



An Unexpected Port Visit to Rota

By Lt. J.L. Harrell
USS *Nashville* (LPD 13)

Rota, Spain, was a port I was looking forward to visiting, and I was finally on my way. But I wasn't getting there by ship or bike; I was being medevaced in our duty truck. Had I known this was the way I was going to get to Rota, I would have dropped it from my list of places I wanted to visit.

My journey to Rota began early one Sunday, with my shipmates and me riding bicycles during a great liberty call in Malaga, Spain. Bicycle riding in Malaga is an ideal mode of travel and a dream come true. This day started with near-perfect weather as my liberty buddy and I set out on the rolling roads through outlying towns, enjoying hours of stress-free exercise and recreation. Our agenda called for a five-mile ride to a flea market, followed by a six-mile scenic leg and a stop at a castle and bullring. From there, we headed back to town for dinner, more shopping and shooting photos of the city's fantastic holiday lights.

We ended our ride near the center of downtown Malaga around 1800. It was dark, and we had no lights on our bikes or helmets, so we dismounted to avoid becoming a hazard in traffic.

With duty looming the next day, we decided to return to the ship around 2030. As we passed through the harbor sentry gates, we could see our ship in the distance. With no traffic on the pier and adequate lighting, I figured it was safe to ride my bike to the ship. I had only 200 yards to go, and home was clearly in sight. I started thinking about what I had done that day and paid less attention to what I was doing now.

My forward motion abruptly halted as the front tire of my bicycle lodged in a set of rail tracks. I felt my handlebars violently jerk to the right as the rear tire left the ground. As my mind returned to the present, I realized I was airborne. I tried to keep from getting hurt by doing a "tuck and roll"—dipping my head into the pocket of my right shoulder and chest, tucking my left elbow into my mid-section, and rolling. The objective of this maneuver is to take the blow on the back of the left shoulder, roll and get up. I successfully performed this evasive procedure. However, I failed to take into account the U-bolt bicycle lock I was carrying in my backpack.

When I hit the pier, the lock slammed into my left shoulder blade and broke it. I remember hitting the ground and hearing a loud crack.

With the help of my liberty partner, I got back on the ship. The doctor x-rayed me and sent me on my truck ride to Rota to see an orthopedist. Two days later, I was released fit for duty.

This mishap taught me several "be" lessons:

Be aware: Know your surroundings, and pay attention. The saddle of a bike is no place to be daydreaming.

Be smart: Always wear your protective equipment. It's a good thing I didn't hit my head during this spill, because I hadn't put on my helmet for this short ride. If I had hit my head, I would not be writing this.

Be thorough: Check your bike and maintain it regularly. Even though I had done this, I never had installed a light, which I should have. 