

# Deadly



# Choices

Story by Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center,  
Photos by ABHC(AW/SW) Homer Elam,  
USS *George Washington* (CVN 73)

In two weeks, a 33-year-old PO2 would be on leave, visiting his two children in Florida, where they lived with his first ex-wife. In the meantime, he was trying to reconcile with his second ex-wife. Neither plan, however, would be accomplished.

A supervisor described the PO2 as “a top performer.” But he had a problem—actually, a

“killer” of a problem. He refused to wear seat belts. His roommate explained that the only time he ever wore them was while driving on base.

One night in early May, the PO2 and a civilian friend climbed into the former’s Chevrolet Camaro and launched a night out on the town. Early morning found the duo approaching a bridge at 84 to 89 mph (in a 35-mph zone), with the PO2 (the driver) not wearing a seat belt. He suddenly lost control and slammed into the concrete bridge abutment



## It's a miracle even one occupant survived when this Camaro crashed into a bridge abutment.

with such force it spun the car around and flung him through a window. His body hit the bridge, and he suffered a fatal head injury. The passenger also was injured.

According to the police, there were 250 feet of scuff marks before the bridge abutment and 150 feet of scuff marks beyond to where the Camaro stopped. However, there were no skid marks at the scene, indicating that the driver never applied the brakes. The police said he had a BAC of .25.

Before returning from deployment, this victim, like everyone else aboard his ship, had attended a safety stand-down, which covered all aspects of the homecoming. The stand-down included several presentations by a state trooper about driving fatalities, state DUI policy, DUI cost, and seat-belt requirements. In April, the ship had a seat-belt convincer aboard to remind all hands about why they need to use seat belts. The leadership also routinely warns everyone about the risks of DUI during school-of-the-ship sessions, 1MC announcements, Plan-of-the-Day notes, and ship's newspaper articles.

Two days after this mishap, all hands aboard the ship began four days of ORM train-

ing. They also went through another safety stand-down, which included training by the state police on drinking and driving, seat belts, and general safe-driving habits. The leadership emphasized the "safe cab" program by adding a key-chain card as a last reminder for Sailors to call a cab, rather than drive after they've been drinking. The ride to the ship is billed to the ship's MWR committee, which then goes back to the Sailor for the money.

Finally, the ship's leadership staged the victim's wrecked car aboard ship so that everyone had to walk past it every day for several weeks.



As a reminder to all hands, the ship's CO displayed the deceased PO2's Camaro on the brow for everyone to see as they went on liberty.



With so much focus on safe driving, it may seem incredible that a fireman from the same ship would lose his life in another car crash just days after the first one. The crew hadn't even completed the ORM-training cycle that followed the first shipmate's death.

Shipmates knew the fireman drank booze most nights, and his PO2 supervisor knew he drank some but didn't feel he abused alcohol—neither did his CPO supervisor. Nevertheless, the fireman and three innocent women died, and one man was injured because no one raised a flag about the fireman's drinking habits.

Disaster struck early one Friday morning as the one woman and three friends were on their way to a hospital to deliver her baby. Unknown to them, they were traveling the same lanes on an interstate highway as the 21-year-old fireman. He was driving in the wrong direction at speeds reportedly exceeding 80 mph.

A few minutes after midnight, his Ford Mustang crashed head-on into their Chevrolet Lumina, which was just one-tenth of a mile

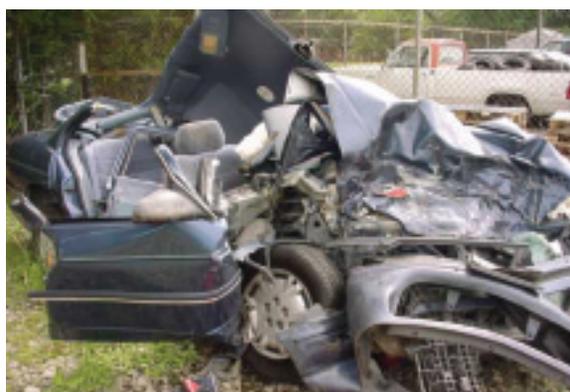
from the exit to the hospital. Autopsy results showed the fireman had a BAC of .27.

Investigation of this mishap revealed the fireman and a shipmate had left the ship earlier in the evening and had driven to the home of another shipmate. Later, the three showed up at a bar. According to the front-door supervisor and other patrons, the fireman was drunk and disorderly when he arrived, and members of the bar staff escorted him out of the building 45 minutes later. One of the shipmates went outside with him.

The bar's general manager then claims to have recommended the fireman take a cab; however, he refused. Instead, he went to his car and told the shipmate he was going to "sleep it off"



Boozing and speeding the wrong way on an interstate highway killed the Sailor driving this Ford Mustang.



Three innocent women died in this Chevrolet Lumina when the Sailor driving the Ford Mustang hit them head-on.

before returning to the ship. The shipmate left his friend reclining in the driver's seat of the Mustang and went back inside the bar.

Later, the fireman drove away, entered the interstate via an exit ramp, and started speeding the wrong direction. He met a state trooper who signaled for him to pull over but to no avail.

After this second tragedy, the ship's leadership held yet another stand-down. Again, state troopers were on hand with graphic and hard-hitting training. The ship also re-emphasized the "safe cab" program. 

*Other commands are developing programs to deal with the problem of drunken driving. Here's what two of them are doing.*

# Arrive Alive

Story by Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center  
Photo by ABHC (AW/SW) Homer Elam,  
USS *George Washington* (CVN 73)

The chain of command at VFA-87 encourages Sailors to find a means to get home or to designate a driver before they go out and party. If they don't, though, they always can call the staff duty officer (SDO), who will call a cab for them. The squadron uses MWR funds to pay for the taxi ride home or to base quarters—but not to another party or bar.

The VFA-87 program, as outlined in their Instruction 5353.1A (Responsible Sailors Don't Drink and Drive), is called "arrive alive." It's not a means to label individuals as alcohol abusers but to help everyone in need. No questions are asked of those who use the program.

Men and women at VFA-87 receive a card to carry in their wallets when they check in for duty; it stays with them until they check out. This card notes that a "DUI can kill more than just your career." It advises, "Don't drink and



In the old days, Sailors had to show ID and liberty cards before they could "hit the beach." Today, many have to show ID and guaranteed-cab-ride cards before they can depart on liberty.

drive." At the bottom of the card is a suggestion to "be responsible, make the call" to the SDO (phone number provided).

The two VFA-87 squadronmates responsible for starting the "arrive alive" program are LCdr. Dennis A. Lazar, Jr. and AO1(AW) Carlos Castellanos. 

# Tipsy taxi

Story by Ltjg. Stephen Jones,  
HM-15

Photo by ABHC (AW/SW) Homer Elam,  
USS *George Washington* (CVN 73)

**A**n impaired person's decision to get behind the wheel of a car is a choice—a very bad choice that destroys the careers of our Sailors and Marines. Besides taking their own lives, they often claim the lives of innocent victims.

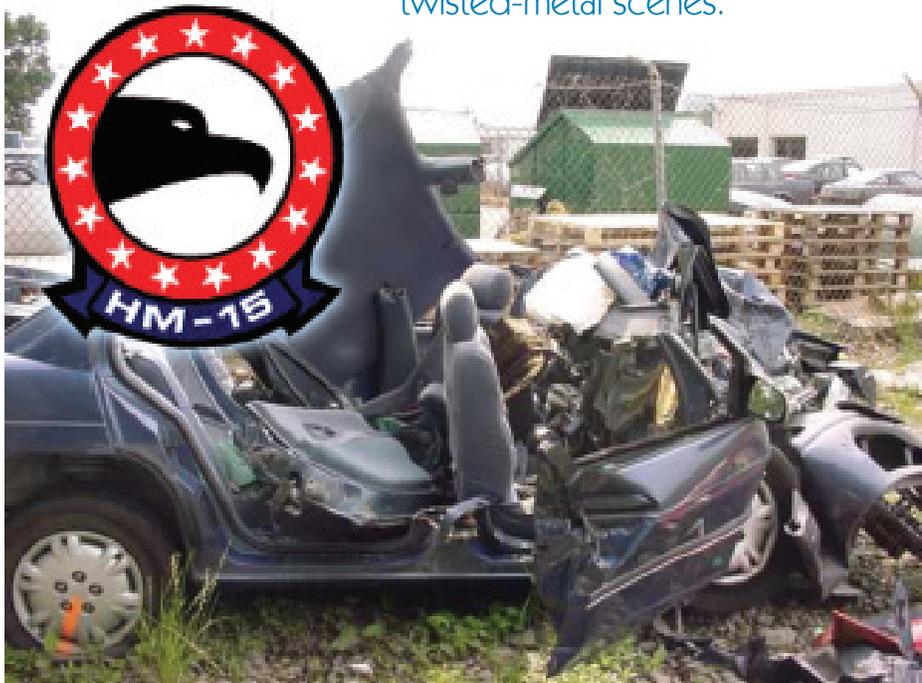
Drunken-driving fatalities can be eliminated when people make the right choice: to act responsibly. The leadership at HM-15 has created a “tipsy taxi” program—as well as driver-improvement and driver-education programs—to help their people make responsible choices. Their goal is to prevent DUIs.

Procedures of the “tipsy taxi” program are simple so they aren't a burden for those who manage the program or those who participate in it. Members of HM-15 receive a voucher when they check in with the safety department. They also sign a drive-safe-program contract,

which says they take full responsibility for the voucher and agree to reimburse the command for any charges incurred on their card. When people complete their tour of duty with HM-15, they are responsible for returning their card to the safety department.

HM-15 has a contract with two local cab companies in which squadronmates only have to show a valid military ID card and their voucher to obtain a free taxi ride. The cab company then bills the command each month for use of the service. Each voucher has a limited value (\$75), which is more than enough to transport a person to any local residence or on-base quarters. In no case, however, can anyone use the “tipsy taxi” program to bar hop.

Using a program like “tipsy taxi” will reduce the number of such twisted-metal scenes.



Although many squadron personnel don't drink, they still can use their voucher to help others who have been drinking and need a ride. The desire of the HM-15 leadership is that no one finds himself or herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. To prevent people from having any anxiety about using their voucher, the names of users are kept confidential.

Make the right choice and help keep those who drink off the roadways. ■