



Staff Sgt. Jon King, C Company, 434th Field Artillery Detachment, explains how a Basic Combat Training Soldier improperly threw a hand grenade to a KSWO-TV news crew April 18, 2014, at the Sgt. 1st Class Tony Burris Hand Grenade Complex at Fort Sill, Okla. (Photo by Jeff Crawley, Fort Sill Cannoneer)

NCO's Quick Actions Saved Lives After Grenade Toss Went Wrong

By Jeff Crawley

Fort Sill Cannoneer

Staff Sgt. Jon King, C Company, 434th Field Artillery Detachment, is being hailed as a hero for removing a live grenade from a throwing pit April 14 at Fort Sill, Okla., after a trainee's hand grenade toss bounced off a wall and landed at his own feet.

"It was very heroic and brave. He definitely did the right thing," said Sgt. 1st Class Dwayne Kimmel, noncommissioned officer in charge of the hand grenade range. "His training definitely paid off."

BCT Soldiers from D Battery, 1st Battalion, 31st Field Artillery were getting their hand grenade training at the

Sgt. 1st Class Tony Burris Hand Grenade Complex during their fifth week of training when the incident occurred.

In Pit No. 1, when the trainee threw his first live grenade it hit the open pit's front wall and bounced to the ground. Instead of immediately exiting the pit as per safety procedures, the trainee looked at the grenade, fell to the ground and just froze, said King, who has 18 years in the Army.

King, who was in the pit with the Soldier, realized he couldn't get the trainee out of the pit in time so he went for the grenade.

“Once I reached for the grenade it hit my foot, bounced behind me between my legs ... so I went for the grenade (again) and threw it out of the pit as fast as I could,” King said. It exploded just outside the bunker-like pit.

“I think it was just pure instinct from several deployments,” King said of his actions.

The M67 fragmentation grenade has a kill radius of 5 meters, wounding radius of 15 meters and shrapnel-producing radius of 230 meters, King said. It has a six-second fuse, but the instructors train for a 3- to 5-second detonation.

Although the BCT Soldier and King wore body armor, if the grenade had exploded inside the pit “there would have been loss of life for sure,” said Kimmel, who is King’s supervisor.

Instead of drill sergeants, who oversee training elsewhere, staff, known as cadre, from the C/434th FA Det., run specialized areas of BCT. Those areas include gas chamber and obstacle course training, and the towers on the rifle ranges, said Capt. John O’Brien, C/434th FA Det. commander. They also perform the hand grenade instruction. King an infantryman, who has been at Fort Sill for three years, was one of the grenade instructors.

The trainees get instruction on throwing grenades as well as what to do if a grenade doesn’t clear the pit. The protocol is for the BCT Soldier not to pick up the dropped grenade, but to immediately exit the pit, and get on the other side of the pit wall and lay down flat.

The cadre member makes an attempt to get to the grenade and if they can’t, they get out of the pit, too, and land on top of the Soldier, covering him or her from the blast.

“We show them how to get out of the pit and what their safety position is,” King said.

BCT Soldiers first throw four training grenades, and then two live M67 fragmentation grenades. Inside the pit with the trainee, the instructor keeps his eye on the grenade at all times, King said.

Kimmel described King as a knowledgeable, calm instructor.

“He takes his time to teach the Soldiers, and if they make mistakes he will stop training so they understand what they did wrong,” Kimmel said.

That’s what King did after a few loud words with the trainee after the mishap.

“I re-explained the throwing procedures to the Soldier and had him throw his second grenade,” King said.

King also spoke to the trainee the next day to ensure he understood just how dangerous the situation had been.

“I told him there was no bad blood between us,” King said.

King called his wife, Andrea, and told her what happened. He said her reaction was, “What!?” and “This is why you guys should have hazard (duty) pay.”

King’s said his co-workers made comments like, “Thank God, you’re alive” and “That would have sucked because you just made the promotion list, and the next day you almost died.”

King emphasized that training incidents like this are rare at Fort Sill. The last one similar to this happened about four years ago. He said the incident will probably be incorporated into the 434th FA Detachment’s training instruction.

For his courageous actions, King is being recommended for a lifesaving award.

“The bravery and heroism that he displayed was phenomenal,” O’Brien said. ■



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