

# A Gotta-Get Attitude Turn \$135,248



It was a Monday morning, turnover day for people returning and departing on post-deployment leave. My chief assigned me a simple job: Return our deployment pool of electronic-countermeasure assets to NAS Oceana before the end of the week. That load contained six ALQ-167 pods, a conversion kit, and five ALQ-126B modules. The equipment was in good shape but wouldn't stay that way.

Tuesday arrived, and we had everything staged and ready to go. The modules, pods and conversion kit were banded onto pallets. It now was time to get a suitable vehicle to transport the assets. We tried all day to check out a truck, but no dice. At the end of the day, we decided to store the equipment in a secure area and to try again on Wednesday morning—after quarters.

On Wednesday morning, the chief said supply had leased a Ryder flatbed truck, and we could use it later in the day. Wanting to make sure everything was set, I asked the chief, "Who's going to drive?" His look gave me the answer. I had driven moving vans across country several times, didn't mind driving big trucks, and earlier had told him about my experience. I asked him if a special license was required, and he answered, "No." The truck had been leased by the ship and was not a government vehicle.

Everything seemed in order. We now only had to wait for the truck. At about 0915, the chief called and told me the truck was ready. An AT2 and I went to the hangar, removed the equipment from secure storage, and readied the gear for movement. We then grabbed a couple pallet jacks and began to move the gear onto the elevator, where a crane would lower the equipment to the pier. I called the supply chief about the truck, but he told me it had been diverted on another supply run and wouldn't be back for an hour.

The truck finally arrived at 1115. I went down to

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the pier to supervise the gear offload, while the AT2 remained on the elevator. The crane operator lowered the pallets from the ship onto the pier, and a forklift driver loaded them onto the truck. We had to put five pallets on a 15-ton flatbed, so that meant we would have to squeeze out every inch of space.

I told the forklift operator to put the first two pallets of ALQ-167 pods on the truck and to push them as far forward as possible. He also had to position them parallel with the bed of the truck. The third pallet was a conversion kit, which was housed in a fiberglass container. The forklift operator put it behind the first two pallets, centered on the bed of the truck. The fourth pallet also contained ALQ-167 pods. I clearly could see that load would not fit parallel with the bed of the truck and still leave room for the remaining pallet of modules. I told him to put the load perpendicular with the truck bed, directly behind the conversion kit.

I could see the truck was too small to move all the assets in one load; however, the day was getting late, and I was determined to finish the job in one trip. The pallet of modules wouldn't fit on the bed, so I had the forklift operator put the modules on top of the conversion kit. I didn't like this solution but figured, "Hey, we're driving on the interstate for most of the trip; we won't make any high-speed turns; and everything should be fine." After all, each pallet weighed at least 1,000 pounds. How could they move? It never crossed my mind to secure the pallets to the truck.

At noon, we departed the pier and proceeded east on the interstate toward NAS Oceana. After just a few miles, we hit a bump in the road, and I heard a loud "Whummmp" from behind. I looked in my rearview mirror and saw the rear pallet had shifted considerably to the right. I told the AT2 that I was going to pull over, see what was wrong, and straighten the load. I

carefully maneuvered to the right-hand lane and then proceeded onto the shoulder.

In an attempt to slow down, I first applied light pressure to the brake pedal. That technique didn't work, so I mashed down harder to see if that would help. Sure enough, it did! The truck slowed down but much more quickly than expected. In fact, the truck stopped much faster than the pallet of modules resting on top of the conversion kit. The modules flew off the flatbed and landed alongside the interstate, striking two pods on the way down. When the pallet hit the ground, the bands broke, sending modules and pieces of them everywhere.

After safely stopping the truck in the curb lane of the interstate, we got out to survey the damage. I never had seen such a mess, and it was all my fault. The equipment was smashed into unidentifiable shapes, and sand and grass covered the items. The pods were in a little better shape, but a couple had nasty dents. Looking at the damage, I couldn't help but notice the cargo straps permanently affixed under the flatbed. I easily could have prevented this mishap had I used this simple device.

After a long struggle reloading the 200-pound modules, we now used the flatbed straps to secure the load before proceeding. Our effort was too late. Figuring my career probably was over, I wanted to finish this job and to head back to face the music.

This sad story gets worse. After we left the interstate, I moved into the far right-hand lane. In a few seconds, the AT2 and I noticed the telephone poles were close to the road's edge. We were concerned because two pods behind the conversion kit extended beyond the bed of the truck and might hit the poles. I then decided it would be best to move into the far left lane; however, traffic prevented a quick lane change. You can guess what happened next, "Cruuuunch!" One of the pods struck a telephone pole, knocking off the nose cone. A bad day just had turned worse!

I felt sick and wanted to hide. I pulled over to inspect the damage. We then proceeded—in dumb-founded silence—to NAS Oceana without further incident.

A two-minute review of the basic principles of ORM easily would have prevented this mishap. I didn't identify how out of control this simple job had grown. In the end, we had wasted \$135,248 because of our haste to "get the job done." 

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