



## Negligent Discharge

Weapons safety is a fundamental responsibility at every level of command. Despite established procedures, required training, and strict handling protocols, a recent surge in negligent discharge incidents demonstrates that complacency, assumption and breakdowns in basic weapons handling principles continue to create unnecessary risk. These events, though varied in location and circumstance, share common contributing factors such as failure to positively verify weapon condition, improper clearing procedures or overall poor weapons handling. Whether on the range, in port, underway or during maintenance and cleaning, strict adherence to weapons safety fundamentals remains non-negotiable. These incidents prove what can happen when these fundamentals are not respected.



File photo, not associated with a mishap

### Complacency in Condition 1

During a training exercise, a group of Marines were positioned in the back of a Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement (MTVR). The unit was upgraded to Condition 1 weapons (*magazine inserted, round in the chamber*) as the Marines rode in the back of the moving MTVR. They remained in Condition 1 for approximately six to seven hours. Over the lengthy duration of the event, overall weapons handling discipline deteriorated inside the overcrowded vehicle packed with personnel and excess gear. Some of the team leaned their weapons on packs or against the MTVR cab including the mishap Marine's (M1) Condition 1 M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle (IAR). It was determined that the weapon's safety selector on the

IAR was inadvertently bumped off safe. Then when M1 repositioned in the confined space, an object engaged the trigger resulting in an unintentional discharge, fatally wounding M1. — *This mishap demonstrates how complacency, poor weapons discipline and deviation from established procedures can quickly lead to catastrophic consequences. Prolonged time in Condition 1, especially in confined and cluttered spaces, significantly increases risk when muzzle awareness and trigger discipline are not continuously reinforced. At no point should any service member ever fail to maintain positive control of a Condition 1 weapon. Strict adherence to weapons handling fundamentals remains the final safeguard against preventable negligent discharge fatalities.*

### Muscle Memory Meets the Wrong Weapon

During a routine turnover for a roving patrol (*conducted in a vehicle with two person teams*), a servicemember (S1) received an M18 service pistol, two magazines and ammunition from the off-going watch stander. The weapon was cleared and placed on the vehicle tailgate for the receiving watch stander to inspect and assume control of. In rainy conditions and while rushing to complete the turnover, S1 inserted a magazine into the weapon and sent the slide forward, unmindfully creating a Condition 1 weapon (*magazine inserted, round in the chamber*) instead of the required Condition 3 status (*magazine inserted, chamber empty*). About an hour into the watch, S1's fellow watch stander departed the vehicle to check-in. During the lull in the duty cycle, S1 decided to conduct weapons maintenance inside the vehicle. Reverting to habits developed from experience with Glock model pistols he grew up learning how to use, S1 placed his hand over the muzzle while gripping the underside of the barrel while attempting to rack the slide back with his other hand to clear the weapon. The pistol discharged, sending a round through his hand causing significant injury that required surgery and limited duty status. — *Carelessness caused by rushing resulted in a Condition 1 weapon instead of Condition 3. Complacency caused by boredom led to the service member relapsing to incorrect muscle memory. Neither carelessness nor complacency are acceptable mentalities when handling weapons. Strict adherence to clearing procedures, muzzle discipline and trigger awareness are always essential components to handling weapons. Never assume a weapon is in a safe condition and never absentmindedly handle a weapon.*

## Loss of Control on the Firing Line

A servicemember (S1) was participating in a course of live-fire during rifle qualification. After transitioning to the kneeling position and firing two rounds, he stood up and experienced sudden leg pain, causing his leg to buckle. He fell back to one knee on the ground and twisted, causing the weapon to end up in an unsafe position with the safety still off and his finger still on the trigger. The weapon fired into S1's foot. Range staff immediately initiated a cease-fire, rendered first aid and coordinated the emergency response. —*This example reinforces that weapons safety fundamentals must be engrained as muscle memory. One's finger should only ever be on the trigger when they are **ready to fire**, the weapon must be on safe until one **intends to fire** and the weapon should never be pointed at anything you don't intend to shoot (like yourself). Maintaining muzzle awareness when body control is compromised may seem like a lot to ask, but this should be instinct, just like the other safety rules. Strict adherence to these fundamentals is essential to preventing negligent discharges. Had the service member adhered to any one of these weapon safety rules, they would have kept a bullet out of their foot.*

## Distraction and a Trigger Squeeze

A service member was on guard for a night watch when his fellow watch standers left the guard shack to conduct post checks. The servicemember became bored while sitting at the desk and decided to remove his pistol from the holster and place it in his lap (*not sure how violating SOPs and safety rules solves boredom*). At some point during this process, the service member unintentionally disengaged the safety. A few minutes later the duty phone rang. The service member leaned forward to answer the phone, causing the pistol to slide off his lap. He grabbed the weapon to prevent its fall, but inadvertently pulled the trigger, discharging a round into his foot (well, the service member probably wasn't bored after this). —*Negligent discharges often occur during moments of distraction and complacency. Removing a weapon without operational necessity, failing to maintain trigger discipline, and allowing attention to shift away from safe handling fundamentals creates unnecessary risk. Weapons should remain holstered unless required for a defined purpose and the finger must remain straight and off the trigger until ready to fire. Adherence to established procedures and disciplined weapons handling at all times are core elements to risk mitigation and prevention of avoidable injuries.*

### Key Takeaways

Negligent discharges occur most often during routine moments when complacency, distraction, or rushed actions replace deliberate weapons handling. Weapons safety is not situational, it is constant. The fundamentals are simple, but they must be applied every time, without exception.

- 1. Do not manipulate a weapon without operational necessity.** Weapons should remain holstered or slung unless there is a clear, mission-driven reason to remove them. Handling a weapon casually or out of routine invites preventable risk.
- 2. Slow down and follow procedures every time.** Distraction, haste and muscle memory can override training. Deliberately verify weapon condition, follow established SOPs and treat every weapon as loaded. Discipline and attention to detail are the strongest safeguards against preventable injuries.
- 3. Ensure obedience to the four weapons safety rules.** These fundamentals are the first and last defenses against a negligent discharge. If they are adhered to, a negligent discharge won't occur.

**Treat** every weapon as if it were loaded

**Never** point your weapon at anything you do not intend to shoot

**Keep** your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire

**Keep** your weapon on safe until you intend to fire

Weapons safety is a personal responsibility. When discipline slips, even for a moment, the consequences can be immediate and irreversible.

*And remember, "Let's be careful out there"*