

# NCWC Safety Rules

(Latest revision November 2002)

## Preface

This document covers the care, use, and storage of the small arms (rifles, muskets, carbines and pistols), artillery and signaling devices, ground charges, air bursts, edged weapons, and horses (or mules) used in Northwest Civil War Council events.

Whenever these items are being used, the user must remember that they are all potentially dangerous items if not handled correctly.

We are attempting to portray a lifestyle and activities, which are inherently dangerous. While we have attempted to cover most situations, it would be impossible to cover them all, therefore, individuals must exercise their own common sense at all times.

Since we are dealing with potentially dangerous weapons and activities, we have developed procedures concerning our battlefield and camp life. We have done so because it is our intent to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for every member of your family. All activities must be carried out with the understanding that safety for yourself and your comrades is a **FIRST PRIORITY and ULTIMATELY you are responsible for your own safety and behavior!**

All participants in NCWC events must have completed and passed a skills and knowledge test on an every other year basis if they intend to use, care or store any of the items covered under these safety rules. Riders have an additional NCWC skills and knowledge test they must have passed yearly to allow them to ride a horse at events.

Unit commanders or their safety officers are required by the NCWC to keep the completed skills and knowledge tests of all members of their unit, dated, scored, signed and filed for easy access if a question should arise.

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## GENERAL BEHAVIORAL RULES

- 1) All members of a reenactment unit must have a thorough knowledge of the safety rules. It is the responsibility of their commanders to ensure that they do. Safety is the first priority of the NCWC.
- 2) Possession and/or use of illegal drugs or any other criminal act is prohibited and is grounds for immediate suspension from the NCWC.
- 3) Alcohol may be used only in moderation and under the following circumstances:
  - a) On a day with firing, only after the last engagement, when weapons are secured and the public has departed.
  - b) On a day without firing, only after the public has departed.
  - c) At backcountries, only during those periods of time which were decided upon prior to the start of the event. For example in the evening between agreed upon hours.
  - d) In compliance with any local regulation.Violation of this rule will result in suspension and such additional discipline as is provided in the bylaws.
- 4) The use of prescription drugs places upon the user the responsibility to see that he/she is not impaired in judgement or function. Failure to do so may result in the imposition of restrictions or sanctions.
- 5) Smoking and open flames are prohibited within 25 feet of exposed powder, cartridges, or charges or at any time while under arms.
- 6) At no time will a member pick up another member's weapon without permission of said member. The only exception will be if it is evident that the member lost it. The weapon should be turned over to battalion headquarters immediately.
- 7) Colors or Standards will be considered captured when touched by opposing forces, and they will be immediately furled.
- 8) Any verbal provocation or physical abuse is strictly prohibited at any time.
- 9) At no time should a firearm be discharged directly at anyone. A range of 30 feet is accepted as the reasonable and prudent distance to fire toward opposing troops unless otherwise practiced.
- 10) Only NCWC AUTHORIZED FIREWORKS ARE ALLOWED at any event.
- 11) NO ball ammunition may be brought to a battle reenactment area.
- 12) No weapons (handguns, rifles, knives, bayonets, etc.) except sabers and dress swords will be brought to any military ball.

## GENERAL BATTLEFIELD RULES

1. Unit and Battalion Commanding Officers have overall responsibility for safety at events. They may delegate enforcement to Safety Officers, however, Ultimately you are responsible for your personal safety and that cannot be delegated.
2. Weapons may not be fired without the Unit Commander's permission. Cap firing does not require permission but must be done in a designated capping and clearing area, and away from the public.
3. Because of the recognized inherently dangerous nature of capping and/or discharging weapons in and around camp areas Battalion Commanders shall designate and mark a specific area for the clearing and firing of weapons between battles. This area will not be on the battlefield since the battlefield is the main show area for other activities. All malfunctioning and loaded firearms will be handled in this firing area only.
4. All long arms will be cleared at the end of each battle. Pistols may be carried loaded as long as they are not removed from the person.
5. Cannons will not fire when troops are in front of the blast cone and are closer than 75 feet.
6. Frontal charges on loaded cannons are prohibited. A cannon is loaded when the rammer is leaning on the wheel hub.
7. Those who are wounded may never fire from a prone position. Skirmishers may fire from a prone position if they keep their muzzles well elevated.
8. Riders should maintain a 30-foot distance from opposing troops and all simulated casualties. When riding in areas where men are casualties all action should be confined to a walk.
9. Pistols must not be capped until prior to "assembly".
10. Any member may call a "CEASE FIRE" at any time if the member witnesses an unsafe condition. A cease fire and a hold on all movement will occur if any unauthorized person, such as a spectator, comes onto the field during a battle, if that person cannot otherwise be controlled.
11. In the event of an actual injury, first aid is to be quickly supplied with the least amount of fanfare. The cry of "MEDIC" is reserved for real (actual) emergencies only. Note: DO NOT MOVE THE SERIOUSLY INJURED!
12. Non-participants are not allowed on the field of battle except by express permission of both Battalion Commanders.
13. Any unit not represented at the Officers Call, Battle Plan Meeting may not participate in that battle, except by prior agreement.
14. Skirmishes, battles and raids are prohibited at public events except when coordinated between Battalion Commanders and the site host. At backcountries raids can be expected 24 hours a day.
- 15 Any firearm with a barrel less than 39 inches shall not fire from the rear ranks except if the front ranks are kneeling, as in dismounted cavalry.
16. Pistols and long arms will not be at full-cock during maneuvering on the battlefield or in a charge.
17. All battlefield participants will make note as to where ground charges are concealed on the battlefield.
18. Hand to hand combat will be permitted only by prior permission of the Battalion Commanders, notification to all units to be engaged and REHEARSAL by all units and persons involved.

## WEAPONS SAFETY RULES — GENERAL

- 1) All weapons must be clean and in good repair prior to use.
- 2) All weapons and cartridges will be inspected by the battalion commanders or their representatives at each event prior to the first battle each day. Any weapon found to be unserviceable shall not be loaded or fired until it has been approved as fully functional by an authorized inspector.
- 3) No item will be permitted in the cartridge box except blank cartridges.
- 4) Blank cartridges must be carried on the battlefield in a leather cartridge box.
- 5) Percussion caps will be carried in an approved cap container.
- 6) Only black powder is permitted for use in firearms.
- 7) Unguarded weapons should not be readily accessible to the public during an event.

## WEAPONS SAFETY RULES — SPECIFIC

### Long Arms

- 1) All long arms will be loaded with FFFg black powder ONLY.
- 2) During loading, the muzzle must be pointed in a safe direction.
- 3) No ramrods will be drawn during battles. Ramrods may be used in firing demonstrations when no opposing troops are present, with company commander's approval.
- 4) Powder flasks and powder horns may not be carried on the battlefield at public events.
- 5) Charges of long arms must be made up in paper cartridges that conform to the civil war period. Cartridges must be made prior to the battle and will contain no more powder than described in the table below. No fasteners (staples, tape, plastic) may be used in making up cartridges.

CALIBER	MAXIMUM CHARGE
.58 CAL	70 GRAINS
.50 CAL	60 GRAINS
.45 CAL	50 GRAINS

- 6) All long arms will be cleaned at the end of each day.
- 7) Long arms will only be loaded at designated times before each battle or demonstration, and at no other time when the public is present.
- 8) In the event a long arm malfunctions on the battlefield, the soldier carrying that long arm will follow the drill for malfunctions on the field.

## Revolvers & Pistols

- 1) Revolvers and other pistols will use FFFg only.
- 2) Specified charges for revolvers shall not exceed those in the table below derived from the Dixie Gun Works catalog of 1999.

CALIBER	MAXIMUM CHARGE
.31 CAL	15 GRAINS
.36 CAL	20 GRAINS
.44 CAL	30 GRAINS
.44 CAL COLT DRAGOON	40 GRAINS
Single shot of any caliber	25 GRAINS

- 1) There is only one tested and safe revolver loading method.
- 2) This method of loading a revolver requires the specified charge of black powder and enough Cream of Wheat per chamber to seal the charge. The powder is poured first and the space above filled with Cream of Wheat, then pressed tightly with the loading lever. No grease is used, as the filler will stay compressed.
- 3) If wads are used they will be made of florist's foam, which crumbles easily. Any other wad, including grease, is prohibited.
- 4) Powder flasks may be carried on the person only at backcountry events, and then only for the loading of revolvers. Powder flasks may never be carried at public events.
- 5) Those using revolvers may carry extra cylinders provided they are properly loaded and carried securely in a leather pouch.
- 6) Pistols must always be carried in holsters with secured flaps or thongs when not in use.

## Sabers, Swords, Bayonets & Knives

- 1) Edged weapons will only be drawn on the command of the unit commander.
- 2) No edged weapon will be leveled or pointed at or make contact with another participant within reach. In a scripted combat any edged weapon will be kept within 45 degrees of vertical at all times.
- 3) Sabers, swords and bayonets will have dulled edges and points.
- 4) Knives may not be drawn on the field, and must be secure in their sheaths. This means that if the sheath is turned upside down, the knife will not move or fall out.
- 5) Hand to hand combat will be permitted only by prior permission of the Battalion Commanders, notification to all units to be engaged and REHEARSAL by all units and persons involved. (See rule 21 in Mounted section)
- 6) Prior to the orders "arms at will" or "route step" bayonets must be unfixed.

## **MUZZLELOADING RIFLES, MUSKETS, SHOTGUNS AND BREECHLOADERS**

### **Definition**

For the purpose of the NCWC, Muzzleloading rifles, muskets and shotguns are defined as those weapons, which are loaded from the muzzle and are ignited by a percussion cap. In other words, weapons with flintlock ignition are expressly excluded from NCWC events.

### **Blank Firing**

#### **Ammunition**

- ◆ Only commercially produced black powder in FFFg (3-F granulation) is to be used.
- ◆ Pyrodex and other smokeless powder use is forbidden.

#### **Storage of Ammunition and Components**

- ◆ Made-up cartridges, caps and black powder should be stored in a cool, dry place that is secure from access by children, flame, fire or any source of high temperature.
- ◆ Caps must be stored in their original container. They may not be stored in glass jars, paper boxes or other unsafe containers.

### **Loading the Weapon**

The following procedure for loading a weapon assumes that cartridges are carried in a cartridge box, caps are carried in a cap box, a wrist capper or a mechanical capping device, and that this is the first time the weapon is being loaded prior to a firing event. In other words, you are not in the middle of a battle.

### **Before Going Onto The Battlefield**

#### **Check the barrel for blockages**

- ◆ Muzzleloaders  
Make sure the barrel is clear of debris by wiping out the barrel with a cleaning patch and by “sounding steel”, i.e., dropping a ramrod in the barrel from about 4 to 6 inches from the breach. If there is no obstruction or debris, you will hear a ringing sound, not a “clunk”.
- ◆ Breechloaders  
Drop the breechblock or open the gun and visually examine the barrel and the breech for fouling, debris and obstructions. Remove any and all residue or debris.

**Check the touchhole for blockages**

## ◆ Muzzleloaders and Breechloaders

Make sure the touchhole is clear of obstructions by placing a cap over the nipple, and with the muzzle near the ground, discharge the weapon. Watch for the movement of grass, leaves and dust caused by gases being expelled from the muzzle. You should also learn to hear the sound of a clear bore.

## ◆ Fixed Primer Rigid Cartridge Guns

Guns firing a rigid cartridge with a fixed primer must have their firing pins checked to verify that they are free-floating, i.e., they are not fouled or frozen into place.

**Secure Ramrod**

Make sure the ramrod is secure in its proper carrying position.

**Secure Bayonet**

Bayonets should be secure in their scabbards and the scabbard firmly attached to the waistbelt.

**At this point you are ready to go onto the battlefield.**

**All Weapons****Repeat Firing**

Follow the procedures given by your company commander for loading the weapon. To help prevent premature ignition, do not remove the expended cap until ready to re-cap, i.e. until after the powder has been settled.

**Blank Firing during battles**

The following procedures are to be followed during all battles and living history demonstrations.

**Malfunctions on the field**

If your weapon fails to discharge:

1. With the muzzle pointed in a safe direction (preferably with the muzzle pointed up), remove the failed cap or cartridge and replace it with another.
2. If the weapon fails to fire, repeat step 1, use your nipple pick to clear the touchhole, try again to discharge the weapon.
3. If, after 3 tries, your weapon still fails to discharge, dump your powder and become a casualty.

**Ammunition Preparation in Camp or Home**

When preparing cartridges in camp or home, the following procedure should be followed:

1. Use only FFFg black powder from a commercial, authorized source.
2. Powder should be sifted through a sieve with the openings no larger than that found in ordinary window screening. This is to ensure that no foreign objects are in the powder.

**Discharging a Weapon in Camp**

Discharging any weapon in camp is **prohibited** except in planned scenarios.

**MOUNTED SAFETY RULES**

- 1) The owner of a horse is legally responsible for the actions of that horse, even if that horse is ridden by another person, unless other arrangements through liability contracts or rental/lease agreements have been made.
- 2) No horse shall be ridden or driven at any field event except by a reenactor in period attire due to insurance considerations.
- 3) All horse equipment must be used in a safe, humane and correct manner.
- 4) A “quick-release” knot will be used to tie horses by the halter lead. Horses shall never be tied by the reins and link-straps shall be fixed to the halter, not the bit.
- 5) A mounted safety officer/skills evaluator (s) for each cavalry unit shall be a knowledgeable member of that unit or another unit on horse safety, training, riding and trooper instruction. The evaluator’s name shall be submitted to the NCWC board to keep on file. This evaluator shall report to the unit commander any dangerous practices, equipment, horses or riders. They both shall report difficult or unresolved problems to their brigade commander.
- 6) A horse will be allowed on the battlefield only if that horse and its rider or driver have together successfully completed the NCWC mounted skills certification administered by a unit evaluator.
- 7) Horses may not be left unattended in camp. A horse guard shall be posted while the public is present.
- 8) An inspection for cavalry shall include all weapons and tack used and all items carried onto the battlefield. The horse's hooves shall be inspected for loose shoes or lodged stones.
- 9) The use of stallions is prohibited unless the unit desiring to employ one agrees to take complete responsibility for its actions and there are no objections from other horsemen who have their mounts at the event.
- 10) Picket lines are to be kept taut. Saddled mounts should be tied so as to keep the saddle from catching the picket rope.
- 11) Individual picket pins are discouraged and if used must be away from camp and watched by a guard at all times.
- 12) Mounted men shall keep a reasonable and prudent distance from their own infantry or artillery troops.
- 13) Riders should maintain a 30-foot distance from enemy ground troops and simulated casualties. When riding within areas where men are casualties all action is confined to a walk.
- 14) Mounted men will not fire at less than a 60-degree angle from their horses' ears and be aware of other troopers and horses around them.
- 15) Horses should not be chased if loose. They should be “hazed” in a non-threatening way towards other horses or their camp picket line. Event planners should not site spectator crowds between the battlefield and any cavalry camps.
- 16) The public in a controlled situation such as a talk or demonstration may touch a gentle horse.
- 17) A loose sling snap must be pushed under the mounted troopers saber belt and not left dangling.
- 18) Hand to hand saber combat between mounted participants can occur only if scripted in advance and approved by both battalion commanders.

- 19) No person may take the reins of another rider's horse while the rider is mounted. If a rider becomes a casualty or prisoner, the person leading the horse shall use the lead strap, and the rider shall keep the reins.
- 20) Safety will always take precedence over the authentic way of doing things with mounted troops if a conflict of methods arises.
- 21) Saber combat between mounted and dismounted troops is prohibited.
- 22) Riders must not let drawn sabers drop below the wrist during engagement.

## **ARTILLERY SAFETY GUIDELINES**

*NCWC artillery and crews will be governed by the "National Safety Rules and Procedures for Shooting Muzzleloading Artillery".*

### **Definition**

Artillery means any form of cannon, howitzer, mortar or any other firearm that's original (full size) bore is greater than 1.5 inches. In this document, the terms "artillery" and "cannon" shall include all forms of these weapons.

### **General Guidelines**

1. The artillery piece to be placed on the firing line at NCWC events must be of period design and construction. The Artillery Battalion commander however, must approve any cannons, and at his discretion he may keep any cannon off the field if he so deems it or its crew unsafe.
2. The minimum distance required between guns is determined by the area required by the gun crew to work the guns safely as determined by the Senior Experienced Gun Officer and/or the Ordinance Sergeant. A spacing of 20 to 25 feet between the nearest wheel hubs of adjacent pieces is suggested.
3. The placement of artillery is the responsibility of the Battery Commander or his individually designated gun commanders.
4. Artillery will be permitted to fire with a minimum crew of 3 persons for each gun, except breechloading cannons. One member of each crew must be knowledgeable and experienced in artillery operation and care.
5. All artillery will have the proper required equipment on site and be in a safe condition as per NCWC rules and regulations. Improperly equipped or unsafe artillery must be removed from the field of fire.
6. No projectiles of any kind or condition are to be fired at any NCWC battle or living history demonstration, unless prearranged and approved by the council.
7. At no time will any object or material be fired from a cannon if that object or material will pass over the 75-foot safety boundary, and thus endanger the participants and/or spectators during any NCWC event.
8. The artillery ammunition box will be placed 25 feet to the rear of its associated cannon and 25 feet from the spectator's line. The lid hinge must be nearest the cannon.
9. The artillery ammunition box is to be constantly manned when unlocked. When the box is not in use, it is to be removed from the field of operation and placed in a secure location.
10. Ammunition boxes must be fitted with self-closing lids, i.e., lids, which fall closed when your hand is removed. Lids may not be fitted with any hold-open device or prop.

11. It is recommended that artillery powder charges be kept in individual safety containers. Each charge must be placed in a leather haversack when being carried from the ammunition box to the cannon muzzle. The charges will not be removed from the containers and haversacks until they are to be placed in the cannon muzzle.

12. The thickness of the foil wrapper for the cannon powder charge is the responsibility of the Battery Commander, giving the highest regard and consideration for the safety of his crew, other crews and the public.

13. Before each NCWC battle, participating artillery must be inspected by battery commanders from the opposing army. Each artillery piece must successfully pass the safety inspection before being allowed to fire in any events. The "Artillery Safety Checklist" must be completed in duplicate by the inspecting personnel. One copy is to be retained by the gun commander and the other copy is to be given to the NCWC Chairman or his designated representative to be retained in the NCWC's files.

14. Each artillery piece must have a certificate issued by an approved business or organization that has inspected the artillery piece by means of radiography, x-rays or magnifluxing or similar NCWC approved methods.

15. Failure to present a copy of a certificate of inspection by some form of radiography is sufficient grounds for the NCWC safety inspector to deny the artillery piece permission to participate in the NCWC event. There are to be no exceptions. Forgetfulness or accidental loss of the certificate is no excuse.

16. A rammer leaning against the wheel hub is a clear signal that the cannon is loaded and ready to fire. A misfired cannon can be extremely dangerous and a red flag is the signal used to alert troops.

## **GROUND CHARGE AND AIRBURST SAFETY GUIDELINES**

### **Definition**

A ground charge is any explosive or smoke effect placed in the ground. An airburst is any explosive charge sent into the air to detonate in the air. Both produce the special effects of artillery strikes.

### **General Guidelines**

1. It is the responsibility of the Engineer Corps to place the ground charges and to see that the airbursts are clear of trees and overhead obstructions.
2. Ground charges are placed in holes 6 inches in diameter and 10 inches deep. These holes are usually located along fence lines and at the front of cannons.
3. Ground charges look like cans buried upright in the ground with plastic wrap on top and flour underneath the plastic wrap. Wires leading from each charge are buried 2 or more inches in the ground.
4. The minimum distance from an exploding ground charge is 10 feet. Do not look directly into the ground charge container. Nothing will be placed over a ground charge.
5. The Engineer and Artillery Corps have fire-fighting equipment available in case of a grass fire.
6. Watch for casing paper from air or ground charges coming back to earth, it may still be hot.