

BOOK REVIEW

Lucien C. Haag,¹ B.S.

Review of: *Human Factors Issues in Handgun Safety and Forensics*

REFERENCE: Hendrick HW, Paradis P, Hornick RJ. Human factors issues in handgun safety and forensics. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2008, 230 pp.

In an age of personal irresponsibility, this book is both timely and relevant as it largely stands for the propositions that there are numerous gunshot deaths and injuries that are the fault of the gun rather than the gun handler and/or that the particular firearm was discharged because of one or more stress/fatigue/startle-related/drug-induced or inattentive conditions led to an inadvertent pull of the trigger on the part of the shooter. Defense attorneys in criminal cases and plaintiff's attorneys in products cases will no doubt find this book very useful in crafting their trial strategies, particularly when the matter of the source firearm for the fatal or injurious bullet is no longer in dispute and that the defendant was holding this gun when the fatal or injurious shot occurred. These claims are not new to police investigators and prosecutors and usually start with such statements as "I didn't know the gun was loaded" or "I barely touched the trigger and it went off" upon first contact with the shooter.

The authors consist of a professor of human factors and ergonomics, a psychologist, and a firearms trainer. Structurally the book is divided into a discussion of human factors and ergonomics as these fields might relate to the unintentional discharge of a firearm followed by a historical review of the development of firearms, types of firearms, their operation, and modern ammunition. This is followed by a further discussion of shooting fundamentals, variations in safety rules and firearms training programs, methods of securing firearms in the home from unauthorized access, and a return to human factors issues and various purported causes of unintentional discharges of firearms.

That there are instances when firearms are discharged unintentionally is a reasonably well-known fact to firearms trainers, homicide investigators, and forensic firearm examiners who deal with

the reconstruction of shooting incidents. This book offers explanations as to how this can occur. The difficulty for everyone involved in the investigative and legal process is the fact that the particular firearm functioned as it was intended in an alleged unintentional discharge—the trigger was depressed while the gun was in a loaded and safety off configuration. The difficulty in identifying or verifying an unintentional discharge is further compounded by the fact that there is no tangible physical evidence or laboratory test that will either prove or disprove the claim that the trigger was depressed unintentionally. Rather, we are all left with the circumstances of the incident, the credibility of the gun handler, the level of charging by the prosecutor's office, and some possible explanations for an unintentional discharge presented in this book.

There are repeated and numerous errors, both typographical and substantive that detract from the more useful points to be made by this book. These include consistently referring to live ammunition loaded in firearms as "bullets" and incorrect terms, such as "bullet magazines." These criticisms may, at first seem petty, but for a text purportedly written by one or more authors' familiar with firearms, they are very distracting and indicate a serious deficiency in knowledge or expertise in the subject matter.

Several tables and concepts presented in Chapter 10 approach the absurd. One of these tables lists the force necessary to bring a moving handgun to a halt with the implication that as this force can exceed the trigger pull force, an unintentional discharge will occur. A second table provides numerical force values necessary "to hold a firearm level" that, as before, exceed the trigger pull requirements for the listed guns followed by the same claim that this can produce an unintentional discharge.

This reviewer has many other concerns insofar as the correctness, accuracy, and reliability of statements, tables, equations and definitions presented in this book but I will leave their discovery to those who elect to purchase a copy of *Human Factors Issues in Handgun Safety and Forensics*.

¹Forensic Science Services, Carefree, AZ 85377.