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### **Fratricide**

- 5: possible enemy tank sighted
- 4: check the map for known coordinates of all friendly tanks
- 3: check for a cold panel
- 2: identify the vehicle
- 1: do I fire?
- 0: Fire

This isn't a guide, and those certainly aren't steps. It is a clock charting the 5 seconds a tank commander has to decide whether or not his tank will survive the night. It is the 5 seconds most soldiers have to decide whether or not their gun is held to the temple of an enemy or a brother.

“Misfiring in the Fog,” an article in the April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003 issue of Time Magazine addresses the difficulty today's soldiers face in the field of battle. Mixed with sleeplessness and fear, the decisions dealing with life or death can be carried out as easily as turning on the lights. . . or in this case, turning out someone else's.

So far Operation Iraqi Freedom has resulted in the death of two in a British Challenger, two more in a British Tornado Aircraft, and another when Armored Vehicles came under attack by a U.S. A-10 aircraft. This is not to discount another 30 wounded when one unit fired on another. Can these deaths be blamed on particular soldiers' disregard for

compatriots? Hopefully not. Fortunately, there is a reasonable explanation: the machines are rising. . .

No, this is not a digression into another installment of the Terminator movies, but it is a true statement. The ease with which one soldier can kill many through machines is increasing. As Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division puts it: “It is a direct reflection of the fact that our enemies have not been able to inflict serious damage on us.” It is furthermore a reflection that our technology may simply be too effective. When a misfire occurs, there is no divine guidance that can steer the projectile off course. When a misfire occurs, a close range projectile has a 100% USDA stamp of approval for destroying the target.

This is proving to be a problem. As our enemies have a lesser and lesser ability to inflict damage upon us, the death by friendly fire percentage grows. In the Gulf War, 35 of 146 or 24% of Americans killed in action were killed by friendly fire, compared to 16% in WW II, and 11% in Vietnam. However the numbers can be deceiving: although saying 13% of Americans have died due to friendly fire in Afganistan may seem shocking, it seems less terrible when one finds out 13% is equivalent to 4 American deaths by friendly fire.

Nevertheless, in an ideal world, we shouldn't make mistakes, and the U.S. Army is certainly making an effort to prevent ‘Fratricide.’ This word coined by the army was created with the specific purpose of thwarting friendly fire. Since so many accidental

shootings can be attributed to a bad decision resulting from stress, why not provide an opposing stress? Now what runs through a soldier's mind in the last second is no longer: "kill or be killed", it is: "am I killing a brother."

Other technological fixes have been implemented. In Saudi Arabia, there is a dedicated fratricide cell working to review all Air Force strike decisions. U.S. troops have been given glow tape on their uniforms, visible only to night vision. Phoenix Beacons attached to vehicles emit infrared only visible to infrared goggles. Blue Force Tracking, though not very effective in real time, attempts to track all friendly targets with blue dots in a field of engagement. Allied tanks have a refrigeration unit installed to create an extremely cold spot on its surface to allow for easy identification. More recent developments include a radar like device that only paints vehicles as targets that do not ping back.

It is nice to see our military is attempting both a human and a technological fix to the problem of fratricide. Yet, it is still fascinating to note that our recently increasing fratricide numbers is a result of a systems interface failure: we simply can't identify targets as fast as we can shoot them down.