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Ah, another normal, late-winter day of calm seas and a gentle breeze blowing off the distant European continent. That's what I thought was in store for us as we made our way toward a much anticipated Mediterranean liberty port. Little did I know how wrong I would be.

The problem started when our ship hit rough seas. As usual, I had my Sailors check all our spaces to make sure everything was secured. While I was waiting for their reports, I took a seat in the boat shop.

I had been there a while talking to the work-center supervisor when the ship took a big roll to starboard. In most cases, I would have braced myself against a solid object to keep the chair stable. However, no solid object was near, and I wasn't seated in the right position to prevent the chair from moving. Oh, I almost forgot—this chair was one with casters attached to the legs, the kind that makes it easy to move around at a desk.

I tried to use my arms and legs to right the chair and keep from hitting the deck. As the chair went over backward, I braced for the inevitable. My head hit a drawer handle on a tool cabinet. I hit so hard I opened a four-and-a-half-inch gash on the top of my head, and my neck wrenched forward. When the dust had settled, I lay

there wondering why everything sounded so loud. I didn't feel any immediate pain. Instead, I just felt embarrassed that I had done what I always train my Sailors not to do.

I decided I wasn't injured and started to stand up, but the PO1 I had been talking to rushed over to hold my head on the deck. He kept telling me to stay still while he grabbed a rag to keep blood from pouring all over the shop. He also had someone call a medical emergency over the 1MC. Although I felt fine, I decided I'd better lay still.

When the corpsmen—and about a third of the crew—arrived, they took charge of controlling the bleeding, then led me to medical, where I received 13 stitches. I was left with a nearly permanent “smile” on the top of my head.

This mishap made me realize that no matter how long you've been on active duty or how much training you've had, you still need to pay attention to hazards. I've been in the Navy 20 years, with assignments to six ships (including four amphib), and I've served as a supervisor and department leading chief. In this capacity, I'm responsible for training Sailors in the hazards of shipboard life, both in port and at sea. My mistake was assuming this experience would prevent me from doing anything wrong. ☹

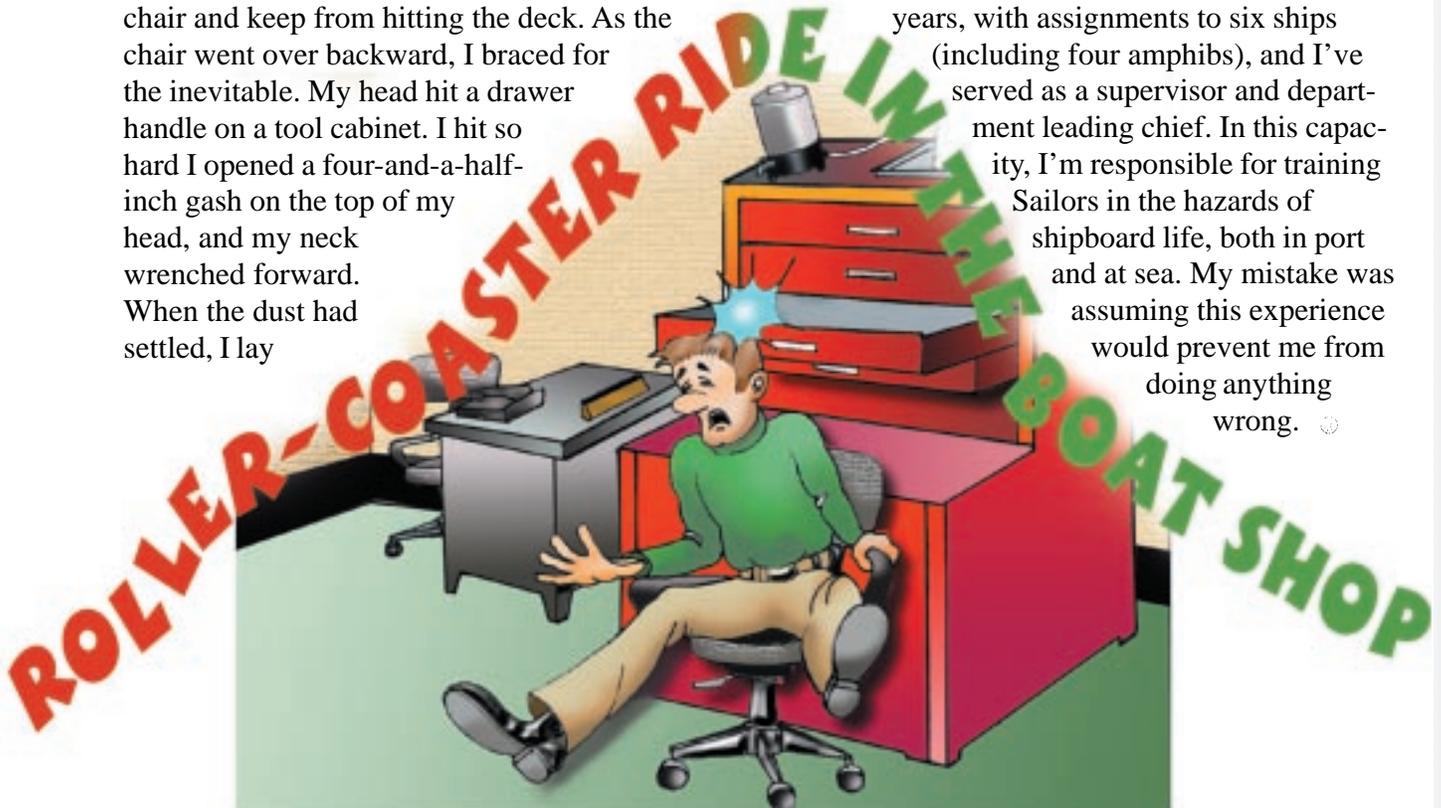


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