

Be Vigilant When Tired and in Potentially Hostile Lands

By Lt. J. B. Eichelbaum

The clock on the moving map display indicated local time was 0230 and the temperature was 103 degrees Fahrenheit. After traveling 30-plus hours, our chartered military transport finally had touched down at the military airfield in the island country of Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf. There had been three aircrew changes, but we passengers had crossed seven time zones in just over 30 hours, and our circadian rhythms were upside down.

Weary from the journey, the hundred or so of us followed the guards to the collection area where we would be split into groups going to different Navy ships in the gulf. Sixty of us were to fly to the USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68) early the next morning aboard a C-2A Greyhound aircraft. We were told hotel rooms

had been reserved for us, and all we had to do was clear customs and board a bus outside the gate. Almost two hours later, we finally gathered outside the base. We now were outside the protection the U.S. military compound had offered. We also were on the wrong side of the M-16s and 50-caliber weapons posted at the base checkpoint.

Force protection in Bahrain was in full swing and curfews were in place. Forming large groups of military members in one place was prohibited, especially in clubs and bars serving alcohol and where a person's awareness is diminished.

Meanwhile, there we were—three busloads of troops including 10 officers, along with a reception committee with a botched plan—waiting outside

Always keep your head on a swivel and your wits about you.

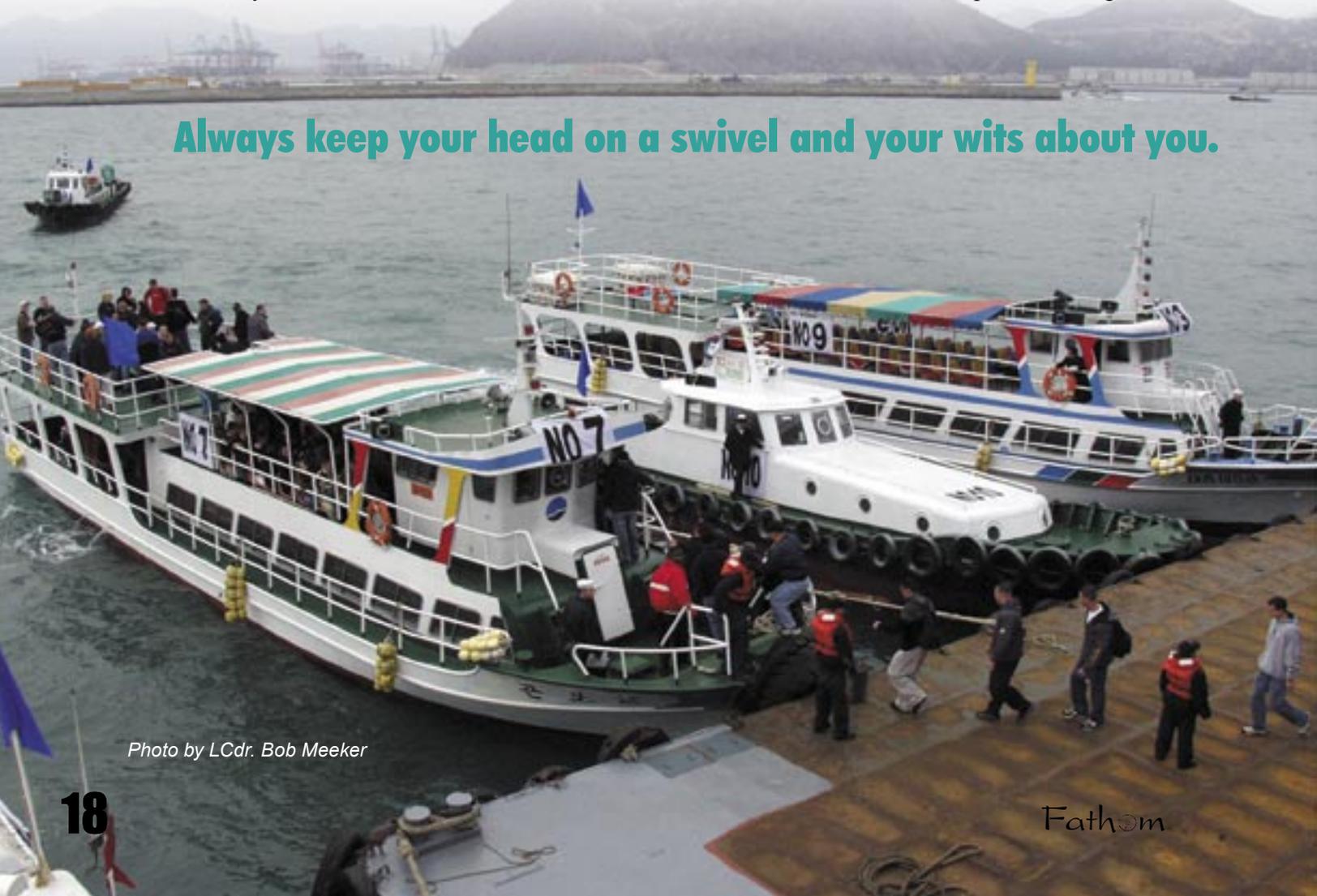


Photo by LCdr. Bob Meeker

the base. Policy dictated a scheduled early morning flight to a ship in the gulf rendered one ineligible for reimbursement for a night's stay in a hotel. Meanwhile, 95 percent of our weary group who had waited patiently to clear customs with thoughts of a shower, some clean clothes, and maybe a couple hours of shuteye, let the bad news sink in. We got off the buses.

We now became a hoard of service members out past curfew, on a dimly lit street in a region where the U.S. military is not so popular, wandering aimlessly with no place to go. We also had very little guidance, since group coordinators struggled to determine what to do. Most of our group returned to base and slept in the waiting area. A few, including me, opted to pay for the hotel, where more risks awaited.

The hotel we chose decided it would be most convenient for us all to stay on the same floor and in the same wing. We now were exhausted and were

individually checking in, unaware of how the hotel was "conveniently" grouping us. After all, it was 0430, and few of us had any wits left about us so we didn't question the arrangement.

About an hour later, when I heard a man next door began chanting, I found myself wondering which way I would jump if the wall suddenly exploded. We should have been separated to minimize losses had a drastic situation [*an anti-American terrorist act*] taken place. We were not attacked that night, but no one ever will know if we were targeted.

Every now and again, we read or see reports about bombs targeting a specific group detonated in public places: nightclubs in Bali and cafés in Israel, to name a few. Terrorism is real, and force protection is no laughing matter.

Always keep your head on a swivel and your wits about you. Be ever vigilant of your surroundings, no matter where you are, but especially when you're in unfamiliar territory in what could be a hostile land. ☹



The July-September 2003 edition of *Fathom* had the article, "New Ear Plugs Are Now Available," that discussed the three sizes of disposable foam, insert-type ear plugs currently available and authorized. The Noise Reduction Ratings (NRR) cited for the new Sound Guard plugs (19.1 dB NRR) and for the old EAR ear plugs (29 dB NRR) give the false impression the new ear plugs are less protective than the old. This is not the case, as the two brands of plugs—when correctly worn—perform essentially the same. The test methods themselves used for each brand differed significantly. Older ear plug stocks can be used until exhausted. Also, readers are asked to disregard the final paragraph in the article. The following link provides additional clarification and noise reduction ratings for other various available DoD-tested hearing-protection devices: <http://www-nehc.med/HPDupdateweb.doc>.

Fathom regrets any confusion or inconvenience resulting from the article. ☹

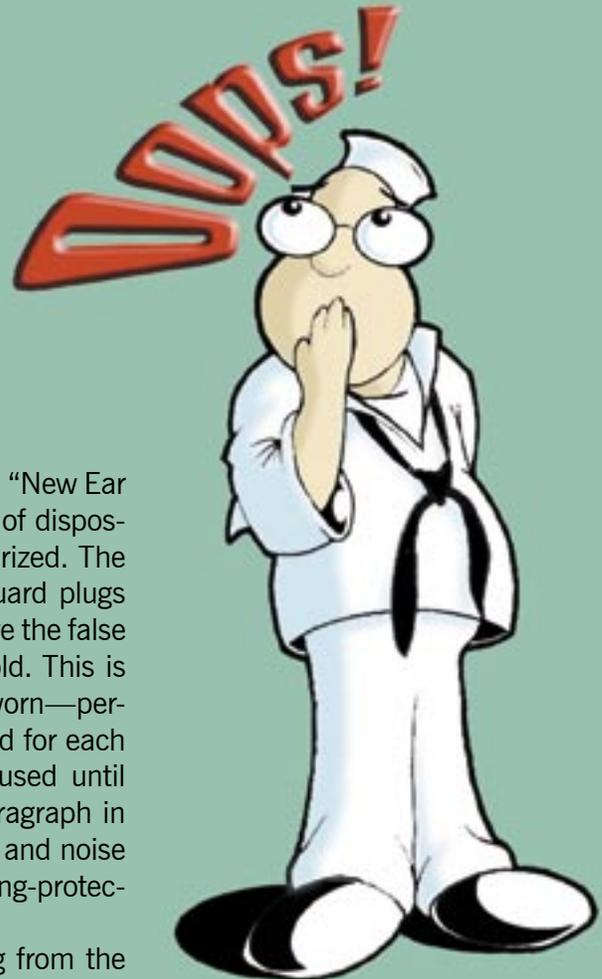


Illustration by DM3 Edwardo Proano, USS *Nimitz*