

# Some Die... I Get Black Eyes... What Happens to You?

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As a third class petty officer in the Navy, I understood that part of my duty was to set an example for junior personnel—not a bad deal, considering it gave me a chance to show my leadership skills to the chain of command. Unfortunately, I didn't always set the "right" example.

In February 2004, a couple of my buddies had invited me to go to a local bar and grill with them. I decided just to meet them there, instead. After I got to the bar, I received a call from my buddies, saying they had gone to a different place and asking me to join them. While walking to my car, I got mugged and ended up with a black eye.

My first reaction was just to chalk up the incident as bad luck. I'd never been in a similar situation, so I didn't think about what I could have done to prevent it from happening. My chain of command, however, quickly reminded me I probably could have avoided the problem if I had used the buddy system.

For some people, "once is enough," but I was destined to have a repeat performance. In the second incident, I had gone out to a club with a Navy buddy and his lady friend. We had been having a great time when my buddy's friend decided she wanted to go home. She only lived a couple blocks away, so my buddy walked with her.

I realize now that I should have gone along, but I, too, had met a girl that night and didn't want to leave just yet. Besides, before leaving, my buddy had told me he would come back and pick me up since he was the designated driver. The club closed before he returned, though, and I once again ended up outside a bar—all alone, except for the company of my young lady. We were standing there, minding our own business, when a man, who was angry about my being with a girl, confronted me. The result was a second black eye, a second incident report, and another lecture from my chain of command about the value of the buddy system.

While the first incident hadn't involved any loss of work, except for a few hours I spent getting X-rays in ship's medical, I wasn't as lucky the second time



around. The black eye required surgery for a broken orbital lobe. I now have a permanent titanium plate for the bottom half of my eye socket.

I thought a lot about these two incidents and came to the conclusion the easy thing to do would be just to quit going out, but I'm no homebody. Everyone has to go out once in a while. What the command had been telling me all along finally made sense. Going on liberty with a buddy just keeps you from being an easy target for drunks, hoodlums and anyone out of sorts.

I now understand that I need to apply risk management to everything I do—both on and off duty. I always need to ask myself, "What can go wrong?" I had been lulled into complacency with an it-won't-happen-to-me attitude. I urge shipmates everywhere, at home and abroad, to police themselves and to realize there is strength in numbers. Don't become the perfect example of a bad situation. ■