

Skiing With a Helmet, **Or** Keeping Your Head on the Slopes

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I ski with the attitude that big rewards only come with big risks, proving that a 25-year-old male's mind isn't always on top of its game.

Over the holidays a few years ago, I went to the slopes near Brighton, Utah. Things were going well until I hit an icy field of moguls one day. In case you don't know, moguls are large, randomly located bumps on an otherwise smooth slope. After the first couple of bumps, my skiing posture deteriorated rapidly, and I was out of control. As I edged farther from the center of the slope, a 3-inch-thick branch reached out and clotheslined me to the ground.

I lay there dazed and bleeding from a gash on my head. The tree had stolen my wool cap and had given me a headache matched only by those from other skiing accidents.

I naturally jumped up quickly and yelled, "Have that removed!" in true naval fashion, hoping to look good for everyone on the lift high above. I was well past looking good at that point, though. It's tough to act cool when blood is flowing steadily from the old noggin.

Did I mention this incident occurred soon after Michael Kennedy and Sonny Bono accidentally killed themselves by running into trees on the slopes? I was lucky to have only a minor cut and a bump. A few feet farther out of control, and I would have ended up in the deep woods. Needless to say, my accident wasn't one about which I called or wrote home.

Afterward, the only thing that hurt was my pride. A painkiller and some rest took care of my headache.





However, I see more helmets on the slopes these days, and it makes me wonder if maybe it's time for a change. Most of the time, kids zip by me at twice my speed and half my age, so they must be doing something right. I wear a helmet each day when I go flying and whenever I'm around the flight deck, and skiing is equally aggressive and dangerous, so why not treat both the same?

I either need to ski less aggressively or to suck up my pride—I've been skiing since age 6 without a helmet—and go to the ski shop and buy one, because my wool cap just isn't doing the job. Helmets aren't very expensive, and they offer many advantages over a hat. If you wear goggles, they fit easily over the helmet's surface and are quite warm. They won't get wet in the snow, either. ❏

The author was assigned to VAQ-131 when he wrote this article.

Read the story of another overconfident, young skier in the account that follows.

Getting Stupid on the Slopes

By Clayton J. Colton

Some shipmates and I headed to the mountains at Big Bear Resort in Southern California; we planned to tear up the slopes. Even though I'm an expert skier, having been reared in a Colorado ski resort and having done aerials for nearly 15 years, I wasn't prepared for the perils I would face on these mountains.

I took my usual spot—at the snowboarders' jump-park—where the young and crazy gather near 10-to-15-foot ramps to watch one another fly into the air, hoping to return gently to the ground.

As the only skier in the crowd of boarders, I naturally felt compelled to fly higher and farther and to look crazier than anyone on the mountain.

I had been hitting the ramps just right all day long, nailing a few spreads, backscratchers and daffies. I definitely had been holding my own with the boarders, even if some of my success was only luck. All my landings had been blind, and I often had cut close to the edges of the landing ramps, leaving me sighing with relief after each touchdown. About 1400, bad luck caught up with me.

It was the last ramp on the hill; it had about a 10-foot lip, with the landing ramp below and out of sight. I hit the ramp with aggression, making sure my last one of the day was going to be big. The second my skis left the ramp, I knew it was going to be big—just not pretty. I hit it with far too much speed, passed over the landing ramp, and fell 15 feet to level, bumpy ice.

As soon as my feet hit the ground, my face hit the ice. Everything felt fine, except for my leg, which was numb. I tried to stand but couldn't. My only option was to slide down the rest of the hill and crawl to medical. I ditched my skis in the woods, knowing I wouldn't be needing them for a couple of years.

After sliding for about 15 minutes, a ski patrol came by and loaded me aboard a toboggan—for the third time in my life—and drove me to a first-aid site. The most painful part of the day was the three-hour ride home in my friend's jeep, with five other people begging for legroom. Meanwhile, my knee throbbed beyond belief as it bounced on the pedestal.

When I finally saw a doctor, I learned the jump had torn ligaments in my knee. I was on crutches for weeks, followed by a year of physical therapy. I'm partly disabled for life. My squadron sent me to Camp Pendleton for recovery. I had to abandon my squadron right

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before a WestPac cruise to go answer phones in a hospital. My dreams of seeing the world by sea were shattered, and I doubt I'll ever see an F-14 launch off a cat at night in the Arabian Gulf. In short, I've probably erased all chances of serving my country.

This mess could have been avoided if I simply had checked the landing ramps for the jumps I was taking that day and had put more thought into the possible consequences of my actions. It's great to get crazy and have a good time once in a while, but it's just plain stupid to go to extremes without applying the principles of risk management. ■

The author was an AEAN assigned to VAW-112 when he wrote this article. Because his name isn't in the BuPers locator, it would appear the suspicions he expressed in the next to last paragraph of his story probably came true, and he's no longer in the Navy.