

Negligent Discharges

Two Examples From the Range

By Staff Writer

Safe Until You Intend To Fire

A Marine involved in a maneuver element during a live fire slipped on the way down range and shot himself in the ankle.

Marines in a maneuver element are instructed not to have their weapons on fire when moving. This Marine did not shift the safety selector to “safe” from “fire” before getting up to move to another firing position. In the movement, he slipped, and his finger brushed the trigger, firing a round that went through the top of his left boot and out the sole.

The Marine in this mishap violated the third safety rule: “Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.” RSOs and OICs in charge of maneuver ranges should consider emphasizing the third safety rule and how it applies to prevent a similar incident.

Hot Brass

While conducting enhanced marksmanship training, a company had Marines online, shooting at targets with M16A2 and A4s. The relays consisted of approximately 25 Marines shooting at targets 7 yards away. The company had gone through the course of fire several times, allowing everyone to get effective training. Each Marine was familiar with the course of fire.

During one relay, the brass expended from a Marine’s M16 flew from the ejection port onto the Marine adjacent

to him. The brass, hot from just having been expended, lodged in the interceptor-vest collar and touched the skin behind his neck. This contact caused momentary discomfort for the Marine, followed by a lapse in concentration and subsequent negligent discharge.

The Marine with the brass on his neck, shooting his M16 right handed, pulled his left hand off the hand guard, dropping the muzzle of the rifle. His right hand remained on the pistol grip, with his index finger in the trigger well. As the weapon dipped downward and to the right, the Marine pulled the trigger, discharging a single round.

The round struck the Marine standing next to him in the foot and went through the dog tag laced into his boot. The victim was fortunate to have just the open wound and a few broken bones that will heal.

The root cause of this mishap was the shooter’s lapse of concentration. His finger still being in the trigger well violated the third safety rule: “Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you intend to fire.” The Marine’s slight discomfort also caused him to lose muzzle awareness, which violated the second safety rule: “Never point your weapon at anything you don’t intend to shoot.”

Finally, when Marines are shooting closely to one another, the RSO should address this issue in the safety brief. Making the Marines aware of the possibility of hot brass will help them be prepared and prevent a reaction like the one that caused this mishap. This month’s negligent discharge stories come from incidents that occurred on the range. **GW**

There are lessons in each that don’t need to be relearned. If you have witnessed a negligent discharge, submit the details to the editor, Safe-GroundWarrior@navy.mil.

