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One hour before the end of another 12-hour shift, a PO2 relieved a PO3 on shotgun watch [*used locally when ThreatCon Charlie is in effect*]. Instead of following the command SOP that states a relief on this watch must carry and load his own weapon, the PO2 assumed a truced-over weapon for the last hour of the workday. Why? Because the PO2 had fallen victim to the all-too-common “that’s the way we’ve always

After unlatching the four rounds from the magazine tube, the PO2 flicked off the safety and dry fired the gun—or, so he thought—to reset the action-bar release. A deafening boom followed—he hadn’t realized a round was in the chamber when he pulled the trigger. As luck would have it, the oncoming duty section was arriving and milling about, getting ready for their day. Five shipmates rushed to the scene to find the visibly shaken but otherwise unharmed

PO2. He immediately was relieved of his M-9 pistol and was taken to the command investigators for an official statement.

Can you count the number of SOP violations the PO2 committed? First, he failed to do a proper post turnover by assuming a truced-over weapon. Second, when he discovered he had an incorrect weapon, he didn’t notify the right people, notably the duty armorer and watch commander. Third, he failed to do an unloading procedure in the only authorized location—the clearing barrel—and he didn’t have the required supervision. Fourth, he didn’t physically clear and safe the

weapon before firing.

Further investigation of the sign-out log for the shotgun revealed it had been signed out to the same PO2 for about 27 hours—through two different duty sections, for day-night turnover. Here was another violation of command SOP, which says each patrolman and each duty armorer is responsible for loading and signing out his own weapon. The two different duty armorers for the duty sections also had violated the same SOP by allowing the same shotgun to remain on post for 27 hours without asking a question. Who knows how long that fifth round had been chambered?

Several people were to blame for this incident, but it was the PO2’s responsibility to have done the right thing. Luckily, none of the nine buckshot pellets ricocheting off the cement and asphalt deck hit anyone. This incident should serve as a reminder that assumption truly is the mother of all screw-ups. ■

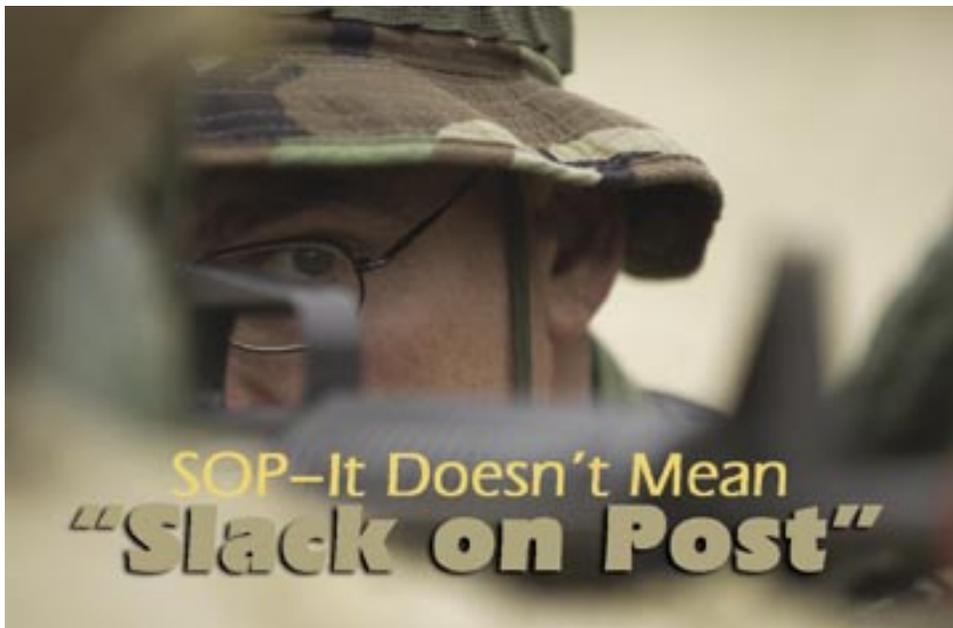


Photo by PH2 Aaron Peterson

done it” syndrome. [*FYI: At the author’s command, a “truced-over weapon” has come to mean one that you physically assume control of but don’t sign for in an official logbook, making you responsible for that weapon.—Ed.*]

Ten minutes into the watch, the PO2 noticed the action-bar release wasn’t in the correct position for the weapon’s condition. He should have called out the armorer, loaded another weapon, and made a trip to the clearing barrel, but he decided to fix the problem himself.

The PO2 knew the M500 Mossberg shotgun holds four shells in a pipe [*magazine*], plus one in the chamber. He also knew command SOP says the weapon should have four rounds in the magazine tube, with no round chambered. So, he went through the motions of unloading the weapon—as if he were at the clearing barrel. In reality, the gun was pointing at the deck at a 45-degree angle.