Watch Out for Those Head Hazards!

Illustration by DM3 Edwardo Proano, USS *Nimitz*

By AEAN(AW) Castillo

One morning during an Arabian Gulf deployment, supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, I learned why wrestling and skylarking are prohibited.

A friend and I were relaxing in berthing when something unexpected happened. It started as friendly jostling, became a pushing match, and escalated from there. Some shipmates playing cards began laughing and cheered us on as we now were wrestling. The match continued until my friend said, "We've got to stop, or I am going to be late for work."

Now comes the kicker. The wrestling ended without a hitch. My friend hurriedly climbed onto his rack to grab his boots but whacked his head against the side of his rack. Wham! I joined our shipmates in laughing—not the kind that follows a joke. Instead, we were laughing because we knew his head had taken a good (but what we thought to be otherwise harmless) whack.

I thought nothing more of it until he got down. I then saw blood and told him, "Find a mirror and see what is wrong with your head. You're bleeding." I was surprised to learn the cut was about two inches from his temple and was deep and long. I said I would take him to medical.

When the corpsman saw the injury, he immediately knew it needed stitches. Thirty minutes and six stitches later, my friend's head was sewn up, and off he went to work. Ironically, he was late, which was his initial concern and which is why he was in a hurry and thus injured himself.

I learned that horseplay and hurrying in a berthing area is as dangerous as on the flight deck or in any workspace. Hazards lurk around every corner. One always must be aware of his surroundings and be able to respond instantly to help a shipmate or himself.

Many things led to my friend getting hurt. Observing safety in berthing is as important as observing it in other areas of the ship. Had we not horsed around in berthing, he would not have had to worry about being late for work. He would have been more relaxed and better aware of his environment. More importantly, he probably would not have split open his "melon" since he could have taken his time getting his boots from his rack.

We all constantly must practice situational awareness and thwart potentially unforgiving hazards readily waiting to claim a victim on or off duty.

We regret not having the author's first name, initials or command. The Navy and Marine Corps White Pages Directory lists several E-3s with the same last name as the author. —Ed.