

# NJP: The Price of

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Underage drinking is one of the most common reasons for which many Marines today find themselves at NJP (non-judicial punishment), and I'm no exception. "Shoulders back, eyes front, sound off"—these were a few of the thoughts racing through my mind as I awaited the CO's judgment. Here's how I had gotten myself in this predicament.

Things were slow at the barracks, and I had a few extra dollars in my pocket. I wanted to get out and have a good time. After rounding up a couple of NCO buddies, we headed to town. The plan was for one of us to be the designated driver—good on us, right? Wrong!

With the liberation of Iraq in full swing, all the locals at the club we went to were eager to show their support for our brothers and sisters in action. They were so happy to see us they gave all of us a 21-year-old-and-over wristband without checking our IDs. After all, with so many forces deployed, they needed all the customers they could get.

We had a great time as we danced, drank and conversed with the ladies all night. By 0330, most people had gone their separate ways, and we soon followed. Once outside, we started talking about how much fun we had had and how many ladies' phone numbers we had picked up. It was going to be a night to remember—or, so we thought.

On our way to the car, I had to make a confession—I had to tell my buddies I had let them down. Even though I was the designated driver, I had been drinking all night and wasn't in any shape to drive us back home. My buddies weren't happy, but they thanked me for speaking up. Rather than argue about what had happened, we decided to do the right thing and call around the barracks until we could find someone who would come get us. We finally found another Marine willing to get out of bed and see to it we got back safely.

Our trip to the base was one of relief—until we arrived at the main gate. As the guard did his



In or out of the military, underage drinking is a big problem.

routine ID card and vehicle checks, he smelled the alcohol from our partying. He then asked the driver to pull to the side and started asking questions. He soon figured out I wasn't old enough to be drinking, and I knew my night was about to turn bad.

I was taken into custody and given a breathalyzer test, which revealed a 0.20 BAC—close to the alcohol-poisoning stage. Later, I was taken to a naval hospital (for further observation), where I blew an even higher BAC—0.24, to be exact. Doctors and nurses immediately made sure I wasn't a victim of alcohol poisoning. After they had treated me, I was released to the squadron duty officer, who secured me to the barracks and instructed me to report to the sergeant major Monday morning. Things just had gotten ugly.

As much as I dreaded going to work Monday, I knew I had to. It was time to face the music. "How could such a good night have gone so wrong so quickly?" I couldn't stop thinking. From day one as a Marine, I had prided myself on being a hard charger—an NCO who tried to set the right example.

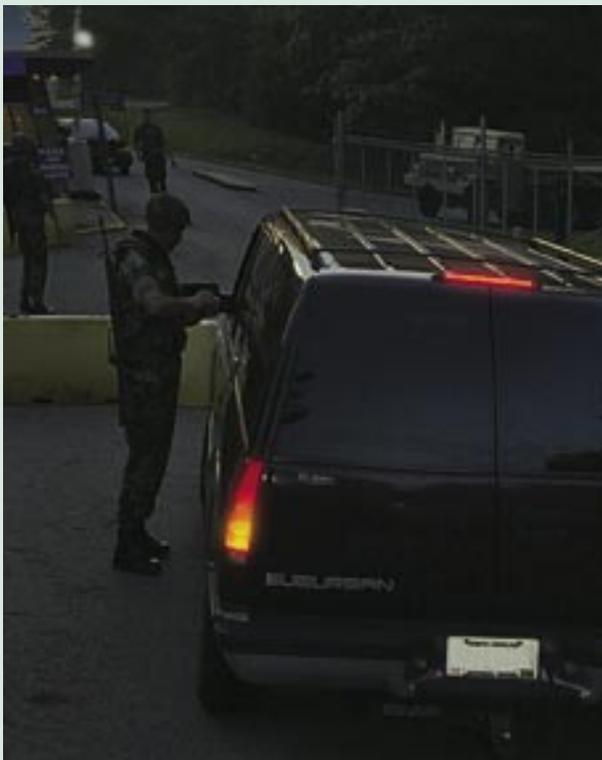
# a “Good Time”

I looked extra sharp that Monday morning, as you would expect from someone about to go “stand before the man.” I knew this day was one I would not forget. I, Cpl. Kevin Thompson, had taken advantage of that nightclub wristband, had broken the trust of my fellow Marines, had jeopardized the lives of my buddies, and had let down my command.

From the day Marines arrive in the fleet, we are told repeatedly not to drink if we're underage. We learn the horror stories of Marines before us who ruined their health and careers by making that mistake. We also constantly attend safety courses, where we see pictures of the horrendous car crashes caused by those who chose to drink and drive. The education about how alcohol can



You may have been the life of the party, but the party is over at this point, and you're likely wishing you had made some other choices earlier in the evening.



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take over our life and corrupt the lives of everyone around us is never-ending, but are we really listening and learning? Evidently not.

A 1995 DoD survey showed that more than 24 percent of Marine privates through lance corporals reported having had serious consequences the previous year from alcohol use. These incidents resulted in the loss of five or more workdays, DWI citations, fights, and injuries. That same report showed 25 Marines had died the year before in alcohol-related incidents, and the number steadily was increasing.

I can't help wondering what would have happened if I had had a few more drinks that night. How ugly could it really have gotten?

My brush with disaster has opened my eyes, and I hope my account of it here has opened yours, too. Learn to look out for yourself and to police one another. You're not doing any favors by turning a blind eye to underage drinkers. ■