

## Phantom Warrior troops straddle motorcycles for safety

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma

7th Military Public Affairs Detachment

FORT HOOD, Texas (July 3, 2008) – Despite the glare of the summer sun, about 70 Phantom Warrior troops from the III Corps Headquarters Command met at the Warrior Way Post Exchange before hitting the streets to emphasize motorcycle safety and awareness with a slow and steady ride July 3.

The riders lined up in 7 groups of 10 before heading out on their 22-mile trip to the Belton Lake Outdoor Recreation Area entrance and back.

Although reasons for participation vary, for event organizer Master Sgt. Michael French a personal close call brought the danger of motorcycles to the forefront and made safety one of his top priorities.

“I have been in an accident myself,” stated the first sergeant of Headquarters and Headquarter Company, III Corps. “And although I was not seriously hurt, the incident really opened my eyes to the dangers of riding a motorcycle.”

French’s incident took place in a parking lot under the blanket of night. French, a Denton, Texas, native said he was wearing all of his protective equipment at the time and was going about 10 to 15 miles per hour. The driver in a nearby car didn’t see him and proceeded to make a wide right turn – he was forced to dump his bike.

According to a report by the III Corps safety office, since the start of fiscal year 2008, seven accidents involving motorcycles were fatal and 46 incidents resulted in injuries. This is an increase of 19 from the previous year.

“We have a lot of young Soldiers coming back from deployment who think they are invincible,” said Lt. Col. Robert Menti, commander of the Phantom Command Battalion. “They buy sport bikes that are lethal weapons and are putting themselves and other motorists in danger when they make poor choices on the road.”

But in addition to motorcycle safety courses offered here, many rides like this one are popping up post-wide to combat the unawareness of motorcycles and the Soldiers who ride them.

“This program brings to light motorcycle safety to everyone, not just the riders themselves. It is very important that non-riders are aware of some of the difficulties that riders face,” French said. “You need to be aware that there are a lot of motorcycles around, especially in our area, you need to look for them and not just look for another car.”



**“You need to be aware that there are a lot of motorcycles around, especially in our area, you need to look for them and not just look for another car.” Master Sgt. Michael French, HHC, III Corps**

- U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma

Sgt. Maj. Patricia Carter of Valdosta, Ga., who has only been riding for three months, agreed that awareness of the two-wheeled vehicles is a key to road safety.

Carter added she thinks riding events like this are beneficial for new riders like herself. They allow novice motorcyclists to get to know other riders and their experiences – learning from them.

“We want the riders to see how mature, responsible riders can truly enjoy riding while operating within the law and Army policy,” said Menti from Buffalo, N.Y. “You do not have to be going 140 miles per hour doing a wheelstand to enjoy riding.”

Even with less two years of riding experience, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeffrey Cliette said he understands that an adrenaline rush can sometimes overcome riders, but they need to respect the power of the motorcycle.

“For me (riding) is about the freedom. It’s a good time to relax,” said the Charlotte, N.C., native. “And this ride gives younger riders the opportunity to slow down, settle down and relax.”

Carter, the first female in her family to become a rider, said the camaraderie and knowledge that motorcyclists share is the reason she wanted to be a part of this event.

“It feels great to be a part of it,” she said. “I’m a rider.”