

# My Price for Rushing Lib

By AT3 Jeffrey Pardee,  
Staff, ComPacFlt

**I**t was supposed to be the start of an outstanding detachment for our squadron to Anchorage, Alaska. We were flying there to be part of Operation Northern Edge and to enjoy a break from the normal days at home base.

The day started without a hitch. We arrived late in the afternoon, with plenty of daylight left to do our offload. Being an AT, I was responsible for making sure the classified gear was secured in a safe before anyone in my shop was released on liberty.

We arrived in the hangar from which we would be operating, only to find there was no safe in which to lock up our gear—a big problem, considering we were deep in thought about our liberty plans. Our division

officer called a point of contact from the Air Force base we were at to ask where the safe was. The POC said it was in a hangar on the other side of the base.

Our headache just had gotten bigger, given the fact the Air Force personnel had secured, and we knew a forklift wouldn't be available until the next day. We decided to go to the other hangar anyway, load the safe by hand, and transport it back to our assigned hangar by truck. We then would lock up our gear and get liberty call started.

Working for the AT shop in an E-2 command, we were used to moving safes and working with heavy objects. Our division officer, our chief, the detachment LPO, two other guys from the AT shop, and I

Navy photo by MC3 (SW) John Hyde



# erty: 16 Stitches

checked out the duty truck and headed to the other hangar.

We backed the truck into the hangar because it was raining. We figured by keeping the safe dry, there would be less chance of it slipping or falling while we were loading it into the bed of the truck. We even took off the tailgate to eliminate the chance of the 800-pound, five-drawer monster from breaking the tailgate. As all six of us were taking a breather after sliding the safe into position to load on the truck, one of the guys remarked, “Kind of heavy, isn’t it?”

Then came the moment of truth. We took our spots around the safe, using what we thought was proper ORM, and started lifting. Moments later, the safe came crashing down, crushing my right hand between the wooden pallet and the floor. My squadromates quickly rocked the safe to one side so I could pull my hand free.

A searing pain shot up my arm and spine, straight to my brain. My peripheral nervous system was so overloaded I went into instant shock. My whole body went numb and started shaking. I remember not being able to respond to all the questions about whether I was OK.

With so much blood flowing from my hand, I wondered if I had lost all my fingers. The guys grabbed a towel and wrapped my hand in it to try controlling the blood loss. My division officer drove me to the emergency room, where it took five nurses and two doctors to hold me down as they stitched me up.

Looking back at this event, I realize we all should have slowed down and taken a few more steps on the side of safety, starting with our arrival. We were all more concerned about going on liberty than we were about the job at hand. Our minds simply were not in the game.

An E-2C Hawkeye aircraft assigned to the “Wallbangers” of VAW-117 approaches to land on a carrier’s flight deck. (Inset) Here’s what the finger of the victim in this story looked like in the emergency room.

Our second mistake was not using a forklift to move the safe. We had been guilty on several other occasions of manhandling heavy objects, instead of taking time to use the right equipment and to do the job right. We should have waited until morning when a forklift would have been available.

Our third mistake of the evening was not wearing gloves. None of us had the proper PPE to be lifting anything. Gloves may not have prevented the safe from crushing my hand, but I’m convinced my injury would have been less serious.

Our skipper always is talking about the Swiss-cheese model and how, when everything lines up just right, a mishap occurs. I now personally know what he’s talking about, having endured 16 stitches, three broken bones in my finger, a lot of pain, and loss of feeling in the tip of my middle finger.

Since that incident, I’ve made it a point to stress ORM, PPE and not rushing jobs to everyone around me. I look back at that event as a wake-up call, and I hope others learn from my mistakes. Take the time to do the job right, and then worry about what you’re going to do on liberty. ➡

*The author was assigned to VAW-117 when he wrote this article.*

*As the Naval Safety Center ASCS who reviewed this article asked, “Who the hell was in charge of this evolution? I can’t believe both a chief and a division officer allowed their troops to try this feat. Eight hundred pounds divided by six people still equals more than 116 pounds apiece, and if everyone isn’t pulling his fair share, the per-person weight can climb like a ‘homesick angel.’”*

## Resources:

- Moving, Lifting Heavy Equipment (tools that make the job easier), [http://www.newsandtech.com/issues/2005/03-05/nt/03-05\\_bourlon.htm](http://www.newsandtech.com/issues/2005/03-05/nt/03-05_bourlon.htm)
- The Unsafe Safe (a shipboard detachment has to swap safes), <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/media/fathom/issues/JanMar02/TheUnsafeSafe.htm>
- Safe Lifting Technique (eight safety tips for lifting heavy objects), <http://physicaltherapy.about.com/od/ergonomics/qt/SafeLifting.htm>