

# A Nearly Horrible Disaster

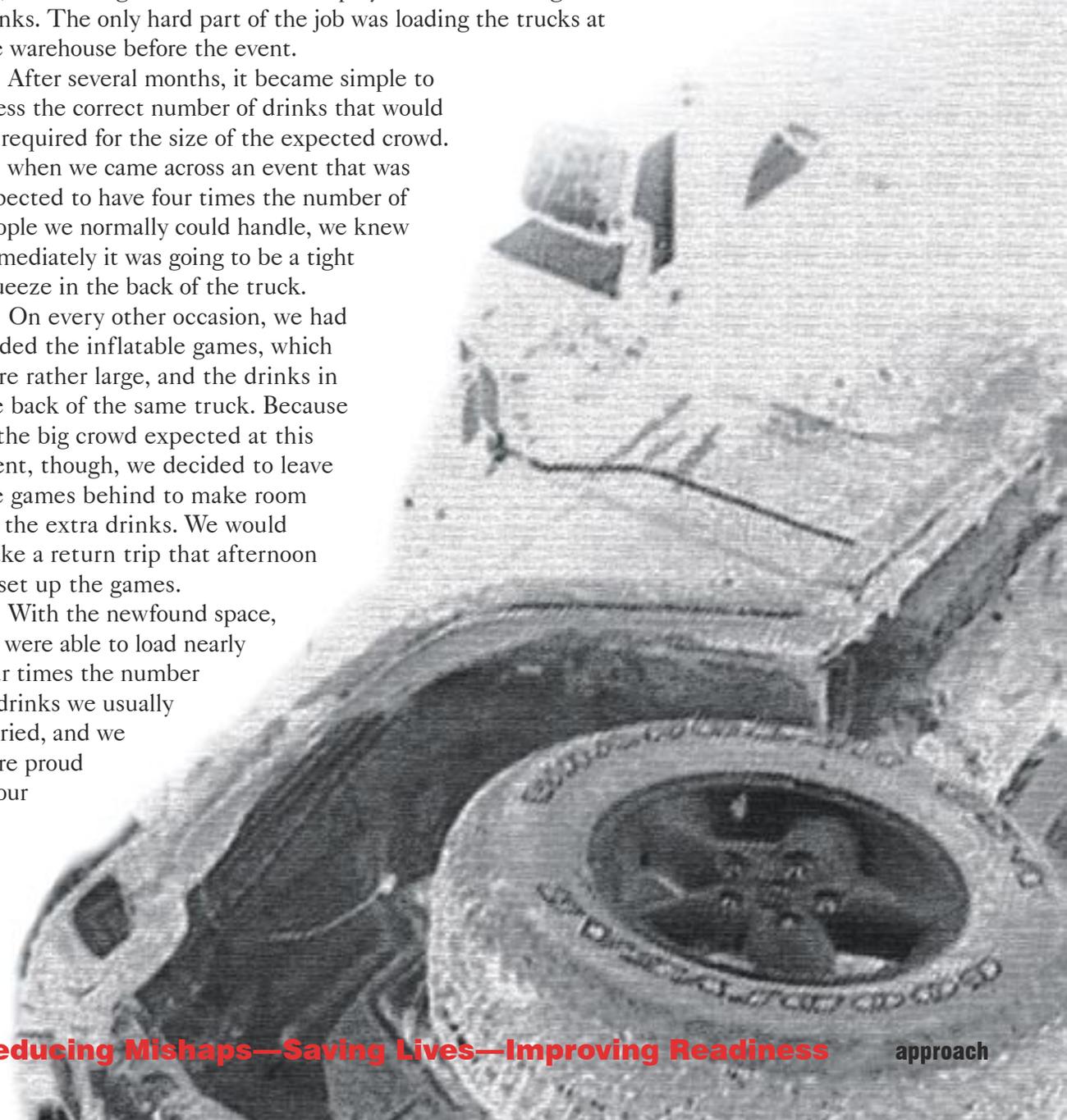
By Lt. Brian Taylor

One summer during college, I worked as a promotions supervisor for a large sports-drink company. My job primarily entailed showing up at major sporting events around the city and setting up big, inflatable games for children to play on while handing out free drinks. The only hard part of the job was loading the trucks at the warehouse before the event.

After several months, it became simple to guess the correct number of drinks that would be required for the size of the expected crowd. So, when we came across an event that was expected to have four times the number of people we normally could handle, we knew immediately it was going to be a tight squeeze in the back of the truck.

On every other occasion, we had loaded the inflatable games, which were rather large, and the drinks in the back of the same truck. Because of the big crowd expected at this event, though, we decided to leave the games behind to make room for the extra drinks. We would make a return trip that afternoon to set up the games.

With the newfound space, we were able to load nearly four times the number of drinks we usually carried, and we were proud of our



accomplishment. One thing we failed to comprehend, however, was the extra drinks weighed six times what the games did—something that would come into play later on.

After we had locked up the truck, my friend and I slapped each other on the back for what we thought was an impressive loading job and jumped in the cab. As we began to drive away, we heard a constant grinding sound from the rear of the truck. I pulled over, and, when we

As we turned onto the ramp, I gave the truck a little extra gas to get up some speed, and we heard a loud crash from the back, as some of the drinks shifted aft.

walked around the vehicle, we noticed the rear mud flaps were dragging the ground. We knew the truck was a little overloaded, but this event was very important, and it was only 6 miles away.

We were getting short on time, and, knowing we couldn't let the flaps drag the entire way, we opted for the fastest solution: remove the mud flaps. Within two minutes, the flaps were in the cab, and we were on our way. It soon became clear we would be late if we stayed on the back roads, so we headed to the freeway.

While slowing at the stoplight that would lead us onto the freeway, I noticed the truck took much longer than usual to slow down. I laughingly remarked we'd better make sure our seat belts were on tight. As we turned onto the ramp, I gave the truck a little extra gas to get up some speed, and we heard a loud crash from the back, as some of the drinks shifted aft. Neither of us was as concerned about the weight shift as much as we were happy the bottles were made of plastic and probably hadn't broken.

We weren't on the freeway for more than a minute when I tried to accelerate and switch lanes to get to our exit ramp, causing more bottles to slide back. Witnesses later stated they saw our back end grinding on the tires, causing them to smoke the entire time we were on the freeway. Unfortunately for us, the back tires became so overstressed they blew out, and I lost control of the truck. Now, bottles shifted everywhere, causing the back end of the truck to swerve all over the road; it was a miracle I avoided hitting any cars.

The truck veered to the left and slammed into a 4-foot-high median, causing the left side of the truck to fly into the air. It eventually landed on its right side, then skidded and spun down the road for 50 yards. When we finally came to a stop, we were facing traffic, and all I could see were cars swerving to avoid our truck, which now was blocking all three lanes of the freeway.

I looked down at my buddy, who was covered with all the gear we had stored in the cab, including the mud flaps. Thankfully, neither of us was injured, and, with the help of good Samaritans, we managed to climb out of the wreck. Needless to say, we didn't make it to the sporting event.

With hindsight being 20/20, I realize my mistakes. I ignored some definite warning signs en route to this accident: the added weight of the bottles, the mud flaps dragging, and the truck taking an exceptionally long time to slow down. If we had stopped and thought about the risks at any of these signs, the accident easily could have been avoided. Instead, we focused on getting to the event on time, despite all the telltale signs.

We not only risked our own lives, but the lives of everyone else on the road. Fortunately, no one was injured because of my poor judgment that day, and I learned a valuable lesson on applying ORM to everything you do. 🦅

Lt. Taylor flies with VAQ-139.