



Listed below are a few colloquial—mostly American—sayings that owe their origins to firearms (and other weapons) usage.

- (a) the original firearms-related definition
- (b) the modern meaning

Armed to the teeth:

- (a) Heavily-armed person or persons.
- (b) Well-supplied with information or equipment.

Bite the bullet:

- (a) Prior to modern medical care, a wounded person was given a lead bullet to bite down on while undergoing surgery to lessen the pain.
- (b) To do something unpleasant in order to get it out of the way.

Flash in the pan:

- (a) When a flintlock's priming pan powder burns or "flashes" but fails to ignite the main powder charge in the barrel.
- (b) A person who claims great skills or achievements but accomplishes nothing.

Going off half-cocked:

- (a) Placing the hammer of a firearm on a halfway position so that it is unable to be fired.
- (b) Thoughtless or hasty behavior.

Grease Gun:

- (a) A tool used to squirt heavy grease into a bearing.
- (b) The nickname given the U.S. M3 submachine gun.

Gunning for someone:

- (a) Searching for someone with the intent of engaging them in a shoot out.
- (b) Aggressively going after someone.

Gun-shy:

- (a) Frightened by the shooting of a firearm.
- (b) A timid person or animal.

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- Hang fire:** (a) A firearm that fails to immediately discharge a ball or bullet.
(b) A delay in something.
- Keep your powder dry:** (a) Making sure that one's black powder does not get wet and unable to be fired.
(b) A request to be careful.
- Lock, stock, and barrel:** (a) The basic components of a firearm.
(b) An activity or assembly of parts that is complete.
- Long shot:** (a) Long-distance shooting.
(b) An attempt or action that has little chance of success.
- Not worth the powder and shot:** (a) Firearms powder and shot were relatively cheap in the "old days."
(b) Something that is not worth much.
- On the shoot:** (a) Searching for someone with the intent of engaging them in a shoot out.
(b) Looking for trouble.
- Parting shot:** (a) The last discharge of a firearm, generally as you are escaping or leaving an area.
(b) Final remarks.
- Quick on the draw:** (a) To be fast when drawing a pistol.
(b) An intelligent, astute person.
- Ram it home:** (a) To push powder and ball down a muzzleloader.
(b) To force something.
- Riding Shotgun:** (a) Position taken by an armed guard on an express wagon or coach.
(b) Riding in the front passenger seat of an automobile.
- Shoot from the hip:** (a) Quickly firing a pistol without aiming.
(b) A rash statement or behavior.
- Straight shooter:** (a) An accurate firearm or marksman.
(b) An honest, trustworthy person.

Worm it out:

- (a) Using a rod-like tool to remove an unfired ball from a muzzleloader.
- (b) To get a secret (or information) out of someone.

—The content of this document was compiled by Clay Spencer,
Cody Firearms Museum Intern

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