

# Puerto Rican on Ice

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It started innocently enough: Two other junior officers and I were en route to the galley at zero dark 30, intent on filling our bellies before a full day of briefs and flying. Our squadron was participating in Cope Thunder exercises, flying out of Eielson AFB just south of Fairbanks, Alaska. It was our third day on

control of the van, and it headed straight for a curb.

After the loud bang that followed and a complaint from one of the passengers that he had jammed his knee into the dash, I parked the van. I was thankful no one had been injured seriously but dreaded the fact I had become the guy who wrecked the van on day three of a three-week det. Further inspection of the vehicle revealed the wheel was canted inward, and it had to be towed back to the rental agency.

As funny as the “who let the Puerto Rican drive on ice” comments from my squadronmates were, they rang true. There were three of us in the van that morning, and the chances are good that both passengers had more experience in driving on ice than I did. One is from New York, and the other is from Cleveland. Even if the three of us shared the same level of experience, I should have made a conscious effort to slow down as I entered the parking lot.

Thinking back to what turned out to be a minor crash, I realize that, with a little more speed or less attention, the results could have been a lot worse. One of us could have been hurt seriously. **S**

*The author was assigned to VAQ-138 when he wrote this story.*

## Resources:

- November Accident Narrative, [http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/seasonal/sdh/presentations/Pictures\\_from\\_WI\\_Nov07\\_Mishap.ppt](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/seasonal/sdh/presentations/Pictures_from_WI_Nov07_Mishap.ppt)
- Winter Holiday Hazards, <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/safetips/a-m/holidayhazards-p.htm>
- Checklist & Tips for Safe Winter Driving, [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/Seasonal\\_Advisories/WinterDriving2005/](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/Seasonal_Advisories/WinterDriving2005/)
- Tips for Safe Winter Driving, [www.osha.gov/Publications/SafeDriving.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/SafeDriving.pdf)

detachment. Flights had been suspended the previous day because of freezing rain and heavy snowfall, which made for unfavorable flying conditions, even in Alaska.

None of us was thinking about the weather when we jumped in our rental van and set off for breakfast. Born and reared in the Caribbean, based out of Whidbey Island, and having spent the last winter on deployment, I hadn't driven in winter conditions for more than a year. I had very little experience driving on icy roads.

You undoubtedly can see where this story is headed. We always discuss ORM, and I've always said ORM is just a new way of pronouncing “common sense,” but I failed to follow through with either this dreary morning. So, there we were, heading to the galley, driving at what I mistakenly considered a “safe speed.” As I turned into the galley's parking lot, I lost

