

Cited for Stealing



That's right: I got a Class "C" misdemeanor for allegedly being the getaway driver in a great conspiracy to steal an orange traffic cone, the kind you see around road-construction sites. I gotta tell you: That's a bad idea, especially when the cones are owned by the city of Corpus Christi, Texas.

One month after reporting to VT-10 in Pensacola for NFO training, I went to Corpus Christi for my buddy's wedding. I arrived there by commercial air about 2300 and went to a rental-car agency and got an upgrade to a Mustang convertible. The rental agency told me it was a brand new car and not to get a scratch on it. "Piece of cake," I thought.

After a few hours of hanging out at the hotel bar with my buddy and his brother, we figured we'd go see what was happening on Chaparral Street downtown. By the time we got there, though, the club we wanted to hit was closing down.

Just as we were about to leave, we saw an instructor we knew from Kingsville. He had an apartment

upstairs and invited us up for a couple of drinks. My buddy and his brother both had mixed drinks, but I went for a soda. That decision would prove to be—almost literally—a lifesaver later that night.

After hanging out there for a while, my buddy, his brother, and I decided to go for burgers. We pulled up to a stop sign on Chaparral Street, where my buddy and his brother suddenly jumped out and started playing with some orange traffic cones. They had been put out so pedestrians could walk through the street from one bar to another.

Things started to go badly when my buddy and his brother brought the cones back to the car. I told them to drop the cones before they got into the car, but, being drunk, they were not listening. I kept trying to get them to cooperate as I pulled away slowly from the stop sign and headed to the burger joint. Halfway through the intersection, I looked in the rearview mirror to find the Corpus Christi 5-0 on our tail.

a Traffic Cone

At this point, I yelled, “Hey, lose those cones!” The cop pulled us over and asked the brother (in the back seat) to get out. Keep in mind that the Mustang is a two-door car, so my buddy (up front) started to get out to let his brother out. The cop told my buddy to stay in the car but once again ordered the brother to get out. As the brother reached down to undo his seat belt, the cop must have thought he was reaching for a weapon. The next thing I knew, the cop hauled the brother over the side of the open convertible, dragged him to the ground, and put cuffs on him.

At that point, my buddy got out of the car and yelled, “Hey what are you doing to my brother?”

At this point, I yelled, “Hey, lose those cones!”

Immediately, three other cops appeared, tackled my buddy, and started subduing him. I saw a cop hit him in the back of the head with a heavy flashlight. Another cop then came over to me, sitting in the driver’s seat, and asked me to get out of the car. Seeing what had happened to my two friends, my thoughts were, “Whatever you say, officer.”

One of Corpus Christi’s finest then put the cuffs on me and proceeded to search my pockets. When he found my military ID card, he turned to me and said, “You guys are officers; you should know better,” like he really needed to tell me that.

The police put my buddy and me in the back of a police cruiser and searched the rental car. I couldn’t help but think about how this was going to affect my career and my security-clearance application.

While we sat there, and in the midst of my buddy telling me how sorry he was, a tow truck pulled up next to the rental car I had been told to keep scratch-free. Eventually, the police pulled me out of the cruiser and explained that my buddy would have to spend the night in jail. The police also told me my buddy might not make it to his own wedding the next day. After I tried to explain our side of the story, the cop told me I could go sit in the rental car that they thankfully hadn’t towed away after all.

At that point, I looked around and saw there were five police cruisers and more cops than you

could swing a dead cat at on the scene. One look at the building next to me as I got back in my car told me why we had so much company. The sign read: “Corpus Christi Police Department.”

Eventually, a police captain came to the driver’s door and started asking me questions. During this inquiry, I heard another cop say, “Hey, these two are drunk; go check the driver.”

I couldn’t help thinking, “Thank God I only had a soda earlier!”

The cops then said they were going to release the brother into my custody, but my buddy would have to spend the night in jail for allegedly “resisting

arrest.” Shortly, though, the police decided to release both guys into my custody as long as we went straight back to our hotel. They gave all three of us Class “C” misdemeanors for theft, although the citation didn’t mention it was for stealing traffic cones.

A few months later, I was able to get all charges against me dropped, but my buddy and his brother weren’t as lucky. They both took deferred adjudication, had to pay over \$400 in fines, and spent 90 days on probation.

Several lessons were learned that night. First, never drink and drive. If I had had anything more than a soda, I would have been looking at a DUI and the end of a short Navy career. Second, always have a designated driver. Third, when you’re the designated driver and babysitting drunks, treat them like kids: Keep a short leash on them, and use the child-safety locks to keep them in the car. While it may be funny to play with traffic cones, don’t steal them—certainly not in front of a cop and not in front of a police station! 

Author’s name withheld by request.

For more info, go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traffic_cone or http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/020422fa_FACT2?020422fa_FACT2.