



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 25-13

Off-Duty Falls From Height

Many of us are familiar with fall protection concerns on-duty, but we seem to forget about it in very painful ways when we clock out for the day. Don't do the enemy's job for them. The following incidents are all examples of service members putting themselves in bad situations where they were destined to **fall**. Please read and keep in mind the next time you find yourself near any ledges or heights.

- Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-corpsman. A Navy hospital corpsman arrived home after a long day of work to find he didn't have his house key. Longing to get inside and relax, he decided to gain access to his abode via the balcony door. The Sailor climbed up the wall (*cue Spiderman theme song*) only to find the balcony door locked (*cue sad trombone*). As he climbed back down to reassess his situation, his Spidey powers failed and he fell, injuring his arm and hip (*cue even sadder trombone*). —*We understand the desperation to get inside your house, but calling a locksmith will likely take less time than this Sailor's trip to the ER.*
- Capturing Catwoman ... or just a regular cat. A Sailor received a call from a neighbor one evening reporting the Sailor's cat was on his roof. Concerned about poor Mitten's safety, the Sailor decided to climb from the balcony to the roof to apprehend the cat (*the cat was likely not in any danger*). Once on the roof he bent over to nab the frisky feline but lost his footing. He fell to the balcony below resulting in a contusion of his right rib and shoulder (*the report does not say if he ever caught his cat*). —*The report's author recommended using a ladder and appropriate PPE. We'd add a better option to simply let the cat figure its own way down. An old Dad saying is "You never see a cat skeleton in a tree." Cats are always better climbers than humans. If Mittens got up there, Mittens can get down – at least safer than you can.*
- Drinking and Juggling. A Marine was having a few drinks at a friend's apartment on the balcony. While leaning against the railing, the Marine's phone and glasses both fell over the edge. In a split-second decision, he lunged/leaned over the edge to catch the items (*we don't know which item he was prioritizing, as he caught neither*), leaned too far and fell to the concrete below. He required surgery to install a titanium rod in his leg and pins and metal plates in his ankle. —*While letting the objects fall risks a broken phone, that's better than a broken leg. We acknowledge alcohol likely played a factor in both the Marine's thought process and balance, so we also encourage having a few less drinks...and staying further from the railing if you are having those drinks.*
- Castle Catastrophe. A Sailor was visiting a foreign country and checking out ancient castles. Finding a wall with a lot of climbing grips, he couldn't resist scaling the castle (*because what do locals love more than Americans literally climbing their national treasures? Well karma hit back hard here*). The Sailor reached a height of about 12 feet before losing his grip. He fell headfirst, striking his face on the rocks below and fracturing his skull. He required multiple surgeries to relieve intracranial pressure and ultimately lost his right eye due to the injuries. —*That's horrible! There are specific places for rock climbing and specific gear climbers should use. Climbing random walls without PPE is asking to get hurt. Please learn from him.*
- Something about friends and jumping off a bridge. This incident is as tragic as it is foolish. A Marine went to a local beach house with friends for a day of drinking (*this isn't going to end well*). After three hours of partying, the Marine saw several others jumping from the 20-foot-high balcony into the water. He decided to



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partake in the fun (or as rational people might call it, insanity). He dove headfirst and landed in an abruptly shallower section of water - four feet deep to be exact. He injured his spinal cord, paralyzing him from the chest down. —*Never dive into a body of water you aren't familiar with, regardless of whether you witnessed others doing so. As this Marine can unfortunately attest to, you can't be certain of the depth. Please learn from this tragedy.*

- **Parkour = Par-fall.** Unfortunately, this tragic incident resulted in a Marine's death (*there's an escalating trend here*).

A group of Marines got together for a rooftop cookout involving alcohol. After a few drinks, one Marine decided to start leaping from roof to roof. The Marine jumped over several short walls which divided the rooftops, then leapt over what he thought was another rooftop divider. It appears he thought there was a lower platform on the other side. What he discovered was a 30-foot fall to his death. —*Rooftops are not a place for goofing around, no matter what you think your "parkour" capabilities are; even less so when alcohol is involved. This mishap serves as a tragic reminder. If a friend is doing something as unsafe as jumping from rooftops, please intervene.*

- **Fatal Humor.** A group of Marines started a night of drinking at 1830. They began at an off-base bar and found their way back to the barracks lounge at 0030 to continue drinking and shoot pool. After 30 minutes of billiards, one Marine missed a shot and went to the window joking he was going to jump from embarrassment at missing such an easy shot. To emphasize his joke, he leaned out the window but lost his balance and fell to the second-floor awning. The group of inebriated Marines rushed to the second floor and onto the awning to provide lifesaving treatment but were unsuccessful. Military police and paramedics arrived and took over, but the Marine died on scene. Post-mortem medical assessment found he had a BAC of 0.214% at the time of the incident. —*There comes a point when it's time to call it a night. It is most certainly before you reach this level of intoxication. While we commend this Marine's friends for trying to save his life, this was ultimately more dangerous, especially considering their similar insobriety. A better scenario would have been if he was put to bed early rather than a group of drunk Marines climbing onto a window awning trying to save him in an emergency.*

Key Takeaways

While we may sound harsh in our commentary of these mishaps, we're deeply sympathetic to the severity of these incidents. These Sailors and Marines sustained life-altering injuries or worse. Our intent here – harsh or not -- is to highlight to the rest of us that each of these mishaps was entirely avoidable. What was missing was sound judgement. We implore you to keep this and the following guidance in mind.

1. Keep your feet on the ground. Several of these incidents were caused by the service members unnecessarily climbing heights. There may be times you need to access your roof or other high-level feature, but if you can avoid that option, please do.

2. If you need to climb to height, do it right. If you do need to access a high-level area, do it properly. This means using a ladder or other stable means of access (*not climbing your balcony wall*). Be conscious of other pertinent safety measures like ropes and harnesses (*fall protection doesn't only apply while on duty*). Have a safety buddy present (*if you fall from your roof, you don't want to have to crawl to your neighbor's house to get help*).

3. Know when to quit (talking about alcohol, obviously). Too many of these incidents were the result of alcohol-enabled poor judgement. There is a difference between enjoying a few drinks with friends and putting yourself in a bad situation. This is a point when looking out for your fellow Sailor or Marine becomes important. Alcohol impairs judgement. If you notice a friend is going over the top, it might be time to cut them off.

And remember, "Let's be careful out there."