

Slamfires

The M14 can fire when its bolt is not fully locked down or in battery. Cause: The firing pin detonates a primer during forward movement, made possible by the free-floating pin. Such an out-of-battery discharge is known as a slamfire, and if you ever witness one, you won't want to see it again.

There is a bridge in the receiver that's *supposed* to catch the tail on the firing pin and restrain its premature forward movement, but that's only according to the blueprints. Many receivers are a little large in this area, perhaps because a manufacturing error on the small side can cause cycling malfunctions and pin breakage.

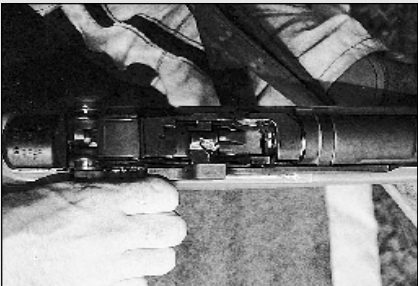
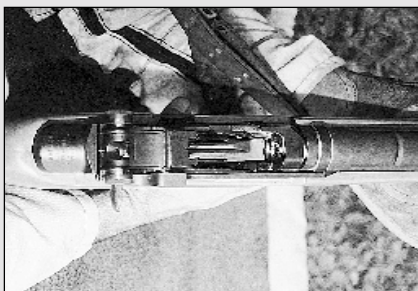
To reduce the chance of slamfires happening to you, let fly the bolt and chamber a round in an M14 and then extract it. Examination of the primer may show an indentation. This resulted from the firing pin "tapping" off the primer as the round was chambered. As discussed, this may not happen if everything in the receiver is correct. Assuming it's not, though, if this contact occurs with sufficient force, which is increased the shorter the distance the pin has to travel to smack the primer (as with a hesitant feeding round), the greater likelihood the impact will detonate the primer.

As the action strips a round from the magazine, it slows the forward speed of the bolt enough to just about eliminate the possibility of a slam fire when the rifle is operating as it was intended—as a self-loader being fed issue ammunition from the magazine. But competitive shooters do not operate the weapon as it was designed. In High Power, half or more of the shots (depending on the course) are loaded into the gun "slow fire," which means one at a time. The majority of slamfires happen in this stage. To circumvent slamfires, follow these steps.

There are two options for getting a solo round into the chamber when the bolt is locked back by the bolt stop. One is to restrain the op rod handle, thumb a round into the magazine, and release the handle, sending the bolt forward to strip and chamber a round. The other method, and the one usually favored by service teams, is to poke a round all the way into the chamber, unlatch the magazine, and release the bolt stop. *Zing!* This method prevents damage to the bullet. Given this loading technique, service teams are no strangers to slam fires, so they use new Lake City Match ammunition to forestall the problem.

For the rest of us, a workable compromise is to poke one up the snoot, unlatch the magazine, and then secure the rod until the bolt has travelled about halfway home. Releasing the bolt from that distance provides sufficient force to seat the bolt but reduces its momentum.

There are other conditions beyond the scope of this article that can lead to a slamfire, such as a bound or hooked firing pin or a rough, undersized, or dirty chamber. Also, always clean the chamber and inspect and check fit any new parts.



Above: The shooter's slow-fire loading technique can either increase or decrease the potential for slam fires. The safest method (top) is to thumb a round fully into the magazine and then release the rod handle. This duplicates semi-auto function. Another method (center) which better protects the bullet from damage is to poke a round fully into the chamber, unlatch the magazine, and, after easing it about halfway home, release the rod (bottom). The magazine is re-latched prior to firing the shot. The safety key here is to shorten the distance the bolt has to develop excessive momentum. Don't let it fly from a fully retracted position.