



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-10

### *Off-Duty Firearms Mishaps IX*

Unfortunately, it's time once again for another painful edition about Marines and Sailors shooting themselves in their off-duty time. Regrettable, this recurring subject (*the ninth edition in the last five years*) has more examples each year than we can squeeze into a two-page dispatch. We may seem to poke fun at these service members, but we're simply trying to highlight how egregious some of their errors are. So, please look at the latest incidents from our database and **remember** them the next time you break out your firearm. You don't want to find yourself as one of our examples, and we don't want that either.



- **The Smoking Gun Feet**. A Sailor went to the range with a shooting buddy (*who was about to lose that title very quickly*). After checking in, the "buddies" went to the firing line and began prepping their firearms. A moment later, the Sailor heard a boom and felt pressure in both feet. In what must have felt like a Saturday morning cartoon moment, he looked down and saw smoke coming from both his shoes. The Sailor's (*now ex*) buddy had been unloading his shotgun from the case, which he transported loaded with the safety off, and pressed the trigger as he picked the weapon up. —*Simple muzzle awareness and proper use of the safety could have kept this friendship enduring. We also recommend you don't transport your weapons fully loaded. Always respect and follow weapons safety standards. You should also expect your friends to show the same respect or don't take them shooting.*
- **"You'll Shoot Your Eye Out, Kid"**. A Sailor was on leave in a rural area (where backyard firearms activities are legal), watching a family member perform target practice on steel targets. There was only one set of eye protection between the pair, so the shooter had them on (*see where this is going?*). The Sailor felt safe standing ten feet behind his family member. As you have probably guessed, the Sailor misjudged that feeling of safety. While watching, the Sailor felt an impact in his left eye and was rushed to the hospital. He'd been hit by a bullet fragment from a ricochet. Fortunately, he suffered only minor injuries and retained his sight. —*There is a reason shooting ranges demand you wear eye protection, even if you're not the one doing the shooting. You can never be sure how a high-energy projectile will act. Ricochets and shrapnel are genuine hazards, no matter where you are standing. Don't take even the slightest chance with your eyesight. Wear proper ballistic eye protection or don't be on the range.*
- **Such a "Waist"**. A service member was helping his sister move over a weekend. Apparently, you never know what gremlins might jump out of the furniture when you're moving, so the Sailor had his 9mm pistol on him. And, (*according to too many self-inflicted gunshot victims*) there is no cooler way to carry a handgun than stuffing it in your waistband, so that's just what the Sailor did. The answer is "no" for those wondering if he used a waistband holster. He just stuffed the gun in his waistband and started hauling boxes. About ten minutes into moving, he decided to remove the pistol to move the furniture more comfortably (*makes sense*). While gripping the weapon, his finger went into the trigger well and discharged a bullet into his leg and foot. —*This is another example where the four weapons safety rules would have stopped an injury and some embarrassment. Simple safety and trigger finger discipline would have kept this Sailor from shooting a hole in his leg and foot. No matter what Hollywood says, simply stuffing a loaded weapon in the crotch or back of your pants isn't "cool"; it's just dumb. You can carry your concealed weapon in your waistband, but appropriate holsters are made for this. Many are designed to keep your finger from accidentally pulling the trigger as you draw the weapon.*

## Off-Duty Firearms Mishaps IX

- Another Poor Choice in Friends. A Marine and his civilian friend were cleaning and preparing several firearms for a recreational shoot planned for the next day. The civilian was pulling out his .45 caliber pistol when he unintentionally discharged the weapon. The bullet went through his hand and into the right leg and groin of the Marine (*DOUBLE HIT!!*). —*Again, be aware of where the muzzle is pointing. And make sure your friends share your respect.*
- Watch This Cool Trick. A group of Marines were spending some R&R time at an off-base hotel. Being highly motivated Marines, they spent their time away from Marine training by doing...more Marine training. The report states one Marine was using one of his friend's 9mm handguns to go over room clearing. It also says the Marines were drinking but "not so much to warrant a toxicology test by medical personnel" (*hmm, guns and booze, that never works out well*). The self-appointed weapons instructor wanted to show how pushing the slide back on the pistol puts the gun out of battery (causing the slide/bolt to stick open, theoretically preventing it from firing). He pushed the slide with his hand in front of the muzzle. The other Marine, believing the weapon was empty, and wanting to test his theory, pulled the trigger. As you may have guessed, the weapon was not empty, the trick didn't work, and the first Marine was shot through the hand and arm. —*There is a reason we conduct weapons training and room clearing in a formal setting. It's dangerous. There is also a reason we recommend against handling firearms and drinking; something about inhibiting judgment, right? Please leave the weapons instruction to the professionals and not in some booze-filled hotel room.*
- Dumb and Dumber. This last example concerns firearms safety and basic common sense – *or a lack thereof*. Gate guards stopped a Marine at the base gate for suspicion of driving impaired. He had a loaded pistol he did not want to be caught with, so he tried to conceal it by placing it in the back seat. During the process, he discharged a round into the floorboard. He was promptly removed from the vehicle and placed under arrest (*and was lucky not to have been shot by the guards or shot himself, for that matter*). —*Let's see here: Driving a potentially deadly vehicle under the influence...dumb. Handling a deadly weapon under the influence...also dumb. Doing both at the same time...incredibly dumb. Trying to conceal a weapon while in a car, while under the influence, while in the presence of an armed gate guard...the pinnacle of dumbness. For those unaware, there are proper avenues of gun ownership for service members who live on base or in the barracks. Trying to conceal a weapon while intoxicated isn't one of them.*

### Key Takeaways

The takeaways from off-duty firearms will always be the same. Simply follow the four weapons safety rules, and you will not shoot yourself or anybody else.

1. **Always treat every weapon as if it is loaded.** Whether you have just fired your last round, just unloaded and showed the weapon to be clear, or just reassembled it, always treat it as if it is loaded. Complacency kills, literally.
2. **Never point a weapon at anything you don't intend to shoot.** Muzzle awareness is the best way to keep a weapon from harming someone, even if it is unintentionally discharged. At the risk of stating the obvious, if you put your hand in front of the muzzle, you are pointing the weapon at your hand.
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.

We also have to talk about alcohol. While not included in the doctrinal "Four Weapons Safety Rules," common sense dictates you do not partake in something that inhibits your motor skills and logical reasoning while handling firearms. Please stay away from alcohol while armed.

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