



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-21

On-Duty Negligent Discharges

One of the most embarrassing things one can do while on duty is to negligently discharge (ND) a firearm. Many of us have heard the lone “Pop!” of a round that discharged on the range when it wasn’t supposed to and everyone looks to see who the culprit was (*and some of us have been that culprit*). It’s a mistake that tends to stick with you, and rightfully so, because NDs aren’t only embarrassing, they’re sometimes painful or even fatal. When handled properly, your weapon should never fire until you want it to. Still, as always (*and unfortunately*), our database isn’t lacking in examples of how some of our warriors shot something other than their targets and now live with the ND remorse. Take note of these totally preventable examples of what **not** to do to stay “on target” and off the ND list of shame.



- **Feel the Burn.** Negligent discharges can come from more than just traditional firearms. During a real-world patrol mission in a High Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) or humvee, the turret gunner of the rear vehicle noticed several civilian vehicles close to his, so he primed a whited star cluster (WSC), which was part of the unit’s signal plan, and placed it inside the turret (*note: you should only do this when you intend to launch the signal; you’ll see why*). The road was rough in the area, and the jostling of the vehicle set off the primed WSC, firing the burning signal flare into the back left seat of the humvee where a fellow Marine was sitting. The flare caught the seat on fire, burning the (*to put it in polite terms*) “rear thigh area” of the Marine sitting there. He called out the fire and everyone vacated the vehicle and extinguished the fire. —*This incident proves two valuable points. First, a negligent discharge can happen with anything that fires a projectile. The safety rule “Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire” can be translated to “Don’t prime the device...” in this instance. Second, an ND can have heavier consequences than potentially injuring someone. This incident happened in a combat zone, and for a significant time, the Marines in this vehicle had to divert their attention from the potential enemy to the self-imposed vehicle fire. Follow firearms safety rules (including flares) lest you get bit in the...*

- **A Rude Interruption.** After sighting their weapons at an indoor range, a line coach took his shooters aside to provide guidance before the range “went hot” (shooters allowed to begin firing). As he began speaking, he was “interrupted by a loud BANG,” according to the report. The line coach looked toward the noise and saw dust from the ceiling settling (*like a shroud of guilt*) on a “very distraught” Sailor. The Sailor was inadvertently given a condition I (*round in the chamber*) M-4 and did not verify its condition upon receipt. He felt the need to reset the sear by pulling the trigger, which obviously fired the round. —*Checking a weapon’s condition should be an immediate action when handed one. Even if you just saw the weapon cleared, you should always check it again so you won’t make the mistake this Sailor did. It wasn’t just his mistake, though. There were multiple lost opportunities to break the error chain: The armory received a condition I weapon (so an earlier shooter didn’t check it), left it as such (the armorers didn’t check it) and handed it out in the same state to this Sailor (the armorers didn’t check it...again). With that chain of error in mind, we also need to take this opportunity to encourage you to dig into your mistakes. This unit didn’t seem to think it pertinent to identify the factors behind this series of mistakes or provide recommendations to prevent their recurrence. The Navy has a saying for this, “Get real, get better.”*

- **Sleepless at the Range.** In another example of woefully inadequate investigating and report writing, a Marine negligently discharged his M18 service pistol while on duty when he removed the pistol from the holster, pointed it at the ceiling and disengaged the safety. The report didn’t note why he did any of this

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(sigh). The only amplifying information in the report was the Marine had slept for only a few hours the night before, went to physical training before the event, and that there was no reason for him to take the pistol out when he did. —*Given the lack of information, all we can say here is please adhere to the weapons safety rules, especially when you're tired. And don't play with the gun. Ever.*



- **Dis-Function Check.** During a complete lapse in judgment or mental awareness, a Marine oncoming duty officer loaded a magazine, inserted it into his M9 pistol, then decided to conduct a function check (*Nooooo!*). As he pulled the trigger on his now-loaded weapon—that he loaded himself—it predictably fired a round...into a table. —*The report stated, “A proper function check does NOT involve using a magazine or ammo.” (True: because functions checks with ammo are called “shooting.”) We'll go further to add that function checks are only necessary when reassembling your weapon to ensure it was properly put back together. There is no reason to function check when*

clearing your weapon or any other time. All you do is increase the chance of pulling the trigger on a loaded weapon. Stop doing it!

- **Behind the Curve.** The Sailor student traveled multiple time zones to attend a weapons course, where he used an M9 service pistol instead of the M18 that he previously qualified on (*spoiler alert: their safety levers are opposite; see SA 23-25 M-18 Service Pistol Mishaps for more*). Due to lost luggage (*we can relate*), the student arrived late for the course and did not get his thigh holster fitted by an instructor with the rest of the class. During dry-fire training, another student noticed the Sailor didn't place the weapon on safe before holstering it and corrected him. Later, the class began live-fire close-quarters shooting drills. When the instructor gave the “threat” command for students to engage their targets, our discombobulated student was confused about what to do next and engaged the target too late. The Sailor fired after the instructor had already given the command to place weapons on safe and holster them with fingers off the triggers. The student (*out of synch and likely stressing out at this point*) attempted to holster the weapon but didn't place it on safe...and kept his finger on the trigger. As he pushed the weapon into the holster, his finger pulled the trigger, “Bang!” discharging a bullet into his foot. The student next to him heard him shout and asked what happened. The injured student replied he got shot. When asked “by who” he stated, “I shot myself!”—*While the student was late and fatigued, influencing him not to follow the four weapons safety rules, the mishap could (and should) have been prevented with some correction by the instructors during the dry-fire portion. This incident is a warning that a safety violation shouldn't just be pointed out and forgotten. Take time to remediate and fix the problem.*

Key Takeaways

We won't complicate the key takeaways because they are always the same when dealing with firearms safety. But we will give you one saying to help you remember the four rules; “Treat, Never, Keep, Keep.”

- 1. Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.** This rule refers to all weapons, even if you are “certain” it is unloaded. If you treat all weapons with the proper respect, you are less likely to have an incident.
- 2. Never point your weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot.** Always be aware of where your muzzle is pointing. If a ND does happen, at least you can keep it from injuring someone.
- 3. Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire.** With enough practice, your muscle memory should do this for you. Having your finger on the trigger should feel wrong before you are prepared to fire.
- 4. Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.** The safety mechanism's exact purpose is to prevent a negligent discharge. Use it. That goes for white star clusters too.

And remember, “Let's be careful out there”