

# A "Go To" Guy Beco

By MR1 John Mapp,  
SIMA Norfolk

Three days before Christmas, a destroyer was just under halfway through the holiday-leave period. A PO2—we'll call him Festus—was working in the general workshop after duty-section muster when the section leader came into the shop.

It seems the FN who was supposed to be standing sounding-and-security watch had neglected to bring his firearms qualification card to the ship. PO2 Festus was on the watchbill as in-port equipment monitor for later that day, but the section leader needed someone with a weapons qualification right now.

PO2 Festus followed the chief to the quarter-deck, where he was issued a 9-mm pistol, shoulder holster, and 45 rounds of ammo. Because it nearly was 0900 and the first sounding-and-security round hadn't been done yet, PO2 Festus donned his gear.

Readers of the Friday Funnies will be nodding their heads sagely at this point. The sense of urgency that filled PO2 Festus' mind was the cornerstone of the mishap to come. The rest of the foundation for the incipient mishap was getting started in the amidships passageway, where duty food-service attendants (FSAs) were breaking out stores from the reefer decks. To make their job easier, they had laid a pair of metal slide plates over the ladder going down to the reefer decks. A safety watch was supposed to be at the top of the ladder, but he was doing multiple tasks to make the job go faster.

Enter PO2 Festus, still in a hurry, as evidenced by his brisk pace as he rounded the corner. He was thinking about how he could speed up the rest of his first round on watch, wondering if he would have time to finish his work in the shop with two more watches to do, and worried about some anomalous readings on the HPAC. He likely also was debating how heavy a hammer to use on the FN who screwed up and stuck him with an extra watch. With so much on his mind, he was pretty much traveling on autopilot.

This setting was a classic recipe for disaster. You had two parts harried and hurried petty officer, mixed with a multi-tasked safety watchstander and salted with two slick-as-glass slide plates covering the ladder treads. The concoction needed baking only 2.5 seconds—the time it took PO2 Festus to get from the main deck to the second deck without ladder treads to slow him down.

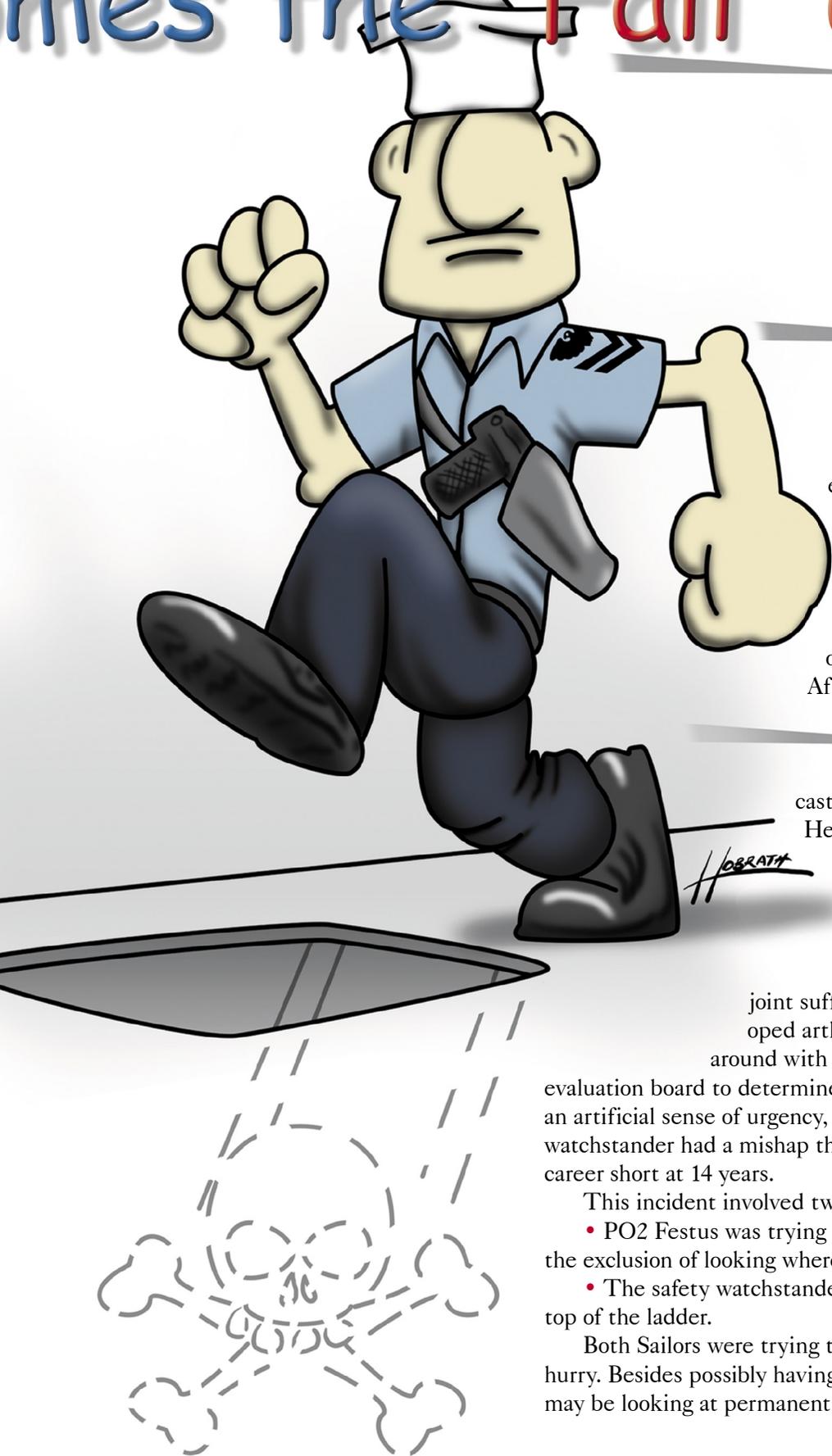
*"It ain't the fall that hurts; its the sudden stop at the end."*

Like a man once said, "It ain't the fall that hurts; its the sudden stop at the end." Our PO2 managed to maintain his carcass in a more or less head-up configuration during the descent. Just before he reached the deck, however, his left foot moved a little too far to the left and hooked the end of the handrail. PO2 Festus thus avoided slamming his 220-pound frame into the FSA at the bottom of the ladder but at the expense of having all that weight concentrated on his left ankle.

Loud expletives ensued, including several from the FSA at the bottom of the ladder. When PO2 Festus tried—but failed—to stand, more loud expletives followed. The FSA kindly got the section leader, who happened to be the ship's independent-duty chief corpsman. The latter organized a plan to get PO2 Festus up the ladder and into a chair on the mess decks, with his injured ankle on the table, under a mound of ice.

Once the HMC had examined the victim, he decided a trip to the branch medical clinic was in order. Doctors at the clinic took a couple of X-rays, which revealed the left leg was broken in two places just above the ankle. More swearing

# meets the "Fall" Guy



ensued, followed by a trip to the nearest naval hospital, where the earlier diagnosis was confirmed. PO2 Festus spent the holidays in a knee-high cast and got a plate with three screws installed on New Year's Eve.

After six weeks of convalescent leave, doctors released PO2 Festus back to the ship, minus his cast but sporting a pair of crutches.

He dealt with two weeks of increasing pain before going back to the naval hospital to be re-examined. Doctors placed him on limited duty. Further tests confirmed the worst: The ankle joint suffered nerve damage and had developed arthritis. PO2 Festus started hobbling around with a cane, waiting for a physical-evaluation board to determine the fate of his career. Because of an artificial sense of urgency, a good worker and conscientious watchstander had a mishap that might cut a promising Navy career short at 14 years.

This incident involved two contributing causes:

- PO2 Festus was trying to catch up on a delayed watch, to the exclusion of looking where he was putting his feet.
- The safety watchstander was absent from his post at the top of the ladder.

Both Sailors were trying too hard to get the job done in a hurry. Besides possibly having his career ruined, PO2 Festus may be looking at permanent disability. ■