Three Long Island ice teas later... A post scriptum to sexual assault training

By Chaplain Norbert Karava

One of the obvious and most cited dangers of the influence of alcohol is what is referred to as impairment or loss of judgment. It does not take reading the Navy Times to realize that countless people have lost their careers, good names, marriages, children, families, friends, fortunes, liberty, limbs and lives making reckless and completely uncharacteristic decisions – we all know this in ambit of our personal experience and acquaintances.

Intoxication has many stages and in most of them, the capacity of logical and analytical reasoning is not impaired. Many convincingly argue (Russian chess players, for example, with the wins to prove it) that in the early stages of intoxication, the analytical and logical powers are enhanced because the mind is freed from the distraction of our usual inhibitions. To be sure, in the latter stages of intoxication, analytical and logical reasoning, together with memory and even consciousness are compromised, but this is usually not when we make our catastrophically bad decisions. In what sense therefore, is our judgment so dangerously impaired when we are blissfully buzzed but nonetheless able to run the gamut of differential calculus? I suggest that merely weakened inhibitions of an emotional nature do not explain our ability to make the astoundingly stupid and unrealistic decisions we are capable of making, and worse, with logical and analytical reasoning intact, executing in the state of the blissful buzz.

Let us put emphasis on the word "unrealistic." We have built our computers much like our own minds: We have our own mental applications (language skills, analytical and logical reasoning, space relations, etc) that, like in a computer, cannot function without an environment. In the computer, the environment in which the applications function is the OS. For the human mind, the OS for our various mental applications is what I refer to as our "ambient sense of reality." It is in the state of the blissful buzz that the logical and analytical operations of the mind are intact, but the ambient sense of reality has been compromised. In this state, the mind still understands the meaning of the word "impossible" but this particular operation of the mind now takes place outside the complex of the other various operations of the mind that situate it in the concrete realities of time, space, matter and even the sense of being, in other words, the ambient sense of reality. And so, to an ever greater degree, the mind knows the meaning of the word "impossible" but loses the sense of impossibility itself.

Having put ourselves into this blissful state of a compromised sense of ambient reality, can it be argued that our moral responsibility is diminished or even vacated? The traditional answer has been in the negative and this for two reasons: Even though its sense of ambient reality has been compromised, the logical and analytical functions of the mind remain intact. The mind very clearly, perhaps even more clearly than usual, knows that certain proposed behaviors are violations of moral norms as well as legal proscriptions, and therefore "wrong," and knows the meaning of "wrong" in relation to these norms and proscriptions. It has lost however, to varying degrees, the sense of wrongness itself. And so, even though a person does not enjoy his usual sense of reality, he very clearly knows that his choices are "wrong." Therefore, he remains capable of consent and therefore culpable. But what if a man's state of intoxication is so acute that not only is his ability to recognize his actions as violations of moral and legal norms compromised, but even his awareness of himself as the perpetrator of his own acts eclipsed? How, in such a case, can a person be reckoned as capable of consent? And this brings us to the second reason why traditional systems of morality consider a man culpable for subsequent acts committed even in a state of intoxication that certainly preclude the capability of consent.

The person who chooses to become intoxicated also chooses both the necessary and possible implications inherent in the state of intoxication, which include, among other things, the possibility of making decisions while not being capable of informed consent. That our judgment will be impaired when we get drunk is common knowledge before we get drunk. Therefore we are responsible for putting ourselves in the state of compromised judgment which must include responsibility for the things we will do while in the state of impaired judgment, even though during the time of our impaired judgment we are not capable of informed consent. And so, a person is justly reckoned as responsible for subsequent acts committed in the state of consent-neutralizing intoxication.

In view of this second reason, the state justly punishes people who are so intoxicated that they are certainly not capable of informed consent when they get in their cars and choose to drive home, killing pedestrians before crashing into the local Quickie Mart..

In view of this, it seems to me that in the context of our alarm with an expanding epidemic of sexual assault in the Armed Forces, certain schools of thought tending to regard the victims of assault while under the influence of alcohol as incapable of consent to acts of sexual intimacy as unfortunate and short-sighted. If you are considered responsible for the choice of driving your car while so intoxicated that you do not know your right hand from your left, how can you not be expected to take responsibility for your expressed consent to sexual acts after 3 Long Island ice teas? Does your choice to drink yourself into oblivion discharge you from your responsibility to your own physical and sexual well-being? Apart from the issue of your partner's responsibility for possibly exploiting your self-imposed vulnerability, when you wake up the morning after and decide that "yes" really meant "no," should you not be held responsible for having said "yes" because you chose to put yourself in a state wherein there was no difference between "yes" and "no?" And why should this be limited to consent to sexual acts? By this logic why shouldn't 3 Long Island ice teas place us in a moral neutral zone, where, as reckoned incapable of consent, none of our acts have any moral meaning and we are not to be held accountable for any of them?

Look as closely as we might at the bottom of the bottle, we shall see no get out of jail free card, whether we call it "incapable of consent" or anything else.

Royal Australian Navy officers visit *George Washington*

By MC3 Marissa Beasley,
***USS George Washington* Public Affairs**

PHILIPPINE SEA – Royal Australian Navy (RAN) officers were working side-by-side with their *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) counterparts July 15-26.

Sub-lieutenants Mitchell Kerr, Adam Powell, Daniel Todd and Matthew Raynar are assigned to multi-product replenishment oiler HMAS Success (OR 304) and will train with *George Washington*'s crew and observe the day-to-day operations of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier.

The RAN officers are equivalent to a U.S. Navy lieutenant junior grade and are surface warfare officers, who are trained to work in the Bridge aboard Australian warships.

"Our officer training is six months of basic training, leadership programs, naval history and 'Sailorization,'" said Sub-Lt. Mitchell Kerr. "Once you finish basic training, we go to our designated school. It can take anywhere from two and one- half to three years to become a qualified maritime warfare officer."

Unlike U.S. Naval officers, who stand bridge watch as a qualification, the officers visiting from the Australian navy have exclusive training in working on the bridge with the official title of Bridge Officer for the Bridge Team.

"On the Success we have auxiliary duties as well as our normal bridge duties," said Sub-lieutenant Daniel Todd. "We can stand anything from security watches, to diving watches but we are primarily trained to work on the bridge."

Although both navies have many things in common, there are some aspects that make the Australian navy very different.

In 1982, the RAN decommissioned its last aircraft carrier, the Majestic-class HMAS Melbourne (R21). For the four visiting officers, spending time on an aircraft carrier is a new experience.

"It's pretty massive, like one of those things you see on television but when you see it close up you're in awe of how big it actually is," said Sub-lieutenant Adam Powell.

While on *George Washington*, Australian officers will be observing flight operations and replenishments-at-sea on a much larger naval vessel than they are used to.

"The most impressive thing that we have seen so far is the aircraft and the amount of power they can put out," said Powell. "The only pilots we have right now are helicopter pilots and the other aircraft we have are flown by the air force."

The Australian officers were not only impressed with flight operations and the smooth flow of the ship's navigation, but by the professionalism and willingness to help that was displayed by *George Washington*'s Sailors.

"When we came here we realized how professional and dedicated the Sailors are to their work," said Kerr. " It's impressive how friendly everyone has been, Sailors will literally drop their tools and anything they are doing to help you out and take you to where you need to go, we have really enjoyed our time here."