



Admiral's Corner

From Commander, Naval Safety Center

It Only Takes One Time

That's the lesson 18-year-old Airman Jonique Sullivan learned Nov. 18, 2004. Until that date, the VX-1 Sailor always had been careful behind the wheel of her car. In her words, "Defensive driving was my middle name."

What made Nov. 18, 2004, different? Jonique was excited—she just had flown on her first SH-60 familiarization flight. She wanted to get home and get the pictures developed from her adventure so she could send them to her mother. "I really was pumped up and excited as I headed to the photo counter at a local Wal-Mart," she explained.

The problem was that her "rush" coincided with "rush hour" traffic—it was 1730, and everyone was getting off work. It also was starting to get dark.

As Jonique approached a red light, she noticed a Dodge Ram rapidly closing behind her. A quick glance in the rearview mirror after she had stopped told her this guy was going to hit her. "Oh, my God; please, Lord, don't let me die like this!" she thought moments before the impact. She then let go of the steering wheel and shielded her face.

The force of the rear-end collision pushed Jonique's car (a 2003 Ford Taurus) forward 40 to 50 feet. When it had stopped moving, **she took off her seat belt**, exited the car, and checked for damage while waiting for the police to come.

Jonique considers herself very lucky, and so do I. Why? Because all she suffered from the incident were some minor muscle strains and back pains. "Nothing was broken, and I wasn't bleeding," she noted. Meanwhile, her car was a total loss.

The lesson here, as Jonique put it, is simple: "If I hadn't been wearing my seat belt, I might have been killed." As it is, she's still breathing and back to normal.

No matter how good a driver you think you are, how many precautions you take, or how invincible you may feel, something bad can happen in the blink of an eye. "In one moment, lives can be changed forever," said Jonique, "so always wear a seat belt."

According to data based on observational surveys during site and assist visits, safety-belt usage in the Navy averages 91 percent, compared to [as related in a Dec. 22, 2004, local newspaper article] 80 percent nationwide and 79.9 percent in Virginia. Only seven Navy victims, however, who died in FY03 four-wheel PMV mishaps are known to have been wearing seat belts. **Nineteen, or 48 percent, of the fatalities were not wearing restraints**, and no determination has been made yet in 14 cases.

It's simple...**Wear your seat belt!**

RADM Dick Brooks