



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-34

Off Duty Firearms (10th Edition)

It's time once again for the familiar and frustrating topic of off-duty firearms mishaps. Why are there so many dispatches about Sailors and Marines shooting themselves, you ask? Because they keep doing it. (SMH). For the past five years, we've averaged more than 20 off-duty firearms mishaps each year in the Navy and the Marine Corps. So, we're going to keep raising this topic until these statistics go down. Please take a look at these unfortunate, upsetting, and ridiculous examples so you can avoid being one of them.



- **Revenge of the Target.** A Sailor went to an outdoor range to shoot steel targets with his 9-mm handgun. After firing a few rounds and hearing that sweet ringing feedback of rounds on target, he got more personal feedback: pain in his thigh above the knee. Shrapnel ricocheted from one of the shots, returned and hit him in the leg. —*Anyone who has seen tracer rounds fired knows bullets can ricochet at some wild angles. However, anyone familiar with the surface danger zones of munitions can attest that shrapnel ricocheting straight back is very rare and means either the range is set up incorrectly or the targets have deteriorated to an unsafe degree. Steel targets are fun to shoot at but make the effort to make sure they are set up properly.*
- **Pellet Guns Count Too.** A Marine was working in his garage when he bumped into the shelving unit, causing a loaded pellet rifle to fall and discharge. The Marine may not have heard a gunshot (*pellet gun*), but he certainly felt the pellet imbed his index finger (*hopefully not on his shooting hand; that would be too ironic*). He required surgery to remove the pellet. —*While a pellet gun may not meet the definition of a firearm per the Gun Control Act of 1968, it should still be treated with the same respect including unloading and storing them correctly. A pellet gun may not be as lethal as a true firearm, but it obviously can still cause injury. As a certain wise mall Santa once said, "You'll shoot your eye out, kid."*
- **The Worst of Friends.** A Marine was attending a pre-wedding party at a friend's house where libations were a-plenty. During the party, one of the Marine's inebriated friends must have felt the party needed a little more excitement, because he pulled out his pistol and started waving it around (*WHY!!!*). Things certainly got exciting when this "friend" negligently discharged the weapon, shooting the Marine in the neck! The Marine lived but spent several days in the ICU and required surgery to repair damaged arteries. —*The Marine in this case is absolutely not at fault for mishandling a weapon, but we encourage people in similar situations to do something about the wayward friend. Hold the people around you to the same weapons handling standards you should hold yourself. Firearms are not props for the dance floor, if you see someone acting this foolishly (dare we say, "stupidly") say something; intervene. If they don't listen, we suggest making yourself scarce.*
- **The Case of the Exploding Gun.** A Marine decided to try a rented AK-47 rifle at a range. He fired approximately 23 rounds before having a misfire. He inspected the weapon and found a split casing that failed to eject. He took the rifle to the range staff who removed the casing and gave the weapon back (*never trust someone else's inspection over your own*). The Marine returned to the firing line and, upon firing the next round, the weapon exploded, injuring his hand and face. The mishap investigation found that the misfire with the split case was a squib load (a firearms malfunction where the fired projectile doesn't have enough energy to leave the barrel). Since the range staff didn't check or clear the barrel, the next round fired into the last round, which was still in the barrel, causing an overpressure and the subsequent explosion. —*While you may assume you can trust the "expertise" of range personnel at a commercial firing range, inspecting the weapon on your own is always the best. Also, pay attention to audible pops that don't sound like a full weapons discharge, as it is indicative of a squib load and can result in the same type of mishap.*



- Things You Really Shouldn't Point Your Gun At. Two Sailors decided to get a late-night snack at a diner. The restaurant was only open for takeout, so they placed their orders and waited for their food in their separate cars. While waiting, one Sailor decided to use nature's bathroom behind a dumpster (*very classy, SMH*). Before getting out of the car, the Sailor noticed a commotion in the parking lot with other patrons and decided to bring his pistol with him (*pro tip, if you feel so unsafe that you need to arm yourself, you might have chosen the wrong dining establishment and the wrong dumpster*). The Sailor

did not have his holster with him, so in true Hollywood movie fashion, he stuffed the pistol in the waistband of his pants (*SMH, again*). After reaching the dumpster, he tried to move the pistol to perform his business. However, during the process, the drawstring of the Sailor's pants got caught on the trigger...**BANG!**... discharging the weapon into the Sailor's, well "groin" area and thigh. When the Sailor's friend heard the gunshot, he drove away thinking the shot came from the patrons causing the previous commotion (*we can hear the squealing tires; so much for no man left behind*). The injured Sailor drove to the hospital to receive medical treatment. —*Every off-duty firearms edition finds a least one service member who failed to realize the hazard of pointing a firearm at their privates. No matter how cool that movie or TV show made it seem, putting a pistol in your waistband without a holster is a mistake. Specific holsters are designed to safely carry a concealed firearm in the waistband. These holsters often come with trigger guards or other safety mechanisms to prevent this exact scenario from happening. So be smart and use a holster, lest you perform an impromptu and painful orchidectomy. Look it up, we had to (Yeesh!).*

- A Tragic Decision. A Sailor, having recently purchased a handgun, wanted to show it off to his friend. The new gun owner decided to demonstrate that the weapon was unloaded by pointing it at the right side of his head and pulling the trigger, no doubt thinking this would be a humorous way to show the gun was clear. Well, there was no joke about the bullet that entered his head, killing him right in front of his friend. The fellow Sailor rushed out of the room to call 911, but there was nothing that could be done. —*We try to make light of some incidents to get people's attention, but there is nothing but sadness and tragedy about a gut-wrenching mishap like this. What makes this incident so frustrating is that a nearly identical mishap occurred approximately five years ago. If you take nothing else from these examples, take this, there is no reason to ever point a firearm at yourself, regardless of how certain you are that it is unloaded.*

Key Takeaways

Our takeaways for this subject don't change. Simply follow the four weapons safety rules, and you will not shoot yourself or anybody else.

1. **Treat every weapon as if it is loaded.** No matter how recently you have unloaded it, assume every weapon is loaded and handle it accordingly. Complacency kills, literally.
2. **Never point a weapon at anything you don't intend to shoot.** This rule obviously includes any part of yourself and any other person. If your weapon does go off for some reason, but you are following this rule, then at least no one will have gotten shot.
3. **Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to fire.** Your muscle memory should make it so that your finger's natural placement is away from the trigger. It should take a conscious effort to place your finger on the trigger to fire.
4. **Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.** If your weapon has a safety, it should only be disengaged at the last point before shooting. Failing to do this opens the window to the all-too-common negligent discharge.

There is a bonus rule that isn't included in the doctrinal "Four Weapons Safety Rules:" **Don't drink and handle firearms.** Common sense dictates you don't drink while in possession of a firearm. Alcohol inhibits your motor skills and logical reasoning skills, two crucial traits for safe weapons handling.

And, like we always remind you, "Let's be careful out there."