



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-25

M18 Service Pistol Mishaps

In 2020, the Marine Corps began fielding the Sig Sauer M18 Service Pistol to operating units, replacing the Beretta M9, the primary handgun since 1985. The Corps points to increased precision and reliability of the M18 as an improvement over the legacy platform, as well as increased modularity for shooters with differently sized hands.

However, transitioning from one platform to the next often comes with some friction. Consider recent changes in transitioning from the Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) to the newer Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV). Mishaps have occurred because of negative habit transfer, the continued use of a highly learned behavior from the legacy platform to the new. This phenomenon is apparent across the fleet Marine force with the recent switch from the M9.

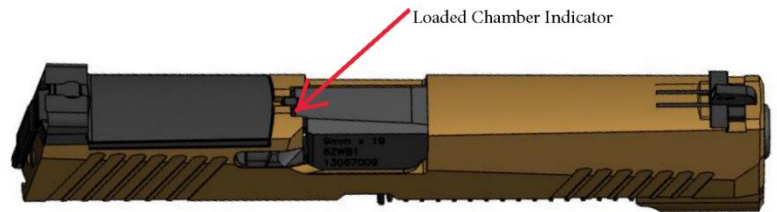


There is also a learning curve when employing a new weapon like the M18. While the general function of most pistols is the same, each firearm has nuanced differences that must be adjusted to. Some of our Marines faced the consequences of not effectively making these adjustments, which we will highlight in examples from our database.

- Up is Down and Down is Up. While conducting weapons cleaning, a Marine negligently discharged his M18, causing injury to his hand. The Marine, deciding his firearm was dirty, attempted to clear the condition one weapon (round in the chamber) to clean the firearm safely. He started by thumbing the manual safety down, intending to ensure the weapon was on safe. Of note: The M18's manual safety is reversed from the legacy M9 pistol. Specifically, the M9 is on **safe** when the safety lever is in the "down" position, whereas the "down" position for the M18 manual safety is on **fire**. In reality, the service member actually changed the weapon to fire (*what happens next is probably fairly obvious*). While continuing to clear the weapon, he inadvertently pulled the trigger, resulting in a negligent discharge through his hand. — *This mishap is a classic example of the above negative habit transfer. With the safety being reversed between the M9 and the M18, Marines must rebuild their muscle memory for this change and must deliberately check (not assume) if the weapon is on safe or fire.*
- This is What Happens When You Skip a Step. While standing duty, a Marine decided to conduct a function check on his M18 (*Side note, there is no need to perform random function checks on your pistol, you only increase the chance of making the mistake we're about to discuss*). He removed the magazine from the magazine well (*good start*) but failed to visually clear the weapon by moving the slide to the rear and checking the chamber or by checking the loaded chamber indicator (LCI) (*and now we have a problem*). Of note: The LCI is a component of the M18 service pistol that its predecessor, the M9, did not have. The LCI provides a visual and physical (to the touch) indication when a cartridge is loaded in the chamber. When the indicator is in the "up" position, a round is chambered and the weapon is in condition one. In his failure to check the chamber or the LCI, the Marine did not realize there was a round still loaded, which fired when he pulled the trigger. Fortunately, in this case, the round only went into the ground. — *With two methods the shooter can use to inspect the weapon's condition, the M18 should, in concept, be safer. Marines (and anyone with this type of handgun) should make the deliberate effort to learn and use these components until the checks become second nature.*

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- **Effective, But Wrong Way to Clear the Chamber.** While conducting duty changeover, the off-going officer of the day experienced a near-mishap while attempting to clear his weapon. He reached the clearing barrel at the armory to transfer the weapon (*oh, the sweet release of responsibility*). He un-holstered the weapon, put the muzzle into the clearing barrel, and removed the magazine (*all clear so far*). However, he neglected to clear the condition one weapon by pulling the slide to the rear to inspect the chamber or check the loaded chamber indicator visually. At this point, the Marine decided to conduct a function check (*again, not necessary when clearing a weapon*). When he pulled the trigger, the round he forgot to check for, discharged (*thank goodness it was into the barrel*).



Potentially adding to the confusion before the event, the posted weapons clearing procedures above the clearing barrel were for the legacy M9 service pistol (*remember that the safety selector is reversed on the new M18*). —Always visually inspect the LCI as well as the chamber of the weapon before turning over a duty firearm or performing a safety check. And don't just mindlessly follow signage. Confirm that the sign is for your weapon type.

- **Trust me, I'm a professional.** An assistant armorer reported for duty and armed himself with his M18 service pistol and ammunition. The assistant armorer then took out another pistol for the lead armorer, loaded it and placed it in condition 1. The two armorers elected to pass the loaded weapon over, instead of conducting a proper weapons transfer by clearing the weapon to condition 4, ideally at a clearing barrel (*you would think armorers would be more diligent about these things*). As the lead armorer took the pistol, he pulled the trigger, firing the loaded round into his left hand. —This mishap is less of a case of people having trouble with a new weapon than it is about poor weapons handling in general. The assistant armorer should have cleared the weapon and stated its condition before handing it off, and the lead armorer should not have accepted it without this happening. Additionally, if the lead armorer had been paying attention to that LCI we keep talking about, perhaps he could have told his assistant to clear the weapon before handing it over.

Key Takeaways

Understanding the operation and functions of a new weapons system is vital to safe operations. It is essential to acknowledge that new weapons will function differently than legacy ones. Here are some considerations as you transition from the M9 to the M18.

1. **Take your time.** As you stand duty or run a pistol range, remember that the manual safety is reversed from the M9 pistol that many Marines are accustomed to. Be deliberate in your thought process as you clear the weapon. Remember that the LCI is an extra feature the shooter can use to confirm whether a round is chambered in the pistol, but there is no replacement for a visual inspection.
2. **Train and remind your troops.** Whether leading a pistol range or overseeing a duty changeover, provide intentional communication reminding service members of the safety indicator and the LCI. Better yet, leaders must take extra time outside annual training to build confidence in their service members' competence with the M18.
3. **Complacency kills.** The Marine Corps used the M9 for over three decades. Operation of the legacy weapon became second nature to two generations of shooters. Don't allow complacency to let you treat this new system like the old. That said, the four weapons safety rules will always apply and mitigate injury to you and others. For more on gun safety, see our many firearms safety awareness products on our public website: <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil>.

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