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NO. 1 IN THE USA



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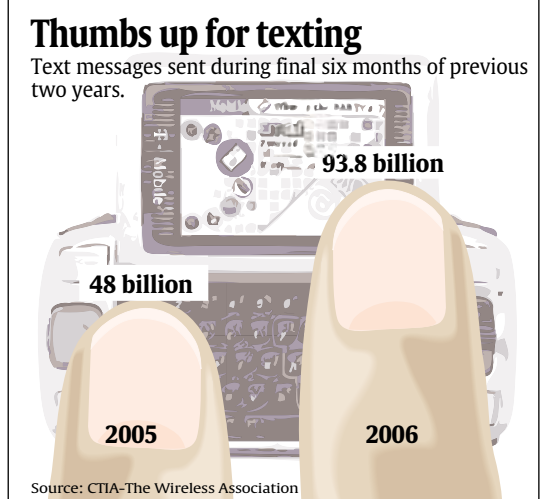
MVP Cheryl Ford helps lead the way with 16 points and 13 rebounds in 103-99 win, 1, 11C.

Life: Just like riding a (\$22,000) bike

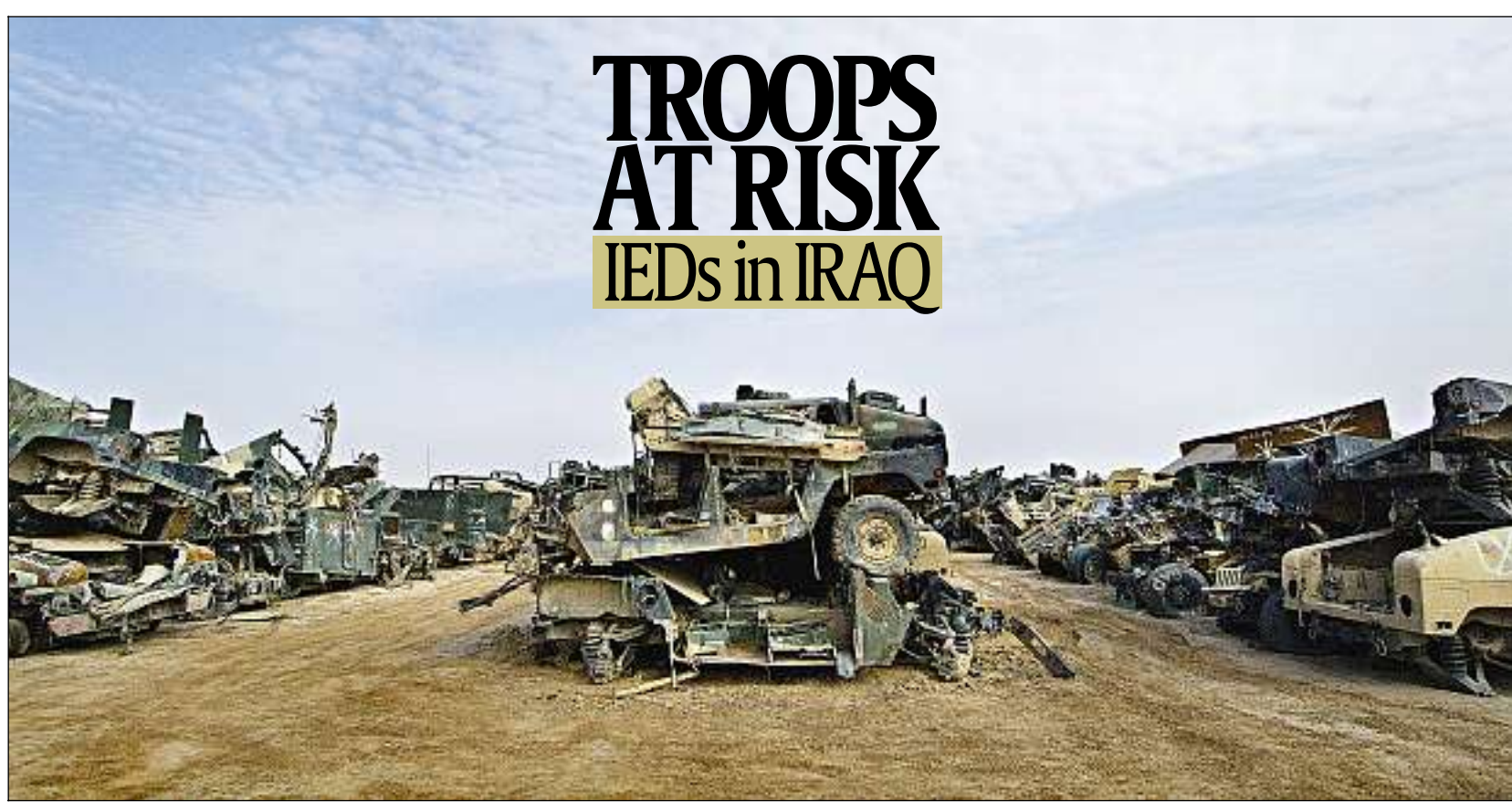
Bicycling buffs with big bucks help fuel trend of high-end two-wheelers. Small-batch bikes are exclusive, but you still have to supply your own power, 1D.

By John O. Buckley

USA TODAY Snapshots®



Source: CTIA-The Wireless Association. By David Stuckey and Adrienne Lewis, USA TODAY



Bombed Humvees: Military vehicles rendered useless by improvised explosive devices litter a military scrap yard at Camp Al Asad in Iraq's Anbar province.

TROOPS AT RISK IEDs in IRAQ

Pentagon balked at pleas from officers in field for safer vehicles

Iraqi troops got MRAPs; Americans waited

By Peter Eisler, Blake Morrison and Tom Vanden Brook USA TODAY
Pfc. Aaron Kincaid, 25, had been joking with buddies just before their Humvee rolled over the bomb...

two U.S. senators said the delays cost the lives of an estimated '621 to 742 Americans' who would have survived explosions had they been in MRAPs rather than Humvees.

Cover story

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Death in a Humvee
Pfc. Aaron Kincaid's family mourns, 11A



In survivor's own words
MRAP saved Gunnery Sgt. Timothy Colomer's life, 9A

At peace: Lady Bird Johnson buried beside husband

By Andrea Stone USA TODAY

STONEWALL, Texas — Lady Bird Johnson was laid to rest Sunday beside her husband, reuniting them under the shade of gnarled live oak and pecan trees near the calm Pedernales River where they once walked together.

Lady Bird Johnson as being the wife of Lyndon Johnson, said her only grandson, Lyndon Nugent. 'Those of us who knew Lyndon Johnson would readily concede that anyone who could put up with him for so many years had already accomplished many great things.'

and wood home once called the Texas White House, compared with 22 years for the president, who died at 64. The National Park Service will now take possession of the house, which had been off-limits for visitors to the national park that surrounds it.

the funeral in Austin. Among them were first lady Laura Bush, former presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter and former first ladies Rosalynn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

at every event. There were death threats. Johnson reacted with grace to every slur, he said, showing 'how to cultivate the beauty in democracy, the voice raised against the mob, the courage to overcome fear.'

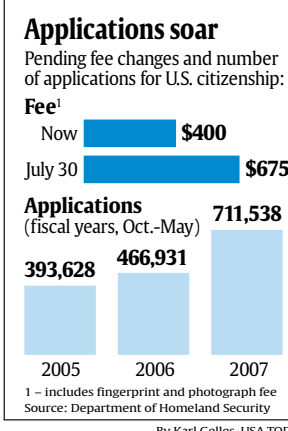
Procession in Texas
Capitol to LBJ ranch, 3A

Immigrants scramble to beat higher application fees

By Emily Bazar USA TODAY

Immigrants are rushing to apply for citizenship, green cards and other benefits before hefty fee increases kick in at the end of the month. Starting July 30, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will raise application fees an average of 66%.

green-card holders, will pay \$1,010 rather than \$395. The prospect of higher fees has fueled a mad dash. In the first eight months of this fiscal year, the immigration service received 711,538 citizenship applications — nearly as many as in all of last year.



grants on citizenship applications. She says 95% tell her they applied to beat the fee hike. 'It's really motivating people.' USCIS spokesman Bill Wright says the fee increase is only one reason applications are up.

to overhaul the immigration system inspired Angel Alvarez, 25, to apply for citizenship. Alvarez, a Whittier, Calif., real estate agent who has been a legal permanent resident for 15 years, came to the USA from Mexico. He was eligible to apply for citizenship five years after getting his green card but says he was fearful of losing his Mexican identity.

Instead of MRAPs, Pentagon chose quicker, cheaper answer to IEDs

Continued from 1A

vehicle issues, including armoring Humvees. The MRAP, however, was "not one of them." Something related to MRAPs "might have crossed my desk," Myers says, "but I don't recall it."

Why the issue never received more of a hearing from top officials early in the war remains a mystery, given the chorus of concern. One Pentagon analyst complained in an April 29, 2004, e-mail to colleagues, for instance, that it was "frustrating to see the pictures of burning Humvees while knowing that there are other vehicles out there that would provide more protection."

Cover story

The analyst was referring to the MRAP, whose V-shaped hull puts the crew more than 3 feet off the ground and deflects explosions. It was designed to withstand the underbelly bombs that cripple the lower-riding Humvees. Pentagon officials, civilians and military alike, had been searching for technologies to guard against improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. The makeshift bombs are the No. 1 killer of U.S. forces.

The MRAP was not new to the Pentagon. The technology had been developed in South Africa and Rhodesia in the 1970s, making it older than Kincaid and most of the other troops killed by homemade bombs. The Pentagon had tested MRAPs in 2000, purchased fewer than two dozen and sent some to Iraq. They were used primarily to protect explosive ordnance disposal teams, not to transport troops or to chase Iraqi insurgents.

The goal: Iraqis 'stand up' so U.S. can 'stand down'

Even as the Pentagon balked at buying MRAPs for U.S. troops, USA TODAY found that the military pushed to buy them for a different fighting force: the Iraqi army.

On Dec. 22, 2004 — two weeks after President Bush told families of servicemembers that "we're doing everything we possibly can to protect your loved ones" — a U.S. Army general solicited ideas for an armored vehicle for the Iraqis. The Army had an "extreme interest" in getting troops better armor, then-brigadier general Roger Nadeau told a subordinate looking at foreign technology, in an e-mail obtained by USA TODAY.

In a follow-up message, Nadeau clarified his request: "What I failed to point out in my first message to you folks is that the US Govt is interested not for US use, but for possible use in fielding assets to the Iraqi military forces."

In response, Lt. Col. Clay Brown, based in Australia, sent information on two types of MRAPs manufactured overseas. "By all accounts, these are some of the best in the world," he wrote. "If I were fitting out the Iraqi Army, this is where I'd look (wish we had some!)"

The first contract for what would become the Iraqi Light Armored Vehicle — virtually identical to the MRAPs sought by U.S. forces then and now, and made in the United States by BAE Systems — was issued in May 2006. The vehicles, called Badgers, began arriving in Iraq 90 days later, according to BAE. In September 2006, the Pentagon said it would provide up to 600 more to Iraqi forces. As of this spring, 400 had been delivered.

The rush to equip the Iraqis stood in stark contrast to the Pentagon's efforts to protect U.S. troops.

In February 2005, two months after Nadeau solicited ideas for better armor for the Iraqis and was told MRAPs were an answer, an urgent need request for the same type of vehicle came from embattled Marines in Anbar province. The request, signed by then-brigadier general Dennis Hejlik, said the Marines "cannot continue to lose ... serious and grave casualties to IEDs ... at current rates when a commercial off-the-shelf capability exists to mitigate" them.

Officials at Marine headquarters in Quantico, Va., shelved the request for 1,169 vehicles. Fifteen months passed before a second request reached the Joint Chiefs and was approved. Those vehicles finally began trickling into Anbar in February, two years after the original request. Because of the delay, the Marines are investigating how its urgent-need requests are handled.

The long delay infuriates some members of Congress. "Every day, our troops are being maimed or killed needlessly because we haven't fielded this soon enough," says Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Miss. "The costs are in human lives, in kids who will never have their legs again, people blind, crippled. That's the real tragedy."

Not until two months ago did the Pentagon champion the MRAP for all U.S. forces. Gates made MRAPs the military's top priority. The plan is to build the vehicles as fast as possible until conditions warrant a change, according to a military official who has direct knowledge of the program but is not authorized to speak on the record. Thousands are in the pipeline at a cost so far of about \$2.4 billion.

Gates said he was influenced by a news report — originally in USA TODAY — that disclosed Marine units using MRAPs in Anbar reported no deaths in about 300 roadside

Vulnerable vehicles: A U.S. soldier slouches from the gunner's turret of his Humvee holding his head after an improvised explosive device hit the vehicle in March during a patrol in a predominantly Sunni neighborhood of southern Baghdad.

By David Furst, AFP/Getty Images



bombings in the past year. His tone was grave. "For every month we delay," he said, "scores of young Americans are going to die."

One reason officials put off buying MRAPs in significant quantities: They never expected the war to last this long. Bush set the tone on May 1, 2003, six weeks after the U.S. invasion, when he declared on board the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended."

Gen. George Casey, the top commander in Iraq from June 2004 until February this year, repeatedly said that troop levels in Iraq would be cut just as soon as Iraqi troops took more responsibility for security. In March 2005, he predicted "very substantial reductions" in U.S. troops by early 2006. He said virtually the same thing a year later.

Casey wasn't the only optimist. In May 2005, Vice President Cheney declared that the insurgency was "in its last throes."

Given the view that the war would end soon, the Pentagon had little use for expensive new vehicles such as the MRAP, at least not in large quantities. The MRAPs ordered for the Iraqis were intended to speed the day when, to use Bush's words, Iraqi forces could "stand up" and the United States could "stand down."

Nadeau, who wrote the e-mail that led to MRAPs for the Iraqis, explains why he did so: "The U.S. government knows that eventually we're going to get out" of Iraq. The United States wants "to help get (the Iraqis) in a position to take care of themselves."

For U.S. forces, however, the answer was something else: adding armor to Humvees. Nadeau and others say the choice made sense because Humvees were already in Iraq and the improvements — adding steel to the sides, upgrading the windows and replacing the canvas doors — could be made quickly, and far more cheaply. Adding armor to a Humvee cost only \$14,000; a Humvee armored at the factory cost \$191,000; today, an MRAP costs between \$600,000 and \$1 million, though some foreign models cost only about \$200,000 in 2004.

The solution to the IED problem in 2003 had to be "immediate," says retired vice admiral Gordon Holder, director for logistics for the Joint Chiefs until mid-2004. "We had to stop the bleeding." Holder says MRAPs seemed impractical for the immediate need: "We shouldn't take four years to field something the kids needed yesterday."

Would it actually have taken four years? That depends upon how much urgency the Pentagon and Congress attached to speeding production. Force Protection Inc., the small South Carolina company that landed the first significant MRAP contracts, was criticized this month by the Pentagon's inspector general for failing to deliver its vehicles on time. But bigger defense contractors were available then — and have secured MRAP contracts in recent weeks that call for deliveries in as little as four months.

A bigger obstacle might have been philosophical: The MRAP didn't fit the Pentagon's long-term vision of how the military should be equipped. Then-Defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld regarded the Iraq war "as a means to change" the military, "make it lighter, make it more responsive, make it more agile,"

Holder says. The MRAP, heavier and slower than the Humvee, wouldn't have measured up, he says.

The commander 'IEDs are my No. 1 threat'

By June 2004, the military had lost almost 200 U.S. troops to the homemade bombs. Gen. John Abizaid, then head of U.S. Central Command, told the Joint Chiefs that "IEDs are my No. 1 threat." He called for a "mini-Manhattan Project" against IEDs, akin to the task force that developed the atomic bomb during World War II.

The Pentagon organized a small task force that, two years later, morphed into a full-fledged agency: the Joint IED Defeat Organization, or JIEDDO. Its leader, Montgomery Meigs, is a retired four-star general. Its annual budget totals \$4.3 billion. Its mission: to stop IEDs from killing U.S. troops.

In one of its PowerPoint presentations, JIEDDO made its priorities clear. First, prevent IEDs from being planted by attacking the insurgency. Then, if a device is planted, prevent it from exploding. "When all else fails," reads another slide, "Survive the blast." That put solutions such as the MRAP into the category of last resorts.

JIEDDO did spend its own money for 122 MRAPs, but it primarily focused on electronic jammers to prevent bombs from being remotely detonated, unmanned surveillance aircraft to catch insurgents putting bombs along roads and better intelligence on who was building and planting bombs.

The agency has claimed some successes. Insurgents in 2007 had to plant six times as many bombs as they did in 2004 to inflict the same number of U.S. casualties, Meigs said in an interview.

But the insurgents — Sunnis loyal to the deposed leader Saddam Hussein, Shiites who hated the U.S. occupiers and foreigners aligned with al-Qaeda — often managed to stay one step ahead of JIEDDO. They changed the kind of explosives they planted and varied the locations of the devices and the way they detonated them.

When the Pentagon added armor to the sides of Humvees to guard against bombs planted along roadsides, the insurgents responded by burying bombs in the roads. The bombs could blast through the vulnerable underbelly of the Humvees. The insurgents also moved to larger, more sophisticated bombs, some packed with as much as 100 pounds of explosives.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, the No. 2 official at the Pentagon, testified on Capitol Hill in June that "as the threat has evolved, we have evolved. We work very, very hard to be responsible to our troops."

Taylor, the Democratic congressman from Mississippi, pressed England about why the Pentagon waited until May to request substantial numbers of MRAPs. "Are you telling me no one could see that (need) coming, no one could recognize that the bottom of the Humvee" didn't protect troops, and "that's why the kids inside are losing their legs and their lives?" Taylor asked.

"That is too simplistic a description," England replied. "People have not died needlessly, and we have not left our people without equipment."

To Pentagon decision-makers,

The Iraqi MRAP:

An Iraqi soldier in March climbs atop the Badger, the MRAP that the United States started delivering to Iraqi forces in 2006. A Marine request for a nearly identical vehicle languished while the Iraqi order was filled. The Marines began getting MRAPs in response to their request early this year.

By Ali Al-Saadi, AFP



the Humvee seemed able to handle the threat early in the war — roadside bombs, rather than those buried in the roads. "If anybody could have guessed in 2003 that we would be looking at these kind of (high-powered, buried) IEDs that we're seeing now in 2007, then we would have been looking at something much longer" term as a solution, Holder says. "But who had the crystal ball back then?"

Nadeau, now a major general in charge of the Army's Test and Evaluation Command in Alexandria, Va., also defends the Pentagon's choices. He says buried IEDs did not become a serious threat to the armored Humvees until 2006. Critics might say, "Why didn't you guys buy 16,000 MRAPs a decade ago?" Nadeau says today, "You know, I didn't need them."

Six officers interviewed by USA TODAY say the threat to the Humvees surfaced sooner. Lt. Col. Dallas Eubanks, chief of operations for the Army's 4th Infantry Division in 2003-04, says IEDs became more menacing before he left Iraq. "We were certainly seeing underground IEDs by early 2004," he says.

In mid-2005, two top Marines — Gen. William Nyland, assistant Marine commandant, and Maj. Gen. William Catto, head of Marine Corps Systems Command — testified before Congress that they were seeing an "evolving" threat from underbelly blasts. They said at the time that armored Humvees remained their best defense.

The congressman MRAPs' simple advantage

Just after lunch on June 27, 2004, a group of enlisted men parked a handful of armored vehicles near a cinderblock building at Marine headquarters in Fallujah, Iraq.

The day had turned sweltering, like every summer afternoon in central Iraq. But this day was special. A congressional delegation had arrived, and among the dignitaries was Rep. Duncan Hunter, then the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. Hunter wasn't just a powerful congressman. He was a Vietnam War veteran, and his son, then a 27-year-old Marine lieutenant also named Duncan, was stationed at the base.

More important to most of the Marines, the California Republican had been instrumental in pushing the Pentagon to get better armor for them. Humvees with cloth doors — canvas, like the crusher hat that Hunter wore that day — had been standard issue when the war began. The fabric worked well to shield the sun; it offered no protection against explosives.

Then, as now, Hunter was impatient with the pace of procurement in Iraq. That winter, he had dispatched his staff to steel mills, where they persuaded managers and union leaders to set aside commercial orders to expedite steel needed to armor the Humvees. He

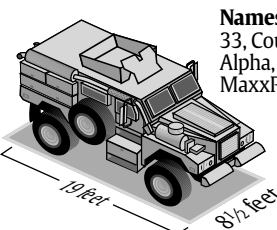
Comparisons of armored vehicles

The U.S. military is rushing to get Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles to Iraq. The new vehicles are larger and better protected against insurgent bomb attacks because of their design.

MRAP's V-shaped hull deflects force of blast up sides and away from crew. Humvee's flat underside catches full force of blast through the floor.

MRAP Category I

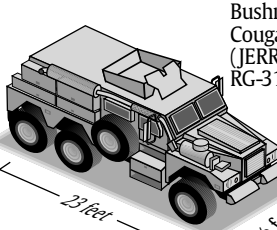
Cost: \$412,000-\$570,000¹
Mission: Urban combat
Wheels: Four-wheel drive
Maximum capacity: Six people
Curb weight: 32,000 lbs.
Combat weight: 52,000 lbs.
Top speed: 65 mph



Names: RG-31 or 33, Cougar 4X4, Alpha, Golan, MaxxPro

MRAP Category II

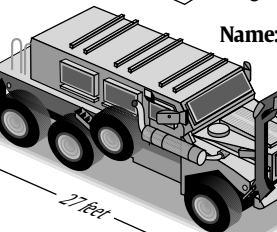
Cost: \$495,000-\$629,000¹
Missions: Explosives disposal, troop transport, convoy escort
Wheels: Six-wheel drive
Maximum capacity: 10 people
Curb weight: 39,000 lbs.
Combat weight: 52,000 lbs.
Top speed: 55 mph



Names: RG-33L, Bushmaster, Cougar 6X6 (JERRV), Golan, RG-31 Extended

MRAP Category III

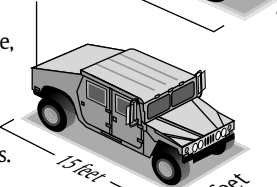
Cost: \$856,000¹
Missions: IED, mine clearance
Wheels: Six-wheel drive
Maximum capacity: 12 people
Curb weight: 45,320 lbs.
Combat weight: 80,000 lbs.
Top speed: 55 mph



Name: Buffalo

M1114 (armored Humvee)

Cost: \$191,000
Missions: Combat, reconnaissance, security patrols
Wheels: Four-wheel drive
Maximum capacity: Six people
Curb weight: About 8,000 lbs.
Combat weight: About 12,000 lbs.
Top speed: 78 mph



Note: Curb weight is the weight of the vehicle with fuel, fluids and armor; combat weight includes the weight of troops and equipment.

¹ — Equipment packages can add to the base price. Electronics and jamming gear can cost an extra \$125,000-\$522,000. Maintenance packages run \$325,000 for two years.

Sources: Army, Force Protection Inc., GlobalSecurity.com and USA TODAY research

By Karl Gelles and Dave Evans, USA TODAY

also worked with the Army and its contractors to expand production.

In Fallujah, Hunter recognized the Humvees. He couldn't identify the two vehicles next to them. One was called a Cougar, the other a Buffalo. Both were MRAPs, made by Force Protection Inc., and both, he was told, were coveted. They were used by explosives disposal teams, but combat units "looked at them and said, 'We want those,'" Hunter recalls.

Throughout most of Iraq, they still haven't arrived.

Despite requests from the field, Pentagon officials decided to ration the vehicle. In 2003 and 2004, they bought about 55, and only for explosives-disposal units. But they chose a different approach for protecting the rest of the troops: adding armor to Humvees. The choice was problematic. The Humvee's flat bottom channels an explosion

through the center of the vehicle, toward the occupants.

Memos and e-mails obtained by USA TODAY show a stream of concerns about the decision to armor the Humvee. Most went up the chain of command and withered:

► **December 2003:** At the direction of then-deputy Defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who was troubled by the mounting death toll from IEDs, the Joint Chiefs began to explore options for giving troops better armor. Detailed information on the Werewolf, an MRAP made in the African country of Namibia, was passed from analysts in the Pentagon to Lt. Col. Steven Ware, an aide collecting information for the Joint Chiefs.

► **March 30, 2004:** Gen. Larry Ellis, in charge of U.S. Forces Command in Atlanta, sent a memo to the Army's chief of staff, Gen. Peter Schoomaker. He complained that

'We were in a Cougar, so we survived' blast

Marine Gunnery Sgt. Timothy Colomer, 32, was leading an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team on a mission last December when his Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle, a Cougar, hit a massive IED. Everyone in the vehicle was knocked unconscious by the blast, but all survived. Here is his story:

I was deployed to Iraq in August of '06, my first tour. I had seen Cougars at Quantico before I deployed. I didn't drive them or train on them — the new ones were getting shipped straight out to Iraq. But I'd done my homework, and I knew its capabilities.

Each EOD team essentially got its own Cougar (built by Force Protection Inc.). It was our main response vehicle. We kept our tools in there — our robots, our explosives, a certain amount of food and water. It was just a large mobile home for us. Inside the Cougar, we'd have four people. The team had a total of 12-15 guys — two were EOD techs and the rest were support and security. One corpsman, a medical guy, and the rest of the Marines were for security. I was the team leader.

We were operating out of Forward Operating Base Habaniyah (about 50 miles west of Baghdad) when we got a call to a weapons cache that had been found by Marines. We chose a route that was a dirt road. I decided we would go out first in the Cougar. The dirt makes it a lot easier for an insurgent with a shovel to go out in the sand and bury (an IED). That's why I decided to lead from the front.

I can't talk much about what we hit — a type of anti-tank land mine. It was daisy chained (with a second IED set to explode seconds after the first). The net explosive weight ended up being over 100 pounds. It was the biggest crater I've seen from an IED.

From the moment we got blown up, we were knocked out. We've

speculated on how long we were out; our consensus was about 20 seconds. The security vehicle behind us (an armored Humvee) was about 20 meters back, and the Marine on the turret got knocked out by the blast wave. Everyone else was OK.

One of the insurgent tactics is to lure Marines to the vehicle that has hit the IED, and then they blow up another IED. So my game plan was, if a vehicle gets hit, you don't get out of your own vehicle until you hear from me (that it's safe). And if you don't hear from me, the next senior Marine takes over.

After about 20-30 seconds, I got on the radio — we all wear personal radios — and I told them to stand by for an assessment. I had two guys who were injured a bit more than I was. I could get up and move on my own.

The two guys in the back seat had some injuries. I told my security guys that we were all alive. The other EOD tech and I had to jump out of the truck and look for that secondary IED if there was one. That was hell. We searched for 10-15 minutes.

At that point, the Marines who had called us up for that weapons cache had shown up. They were about 400 meters away when the explosion happened. So they heard it; they saw it. By the time my sergeant and I were out looking for the secondary device, they were there to provide more protection.

We assessed the vehicle. We couldn't move it. At that point, we all got pretty sick. I had some projectile vomiting because of the



By H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

"No question": Gunnery Sgt. Timothy Colomer says he wouldn't have survived the IED he encountered in December if he had been in a Humvee.

concussion. My three security Humvees did a medevac so we could all get to the hospital. Then, the other security guys, the ones who had come along, stayed with our truck. They called in a second EOD team to recover our truck and to still respond to that weapons cache. But on their way, (that team) also got hit by an IED, and that wound up killing one guy.

In response to that, they sent out another EOD team, a third, and that was the one that actually accomplished the mission.

It's like the Wild West out there.

We had complete confidence in the Cougars. We had Cougars that were blown up by anti-tank land mines. We had an incident where a car bomb was driven at one of our



By Marine Sgt. Timothy Colomer

Massive crater: Gunnery Sgt. Timothy Colomer took this picture of his Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle right after the explosion.

Cougars and blew up, and (the vehicle) protected everybody inside.

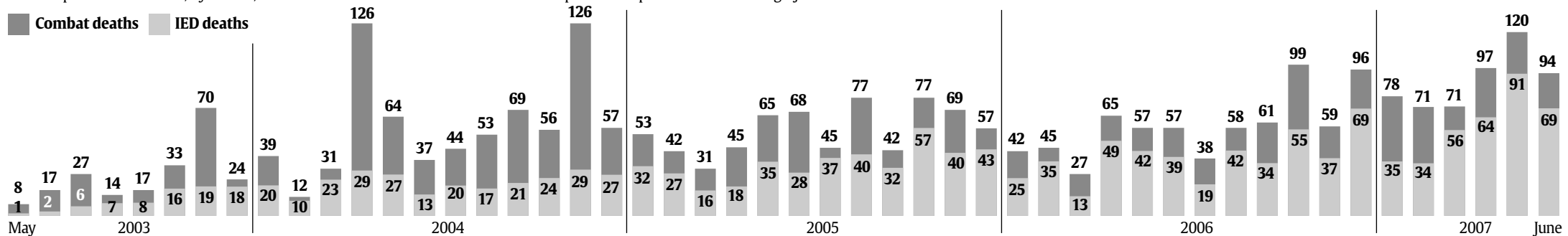
Our job is to render safe or neutralize IEDs, so we constantly had explosions around us, sometimes just feet away. The Cougars take a beating. They're absolutely tough, like a tank on wheels.

It's such a good idea to replace Humvees with Cougars. They can do all the stuff the Humvees do. A Cougar can outrun a Humvee off the line, no problem at all, an armored Humvee, and probably can keep up with a normal tactical Humvee. And the difference in protection is incomparable.

Had we been in a Humvee when we got hit, we would have been dead, no question about it. We were in a Cougar, so we survived.

IED attacks cause more than half of all combat deaths in Iraq

U.S. troops killed in combat, by month, and those whose deaths can be attributed to improvised explosive devices through June:



Source: Analysis of Defense Department data by Paul Overberg, USA TODAY

By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Continued from 8A

"some Army members and agencies are still in a peacetime posture." U.S. commanders in Iraq told him that the armored Humvee "is not providing the solution the Army hoped to achieve." He didn't recommend MRAPs but rather suggested accelerating production of a combat vehicle called the Stryker. In response, the military said new Humvee armor kits would suffice.

April 28-29, 2004: Duncan Lang, a Pentagon analyst who worked in acquisition and technology, suggested purchasing the Wer'Wolf, the MRAP put before the Joint Chiefs in December 2003. In an e-mail to colleagues and supervisors, Lang said "a number could be sent to Iraq as quickly as, or even more quickly than, additional armored Humvees." He called it "frustrating to see the pictures of burning Humvees while knowing that there are other vehicles out there that would provide more protection."

April 30, 2004: Another Pentagon analyst, Air Force Lt. Col. Bob Harris, forwarded details about MRAP options to a member of the IED task force. The list included a variety of MRAPs, among them the Wer'Wolf and Force Protection's Cougar. "There was no great clarity as to why they didn't pursue these options," Harris says. "I saw it as my job to educate." Harris is now an acquisition officer at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts.

Hunter says the advantages the MRAP had on the Humvee were clear. "It's a simple formula," Hunter says. "A vehicle that's 1 foot off the ground gets 16 times that (blast) impact that you get in a vehicle that's 4 feet off the ground," like the MRAP.

Although Hunter favored adding armor to Humvees, he now calls the military's devotion to that approach a costly mistake. "It's true that they saved more lives by moving first on up-arming the Humvees," he says. "The flaw is that they did nothing on MRAPs. The up-arming of Humvees didn't have to be an exclusive operation."

Holder dismisses the idea that the Pentagon could have moved on a dual track: arming Humvees while ordering up MRAPs. He doubts Congress would have funded both at the time. But that's exactly what Congress is doing now — buying both vehicles.

"We probably should've had the foresight" to start buying MRAPs earlier, says Ware, the Joint Chiefs aide (now retired) who passed the information to superiors and counterparts in the Army and Marines. But "we just couldn't get them there fast enough." Adding armor

to the Humvee, Ware says, "was better than nothing."

The lieutenant colonel 'Hope no one gets wasted'

A PowerPoint presentation, dated Aug. 25, 2004, shows wounded troops lying in hospital beds. Most are bandaged. One is bloody. His left eye is barely open, his injured right is covered by a patch. Each was maimed by an IED. Each, save one, was in a Humvee.

On another slide: "Numerous vehicles on the market provide far superior ballistic protection" than the Humvee, wrote then-lieutenant colonel Jim Hampton, the man who prepared the presentation for the operations staff of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Baghdad.

Safety is a passion for Hampton. He's so concerned with security that he asks his wife, Kate, to take her pistol when she goes for walks on their 80 acres in rural Mississippi. When he got to Iraq in early 2004, he was tasked with looking at armor options to protect the Corps of Engineers, the agency sent to help with rebuilding efforts. For weeks, he studied armor options. His conclusion: The corps should get MRAPs to protect its people, specifically Wer'Wolves. Hampton says he asked for 53 Wer'Wolves. The corps got four.

Hampton couldn't have been more opposed to up-arming the Humvees and warned his superiors. He even e-mailed his wife from Iraq. "Hey Babe," his e-mail read. "Just a little aggravated with the bureaucracy. It is simply beyond my comprehension why we're having to go through such (an ordeal) to order confounded hard vehicles. I sure hope no one gets wasted before the powers-that-be get off their collective fat asses."

Finally, he wrote his congressman, Rep. Chip Pickering, R-Miss., urging him to investigate deaths involving the Humvee. "We would never consider sending troops" in Humvees "up against armor or artillery," Hampton wrote, "but this is tantamount to what we're doing because these vehicles are being engaged with the very ordnance delivered by artillery in the form of improvised explosive devices."

By November 2004, Pentagon analyst Lang had grown discouraged, an e-mail shows. "I have found that you can never put the word out too many times," he wrote on Nov. 17. "I send it on to (the Secretary of Defense's office), Army and (Marine Corps) contacts I have. Some of it is getting to the rapid fielding folks and force protection folks that are looking at Iraq issues. I do not see much action."

Lang closed the message with a variation on his earlier plea: "For

Deadly impact: A U.S. Humvee burns in April near Samarra, 60 miles north of Baghdad, after an improvised explosive device detonated near its convoy. IEDs account for more than half of the U.S. combat deaths in Iraq.



AP

the life of me, I cannot figure out why we have not taken better advantage of the sources of such vehicles," he wrote. "We should be buying 200, not 2, at a time. These things work, they save lives and they don't cost much, if any, more than what we are using now." At the time, a basic Wer'Wolf cost about the same as a factory-made armored Humvee: around \$200,000.

In December 2004, at a town hall meeting with troops in Kuwait, a soldier asked Rumsfeld about the lack of armor on military vehicles. Rumsfeld explained the situation this way: "You go to war with the Army you have. They're not the Army you might want or wish to have at a later time."

The concerns troops voiced at the meeting might have had an impact. Within a week, the Marine Corps Systems Command in Quantico posted its first notice seeking information on MRAPs from potential contractors.

Back in Fallujah, the desire for the Cougar had grown. By February 2005, the Marines were formally asking for more. Field commanders sent their first large-scale request for MRAPs, seeking 1,169 vehicles with specifications that closely mirrored those of the Cougar. They no longer envisioned the vehicle as limited to explosives-disposal teams; they wanted MRAPs for combat troops, too.

Roy McGriff III, then a major, drafted the request signed by Brig. Gen. Hejlik. "MRAP vehicles will protect Marines, reduce casualties, increase mobility and enhance mission success," the request read. "Without MRAP, personnel loss rates are likely to continue at their current rate." In spring 2005, he would have a chance to argue his case before top generals.

The Marine major 'Unnecessary' casualties

They convened March 29-30, 2005, at the Marine Corps Air Sta-

tion in Miramar, Calif. The occasion: a safety board meeting, a regular gathering to address safety issues across the Corps. In attendance: five three-star generals, four two-stars, seven one-stars and McGriff.

McGriff knew the MRAP's history and the Pentagon's reluctance to invest in the vehicle. He had learned about the vehicle from a fellow Marine, Wayne Sinclair. Sinclair, then a captain, wrote in the July 1996 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette* that "an affordable answer to the land mine was developed over 20 years ago. It's time that Marines at the sharp end shared in... this discovery."

Addressing the generals, McGriff recommended analyzing every incident involving Marine vehicles the same way investigators probe aircraft crashes. Look at the vehicle for flaws, McGriff recalls telling the officers, and examine the tactics used to defeat it.

Lt. Gen. Wallace Gregson, commander of Marine Corps Forces in the Pacific, and Lt. Gen. James Mattis, leader of the Marine Combat Development Command, listened and then conferred for a moment.

The room grew quiet. "Then they said, 'OK, what do you want to do?'" McGriff remembers.

He recited the very plan that the Pentagon, under a new Defense secretary, would embrace in 2007: "A phased transition. Continue to armor Humvees. At the same time, as quickly and as expeditiously as possible, purchase as many MRAPs as possible. Phase out Humvees."

According to McGriff, the room again grew silent. Then, Mattis finally spoke: "That's exactly what we're going to do." Mattis' words failed to translate into action. The urgent-need request McGriff drafted went unfulfilled at Marine headquarters in Quantico. A June 10, 2005, status report on the request indicated the Marine Corps was

holding out for a "future vehicle," presumably the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle — more mobile than the MRAP, more protective than the Humvee, and due in 2012. In practical terms, that meant no MRAPs immediately.

McGriff foresaw some of the turmoil over vehicles in a prophetic 2003 paper for the School for Advanced Warfighting in Quantico.

"Currently, our underprotected vehicles result in casualties that are politically untenable and militarily unnecessary," his paper read. "Failure to build a MRAP vehicle fleet produces a deteriorating cascade of effects that will substantially increase" risks for the military while "rendering it tactically immobile." Mines and IEDs will force U.S. troops off the roads, he wrote, and keep them from aggressively attacking insurgents.

The words were strong and the conclusions were damning. Rhodessa, a nation with nothing near the resources of the U.S. military, had built MRAPs more than a quarter-century earlier that remained "more survivable than any comparable vehicle produced by the U.S. today," McGriff wrote.

Despite his views then, McGriff, now a lieutenant colonel, says he understands the delays. MRAPs needed to be tested to ensure they could perform in combat. "Nothing happens fast enough when people are fighting and dying," he says today. "But amidst the chaos, you still have to make the right choices. In the end, I think the Marines got the MRAP capability as quickly and safely as possible."

Others disagree. Marine major Franz Gayl, now retired, was science adviser to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq. He saw how Marines were still being killed or maimed in Anbar in the fall of 2006. If the Marine Corps had decided MRAPs were a top priority, he says, it could and should have pursued them with the same urgency the Pentagon is now showing.

"The ramp-up of industry capacity was delayed by over 1½ years," Gayl says, "until it became the dire emergency that it is today."

Bureaucrats didn't want the

MRAP sooner "because it would compete against" armored Humvees and "many other favored programs" for funding, Gayl says. Gayl, who works as a civilian for the Marines at the Pentagon, has filed for federal whistleblower protection because he fears retaliation for speaking out about the failure to get MRAPs sooner.

Defense Secretary Gates 'Lives are at stake'

After McGriff addressed the generals in March 2005, another 15 months passed. Then the Marines in Iraq reiterated the request for MRAPs. This time they sent the request directly to the Joint Chiefs. This time they were successful.

In December 2006, after insurgent bombs had killed almost 1,200 U.S. troops in Iraq, the Joint Chiefs validated requests from Iraq for 4,060 MRAPs, and the formal MRAP program was launched.

By March 2007, Marine Corps Commandant James Conway called the vehicle his "No. 1 unfilled warfighting requirement."

In part, that's because he saw it save lives in Anbar province. Brig. Gen. John Allen, deputy commander of coalition forces there, says the Marines tracked attacks on MRAPs since January 2006. The finding: Marines in armored Humvees are twice as likely to be badly wounded in an IED attack as those in MRAPs.

Perhaps more convincing: No Marines have been killed in more than 300 attacks on MRAPs there.

The news, revealed in USA TODAY on April 19, drew the attention of Defense Secretary Gates, four months into his job at the Pentagon. He was traveling in Iraq and read about the MRAP's success in the Pentagon's daily news roundup. Weeks later, at a news conference, Gates said the Pentagon would rush MRAPs to Iraq "as best we can."

Late last month, top Pentagon officials approved an Army strategy for buying as many as 17,700 MRAPs, allowing a one-for-one swap for its armored Humvees. About 5,200 MRAPs had been approved for the other services. Now, Pentagon officials decline to say exactly how many MRAPs they need.

One official says they'll build MRAPs as fast as possible, then recalibrate the military's needs as they assess operations in Iraq, a tacit acknowledgment that they may need fewer MRAPs as U.S. troops are withdrawn.

During another news conference late last month, Gates worried that the companies building the MRAP — not only Force Protection but BAE Systems, General Dynamics, Osh-

Continued on 11A ▶

A year after he enlisted, soldier died in Humvee

By Blake Morrison
USA TODAY

When the war in Iraq began, Kenneth Ellsworth Kincaid IV — everyone called him Aaron — had no intention of joining the Army. He had children to raise, and on the day U.S. forces invaded Iraq — March 20, 2003 — his second daughter turned 2 months old.

Little Abi Kincaid's big, brown eyes looked just like her father's. She seemed one of the best reasons for Aaron and Rachel Kincaid to give their often rocky marriage another try.

The story of Aaron Kincaid is like that of hundreds of other soldiers killed in Iraq. They joined to serve their country but also to help themselves. And in the months before Kincaid died in Iraq, at age 25, his wife says it had given him an identity — a renewed sense of self that reignited the love they had when they met.

Rachel Snyder had been drawn to Aaron's confidence, his smile, even those silly T-shirts he used to wear — the ones that said Party Naked or Spank Me. She remembers, at 18, feeling fireworks as they watched them at Stone Mountain, Ga., shortly after they started dating in 1999. About a year later, their first child — a girl they named Kennedy — was on her way.

They married on Jan. 20, 2001. Not long after, things changed.

Aaron's job detailing cars at local dealerships didn't offer much of a paycheck or much of a future. They already had one little mouth to feed, and with Rachel expecting Abi, money would only get tighter. The confident Aaron Kincaid — the 5-foot-8 life of the party — had all but vanished.

Before Abi was born, Aaron and Rachel separated, and she moved back with her parents in Lawrenceville, a suburb of Atlanta. When Abi arrived, she reminded them of their hope for a future. They got an apartment in Lilburn, Ga., and resolved to try again.

By Abi's first birthday, the Kincaids' marriage wasn't anything to

Fatherless family: Rachel Kincaid, widow of Aaron Kincaid, with her daughters Kennedy, 6, right, and Abigail, 4, at their home in Monroe, Ga. In October 2005, Aaron Kincaid enlisted with the Army after his mother suggested the military as a way he could support his family and make a promising future for himself. His armored Humvee proved insufficient against the blast of a makeshift bomb. He was killed by an improvised explosive device in his first month in Iraq.

Photos by Michael A. Schwarz, USA TODAY



celebrate. Rachel and Aaron fought constantly. And within a few weeks, Rachel took the kids and went back to her parents.

"It's like we were on a different page," she says now. The way she tells it, she wanted to settle down and focus on family. But Aaron continued to worry. He didn't have money to go to college, and his job detailing cars almost always cooled with the weather.

He filed for divorce, then withdrew the papers. Then Rachel filed. By summer 2004, their marriage was legally over. But they decided to try yet again. This time, they leased a house. That December, for the first time, they bought a tree and celebrated Christmas in their own place. Still, Rachel says her husband struggled. "He felt like he wasn't a good father and wasn't a good husband," she says.

In September 2005, days before

he enlisted, Aaron visited his mother, an artist in Lilburn. "What am I going to do?" Marcia Kincaid says her son asked. "I have two children and a wife."

"Then we discussed the military," she says.

"You go, you learn a trade, then you have an option of going to school," she recalls telling him. "They take good care of you and your family while you're there."

Then she uttered the words she'll never forget: "The chances of you getting hurt are about as much as getting run over by a bus."

Aaron laughed. "Yeah, you're right, Mom," she recalls him saying. "The war is calming down in Iraq."

Against Rachel's wishes, Aaron Kincaid enlisted in the Army in October 2005. He was assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division.

In September 2006, before the end of his first month in Iraq, he



Mother's pain: Marcia Kincaid told her son to consider military.

was killed while on patrol in an armored Humvee.

The night after she learned her Daddy died, Kennedy Kincaid says she had a dream about him. He was playing with two angels, she recalls. And he told her he loved her.



Memorial: Rocks in Marcia Kincaid's garden honor her son, Aaron, and another soldier, Velton Locklear, killed in Iraq along with Aaron.

Insurgents adapt to U.S. defenses faster than military adjusts to IEDs

By Peter Eisler
USA TODAY

When Army Capt. Patrick Murphy arrived in Iraq in June 2003 to head a combat team of the 82nd Airborne Division, IEDs weren't much on his mind.

"I'd never even heard the term until I got over there," says Murphy, now a Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania. By the time he left, his brigade had lost 19 people, many to IEDs, and the devices were the first thing he thought about every time he took his unit on patrol. "I led over 70 convoys, and I remember just looking ahead all the time over the concrete for IEDs," he says. "By (late 2003), they were our biggest concern — IEDs first, then mortars, then snipers."

Murphy was in Iraq when the IED threat was just emerging. When he left in 2004, the devices had become the leading killer of U.S. troops, and they remain the leading killer of U.S. troops today.

"The most unpleasant part of my job is every night going home and handwriting notes to the families of those who have been killed in action ... and about 70% of them are the IEDs," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said at a congressional hearing in March. "As soon as we ... find one way of trying to thwart their efforts, (the insurgents) find a technology or a new way of going about their business."

The evolution of IEDs in Iraq parallels the evolution of the tools the Pentagon has used to combat them. The placement of the IEDs, the ways they're triggered, the explosives they employ — all of that has

Evolution of the IED: From simple to extremely deadly

Insurgents have discovered increasingly deadly ways to build improvised explosive devices, forcing U.S.-led coalition troops to improve their defenses. How the IED has evolved:

Crude bombs

Containers/casing
Almost anything from a small soda can to a van.

Explosives
TNT, military shells or fertilizer and fuel oil.

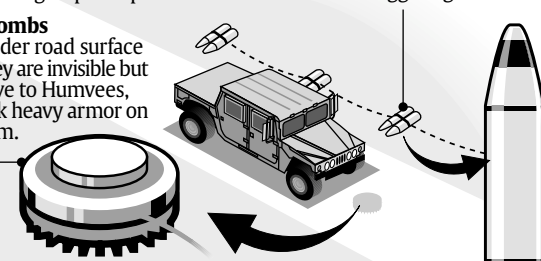
Fragments
Ball bearings, nails or bolts are used to increase damage or injury.



More powerful blasts

Explosives: Mortar and artillery rounds, sometimes in groups of up to a dozen at once.

Buried bombs
Placed under road surface so that they are invisible but destructive to Humvees, which lack heavy armor on the bottom.



"Daisy chains"

Charges spaced apart and set to explode all at once or in sequence. Sometimes a main charge is exploded, then bombers wait for more troops to respond before triggering another.

Armor-piercing charges

Explosively formed projectiles use explosives to propel a metal disc, reshaping it into projectile capable of breaking through up to 5 inches of armor plate.



Sources: GlobalSecurity.com, Applied Research Associates and Defense Department

By Karl Gelles, USA TODAY

changed time and again as U.S. forces have tried different ways to detect, disable or protect themselves against the devices.

Much of the raw material used by insurgents to make IEDs — artillery shells and explosives, such as TNT and C-4 — was looted from Iraqi military ammunition caches that were not secured by U.S. forces immediately after the invasion, according to a March report by the Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm.

"Not securing these conventional munitions storage sites has been costly," the GAO wrote. The looted material has given insurgents ammunition to "construct IEDs ... and maintain the level of violence."

Early IEDs were relatively small and straightforward, often a 155mm or 152mm artillery shell hidden in a wall or embankment along a road. Insurgents would run

wire from the device to a handheld trigger, which they could activate from a nearby hiding place.

As U.S. troops figured out how to detect those IEDs, by spotting the wires or a suspicious character nearby, insurgents began using remote triggers — car key fobs, garage door openers, cellphones — to detonate the devices from greater distances. They also turned to more powerful explosives, sometimes "daisy chaining" multiple artillery rounds to boost destructive force.

By March 2004, "they were using daisy chains, 155mm rounds, maybe seven, eight in a row," says Army Maj. Myles Caggins, who led a support company in Diyala province. "And they had a little ruse: One IED blows up, everyone stops, and as people walk up to investigate, more blow up. The techniques changed."

In late 2003, as troops scoured Iraqi scrap yards for steel to fashion

"hillbilly armor" for Humvees, the Pentagon began ordering add-on armor kits for the vehicles, including hardened steel doors and side panels. By May 2004, under pressure from Congress, the Army had delivered 7,000 kits; more arrived in the months that followed.

Around that time, troops also started getting their first large-scale deliveries of jammers: devices that can be mounted in a vehicle or, in some cases, carried in a backpack, to block the wireless signals insurgents used to set off IEDs.

The insurgents adapted faster. By early 2004, they'd begun burying IEDs under roads, so they would blast up through the thin floors that proved to be the Achilles' heel of even the armored Humvees. And the use of those buried IEDs grew steadily over the next 18 months, as more armored Humvees reached the field.

The triggers changed, too. As more jammers arrived, insurgents reverted to hard-wired devices or switched to pressure-plate IEDs, which go off when a vehicle rolls over them. By 2006, U.S. troops were seeing "baking trays," in which C-4 is sandwiched between metal plates and set to explode when compressed by a vehicle.

"They have adapted every time we've come up with a new way to defeat them," says Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., a combat veteran and critic of the war.

Now, they're adapting again, using IEDs that employ "explosively formed projectiles," known as EFPs. Those devices fire a metal slug that becomes a molten projectile as it travels toward its target. They are so powerful that they've been described as capable of slicing through an Abrams tank.

The Pentagon is developing yet

another armor kit — this time to put on already armored vehicles, including MRAPs and Humvees — that can protect against EFPs.

From the start, the insurgents "made a decision to attack our tactical mobility ... and they've chosen the IED as the way to do that," says retired Marine general Anthony Zinni, former chief of the U.S. Central Command. "This is the first war where we've faced an enemy that's adapted better than we have at a tactical and operational level. We had IEDs from Day 1 ... What have we done to adapt? Nothing."

"The best counter to the IED is to get into the head of the guy who's planting it. If he's doing it for a buck, give him a better job. If he's doing it because he's pissed off, give him some promise of a better life," Zinni adds. "If you say there has to be a technical solution, a silver bullet, you're not going to win."

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kosh Truck, Armor Holdings, International Military and Government and Protected Vehicles — won't be able to get the vehicles to Iraq fast enough.

"I didn't think that was acceptable," Gates said. "Lives are at stake."

The young lieutenant

Safest vehicle ever

As the sun began to bake the Iraqi countryside last month, Marine 2nd Lt. George Saenz headed back to his base on the outskirts in Fallujah. He felt oddly joyful.

Saenz had just spent hours leading his platoon through one of the most excruciating battlefield jobs — inching a convoy along the crumbling streets of Fallujah, searching for homemade bombs planted in the asphalt or dirt.

The night before had proved dangerous. Two bombs had blown up underneath Saenz's convoy, including one beneath his vehicle.

As Saenz turned through the gray blast walls protecting the base, he says he couldn't help but think: *If I had been riding a Humvee, I wouldn't be here right now.*

Saenz knew why he was alive.

His platoon in the 6th Marine Regiment Combat Team had replaced its Humvees with MRAPs. The two blasts produced just one injury, a Marine whose concussion put him on light duty for a week.

"We're probably in the safest vehicle ever designed for military use," Saenz says, recalling his platoon's record: Three months. Eleven bomb attacks. No one dead.

MRAPs have become legendary in Anbar since Marines began using them on dangerous missions clearing roadside bombs. Tank commanders, radio operators and others drop by Saenz's platoon every day to do what Rep. Hunter had done three years earlier — inspect the small fleet of MRAPs, knock on the armor, sometimes crawl inside.

Scores of MRAPs are scheduled to arrive in Anbar this summer. That means they'll be available for the first time to the Marines for tasks other than clearing IEDs, says Marine Col. Mike Rudolph, logistics officer for U.S. forces in western Iraq. No one has decided how MRAPs will be used, but "everybody wants one," Rudolph says.

To be sure, the vehicle isn't perfect. Saenz's team warns that MRAPs drive like trucks, plodding and heavy. Some models are so bulky they leave blind spots for

troops peering over the boxy hood and so noisy a driver has to shout at someone 2 feet away.

"They're just so heavy," Sgt. Randall Miller says. "These are virtually designed off a semi-truck platform."

After substantial testing, the military also has concluded that MRAPs are vulnerable to explosively formed projectiles, the newest and most devastating variation of the IED. More armor has been developed for the MRAPs the Pentagon ordered this spring.

Miller isn't complaining. On his first tour in Iraq in 2004-05, Miller searched for land mines in a Humvee. His detection technique was simple: "Go real slow, cross your fingers." He still drives slowly but feels safer knowing the MRAP's V-shaped hull will deflect a bomb blast. "I've seen our guys get hit and walk away," Miller says. "They're awesome, awesome vehicles."

The widow

They should've done it sooner

Whom or what is to blame for the delay in getting safer vehicles for the 158,000 U.S. troops in Iraq?

Jim Hampton, now a retired colonel, questions why the Pentagon and Congress didn't do more to

keep the troops safe. "I have colleagues who say people need to go to jail over this, and in my mind they do," Hampton says.

Hunter, now running for president, blames the Pentagon bureaucracy, which he says "doesn't move fast enough to meet the needs of the war fighter. We have a system in which the warfighting requirements are requested from the field and the acquisition people say, 'We'll get to it on our schedule.'"

Other members of Congress blame Rumsfeld and his vision of transforming the military into a leaner, faster fighting force.

Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., wonders if Rumsfeld's forceful personality silenced some of the generals. "Rumsfeld so intimidated the military that I've lost confidence in them telling us what they really need" in Iraq, Murtha says.

"They all knew the Rumsfeld rule: Your career is over if you say anything contrary" to his policies, Murtha says. "It's much better now that Rumsfeld is gone. The military is being much more honest."

If the Pentagon "had just listened to the guys in the field" who wanted MRAPs, Murtha says, "we'd have them in Iraq right now."

USA TODAY could not determine

what role, if any, Rumsfeld played in MRAP deliberations. A spokesman for Rumsfeld, now running a foundation in Washington, said last week that the former Defense secretary would not comment.

Aaron Kincaid's widow, Rachel, doesn't know who should be held accountable. She is haunted by whether getting MRAPs to Iraq earlier might have saved her husband's life. The bomb that blew apart his Humvee lay along the path he and his unit took, and no one noticed.

Today, she wonders: Was his death really about the path that he took, or about the path the Pentagon spent years avoiding, the path that, in May, finally led them to the vehicle that might have saved her husband's life?

"You think there is always something that could've been done to prevent it," Rachel Kincaid says of her husband's death.

"If that's been around for that many years," she says of the MRAP, "why hasn't it been used? They should've done it at the beginning of the war. They should've done it three years ago, four years ago."

Contributing: Ray Locker, Thomas Frank, Paul Overberg, Susan O'Brian and Marissa DeCuir



Video: Survivor's account

USA TODAY.com Marine Timothy Colomer explains how an MRAP saved his life

MRAPs vs. Humvees

Timeline traces the choices Pentagon made on the road from Humvees to MRAPs

What are the losses?

Review the death toll and the blow to U.S. strategic interests caused by IEDs