



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on August 29, 2014

Nine-year-old Girl Accidentally Shoots Instructor: Should Our Freedoms Be Casualties, Too?

Must every tragic and unusual gun death be accompanied by irrational calls for more government intrusion into our lives? Virtually all of us have heard about Arizona firearms instructor Charles Vacca, who was [accidentally shot](#) and killed Monday at the Last Stop gun range by a nine-year-old girl he was teaching to shoot a fully automatic Uzi. The incident was caught on video and, not surprisingly, has caught the nation's attention. Unfortunately, though, it's reason and reality that are caught in the crosshairs.



Many Internet commenters have seized the opportunity to place blame for this unfortunate accident on who they call “gun nuts”: NRA members and Second Amendment defenders in general. They also frequently place undue onus on the young girl's parents, perhaps not considering that the couple was at a gun range that offered machine gun rentals (with supervision) — in much the same way that people can pay to race cars on a closed track — and that the parents had the expectation that this professional recreational facility was safe. And this expectation was not unrealistic. As the *New York Times* itself [reported](#), quoting Last Stop gun range owner Sam Scarmado, “In the last 14 years, we've probably had 100,000 people shoot five million rounds of ammunition, and of those, a thousand to two thousand of them were children,” he said. “We've never given out a Band-Aid — no one's never even got a scratch.” The paper added further perspective, writing, “Daniel Webster, the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, said that what happened at Last Stop was ‘an outlier.’ Shooting ranges are generally regarded as safe places, where guns are fired in a controlled setting and under the supervision of trained instructors.”

This doesn't stop the critics, however, from saying that because of that “outlier” a man is dead. It doesn't stop them from calling for new laws (a.k.a. “removals of freedom”). It's tiresome bleating. And, at risk of seeming frivolous, I'll say it reminds me of when, responding to his daughter Gloria's rhetorical question about how many people are killed with handguns, All in the Family curmudgeon Archie Bunker [replied](#), “Would it make you feel any betta', little goirl, if dey was pushed outta' windas'?” The remark was meant to be humorous — and was not intended to buttress the Second Amendment cause — but it gets at a truth about anti-gun fanatics:

They would feel better if people were pushed out of windows.

Last year, a poor little Indiana boy named Dylan Williams died after being [struck](#) in the head with a baseball. Another young boy, Illinoisan Eric Lederman, had been [killed](#) after being struck with a baseball the year before. I knew a 12-year-old boy in my area who died jet-skiing. None of these cases — or the thousands of others involving accidental recreational-activity death — received the national attention of the Arizona shooting. And they never inspired calls for the activity's banning. They're instead met with due compassion, prayer, and statements such as “It just brings to light that there are



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no guarantees [in life],” which is what a school official said in the Lederman case.

The fact is, we accept the risk inherent in recreational activities all the time, including those listed as the most dangerous sports, such as horseback riding, hang gliding, rock climbing, skateboarding, motorcycle racing, cave diving, and heli-skiing. Of course, critics say that guns aren’t at all like these things. And they’re right.

Owning and being proficient in the use of firearms is infinitely more important.

While there is the Second Amendment, the Founding Fathers would never have even contemplated making big-wave surfing, baseball, or cave diving a right explicitly guaranteed in the Constitution even if these activities had existed at the time. They’re frivolous, examples of risk taken for no reason other than fun. But shooting sports are fun and more.

Consider: rock climbing can definitely teach a certain situation-specific survival skill. And survival skills are held in high esteem, which is why children participate in programs such as Outward Bound. But what, by definition, is more of a survival skill than self-defense? It’s the ultimate survival skill. This is why the Swiss require adult males, all part of the nation’s militia, to keep an assault rifle at home. They are not, last I heard, required to own skateboards.

This appreciation for firearms recreation and its benefits is nothing new, either. As Thomas Jefferson wrote in a 1785 letter to Peter Carr:

A strong body makes the mind strong. As to the species of exercises, I advise the gun. While this gives moderate exercise to the body, it gives boldness, enterprise and independence to the mind. Games played with the ball, and others of that nature, are too violent for the body and stamp no character on the mind. Let your gun therefore be your constant companion of your walks.

So guns are different for the above reasons — and for another: Liberals are scared of them. It’s in their heads. A level of risk they readily accept in non-firearm-related activities induces apoplexy when the subject is guns. It’s not rational. It not thought out. It’s not mature. And it should not influence policy.

Yet there’s a wider problem related to risk: Living our heavily-insured, security-system, bubble-wrap lifestyles, we sometimes behave as if all risk can somehow be divorced from life. But simple truth:

Death happens.

Accidents happen.

People die.

Get over it.

As soon as you’re conceived your life is at risk (especially, it seems, until birth). And if you want to drink deeply of the cup of life, where spillover runs down your chin, you’ll risk your neck even more. You may play baseball, go hang gliding, or ride motorcycles — or shoot guns. Why, some even take the risk of not seeing to self-defense and leaving themselves easy prey.

Another argument we hear in the Arizona tragedy’s wake is that no nine-year-old should ever fire a gun. Now, while I personally wouldn’t have a young child discharge a fully-automatic weapon, this is silly. Historically, boys in America were taught to shoot and hunt at tender ages, and they even sometimes fought in war. David Farragut was [commissioned](#) a U.S. Navy midshipman at the age of 9, and he fought in, and captained a ship during, the War of 1812 when he was 12.



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Speaking of which, we'll also hear anti-gun critics say that certain firearms should be outlawed because "they were made for military purposes." This has been said about the Uzi, but the reality is that all types of firearms were originally made for this reason. Should a collector be disallowed from owning an antique flintlock because it was made for "military purposes?"

Moreover, even insofar as civilians do become "militarized," is this always a bad thing? Consider: Second Amendment critics, along with many others, have recently been alarmed by the militarization of police forces and by how even government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture now have SWAT teams. I share this concern. But please read something the great G.K. Chesterton wrote in his 1905 book *Heretics*:

The professional soldier gains more and more power as the general courage of a community declines. Thus the Pretorian guard became more and more important in Rome as Rome became more and more luxurious and feeble. The military man gains the civil power in proportion as the civilian loses the military virtues. And as it was in ancient Rome so it is in contemporary Europe. There never was a time when nations were more militarist. There never was a time when men were less brave.

Digest the above passage thoroughly. As it was in ancient Rome, so it is in contemporary America. Know that insofar as you discourage civilian military virtue, you'll inadvertently increase the power of the authorities. Oh, that power may not accrue to the actual military in our time and place (at least not yet), owing mainly to our strong separation between military and civilian life. But this is precisely why that power devolves to the authorities that do directly interact with the enfeebled civilians: governments at all levels and their "militaries," meaning, police forces and other law-enforcement agencies.

So, ironically, it may be the people most lacking in military virtues — liberals, city residents, and anti-gun activists (almost complete overlap there, I know) — who are most responsible for the militarization they fear. And that's what happens when you're governed by fear and engage in something far more dangerous than firearms accidents: accidental policy conclusions.

So just stop. Think. Guns haven't killed nearly as many people as irrationality has.



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