



Let's Talk Safety

In each of my instructional articles, I close with a couple of quick reminders about safety. These are more than just buzzwords to me, they are a big part of why I became an instructor; to teach people how to enjoy our sport and everything good it has to offer; with responsibility, respect and safety.

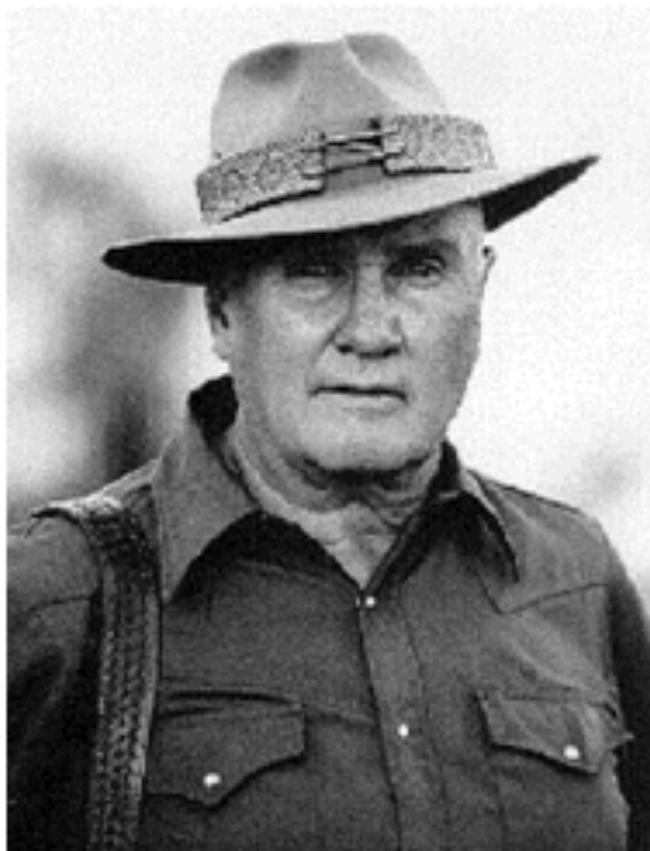
Let's face it, whenever we are around machines or equipment that, if misused, can hurt us or others we must give safety a lot more than just lip service. Those of us old enough to remember wood shop in high school remember the torn up, blood stained shirt that hung over the band saw reminding us of that one careless moment some student had, cautioning us not to be that student. It was drilled into us in the police academy as well that when the gun goes off there is no do over, and no way to call the bullet back. In sport shooting it's no different. One moment of carelessness can change a life in an instant. In this photo the action of the gun is closed and the finger is on the trigger while the shooter was changing stations on a sporting clays course..... my advice, don't be this guy.



We, as responsible shooters and gun owners, must always observe the [three Golden Rules of safety](#) that the NRA trains:

1. **Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.** Here at VOMTC our board has determined that muzzle toward the ground, with the action opened, is the safe direction when not on the firing line.
2. **Always keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.** At VOMTC that means you put your finger on the trigger when you are on the firing line, it's your turn to shoot and your gun is pointed downrange toward the target.
3. **Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.** Like #2 above, this means you are on the firing line, the squad has been given the go ahead by the puller or squad leader to proceed, and it's your turn to shoot.

Equally important, but sometimes overlooked is a maxim coined by the late Col. Jeff Cooper; Marine, writer, raconteur, hunter and groundbreaking innovator in defensive firearms technique.



Col. Cooper was fond of saying "**never point a gun at anything you are not willing to destroy**". Sound advice on face, but I can't count the number of times I've seen shooters on a trap or skeet squad close the action on their loaded gun in preparation for their next shot.... with the muzzle pointed at one of their own feet! When I see this happen, I'll approach the shooter after they've fired their shot, and ask them if they are willing to destroy their feet, repeating Col. Cooper's advice. It can be a sobering reminder.

Finally, let's talk duds. We've all had them, factory shells or reloads. You pull the trigger and get 'click' instead of 'bang'. You open the gun to look at it, then close the gun back up on the shell and try again, or remove the dud shell, put it in your pocket, then reload with a fresh shell. Everything is great, right? Well, not exactly.

A shell that doesn't fire could have done so for a number of reasons, but you aren't going to know if it was a light firing pin strike, bad powder or if the primer didn't properly detonate and is sizzling away in the case ready to light the powder without warning. If you open the gun quickly, and the powder does light off, the gas will find the path of least resistance.... which will be to push the primer out. You can easily end up wearing that primer and the red hot gas that's pushing it. If you hurry that shell into your pocket and the powder combusts, your fellow shooters might end the day with a memorable story of you doing the "my pants are on fire" dance.

Our guideline at VOMTC is if the shell doesn't go off when you pull the trigger, wait 15 seconds and then slowly open the gun, keeping your face away from the breach. If the shell has a shallow dent, or no dent, on the primer you could try shooting it again, or you can discard it by throwing it to the ground several feet out in front of the firing line. Whatever else you do, **don't put a dud shell in your pocket.**

When the squad has completed the full round, and it is safe to do so, recover the shell you tossed and put it in one of the GI ammo cans we have placed in each storage locker on the trap field. The cans look like this and they are sturdy enough to contain all the energy, gas and debris should the shell detonate later. We collect the duds periodically and recycle them.



The rules of firearm safety must never be overlooked or slighted. Each of us, as responsible shooters, has a duty to ourselves and to our fellow shooters to always be vigilant. When you see something that looks unsafe, please bring it to the attention of the shooter in a friendly way. Nine times out of ten that will solve whatever it is on the spot. If it continues, then you can always look to a range safety officer or a club officer for assistance. We have an amazingly great safety record here at VOMTC, a record that's worth being proud of. It's up to all of us to help keep it that way.

Remember, that there are NRA Certified Instructors at trap six and seven on every public day who can help you improve your skills and help you discover your personal solution.

See you again soon with another shooting tip, but in the meantime, remember to keep those muzzles pointed to the ground when not on the firing line, and keep those actions open whenever you are not actually shooting.

Safety first, foremost and always! -- Frank

