

“GLOBAL-21”

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Nothing is more soothing than the cool relief of porcelain after a good night of celebrating. I am 18, just off liberty in Naples, Italy; lying on the floor of the ships head (restroom) and it feels great. I had one of those legendary nights spent in a non-PC sort of way. Granted, I hadn't sworn off drinking yet, but it was coming before sunrise. Europe was great, I could legally drink under 21, command sanctioned usually. Historically speaking, drinking has always been part of the military, and the Coast Guard is not an exception. But with today's societal beliefs and laws, drinking alcohol has become a career buster. The "way we always did it" is no more. A solution to help fight alcohol related problems in the Coast Guard is the Global-21 initiative. Global-21 prohibits any member under the age of 21 to drink, regardless of the country. In the past, the command had discretion, so if the Cutter (ship) pulled into Mexico you could drink, but in the US, you could not. The complaint against Global-21 is obvious; the Coast Guard cannot set the drinking policy for its members in other countries. The answer for Global-21 is not as obvious, because it involves career choices, U.S. laws, personnel safety, and societal acceptance. We have a responsibility to our Sailors to ensure they don't ruin their careers before getting started.

Never, and I mean never, have liberty-call on a small, resort Mediterranean island, for retirees, after 40 days underway. We unleashed 400 squids and jarheads onto an island with a population of about 3000. All had to be back by mid-night, unfortunately, the bars closed at 2200. Gravity works well on the cliff side of the island, we proved Newton's 1st law of motion more than once, and the Command proved his 3rd Law the next morning, for every action... We survivors of our youthful indiscretions simply write it off as, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger". I always hear how much smarter kids are today and I imagine that they will hear the same thing when they are my age. Even so, they tend to make the same mistakes. The difference is what I could get away with, they can't. A DUI when I was 19 would have got me a "...take it

easy...” from the Cop and a good sea story for the crew, now it would set me back \$4000 in legal fees alone. That doesn't count career losses. Society has turned around on the way they look upon alcohol. Yet we have not forbade alcohol for those over 20, just the under 21 crowd. Statistically, 21-25 year-olds have the highest rate of alcohol incidences and is rising. Why don't we pass a policy that eliminates alcohol for everyone in the Coast Guard? Isn't that the same as passing Global-21 on the 18-20 year-olds? Ah, the question gets bigger.

The legal age for drinking in all 50 States is 21, not so in Mexico and Canada. However, if a person is intoxicated on US soil and not of legal age, they have broken the law. When an intoxicated member under 21 returns from Mexico or Canada he or she has violated US Law. For that matter, any Coast Guard Cutter is legally US soil and by-law anyone intoxicated underage is in violation of the law, something Commands have ignored for years. So the precedence-of-law is set for Cutters to prevent drinking of underage Coasties while in foreign ports. Now the only thing to address is travel to foreign countries on leave or liberty.

Alcohol and youth has always been a bad combination. It doesn't have to be a liberty port-of-call; Coasties can just as easily jump the boarder to either Mexico or Canada where drinking at 18 is legal. In 2004, we lost two shipmates to the free side of hotel balconies, both had jumped the border to Canada, were underage, and alcohol was a factor. What choice did they have? They couldn't drink here and they couldn't return under the influence to US soil. Would Global-21 prevented it or would they have done it anyway? Hard to tell, but I believe that most Coasties have a sense of discipline to rules and regulations. This becomes a safety issue when young service members border jump to drink. With motorcycle safety, the military mandates riders to wear helmets (and Kevlar body armor) when riding both on and off installations, on leave and liberty, and any other time the bike is operational. This is just another blanket rule to keep our

Coasties safe, the issue of age discrimination is for the lawyers, and maybe with Global-21 in place the recruiters would start out with 2 less goals to fill in 2005.

With new recruits in training, let's look at the military societal issue. I have always said the military makes the best Functional Alcoholics. The military doesn't let its members call in sick. So you have to come to work and actually, work; usually the worst possible job once the boss is aware of the previous night's antics. Shaky Jake was on my 1st Navy ship. He got the nickname because after 3 days underway, old Jake would start trembling. He would continue trembling for weeks until we pulled into port and then, puff, solid. In the Coast Guard, we work in small units and become like a family. Most young people are looking for acceptance and a crew of 50 Coasties makes a comfortable family. Get underway for 3 months with that crew and bonds will form. These bonds will form both underway and on liberty. A lot of that liberty time maybe spent at bars. When they get back to the States, these 18-20 year-olds can no longer go to the bars, even though their over 21 friends do. When they get together at each others houses the alcohol issue will again raise, the over 20 crowd wants to drink, under 21 can't. They become societal outcasts from the unit. Their choice is to give up their friends or drink. Most head down the wrong path. Global-21 prevents the relationship in the 1st place, so the social order of acceptance is set from the beginning. This creates less social problems and, hopefully, better 1st time retention.

Retention is a measurable metric that we use all the time. In some cases, it can reflect on the Command at the unit if retention swings to the extreme in either direction. Whether, Global-21 would ultimately increase the retention is for future debates. What it will do is place a tasking on all Commands to provide underage options for their shipmates, from researching local resources to responsible Command sponsored events.

So what are our courses-of-action (COA)? We need to look first at the Coast Values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. Honor is how we conduct ourselves as individuals, units, and Coast Guard. Honor is the foundation of our service, which other values stand upon. Respect covers: respect for ourselves as well as for our shipmates. ‘Will you respect me in the morning?’ is a phrase we should all carry. If I am always apologizing, then it is time to check that value. Finally, the top stone, Devotion to Duty is where the wrench hits the deck plates. It shows us what we look like in the mirror. Is the mission complete? Did we give it our all or just get-by for the paycheck? Values are what we stand on, lose one and we lose the horizon.

Instituting Global-21 Coast Guard wide is the 1st COA that we can take. This action, while causing some initial problems with the Old Guard (those before us) will eventually become “the way we always did it”. With alcohol, I think this is the best solution from both a value aspect as well as a financial concern. The less chance of an alcohol related incident by a member equals less cost to the member, the Coast Guard, and eventually the public.

The 2nd COA is ban alcohol for the entire Coast Guard. While this would certainly reduce the alcohol problems, it would also strike null the value of respect to our members. Like prohibition, this COA would place the foundation of our Honor on a precarious perch. I believe it would also create a large exodus from the service, which again will eventually cost taxpayer money to rehire and retrain.

Lastly, do nothing and maintain the status quo; we would survive like we have since the beginning. However, in the beginning there wasn’t CNN, FOX, etc. to magnify every tiny situation, and then expand it into a breaking news focal point. The entertainment industry says any exposure is good exposure, not so for the government. The one Coastie, who kills someone in a DUI, expands into the entire Coast Guard having alcohol problems. To the media, each

individual Coastie is a macro-representation of the whole Coast Guard. After sufficient media hits, we again lose our foundation, Honor of the Coast Guard in the public's perception.

So there are our choices. We will survive regardless of the choice. The Coast Guard is a government program and everyone knows how hard it is to get rid of one. But to Honor and Respect our shipmates, we need to take positive action and institute Global-21 for the future of the Coast Guard. Let us ensure that the next goal the recruiters land won't have their careers plummeting from the free side of a balcony.