

KNOWN ISSUES WITH SERPA HOLSTERS

There are at least five known safety issues with the BLACKHAWK! brand SERPA holsters. At a minimum the first safety issue is also present in any of the other copy-cat holsters that are designed to release the retention device by pressing your trigger finger towards the body while drawing.

1) Trigger finger slipping onto trigger during draw stroke under pressure causing ND into shooters leg during draw stroke due to design of release.

I know of a few ND's on the draw stroke that have occurred to Officers in Washington State agencies when shooters were using Sherpa holsters. The most recent I know of was on 11/19/11 when a Deputy from the Pierce Co SO had an ND 1911 his leg while drawing from a SERPA holster during in-service training. I know this sort of injury has also occurred with the Spokane SO in the past and based on the numbers of this type of self-inflicted wound that I have heard of happening outside of in-service training in the state, I would be surprised if there was no history of other incidents of this happening with WA agencies.

This has happened enough that a specific wound profile has been seen which in some circles has been referred to as the "SERPA bite". The wound resulting from this type of ND typically is described as "a round entering just below the level of the holster on the lateral side of the thigh and exiting the medial side of the thigh just above the knee."

These ND's happen with shooters with a wide variety of experience. From the novice, to the highly experienced, the very design of the retention device induces the trigger finger to slip inside of the trigger guard when stress is added (being on a shot timer, qualifying, being in a gunfight, etc), even for those that have been using this type of holster for a long time.

2) Holster can be physically pulled off of duty belt during "gun grab" due to inferior design and materials used.

The construction of the holster is sub-par compared to offerings from other, well known, duty holster companies. In my research on this issue, I have seen SHERPA holsters shearing in half, large chunks of the plastic breaking off, screw heads being pulled through the backing plates, belt loops torn off the holster and other critical failures in retention resulting in the loss of control of the firearm to the bad guy.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOBEJvMZ_f4



Results of ONE sharp tug during weapon retention training

3) Release can be clogged with snow/sand/debris completely locking up the holster and preventing the weapon from being released.

In 2005, I was a member of an organization in Mosul, Iraq with about 6 operational members. One day in the spring of 2005, we were issued brand new SERPA holsters for our Glock 19 pistols. Immediately, we put them on our gear and began a training program with them. Within a matter of days, 10-15 of the holsters had to be catastrophically disassembled with a hammer and large screw driver as that was the only way to get the pistol out of the holster after the retention device bound up due to sand getting into it. Seven years later, this continues to be an issue with these holsters and in addition to sand, a minimal amount of dirt or snow has been shown produce the same results.

I know of a Seattle PD Officer who had his SERPA lock up on him from debris during a training class in April of 2011 (the following is a video demonstrating this from a course in New Mexico and is separate from the event I just referenced).

http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid53246191001?bckey=AQ~~,AAAACnIIBGk~,NZYO3xUDM_E0TWMBUpCe8YivKyjrCCqn&bctid=1155868233001

4) When weapon is inserted in the holster backwards during commonly taught methods for one handed manipulations, the pistols can get stuck in the holster and the only way to remove it is to completely remove a screw to release the front sight.





If you look inside an empty SHERPA holster, along the back wall, there's a plastic bar that starts in front of the trigger guard and ends about halfway to the bottom of the holster. As the gun is inserted, that bar is compressed against the holster body by the dust cover, creating a friction fit. If you insert the gun backwards, that lever is compressed first by the front sight, then by the balance of the slide, creating the same friction fit. The trouble starts after the front sight clears the end of that bar. The FS is taller than the slide, and after the end of the bar clears the FS, the bar snaps down onto the slide. When you try to pull the gun back out, the bar catches the FS locking the gun in place.

This can be corrected by removing the screw that holds the bar in place, or you can slide a long narrow paddle of some sort in to raise the bar above the FS allowing it to clear.

Fatal flaw: This cannot be corrected while in the fight. The gun is stuck.

This is a known issue with all models of Glock pistols as well as the M&P line. At a minimum, I would imagine it would be an issue for all other pistols with a generally square profiled slide.

5) With some firearms, the magazine release can be activated while an officer is seated in their vehicle resulting in the magazine falling out of the pistol without the officer's knowledge.

On 3/1/12, an officer approached me (Stefan Wolak, Firearms Instructor for the Okanogan County Sheriff's Office) stating he had an issue with his new holster / pistol combination. He just started using a Gen 4 Glock-17 and has a "SERPA Level 3 Auto-Lock Duty Holster"-

<http://www.blackhawk.com/product/Level-3-SERPA-Auto-Lock-Duty-Holster,1175,1412.htm>

about a week ago.

When sitting down in a vehicle, the combination of holster, seatbelt buckle and seat push the holster into a position that causes the Gen 4 magazine release to activate, causing the magazine to fall out onto the floor or seat of the vehicle, leaving the officer with only one round in his firearm. Multiple times yesterday and today, myself and this officer set up his pistol in the holster and watched the magazine get ejected as he buckled the seatbelt and got settled into the seat.

Given how common the Glock-17/22 sized frame is in LE, this is yet another significant issue with the holster design.

This is not anything I have seen with other duty holster designs. I have seen it in some concealment holster designs when using an extended magazine release (Glock 34/35's, "race" 1911's, etc), but I have never seen this issue in duty holsters, or with standard length magazine releases.

Training companies that I can think of off the top of my head that have banned SERPA's during class, or at least STRONGLY suggest other holster designs-

BRTC (banned)

Vickers Tactical (banned)

EAG Tactical (banned unless you are military)

Todd Lewis Green (banned)

Gunsite (strongly suggests other designs)

Kyle Defoor (will allow them if the retention device has been deactivated and retention is only performed by the tension screw)
Wilson Tactical Training (banned)
Cerino Training Group (strongly suggests other designs)

In addition, I know that FLETC is currently looking into issues with the SERPA holsters due to 3 recent ND's including 2 resulting in injuries to the upper leg with the very real possibility that they will ban them as well.

The SERPA issue is one I feel strongly about and have for many years. I have been responsible for hosting a variety of firearms training courses at the Okanogan SO range for the past three years. While we have not had any of these issues appear yet during training, they are happening enough across the country and across all skill levels that I will not allow a student to attend training that I host with a "holster who's retention device is defeated by applying pressure with the trigger finger towards the body (ie BLACKHAWK! SERPA brand holsters). "

I have compiled this information from a variety of sources. Some was personal experience, some was personal communication with others involved in these incidents and some was from a (very) little bit of research into the problems associated with the SERPA holster. I specify "very little" research, because when one starts really looking at the issues brought up, there is a veritable landslide of individuals having these issues with the SERPA holster. It is entirely correct to say that these are not isolated incidents.