

防不勝防

fang2 bu2 sheng4 fang2

A police officer was in serious condition in hospital after being struck by a police cruiser in Mississauga, Ontario. The cruiser was, at the time, responding to a call about a breaking and entering in progress at a nearby house.

An internal investigation has been launched to find out exactly what happened, including the speed of the vehicle. But the police said the cruiser was not in pursuit of suspects at the time.

The job of a policeman is inherently dangerous, so officers have to be vigilant for dangers as they carry out their duties.

But their attention would be on armed suspects instead of fellow officers. So when an officer is hurt by a colleague, it is a danger that can be described as “防不勝防” (*fang2 bu2 sheng4 fang2*).

“防” (*fang2*) is “to guard against,” “to prevent,” “to defend,” “不” (*bu2*) “no,” “not,” “勝” (*sheng4*) “to win,” “to triumph,” “to be competent enough.” Literally,

Idiom by Lon Yan

the idiom is “not competent enough to guard against even if you try to guard against it.”

“防不勝防” (*fang2 bu2 sheng4 fang2*) means “impossible to guard against,” “you can’t guard against it,” “impossible to defend effectively.”

The term “friendly fire” is rather ironical. When you are fired upon, it is no laughing matter no matter where the bullet is coming from. A bullet is never friendly when it meets the human body.

Friendly fire refers to bullets that are fired mistakenly by a fellow soldier or policeman at someone who is on the same side, which is another kind of danger that is “防不勝防” (*fang2 bu2 sheng4 fang2*).

Terms containing the character “防” (*fang2*) include:

防止 (*fang2 zhi3*) – to prevent; to avoid; to avert

防火 (*fang2 huo3*) – fire prevention; fireproof

防水 (*fang2 shui3*) – water repellent; waterproof

防疫 (*fang2 yi4*) – epidemic prevention or control