



“Without safety, we have nothing”

This quote from the late Pat Rogers stuck with me not only because this is how he began his safety lecture in the 2014 pistol and rifle classes I took with him, but also because of its simple and cold truth. Indeed, this inspired me to include “safely” when creating our tag line “Every Day Carry training to *safely* and effectively save lives” [emphasis added]. If we seriously injure or kill ourselves or innocents while putting down bad guys, we’ve accomplished nothing; literally a zero sum result.

It’s with this backdrop that when I read about **Alec Baldwin’s** recent move set mishap, I thought it would be a good idea to review how **Brandon Lee** was killed during the filming of the great cult classic **The Crow**. We won’t really know what happened with Alec Baldwin for months, but 28 years later we do know how Brandon died, why it was so unavoidable, and how this teachable moment provides lessons for those of us conducting Force on Force training with UTM or Simunitions.

First, we need to understand what a “prop gun” is. This is simply a movie industry umbrella term used for any real firearm (functioning or inert) or replica firearm (inert rubber, foam, plastic, metal) that is used on a set. The Prop Master and his assistant are responsible for procuring, storing, setting up, and accounting for these prop guns.

Real functioning movie firearms use two types of ammunition: blanks (primer, powder, paper or plastic cover, and no projectile) for live shooting scenes, and squib rounds where you have a live primer and a bullet but no powder. The latter are used for those close up shots so you can see the primer when the actor is loading the cartridge into the gun, or see the bullet when an actor is staring down the muzzle end of the gun. The idea is to add realism.



While filming **The Crow**, the lone assistant prop master was playing around off set with a real firearm prop gun loaded with squibs and pressed the trigger. The result was a loud noise that only the assistant prop master heard and a bullet that lodged in the barrel. Both fearing for his job and failing to understand how real firearms and ammunition worked, this assistant never told anyone and placed the gun back in storage.

Later during filming the gun was loaded with blanks and when the gun was fired at close range toward Brandon Lee, the gases from the blank round were sufficient to propel the lodged bullet out of the barrel and strike him with a mortal wound.

I believe there are lessons we can learn from these types of events.

First is with Force on Force. At EDC Pistol Training there's a reason our real Glock 17's, Sig P320's, and AR-15's use UTM conversions for Force on Force, namely that they prevent live ammunition from feeding or firing as well as visually identifying them to the users as UTM guns. Even with these UTM guns, there are different barrels for projectiles or blanks so if we are doing training with silent or battlefield blanks these barrels cannot feed or fire man marker rounds with projectiles.

Second, with live fire training, practice, and every day carry, we must always heed the 4 universal safety rules before we do anything else. There are slightly different iterations of these rules dating back to Jeff Cooper, but here's what we teach at EDC Pistol Training:

1. Always know the loaded status of your weapon.
2. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
3. Always keep your trigger finger indexed on the frame until ready to shoot.
4. Always positively identify your target and what is around it.