

# Paging Wyatt

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Come to think of it, let's call in a couple of driving instructors, too.

Sailors excel at multi-tasking, which usually is a good thing. However, some tasks never should be attempted together. Take the case of our latest addition to the ranks of gunfighter wannabes.

The star of this particular western tried to combine the mutually exclusive tasks of driving and firearms handling.

Confused? Welcome to the club. Our hero's supervisor, LCPO, division officer, and department head share your confusion, along with everyone else familiar with the details of this little comedy.

Let us slip back to the thrilling days of yesteryear—or, at least to the winter of 2006. Our stalwart hero, whom we will call Petty Officer Festus, was on leave in Georgia. Festus hitched the mules to the family buckboard—OK, he really got behind the wheel of his mom's car. He and dear old Ma, who presumably was wearing a gingham dress, bonnet, and white apron, were driving to a local shooting range for some target practice—family time, togetherness—you know.

Festus and Ma carefully had placed his shootin' iron, a .45-caliber Glock, in the glove box and had tucked the ammo in the center console. Festus was *certain* the weapon was unloaded because he just had cleaned it the night before.

The closest range was located on a nearby Air

Force base. Military installations have very strict procedures for bringing weapons onto the base: The magazine must be removed, and no cartridges may be in the weapon. On the way to the base, our hero, who was certified to carry concealed firearms and therefore should have known better, decided that the best time to make sure his weapon was unloaded was while driving down the street.

Stopped in traffic, at a red light, Festus practiced his best Clint Eastwood squint, reached into the glove compartment of the family buckboard—I mean his mom's car—and took out the pistol. He then pulled back the slide a little to make sure the chamber wasn't filled with a live round. When he didn't see a cartridge, he released the slide. For some reason, Festus decided the next logical step was to point the muzzle toward his left thigh and pull the trigger.

No one even vaguely involved in the investigation of this incident has any idea how Festus failed to notice that a round did, in fact, remain in the chamber. Festus himself swears up and down the weapon had been unloaded when he'd cleaned it the previous night. Similarly, no one ever has come up with a sat-



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isfactory explanation why Festus thought his leg was an acceptable substitute for a clearing barrel *[or pointing the weapon in a safe direction]*.

Pop quiz: What happens when you pull the trigger on a pistol with the safety off and a round in the chamber? If your guess involves a loud noise, a high-velocity projectile, and possibly a great deal of foul language, you already may be a winner.

By a series of miracles so improbable that calculating the odds is impossible, the .45-caliber bullet struck Festus inside his left thigh, traveled through the leg without hitting the femoral artery or any bone, and exited behind the left knee. A millimeter one way or the other, and the bullet would have shattered the thigh bone or severed the femoral artery. The latter likely would have been fatal—it absolutely would have caused a great many long-term medical problems, including permanent disability. As it is, the bullet gouged through a lot of muscle tissue and did an unknown amount of damage to a group of nerves behind the knee.

Ma took the reins—sorry, she got behind the wheel—and tried to drive Festus to the hospital but soon gave up on this idea and called for an ambulance. Festus was transported to the local ER, where the docs gave him a couple of bandages, a splint, and a handful of painkillers. The police, meanwhile, took away his shootin' iron (they gave it back the next day) and decided not to charge him for discharging a firearm inside the city limits. Ma presumably gave Festus a hard time for ruining the buckboard's upholstery with blood and for punching a hole through the floor, although that probably helped the blood drain out.

When Festus got back to work a few days later, he also received a great deal of more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger abuse from his entire chain of command. Based on his behavior in this incident, Festus was told he has no business handling firearms *anytime*.

The command's safety personnel sighed deeply, shook their collective heads, and proceeded to create an update for the safety-training program. Here are a few of the highlights from that training update:

***Driving is dangerous.*** Maneuvering one-and-a-half tons of metal and plastic along concrete or asphalt streets filled with similar vehicles is inherently hazardous. While driving, the *only* thing the driver should be thinking about is driving—period, full stop.

***Handling firearms is inherently dangerous.*** While handling firearms, *do nothing else*—ever, period, full stop.

***All firearms are assumed to be loaded until proven otherwise—always, period, full stop.***

***Never point or aim a firearm at anything you do not wish to shoot.*** If the shooter does not want a bullet hole in something, he or she should not point a gun at it—ever.

***Always assume the weapon will fire every time you touch the trigger.*** That's every time, with no exceptions.

Festus should have checked the weapon the moment he took it out of the safe. He should have put on the safety, made certain the firing chamber was empty, and the magazine was removed. He should not have handled the weapon in the car—no matter how long the light stayed red. He should not have pulled the trigger on the weapon. He should have pointed the weapon in a safe direction. Had any one of these conditions changed, Festus would not now be walking around with a cane and a splint. Hopefully, Petty Officer Festus will recover the full use of his left leg. In the meantime, the command is trying to help others avoid the mistakes Festus made. ■

## Resources:

- <http://www.nrahq.org/education/guide.asp> [*NRA Gun Safety Rules*]
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun\\_safety](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_safety) [*Gun Safety*]
- <http://www.bradycenter.org/let/safety/safety.php> [*Responsible Gun Ownership and Safe Storage*]