



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-30

### Gun and Bow Mishaps (Hunting Edition)

It's about time for another off-duty firearms mishap dispatch because, well, there are so many Sailors and Marines shooting themselves that we feel compelled. This season, we've included hunting bow mishaps because weapons safety is weapons safety regardless of whether your projectiles are bullets, arrows or bolts. And since the weather is beginning to cool down, many people are returning to their deer stands and game trails, so this dispatch is *aimed* specifically at hunting-related incidents (*pun intended*). Before your next hunt, please take a look at these incidents to avoid becoming the next statistic. There are too many in our database already.



- **Eye on The Prize.** While hunting, a Marine sighted a deer worthy of his wall. He took aim, breathed in, released his breath, held and fired—*then felt as if he was punched in the eye*. The Marine placed his face a little too close to the scope and learned a painful lesson in eye relief (*the distance between the scope and the aiming eye, which we know is taught during basic marksmanship*). The report doesn't indicate if the Marine bagged the deer, but he'll have a painful tale to go with it if he did. —*The fundamentals of marksmanship apply regardless of your weapon system, including using scoped arms. Get a feel for the gun you are using and build your muscle memory for things like eye relief before you fire the weapon.*
- **When Children Strike.** A Marine took his son on a bow-hunting trip. As they trekked through the woods, the Marine suddenly heard the twang of his son's bow releasing an arrow. Instead of finding an animal felled by his son's shot, the Marine found an arrow sticking out of his back. (*Perhaps little Timmy had strong feelings about having to eat his vegetables.*) —*We jest about this slightly, only because the Marine fully recovered. This type of incident is a very serious issue, where proper weapons handling (like weapon orientation awareness) must be ingrained in all weapons users. This awareness is important regardless of age, but especially for minors. Put your child through the necessary repetitions and instill in them the basic rules of weapon safety before you head to the woods for a hunt (because we all want to come "back" safely).*
- **Break [Shoo] a Leg.** Two Sailors were hunting in a woody area near town. While taking a break at their campsite, Sailor 1 went to take his firearm out of his holster, which had a trigger lock that prevented inadvertent firing (*unfortunately, he was on his own once the gun was free of the holster*). According to the report, the gun "accidentally discharged" when the Sailor un-holstered it, striking him in his upper right thigh. Sailor 2 immediately administered first aid and then drove Sailor 1 to the nearest emergency room. —*Very few handguns are prone to "accidental discharge," so we're a bit skeptical. Regardless, if you follow the rules of weapons safety (included in the key takeaways), even an "accidental" discharge will not hurt you or your hunting buddy.*
- **Up The Creek Without a Paddle...Hand.** A Marine was bird hunting with other Marines at a local lake. They kayaked from one end of the lake to the other and began setting up their duck blind. While he worked on the hunting position, the Marine leaned his 12-gauge shotgun against his kayak (*not the steadiest platform if you ask us*). After completing the position, the Marine reached for his shotgun, intending to pick it up by the middle, but it started to fall as he did. He shot his arm out to catch it (*and avoid the obligatory push-ups for letting his gun hit the floor. It's a Marine thing*). Unfortunately, in his lunging grab, he managed to grab the end of the barrel and simultaneously discharge the weapon. His hunting buddy helped him

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bandage and tourniquet his hand and then they kayaked (and by “they,” we mean our injured Marine’s buddy) back to their truck and drove to the nearest hospital. — *Treating every weapon as if it were loaded, which it was in this case, means consciously and deliberately placing weapons down safely and with the safety engaged. Never just lean them against something haphazardly.*



- **Get a Grasp.** A Sailor was going bow hunting with a friend. Before beginning their trip, the Sailor wanted to try out his friend’s new compound bow with a mechanical release (a wrist strap for holding the bow string with a release “trigger”) that the Sailor was unfamiliar with. As the Sailor drew an arrow back and attempted to release it by pulling the trigger, nothing happened. Surprised by the malfunction and unable to hold the bow string back, the string sprung forward, wrenching the Sailor’s arm and partially dislocating his shoulder. — *This Sailor’s unfamiliarity with the release mechanism could have had a much worse outcome. Bows aren’t one-size-fits-all either, so your friend’s bow may not have the proper draw length for you, making it more difficult to hold the bow string back. We’ll file this example in the “know your gear” bin and add “know if the bow is your size” too.*



- **Too Cocky.** While a Marine was de-cocking his crossbow, he lost his grip on the cocking rope, causing his thumb to make hard contact with the handle and fracturing it (*his thumb, not the handle*). Apparently, there are few precautions available when de-cocking a crossbow, according to the report. — *As always, the internet has its say on the subject too. With a quick web search, we found a few alternate ways to safely de-cock a crossbow that doesn’t involve holding the bowstring’s tension with your hand. Most, if not all manufacturers will tell you that using a decocking bolt or shooting a real bolt into a target is the safest method. As with the rifle creed of the U.S. Marine,*

*“This is my rifle [crossbow], there are many like it, but this one is mine...” Master your weapon, including using the safest way to de-cock or unload it.*

### Key Takeaways

We shall repeat the four weapons safety rules as often as necessary until we drill them into all weapons handlers’ memories. If you follow these rules, shooting yourself or someone else negligently should be impossible. With some modification, these rules can also apply to bow and arrow use, so bow hunters, don’t stop reading yet.

1. **Treat every weapon as if it is loaded.** Respect the lethality of your weapon, whatever it may be. There’s zero room for complacency here. Heeding this rule will set the tone for safe weapon handling.
2. **Never point a weapon at anything you don’t intend to shoot.** This rule is the most universally applicable. Whether a gun is loaded or a bow is notched and drawn, it should feel extremely uncomfortable to point it at another person (or any part of yourself). Consciously keep your gun or bow oriented in a safe direction; that way, even if the weapon goes off, it can’t hurt anyone.
3. **Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire.** (The same applies to crossbow hunters). Train to have the muscle memory to keep your finger away from the trigger until you are ready to shoot. This action should be a deliberate step.
4. **Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.** (For a bow, consider “do not draw your arrow back until you intend to release”). Keeping the weapon on safe keeps you and others safe if the first three rules get skipped, which they shouldn’t for any reason.

**And remember, “Let’s be careful out there.”**