

SEEING IS BELIEVING

STAFF SGT. EDUARDO A. ALEGRIA
U.S. Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory
Fort Rucker, Ala.

When I deployed to Iraq as a cannon crewmember with the 101st Airborne (air assault), each Soldier in my unit was supplied with two pairs of goggles. One pair provided protection during air assault missions, while the other offered ballistic protection. Even though the unit Leaders instructed us to use our goggles, the matter was not strictly enforced. Therefore, some Soldiers placed their goggles on their helmet. As a result, many Soldiers suffered eye injuries, and some even lost their eyesight.

During my second deployment, this time to Afghanistan as a combat medic with an artillery unit, my unit leadership, like that of my air assault unit leadership in Iraq, instructed us to use military combat eye protection (MCEP). However, this time the MCEP-use standards were enforced. All Soldiers were ordered to use their protective glasses, even during night. This meant we had to change the lenses in our glasses twice a day — gray lenses for daytime and clear lenses for nighttime.

Getting into the habit of wearing MCEPs 24 hours a day and changing the lenses was very difficult. Honestly, it was a pain. But as my deployment progressed and I witnessed firsthand what shrapnel did to the eyes of Soldiers who were not wearing MCEPs, wearing eye protection became extremely important to me. In no time, it became second nature. I knew the most important thing I could do to protect my eyesight and that of my fellow Soldiers was to wear approved MCEPs.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to statistics from the U.S. Army Public Health Command (Provisional), the average Soldier who suffers an eye injury is an E3 to E5, 20- to 24-year-old male, who is struck by an object while performing combat soldiering, participating in sports or doing maintenance, repair or servicing. He is not wearing eye protection and will lose an average of 6.1 workdays at an average cost of \$9,724 because of the injury. To learn more about authorized eyewear, go to <https://peosoldier.army.mil/pmseq/eyewear.asp>.

AUTHORIZED PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR LIST (APEL)
MILITARY COMBAT EYE PROTECTION (MCEP)

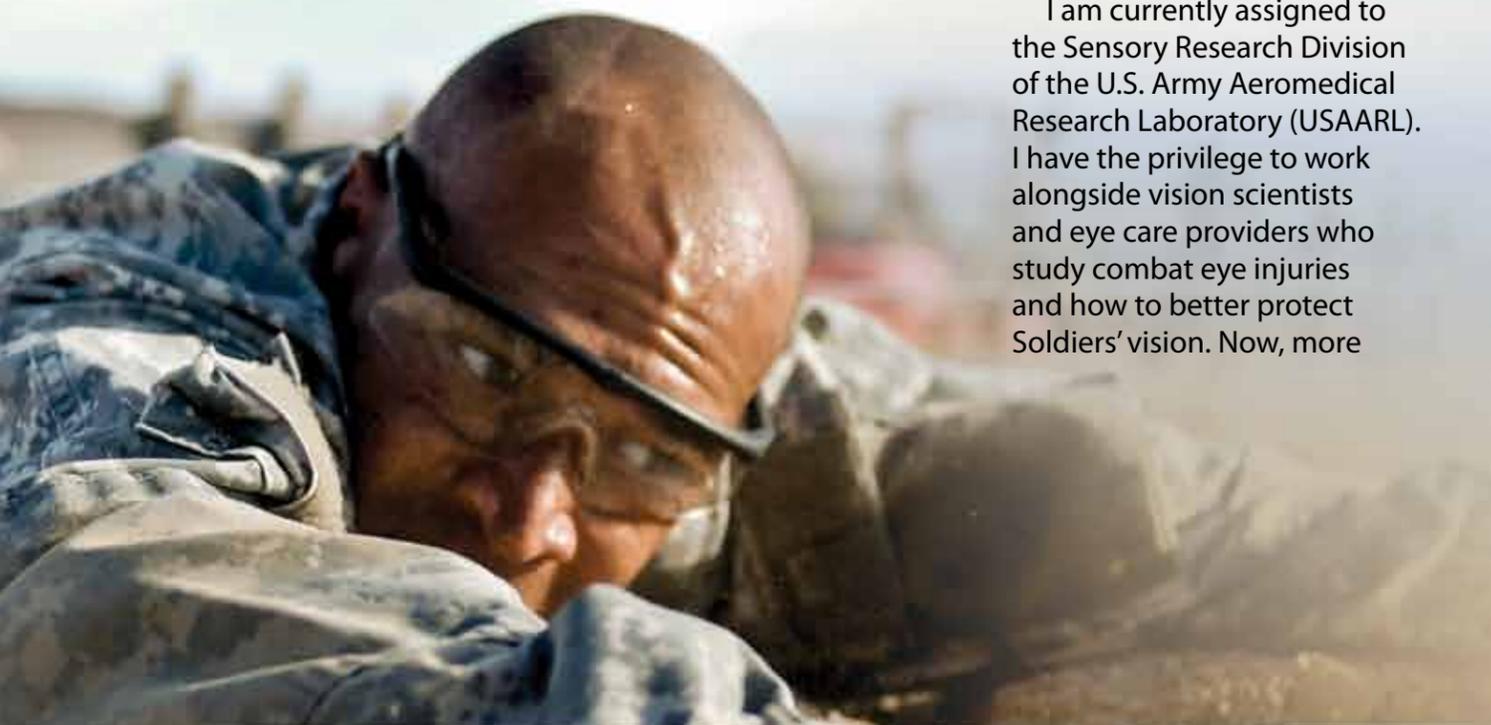
The Authorized Protective Eyewear List (APEL) allows PEO Soldier to offer more choices in protective eyewear, which improves Soldier acceptance and use of protective eyewear. The APEL for Ballistic Protective Eyewear can be found at <https://peosoldier.army.mil/pmseq/eyewear.asp>.

SPECTACLES

- ALL PURPOSE
- HAZY & BALISTIC
- VISION ONLY
- DAY OPERATIONAL
- VISION ONLY

GOGGLES

- VISION ONLY



I am currently assigned to the Sensory Research Division of the U.S. Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory (USAARL). I have the privilege to work alongside vision scientists and eye care providers who study combat eye injuries and how to better protect Soldiers' vision. Now, more

than ever, I understand how important eye protection is; how the eyewear is designed to protect a Soldier's vision from dust, wind, sunlight and shrapnel/ballistic fragments; and how much work goes into providing Soldiers with the safest eyewear available.

For many years, USAARL has evaluated the ophthalmic characteristics of eye protection and provided recommendations to industry and project managers to ensure the eye protection worn by Soldiers meets military requirements.

This means when a Soldier puts on a pair of MCEPs included on the Authorized Protective Eyewear List (APEL), he or she is wearing eye protection that has been tested by vision experts and approved by users.

Other ways USAARL is working to protect Soldiers' vision includes identifying ways to reduce the incidence and severity of combat eye injuries and methods to increase Soldiers' use of eye protection in combat. In addition, USAARL is investigating the relationship

of eye injuries caused by the initial pressure of a blast (as opposed to secondary effects of the blast, e.g., shrapnel) and the use of protective eyewear. USAARL is also developing methodologies and standards to better assess the effectiveness of protective eyewear.

The Army keeps moving forward to better fit Soldiers for battle. As Soldiers, we can feel confident knowing that when we wear MCEPs, we are reducing the likelihood of sustaining an eye injury.◀

PROTECT THOSE PEEPEERS

WAYNE COMBS
U.S. Army Public Health Command (Provisional)
Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.

Many eye injuries are avoidable if Soldiers use common sense to protect their vision and Leaders ensure their Soldiers wear appropriate eye protection. Keep the following tips in mind to protect your vision at work and home.

At Work

- Follow eye safety signs and procedures.
- Know what to do if a hazardous material splashes into the eye. Know where the nearest eyewash station is and how to use it.
- Always wear approved eye protection for mechanical, chemical, biological or radiant energy (from such sources as welding, lasers or sunlight) hazards. According to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the industry code "Z87" must be marked on the side of protective eyewear. For training and operational duties, a ballistic standard is required. Military Combat Eye Protection (MCEP), approved by Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier and labeled APEL (Approved Protective Eyewear List), significantly exceeds ANSI Z87 standards and meets this requirement.
- Make sure eye protection is clean and in good shape.
- Do not wear contact lenses in areas where there is smoke, dust or fumes, or when training or deployed.
- Report eye hazards to supervisors.
- If an eye injury occurs, immediately call emergency medical services.

At Home

- When outside, wear sunglasses that absorb the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. Both clear and tinted MCEP lenses provide UV protection. A broad-brimmed hat also helps protect the eyes.
- When working on cars or around the house, be aware of eye hazards. Mechanical hazards such as rust or flying objects, chemical hazards such as battery acid and radiant hazards are common in the home shop.
- Wear approved eye protection. Safety glasses and goggles should have ANSI Z87 markings on the side. Remember, MCEP exceeds safety glasses standards and can also be worn when working at home.
- Always wear appropriate approved eye protection when playing sports. For eye-hazardous sports such as racquetball, wear American

Society for Testing and Materials-approved eyewear that contains protective lenses.

In addition to the tips above, it's a good idea to have an eye exam every two or three years, or sooner as directed. Early detection and correction of eye problems is important. Above all, use common sense and protect your vision.◀

