



PCU George H.W. Bush Sailors Simulate Drunk Driving

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NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (NNS) -- Sailors from Pre-commissioning Unit (PCU) George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) experienced the danger of driving under the influence of alcohol without leaving the safety of Huntington Hall's gymnasium June 5 and 6.

A \$2.5 million drunk driving simulator and display called "Save a Life Tour" travels to military installations as well as schools and colleges around the country year-round. The Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program sponsored the visit.

The "Save a Life Tour" senior manager, Brian Beldyga, lost his fiancée in a drunk-driving incident. Beldyga hits people hard with an in-your-face attitude as he instructs Sailors during a 30-minute demonstration on the affects of drinking and driving.

After a brief introduction, Beldyga let 219 Bush Sailors take the "wheel" of the simulator for three minutes. During the "drive" control of the car becomes delayed and peripheral vision becomes fuzzy as Sailors simulate going from sober to a blood-alcohol content of 0.34, more than three times the legal limit in most states.

"I couldn't focus at all," said Culinary Specialist Seaman Recruit Leonard Mason. "Nothing I could do could correct what the simulator does."

Beldyga said that about 70 percent of drunk-driving fatalities are the result of tunnel vision, a narrowing of the eye's focus as blood-alcohol levels increase. The result, he said, is less concentration on what is happening outside the peripheral area of the driver's lane. "Save A Life Tour" simulates this tunnel vision to give a startling wake-up of how impaired a driver can become while under the influence.

"It really feels like you're operating something impaired," said PCU Bush Executive Officer, Cmdr. Thom Burke. "The simulator reminds [us] not only that driving drunk is dangerous, but that you really need to be checking the mirrors and looking around."

"It was hard. Man it was hard. It was not a joke," said Personnel Specialist 3rd Class Paul Smith. "Here, we can all laugh, but there, crashing into a building is not funny."

Not that the Sailors were left to crash and burn, so to speak. Beldyga stood by their sides and showed them how to beat the machine.

"I tell them how to beat the simulator, and give them every opportunity to beat it," Beldyga said. "They can't, and if you can't it after me helping you while you're sober, then don't sit there and say you can go out and do it in real life."

Bush safety officer, Cmdr. David Nelsen, was enthusiastic about the impact "Save A Life Tour" makes, especially two graphic videos in the program that show drunk driving victims, some of which are in the operating room of a hospital emergency ward.

"We want to show our Sailors, graphically, the risk of drinking and driving," Nelsen said.

The message got through to Mason, who said he doesn't want to go out to have a drink, but, if he does, he won't even consider driving.

"You could mess your car up or someone else's car, or someone else's life. That's even worse," he said.

Beldyga sums up "Save A Life Tour's" message: "Be there for your friends. Take their keys and don't let them drive. It's as simple as that."

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