



# Naval Safety Center

## Lessons Learned

18-03

### ***“Don’t try this at home, I’m a trained professional!”***

*(USMC Edition)*

Working with firearms is inherently hazardous, and live fire exercises add even greater risks. Even so, during the past 30 months, our Marines have inadvertently shot themselves twice as often OFF-duty as compared to on-duty! -- 31 incidents of negligent firearm discharges in off-duty mishaps, resulting in 542 lost workdays and 1 fatality. Seriously, Bro! (and Sis)! Somehow our discipline on the range and on-duty isn’t carrying home.

Here is a random sampling of some of the most recent events:



A Marine negligently discharged his personal firearm into his left thigh while in his parked POV. The message adds, “he was waiting in the store parking lot while his wife shopped.”

A Marine was excused from work early to meet with a real estate agent. While waiting for the meeting, the report states he “experienced an accidental discharge while handling his 9mm pistol”. The bullet lodged in his leg. He then drove himself to the ER.

While firing his personal weapons alone off-base, a Marine negligently discharged his 9mm pistol into his left thigh while attempting to clear a stoppage. The report goes on to say that he used his belt as a tourniquet and drove to his residence ON-base where his wife and neighbor then took him to the hospital. -- You have to wonder how hard he had to grit his teeth to smile and greet the gate guard on the way to his house.

Two Marines were off base at one’s residence. They were working on a vehicle, but then they decided they should “work in” a new pistol holster that one of them had purchased. Marine 1 put on his holster and cleared the weapon. He stated that he recalled “ejecting the magazine and racking the slide to the rear, which should have cleared the pistol,” before putting it back in the holster. He stood 5-7 feet away from Marine 2 and performed a “quick draw” of the weapon (what could possibly go wrong...). His index finger missed the trigger guard and squeezed the trigger. The “empty” pistol discharged, causing a round to strike his buddy in the abdomen.

-- The report goes on to say “alcohol was a contributing factor to this mishap.” Sigh...

A Marine was inspecting a handgun while visiting a buddy’s house. He failed to clear the weapon properly and negligently discharged the firearm, shooting the homeowner (and gunowner) Marine in the foot.

A Marine was at his friend's house, where he was assessing a 9mm pistol (here we go again) belonging to a totally different friend. He accidentally shot himself in the thigh.

A Marine went shooting at a local range. The next day he prepared to clean his weapon by removing the magazine and pulling the slide to the rear. He did not observe a round eject and he didn't visually inspect the chamber, but he "assumed the weapon to be in condition 4." Shortly thereafter he depressed the trigger in order to engage the slide release to disassemble the weapon, but instead (surprise!) shot himself clean through his left hand.

Marine 1 was watching the NCAA tournament at a fellow Marine's house. He did what any of us would do while watching basketball (right?), he decided to adjust the sights of his pistol. When he began to disassemble it, he shot himself in the left hand and knee.

A Marine was attending a party at a friend's house while on leave. The friend was waving a pistol around and negligently discharged it into the Marine's neck, exiting his back. The report simply states "during the party alcohol was present."

## Factors

- Failure to use basic firearms Safety Rules

### **Lessons Learned:**

Sadly, none of these lessons are new. They are the same lessons we've learned over generations of firearms use. All of these incidents result from failing to follow the basic tenets of firearm safety. To borrow another quote, "Throw me a bone here!" Generally, there are four rules, but we'll stick to just two to keep it simple:

#### **1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.**

This includes:

- A weapon you just loaded.
- A weapon you just brought home from the range.
- A weapon you just got out of your bag.
- A weapon your buddy just handed you.
- A weapon you just handed back to your buddy.
- A weapon your drunk buddy is waving around (we'll get to that again later...).
- A weapon you just removed the magazine from and cleared the chamber (so you think...).
- A weapon you just dismantled into four pieces and is sitting on the table (you get the idea...).

#### **2. Never point a weapon (every weapon) at anything you don't intend to kill/destroy.**

This doesn't just mean "purposefully aiming" – it means muzzle discipline. Don't let the muzzle cover anything you aren't willing to shoot, including:

- Your foot, thigh, hand, finger, head, etc.
- Your buddy's foot, thigh, finger, head, entire body, etc.
- The thin drywall of the room, on the other side of which you can't see who is there (it has happened...).
- etc.

Following just these two basic rules would have avoided 87% of the off-duty firearm mishaps that occurred in the past three years to date. Another 10% could've been avoided if Marines didn't lean loaded shotguns on things. You can do that with a walking stick, but when the stick falls down it doesn't shoot you or your neighbor. Believe it or not, dropped shotguns have hurt Marines three times in 30 months! That's almost enough to be its own Lesson Learned article!

**Bonus Lessons:**

-When waiting in the car for someone, playing a first-person-shooter game on your cell phone is a better way to burn time than playing with your handgun for real.

-If you are watching the ball game, just stick to eating nachos and hot wings. Save the gun maintenance till later.

-Although John Wayne might've been proud (after he stopped laughing), don't be afraid to call 911 instead of driving your bleeding self across town to get help. Especially if your car is a manual.

**Recommendations:**

1. Brief this lesson to all Marines (and Sailors because they aren't immune either).
2. Remember AND USE these two basic firearm safety rules, even OFF-duty.
3. Many Marines enjoy firearms ... and many also enjoy partaking in alcohol ... but please avoid mixing the two.

*"Let's be careful out there"*