

Officer of the Day

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In my story on “Impedance Matching,” I told you that I was on a ship making its way from Honolulu to a new duty assignment at the Pacific Fleet Command Headquarters in Oakland, California on San Francisco Bay, and that I would be in charge of electron tube storage.

Well, in any branch of military service, including the Navy, other assignments come to you (often on a rotational basis) in addition to your main responsibility.

A surprisingly big one came to me. I’ll tell you about it after a short diversion.

When I was Bishop of our ward, my original councilors were Bill Woolf and Reese Hansen. Later on, Reese was called to be a councilor in a BYU stake presidency and Clayton Conn was called to replace him.

Just after the Sacrament Service had ended, we remembered that the First Presidency, in a letter, had asked us to say a few words in support of the men and women who serve in the military units of our country. They had made the same request in a previous year. We got into a little discussion concerning who spoke to this subject last year. No one could remember so my councilors elected me to do it. I gave an impromptu talk concerning the opportunity, responsibility, and personal growth that come to those who serve in the military by recounting one of my own experiences.

In the Navy, you will be called to be “Officer of the Day” on a rotational basis. This can be aboard ship or in an office on dry land. Being Officer of the Day does not necessarily occur during the daytime. As a matter of fact, junior officers will usually get the nighttime shifts.

I was a 26-year-old Ensign, the bottom rung of officer status, yet I was called to be Officer of the Day for a 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. shift.

I showed up at the Command Headquarters room at the appointed hour and met an assigned Duty Officer who happened to hold the office of Commander. He was supposed to be my backup in case of trouble, but in terse, Navy-type language ordered, “Hall I’m going to bed in this next-door bedroom and whatever happens tonight, you had better! @#\$\$% not disturb me!” There I was, on my own, officer in charge of the Navy base and the Pacific Fleet.

Where else in the world could a 26-year-old get this kind of responsibility?

I had two problems that night. First off, a group of drunken Marine officers in a Jeep crashed through the security gate at our base at a high rate of speed. They were lucky the MP’s (military police) didn’t shoot them. If the war hadn’t been over, they might have. The MP’s took off after them in their own Jeeps and, after a wild chase through the base, managed to capture and handcuff them.

Then the MP’s called and asked what they wanted me to do with them. A military officer is not only an officer; he is an officer and a gentleman.

I didn’t know the rules on this kind of a problem and, of course, did not want to reap the dire destruction threatened by my backup officer if I were to disturb his sleep.

If the Marines had not been officers, I know that I could have thrown them in the brig (Navy jail), but I wasn’t sure that I could do that to officers.

So I ordered the MP’s to put them in sickbay (military hospital) and tie them in bed until they sobered up the next morning.

The second problem was one of concern because of a hurricane and large tidal waves that were developing in the west Pacific Ocean. The problem was straight forward, but took time. All ships in the area had to be warned of the situation. This was accomplished shortly before my stint as Officer of the Day was ending and my replacement arrived.

I've often wondered how comfortable the President of the United States would have been if he knew that a young farm kid from Marriott had been in charge of the Navy base and the entire Pacific Fleet that night!

Certain high-ranking officers can override the decision of the Officer of the Day. In my situation, however, the commander had abrogated any responsibility that he had and there were no other commissioned officers in the command room.

The staff that I had to work with during my OD assignment consisted of about 50 permanent civilian employees manning communications and other electronic equipment plus a couple of petty officers (non-commissioned officers).