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**W**hen Sailors trade their controlled shipboard environment for the free-wheeling, ready-for-anything liberty world, they are thinking of fun, not hazards. Add booze and late nights to the situation, and you have all the ingredients for trouble, whether it's getting beat up in a fight or falling off a pier and drowning.

As I learned during a deployment aboard a cruiser, however, there are ways to control the risk of mishaps. One method we used was the buddy system, which requires everyone who goes on liberty to leave the ship with at least one other person. This system ensures you have help getting out of tight spots. It also lets one person be responsible for getting a group back to the ship, whether it's by bus, taxi or liberty boat. (While overseas, we weren't allowed to rent or operate motor vehicles.) The buddy system is extremely effective in countries where English is a foreign language.

As it turned out for one of our Sailors, the buddy system also can save you from going to jail. The Sailor and two buddies on liberty with him in Bahrain were waiting outside a club that had closed. They hailed a taxi and went to their hotel room, unaware of the chain of events taking place inside.

It seems that a bouncer from the club where the three had been got into a dispute with another American and mistakenly identified our Sailor as the troublemaker. Officials from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service tracked him to the hotel room and were prepared to charge him. However, his two buddies confirmed his story word-for-word,

so the investigation shifted, and the real culprit was caught.

The buddy system is effective, but the liberty-risk program run by the CPO mess aboard my cruiser was even better. This program allows the command to monitor the actions of Sailors who misbehave.

When our ship left for deployment, the CO explained the rules of the program to everyone. Shipmates who had a problem on liberty were placed in a liberty-risk category depending on the severity of their trouble. The lightest category was Class Alpha: Sailors couldn't drink, and they had to be back aboard by 1830 for muster. Class Bravo required Sailors to be escorted on liberty by an E-5 or above (or an equivalent pay grade for more senior personnel), and they, too, had to return to the ship by 1830 for muster. Sailors in Class Charlie were not allowed off the ship.

If they stayed out of trouble, they moved up one category for each port, so no one ever stayed on the risk list for more than three port calls. Of course, Sailors who ended up in Class Charlie the last day in the Gulf knew they would miss every port call (one in Bali and two in Australia) on the way home. This knowledge proved to be more than enough deterrent for would-be irresponsible crewmen.

The liberty-risk program won't stop a Sailor from jumping off the fantail onto a pier, as we learned during our port call in Sydney. However, it does help to prevent a few troublemakers from ruining liberty for all their shipmates. ■

*The author was assigned to the Naval Safety Center when he wrote this story.*