

ALABAMA UNITS JOIN FORCES TO COMBAT MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENTS WITH A SAFETY RIDE

A group of motorcycle enthusiasts from the 4/75th Training Division (Mission Command) and 87th Army Reserve Support Command (East) recently enjoyed a leisurely ride from Birmingham to Tuscaloosa as part of the Motorcycle Mentorship Program's Spring Safety Ride. The trip wasn't purely for fun, as riders participated in a motorcycle refresher course, safety, and maintenance session before riding off on May 17, 2012. Riders including Soldiers, civilians, and family members participated in the 148-mile trip, which encompassed all types of riding -- group, urban, country, and staggered. Motorcycle mentors stressed the importance of being safe while having fun.



Riders from the 4/75th TD(MC) and 87th ARSC(E) Motorcycle Mentorship Programs (MMP) complete pre-ride checklists and receive final instructions before they begin their first quarter safety ride. The MMP combines camaraderie and fun with education as it develops the skills of both new and experienced riders to promote safe and responsible riding.

“Riding motorcycles is fun, but you have to always be very safety-conscious when riding. You can't afford to be anything else because unsafe practices on a motorcycle can cost you your life,” CPT Michael Hill, who leads the 3rd Group, 4/75th TD(MC) mentorship program, said. “When riding a motorcycle you have to have situational awareness at all times, learn how to anticipate problems, and know how to ride defensively.”

The quarterly MMP Safety Ride began at 8 a.m. when the mentors inspected the participants' bikes using the Tires and Wheels, Cables and Controls, Lights, Oil and Fluids, Chassis, and Sidestand (T-CLOCS) pre-ride checklist. The T-CLOCS is a comprehensive inspection that should be conducted semiannually, with an abbreviated version conducted prior to every ride. Following the inspections the riders completed a riding course designed to accentuate and teach control of the motorcycle. After a rider safety meeting and route briefing the group rode to the Paul W. Bryant Museum in Tuscaloosa, where they ate lunch and toured the museum before returning to the Hanson Army Reserve Center in Birmingham.

With a core group of riders, Hill said he would like to have more participation. Rides are open to everyone, military or civilian, all ranks and grades, he added. “This is an important program for all riders”, said LTC Ted Joy, Deputy Commander for the 3rd Group. “Riding in a group, when done right, is always safer than riding alone. The emphasis on safe riding practices, maintenance and inspection before each ride, and proper use of safety gear and equipment is good information for everyone.”

MAJ Stephen Stanley, Deputy IG with the 87th ARSC(E), is also an experienced rider who believes in the importance of the MMP and motorcycle safety. “By participating in this program we can show the younger riders that it's okay to ride safely and wear the required personal protective equipment (PPE),” Stanley said. “So often the younger riders won't wear all the necessary protective gear when riding because they think it's not 'cool'. They don't realize what can happen to them if they choose to ride without their PPE.”

Riding a motorcycle can be one of the most liberating methods of transportation, but it also has the potential of being one of the most dangerous. According to U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center statistics, motorcycle accidents and fatalities have been on the incline, making motorcycle training a top priority for the Army. Mr. John Morgan, Safety and Occupational Health Specialist with the 87th ARSC(E), stressed that riders should follow all safety practices and policies at all times, not just on a sponsored ride. According to Morgan, “Motorcycling is a high-risk mode of transportation. Army Safety Programs, and the Motorcycle Mentorship Program in particular, help mitigate the level of risk and reduce the number of casualties.”

Along with a thorough inspection of each bike and protective equipment, a briefing on proper distance and formation for group rides, group hand signals, and information on how to identify possible road hazards and traffic considerations were included as part of the program.

“Motorcycle accidents are a serious issue Army-wide. We try to decrease them through education, responsibility, experience, and leadership,” said COL Ricardo Menendez, 4/75th TD(MC) Deputy Commander. “This activity was a good reminder and review of pre-ride inspections and how thorough you have to be to prevent accidents,” Menendez said. “The less experienced riders learned from the more experienced riders, and it provided another opportunity for the experienced riders to review safety practices. Even experienced motorcyclists become complacent on some aspects of motorcycling, especially if they haven’t ridden for awhile. The MMP is a good program that should remain mandatory to all riders of different skill levels and experience,” he said.



4/75th TD(MC) and 87th ARSC(E) riders stop for a photo opportunity in front of Bryant-Denny Stadium on the campus of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa during the May 17th MMP Spring Safety Ride.