. That will never be possible in the chaotic environment that we must operate and thrive in.

Hazards. We will never be able to identify all of the hazards that could affect our Marines and Sailors and we don't need to. We need to cultivate a culture of smart decision making at all levels when faced with either simple or complex problems.

Risk. Make decisions to accept risk at the appropriate level and in a timely manner. Understand that some level of risk will always exist.

Discipline. Safety incidents often times occur due to a break down of discipline; either self-discipline to do what's right when no one is watching, or unit discipline to enforce standards. Maintaining self-discipline and enforcing standards is everyone's responsibility, not just those in charge or the DOSS. Erosion of discipline leads to cutting corners, unsafe practices, and mishaps.

Leadership. Active, engaged leadership can prevent accidents and mishaps by being present. A leader's presence has a two-fold impact on safety; leaders catch mistakes based on their experience and they enforce standards which prevent mistakes that lead to accidents or mishaps. I expect Marines in leadership positions to lead from the front. When "leaders" aren't around, I expect the senior Marines on site to step up and take charge of the situation and behave, act, and perform as a leader.

Decision making. Decisions are either made deliberately or hastily. When time permits use a deliberate decision making process to thoroughly think through the plan, identify pitfalls, and develop a plan that mitigates risk. Once execution of a task, exercise, or operation begins, decisions typically shift to being more hasty in nature. Hasty decisions does not imply careless decisions. Hasty simply implies there is less time to study a problem and develop a solution. Some decisions even happen so fast that they are made subconsciously. An example of when a hasty decision must be made is an in-flight emergency. Most importantly, no matter how much time you have to make a decision, you must weigh options, mitigate hazards, and decide how much risk to accept. No matter how much time you have to decide, leaders must make decisions at the appropriate level. Know what decisions you are allowed to make and what decisions must be made at a higher level above you. Leader's can delegate decision making authority, but never responsibility. If you are uncertain whether the decision you are making is within your authority to make it, ask before you make the decision. If time does not permit to ask and a decision must be made, have a bias for action and make a decision. Indecision slows our tempo, is counter to our warfighting ethos, and often times leads to additional issues that could have been prevented through action.

Force Preservation. Every individual in the squadron is vitally important to accomplishing our mission. Anything that takes a Marine or Sailor out of the fight has an impact on the entire unit. Leaders will be actively engaged with their Marines and understand the challenges they are experiencing, provide assistance when needed/requested, and know what resources are available to assist Marines. The ultimate goal of force preservation is keeping Marines in the fight and when out of the fight to return them to the fight as quickly as they are able.

Semper Fidelis,

LtCol Wayne Phelps
Commanding Officer
VMU-3