



# NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

## SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 22-25

### *Winter Sports IV*

*“Son of a nutcracker!” — Buddy the Elf (after being hit in the face with a snowball)*

With the recent arctic blast blanketing much of the northern U.S., many of us will be heading to the slopes and rinks for our favorite winter sports — and, for some, the strains, sprains, and breaks that come with them. Data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission show that more than one million people were injured in winter sports in 2019, with skiing and snowboarding making up more than 50 percent of that number. Ice skating, sledding, and ice hockey rounded out the top five. As you might guess, our database closely mirrors those stats, which is why we have enough winter sports-related mishaps to warrant yet another safety awareness dispatch on the topic.



With plenty of examples to choose from (*we're not proud of that*), we selected the top ways you can get hurt in winter sports. We selected stories as learning moments to remind us of the hazards associated with winter sports. Now, put on your helmet, adjust your goggles and let the games (*learning*) begin!

- **No Experience is Required.** First in the lineup is a short run but to the point. A Sailor was skiing at a local resort, fell, and broke her arm. The report noted that the Sailor was an inexperienced skier (*which is the learning point*). — *Skiing takes physical conditioning and coordination. If you're new to the sport, you'll probably fall...at least a few times. With that eventuality in mind, taking skiing lessons that include learning how to fall is a good first step. It could save you the pain, surgery, convalescent leave, and 28 days on light duty this Sailor endured.*
- **Downhill in a Hurry.** Next, in the “didn't make it to the bottom in one piece” event, a Marine skiing down a slope hit a patch of ice, causing him to accelerate. Unable to slow down, he departed the slope and fell down a steep traverse, hitting a tree. Upon impact, he lost consciousness and entangled his leg in the tree, resulting in severe injury. He eventually regained consciousness, and the ski patrol found him and transferred him to the emergency room (ER), where he was treated for a broken femur and three broken ribs. — *Our “slayer of the slopes” was an experienced skier but may have been overconfident in his abilities in the conditions that day. Perhaps taking a few slow runs first would give a better feel for the conditions.*
- **Hitting Rock “Bottom.”** A Sailor was sledding on Christmas day with his family. He went down a hill with his brother in adjoining inner tubes, catamaran style. At the bottom of the hill, the Sailor struck a rock with his...well, “posterior”...the left side, to be precise. After his painful, personal rock experience, he could not feel his left leg or support weight on it. Relatives (*wisely*) insisted the Sailor seek medical attention, so they took him to the nearest hospital. X-rays revealed nothing was broken. Doctors prescribed hydrocodone medication for the pain (*it must've been pretty bad*) and told him to “ice the location.” He didn't miss any work because he had plenty of time to recover during his leave (*not a fun way to spend the holidays*), but he required another 14 days of light duty upon return. — *We don't even know what the cautionary tale is here except: a) Know your sledding surface before you take the plunge, and b) Remember that inner tubes have a hole in the middle. So try to keep your body parts off the ground...lest ye have an embarrassing holiday story the family will talk about for years to come.*

## Winter Sports IV

- **False Start.** A Sailor decided to take a running start at his sled and (*because you're reading about him here*), he didn't make it. As he ran and leaped toward his sled, he tripped and stumbled, missed the sled entirely, and slid down the hill, "sledless." As he tried to climb back up the hill, he felt severe pain and decided to go to the ER (*good call*), where he was diagnosed with a broken collarbone. — *This mishap illustrates why the Pros don't use the "leap-to-sled" technique in the Olympic skeleton competition. Keep it simple on the hills, folks. You don't need a flying start to go fast.*
- **The 25<sup>th</sup> time's a Charm!** A Sailor went for his first snowboarding trip with friends. One of the more experienced snowboarders provided training and advice and left him on his own (*too soon, as you'll see*). Over four hours, the report says the Sailor "fell 25 times hitting their head" (*yikes!*). He was referred to the ER and placed on a daily concussion protocol. — *We're not sure if he hit his head all 25 times, but compounding this Sailor's horrible first snowboarding trip (and hopefully his last), the ski lift chair hit him too! Snowboarding isn't for everyone. At some point, it's time to reevaluate your choice of winter sport, perhaps over a mug of hot chocolate in the comfort and safety of the lodge.*
- **A Tale of Two Skaters.** In the first performance, a Sailor was ice-skating at a local rink when he rolled his ankle. Fortunately, for this Sailor, he escaped with only seven days of light duty. Second, in the program, a Marine attempted to stop while ice-skating and hit a crack, which sent him flying...landing on his face...and knocking him unconscious for a few minutes. — *The common thread in both mishaps is that neither skater was experienced or conditioned well for the sport, and they seemed to have pushed themselves beyond their skill level. Ice skating requires practice and conditioning. Know your abilities, or lack thereof, before you **hit** the ice...literally.*
- **♪"All I Want For Christmas is My Two Front teeth."** While playing in a hockey tournament, a Sailor was struck in the face by "an errant hockey puck," according to the report. The Sailor was on the bench at the time. — *The "errant" puck had no idea what its intended target was, but regardless, it lacerated the Sailor's lip badly enough to need 17 (yes, seventeen) stitches and require a visit to the dentist to realign his two front teeth. Whether on the ice or the bench, the possibility of getting a puck to the face exists during hockey games. This Sailor wasn't wearing a face shield either, which could have prevented his painful injuries. Please wear PPE.*
- **Train as You Fight.** While technically not a sport, it could be considered one for the Marines, we suppose. At approximately 2230, a group of Marines went out to the courtyard for a snowball fight. As one of the Marines jumped over a snow-covered wall to avoid enemy snowball fire, he landed on his right ankle and wrist. Assuming the injuries were just flesh wounds, the Marine went home. He visited the ER the next day just in case. Sure enough, X-rays found fractures to his ankle and wrist. — *If you're going to dive over a wall, make sure you know how to land. That's why the Corps has wall jumps in their obstacle courses.*

### Key Takeaways

1. **Risk management...it's not just for on-duty.** This takeaway appears in nearly all lessons learned where physical activity is involved. In this case, choose slopes and maneuvers that match your skill level. For some, it may have been months since the last ski outing, so ease back into it. Consider the hazards and changing conditions around you and adjust for them. You're not in a James Bond movie; slow down.
2. **Experience is only a chance to learn.** Experience can give you wisdom or overconfidence. Choose wisely. Just because you can ski fast doesn't mean you should. Experience should teach you to apply takeaway #1 on every trip. It will help keep you on the slopes and out of the emergency room.
3. **If there is PPE for the event, wear it.** You'll be glad you did, whether a helmet or a face shield.

*And remember, "Let's be careful out there"*