

Standards of Weapons Handling

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OIF Fatal Incidents

- The Department of Defense announced today that Spc. Alyssa R. Peterson, 27, of Flagstaff, Ariz., died on Sept. 15 in Telafar, Iraq. Peterson died from a non-combat weapons discharge.
- Pfc. Pablo Manzano, 19, B Company, 54th Engineer Battalion, V Corps, Bamberg, Germany, of Heber, Calif., died on Aug. 25 in Logistical Support Area Dogwood, Iraq. Manzano died as a result of a non-combat weapons discharge.
- The Department of Defense announced today that Pfc. Ryan R. Cox, 19, of Derby, Kan., died June 15 as a result of wounds received from a non-combat weapon discharge near An Najaf, Iraq.
- The Department of Defense announced today that Sgt. Sean C. Reynolds, 25, of East Lansing, Mich., was killed on May 3, 2003, in Iraq. Reynolds was climbing a ladder when he fell causing his M4 rifle to accidentally discharge.
- The Department of Defense also announced today that Spc. Rasheed Sahib, 22, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was killed on May 18, in Balad, Iraq. Sahib and another soldier were cleaning their weapons when the other soldier's weapon discharged striking Sahib in the chest.
- The Department of Defense announced today that Spc. Gil Mercado, 25, of Paterson, N.J., was killed yesterday by a non-combat weapon discharge in Iraq.
- Spc. Narson B. Sullivan, 21, 411th Military Police Company, Fort Hood, Texas, of North Brunswick, N.J., was killed by a non-combat weapon discharge. The incident is under investigation.

Weapons Handling Procedures

Weapons handling procedures provide a consistent and standardized way for a Soldier to handle, operate, and employ their weapon safely and effectively.

Purpose

To establish a standard of weapons handling to ensure the safety and effective employment of weapons by Soldiers. These procedures will reduce negligent discharges, reinforce positive identification of targets prior to engagement, and lay the foundation for effective weapons employment in combat.

Weapons Handling Procedures

Weapons handling procedures
apply at all levels of training
and especially during combat.

WEAPONS HANDLING IS A VITAL SKILL

--- EVERY SOLDIER'S DUTY! ---

THERE MAY BE NO 2ND CHANCE!

Pre-OIF: **“OVER THE PAST 3 YEARS, 34**

SOLDIERS WERE KILLED AND 147 OTHERS

WERE INJURED BECAUSE OF IMPROPER

WEAPONS HANDLING OR IMPROPER MISFIRE

PROCEDURES.”

Basic Tenets

- Weapons **ALWAYS** on **SAFE**
- Muzzle Awareness
- Finger outside Trigger Well
- Every Weapon is **ALWAYS** treated as a Loaded Weapon

Standards:

Low Port Carry



Buttstock of the weapon rests in the pocket of your arm and shoulder.

Trigger finger always located outside of the trigger well.

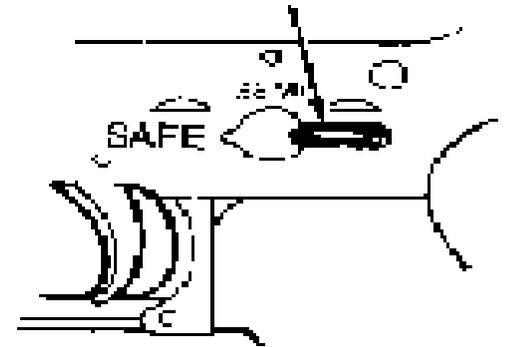
Soldier with head up, observing, and ready to bring weapon rapidly to bear on any emerging target.

Weapon always on *SAFE*, unless immediately preparing to engage a target.

Muzzle of the weapon always aimed at a 45 degree angle to the ground away from personnel.

Standards

- **Weapons should always be on *SAFE*.**
 - Unless stored in unit arms room or immediately prior to an engagement of a target.
- **Weapons must be put on *SAFE*:**
 - Upon drawing a weapon.
 - Before loading a magazine.
 - Before any movements with a weapon.



Standards (cont)



- Magazines will only be inserted into a weapon at the direction of the chain-of-command.

- Weapons will be carried at the low port at all times, unless directed otherwise by the chain-of-command.



Weapons Readiness

A weapon's readiness is described by one of three conditions. The steps in the loading and unloading process takes the weapon through three specific conditions of readiness for live fire.

Weapon Status

- **Green**
 - Weapon on Safe
 - Empty magazine inserted in weapon
 - Bolt forward, ejection port cover closed
- **Amber**
 - Weapon on Safe
 - Magazine with ammunition inserted in weapon
 - Bolt forward, no round in chamber, ejection port cover closed
- **Red**
 - Weapon on Safe (unless directed or soldier perceives imminent danger)
 - Magazine with ammunition inserted in weapon
 - Round chambered, ejection port cover closed

Loading Procedures

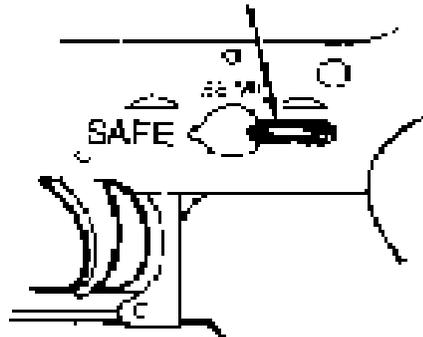


1. Point the rifle muzzle in a safe direction.

2. Cock the rifle, and lock the bolt to the rear.



3. Return the charging handle to the forward position.



4. Place the selector lever on SAFE.
(If not already on SAFE.)

Loading Procedures (cont)



5. Check the chamber to ensure it is clear.

6. Insert the magazine, pushing it upward until the magazine catch engages and holds the magazine.



7. Tap upward on the bottom of the magazine to ensure it is seated properly.

8. With the bolt open, depress the upper portion of the bolt catch to release the bolt and chamber a round.

9. Tap the forward assist to ensure that the bolt is fully forward and locked.



Unloading Procedures

1. Place the selector on SAFE.
(The weapon must be cocked to point the lever toward SAFE.)



2. Remove the magazine.



PULL DOWN MAGAZINE

3. Lock the bolt open, pulling the charging handle rearward and pressing the bottom of the bolt catch; allow the bolt to move forward slightly until it engages the bolt catch. Return the charging handle forward once bolt is locked to the rear.

BOLT CATCH



Unloading Procedures (cont)

4. Check the receiver and the chamber areas for ammunition.



5. With the selector lever on SAFE release the bolt forward by pressing the upper portion of the bolt catch.



Weapons Maintenance

Stage 1:

After non-firing duty with weapons (D&C, BAC, etc)

- **field strip IAW TM (reinforces initial BRM training)**
 - **all dust, dirt, mud, any rust removed**
 - **large carbon removed, on bolt face and flash suppressor**
 - **light coat of CLP on all metal, internal and external**
 - **patch thru barrel at discretion of DS/ inspector**
- THE FIRST PRIORITY OF WORK FOR ANY SOLDIER AFTER SECURITY IS WEAPONS MAINTENANCE**

Weapons Maintenance

Stage 2:

After duty involving live fire or field training (BRM, FTX, etc)

- field strip IAW TM**
- all carbon removed**
- chamber cleaned with chamber brush and CLP**
- bore brush, patches, and CLP used to clean inside barrel**
- *during FTX priorities of work or other tactical training, the bolt extractor will not be removed until final cleaning at the company area before turn in. This reinforces security and help minimize the loss of small parts in the field.**

WEAPONS MAINTENANCE MUST BE DRIVEN HOME AS A REGULAR, REPETITIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF SOLDIERS AND LEADERS

Weapons Maintenance

Stage 3:

For preparation for inspections (i.e., lay-out or in-ranks)

- **field strip IAW TM (reinforces initial BRM training)**
- **completely clean, free of all dirt, carbon, and rust**
- **no CLP – dry. Light coat of CLP on all metal, internal and external, before return to arms room.**

**WEAPONS MUST BE INSPECTED SEVERAL TIMES
A DAY BY LEADERS, ESPECIALLY IN THE FIELD
TO ESTABLISH A FOCUSED CULTURE OF CARE
FOR OUR WEAPONS**

Guard Duty

• Upon being posted by the **Commander-of-the-Relief (COR)** for guard duty, soldiers will:

- Carry weapons at the low port.
- Physically have their weapon at all times.
- Be briefed, and conduct confirmation brief on the use of deadly force (confirm understanding of weapons status).
- Properly operate and clear their weapon(s).
- Inventory any ammunition with their COR.

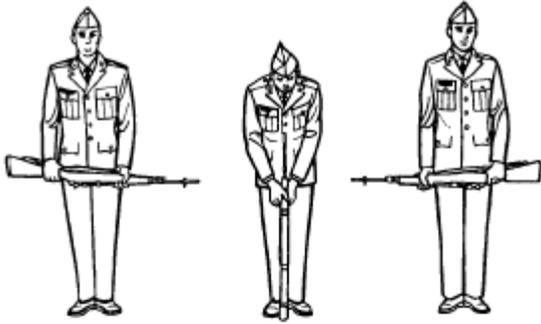


Weapons Clearing in Formation

• **Following completion of the tactical phase of all live fires and Foot Marches, weapons clearing in formation will be as follows:**

- “Lock and Clear all Weapons.”
- All magazines or belts will be removed.
- Soldiers form in ranks, and “Inspection arms.”
- Immediate chain-of-command will inspect all chambers visually, using white light when necessary.
- “Ready-Port-Arms”
- Soldiers will recharge all weapons and place them on SAFE.
- Magazines will NOT be reinserted into weapons until all ammunition has been turned in, and accounted for, with brass and ammo checks completed.
- Under no circumstance will the weapons themselves be used to “strip” ammunition from magazines.

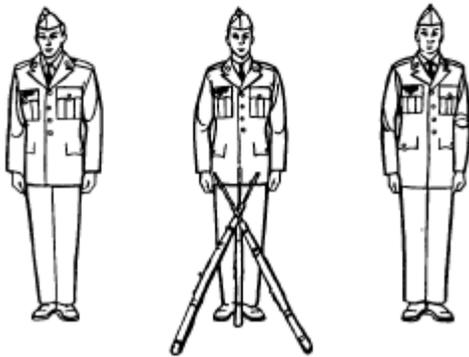
Grounding Weapons



- When weapons are separated from soldiers, they will be arranged in formation for ease of accountability and control.



- If stacked, Soldiers will follow FM 22-5.



- If grounded, all weapons will have selector/safety visible. Bipod mounted weapons will be grounded on bipods, with all muzzles facing in the same direction away from nearby troops.

Discharge of a Firearm

- A negligent discharge of a firearm is an act that results in the discharge of a firearm, regardless of type ammunition, due to the negligence of the operator.
- A willful discharge of a firearm is an act that results in the unauthorized discharge of a firearm, regardless of type ammunition, due to willful misconduct of the operator.
- Commanders will report any negligent or willful discharges as a Serious Incident Report. Additionally, they will informally investigate all such instances and render a written report to their higher commander within 96 hours of the incident.

Enforcement

- **Tools for enforcing safe weapons handling:**
 - Training (focus on specific safe handling procedures)
 - Performance Counseling (in the event of failure)
 - Non-punitive Measures (remedial training, extra duty)
 - Reprimand (negligent or willful act)
 - Non-judicial Punishment (Violation Article 92 of UCMJ) (negligent or willful act) - Summarized Art 15/Art 15
 - Administrative or Punitive Discharge for serious or repeat offenders (negligent or willful act)

Vignette #1

Range Walk

Situation:

- Soldier running down a wet, grassy slope with his M16 bolt locked to the rear, a loaded magazine in his weapon, and weapon on “SEMI.”
- He slipped and fell backward, causing the round to chamber and discharge.
- The soldier was shot above the middle toe on his left foot, shattering all bones on his second and third toes, and now suffers from permanent nerve damage.

Vignette #1

Range Walk

Discussion:

- How could this have been avoided?
- What safety steps should the soldier have taken?
- How should the soldier have moved down the hill?

Vignette #2

Safe Handling

Situation:

- A soldier is cleaning his weapon, but neglected to clear it prior to cleaning.
- During the cleaning process, the soldier dropped the weapon.
- When the weapon hit the floor, the bullet struck the soldier in the shoulder.

Vignette #2

Safe Handling

Discussion:

- How could this have been avoided?
- What safety steps should the soldier have taken?

Vignette #3

Kosovo Killing

Situation:

- Soldier, age 19, serving as a peacekeeper in Kosovo, was on a goodwill mission to clean up a local school ground with his unit.
- While on duty, the soldier allowed children playing near by to play with his weapon and pulled the trigger to see if the safety catch was on.
- Rounds from the weapon struck a six year-old boy in the chest and arm, and he died as a result.
- Ultimately, the soldier was acquitted because it was determined that he had never been certified on the weapon he was carrying at the time of the accident, the M249 SAW.

Vignette #3

Kosovo Killing

Discussion:

- How could this have been avoided?
- What safety steps should the soldier have taken?
- Why is it important to be certified on a weapon?

Conclusion

Weapons training and 100% enforcement of the weapons handling procedures at the individual and collective level is the key to safe and effective weapons employment. **Weapons Handling and consistent Weapons Maintenance to Standard must become a central part of our Soldiers' and Leaders' culture.**

References

- FM 22-5
- FM 23-9
- FMFM 0-9
- STP 21-1-SMCT
- MCRP 3-01A