



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-25

M320 Grenade Launcher Mishaps

The M320 Grenade Launcher Module (GLM) is a recent addition to the Marine Corps' arsenal. Some Marine Corps units received the weapon system as early as 2017, but large-scale rollout did not start until about 2020. With the increased use of this system, the fleet is learning valuable lessons for its employment, but some of these lessons were learned painfully. Several Marines have taken chunks of their fingers off with poor hand placement. If your unit is using this system, take a moment to learn one of the things not to do to keep all of your digits.



- **A Well-Intentioned Modification.** Early in the system's rollout, a battalion received several M320s from an adjacent battalion. During the transfer, the armorers identified that some of the weapons' Folding Vertical Grips (FVGs) were reversed (*in the standard position the grip folds backward toward the butt of the weapon, reversed it folds forward*). Battalion leadership decided they preferred the modification because, in the reversed setup, the shooter's hand is further from the muzzle when the grip is extended to its vertical position. The unit applied the modification to each of their new weapons and scheduled their first range. Before heading to the range, the unit conducted a safety test of the grenadiers to ensure their understanding of the FVG's handling procedures, zeroing, etc; all grenadiers were deemed qualified. On the day of the range, the battalion conducted a dry run, and everything was looking good. The battalion commander, sergeant major and battalion gunner attended the live fire run to observe (*the bad stuff always happens in front of the boss*).



Proper FVG installation



Reversed FVG installation

When the live run began, an unfortunate grenadier entered the trench system and prepared to engage targets. He extended the M320 butt stock, raised the leaf sights, loaded a round and assumed a modified standing position. One thing he neglected to do, though, was extend the FVG. He grasped the weapon palm up, not realizing part of his forefinger was raised in front of the muzzle. When he fired the round, the projectile took a portion of his finger with it. —After analyzing the mishap, the unit determined that reversing the hand grip places the shooter's hand further back when the grip is extended (seems better, right?); but it does the opposite if the shooter fails to extend the grip (definitely worse). As such, they reversed their decision and mounted the FVGs following the manual. The board investigating this mishap recommended the technical manual clarify that no modifications should be made to the FVG and that emphasis should be placed on the FVG being

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extended whenever firing. We agree with the board. Manuals are usually written that way for a reason. It's generally wise to follow what they say.

- **Almost Stopped in Time.** In another incident, a Marine reached the advance limit in his unit's platoon attack. A counterattack was simulated and the grenadiers were expected to use their M320s to repel it. The range safety officer noticed one of the grenadiers neglect to put his FVG down (*hmm sound familiar*) and place his palm right under the muzzle as he grasped the grenade launcher preparing to fire. He yelled for the position safety officer nearest the Marine to stop him, but right then the Marine fired. The grenadier was lucky in that he only lacerated his finger. —*While it is a safety officer's job to monitor everything in their designated lane, capturing every single hand placement is impossible. The gunners must ensure they have their weapons handling techniques down pat before going live.*



- **More Poor Hand Placement.** The report for this incident was relatively short and was a simple paragraph. The report noted the “mishap occurred when the grenadier did not deploy his broomstick (aka FVG)” (*and so the trend continues*). The Marine placed his hand on the front of the weapon, thinking he was “holding the broomstick.” He fired the round, which impacted his hand so severely that he required pins to hold his finger and hand bones together. —*Firing a high-speed projectile is no time to be absentminded about your hand placement.*

Key Takeaways

While each incident has nuanced differences, the bottom line is that each Marine in these mishaps lost awareness of their weapons handling. Weapons handling should be muscle memory, whatever weapons system you are using. Keep in mind this guidance when developing this muscle memory for the M320.

1. **The FVG must be extended when firing.** In each case, the grenadier neglected to extend the folding vertical grip. The M320's short barrel increases the chance of the shooter's finger ending up in front of it. Ensuring the grip is down and gripping it properly will help ensure your hand is far enough away from the muzzle.

2. **Maintain muzzle awareness.** We constantly reiterate muzzle awareness to ensure we don't flag somebody with our weapon, but we also need to ensure we aren't flagging ourselves. Make sure you pay attention to your hand placement. It can be easy to fixate on other aspects of a live-fire range but don't let that cause you to neglect your basic weapons handling. It will save you from a painful and potentially fingerless day (*and many days thereafter...*).

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