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## 'Riders ready for anything'

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There was little time to react.

By the time retired Master Sgt. Earl Daniels saw the car pull out of the driveway along Rucker Boulevard near Fort Rucker, Ala., the impact that took his leg and nearly took his life was imminent.

"I saw her pull to a stop and, with my bright gear and the motorcycle's headlight on high, I thought she saw me too," Daniels said as he recounted the events of the morning of Feb. 19, 2009. "I checked her face and her tires to make sure she wasn't moving and slowed my speed just in case."

As Daniels passed the car, he saw motion out of the corner of his eye and glanced to his right just in time to see the driver as she hit him with the passenger side bumper of the car.

The impact trapped Daniels' right leg between the car and the motorcycle, nearly ripping it from his body and shattering his pelvis. He hit the hood of the car hard enough to leave an impression of his body before he flew 75 feet through the air. He came to rest near a curb where he remained as passersby worked to place a tourniquet on his leg to stop the profuse bleeding before paramedics got there.

When help arrived, Daniels was quickly evacuated to a near-by medical center where doctors determined they would not be able to save his right leg. The doctors took the leg and worked to fix his crushed pelvis. By the time doctors were able to stabilize Daniels, the retired helicopter mechanic had lost four pints of blood.

In theory, Daniels shouldn't have been the victim of such a crash. At the time of the accident, he had many years of motorcycle riding experience under his belt and was a lead instructor for the Army Traffic Safety Training Program at Fort Rucker. He spent most of his days preaching motorcycle safety to other riders and prided himself on his own strong riding skills and full set of superior Personal Protective Equipment.

Still, on a bright, chilly morning, a nearly fatal motorcycle accident found him. But, thanks to his training and PPE, when that accident found him, Daniels was ready to react and, because he was ready, he got away with his life.

"When I saw her coming, I swerved the bike the way we always teach the students to do in an emergency," he said. "Had I not swerved the way I had practiced a hundred times before, she would have crushed the entire right side of my body and probably killed me."

Last year, the Army lost 32 Soldiers to motorcycle accidents. In general, the Soldiers killed were leaders, sergeant through captain, between the ages of 21-47. More than half the fatal accidents involved speeding and rider overconfidence and almost 20 percent involved alcohol.

"We are losing far too many Soldiers to preventable motorcycle accidents and we need to make every rider understand that readiness and risk management extend beyond the duty day," said Command Sgt. Michael Eyer, senior noncommissioned officer at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. "Saving our Soldiers

from these accidents and preserving our fighting force comes down to each rider's choice to train, practice, gear up and ensure they are ready for anything out on the road."

Steve Kurtiak, Privately Owned Vehicle and Recreational Safety Specialist at the USACR/Safety Center, said being a "rider ready for anything" comes down to getting the proper training, wearing appropriate PPE and being vigilant of all the possible risks on the road.

"The safety burden always resides with the man or woman riding the motorcycle," he said. "He or she, at all times, needs to be thinking that every single driver is out to get them."

As the days turn warm and riding season rolls into full swing, Kurtiak said refresher training and caution on the road is even more important as drivers aren't used to seeing motorcycles.

"Right now, riders have to be on their toes all the time," he said.

Army installations around the globe offer Soldiers, Civilians and Family members a wide variety of training and mentorship programs to help create a new generation of "riders ready for anything."

Basic and Experienced Rider Courses, the Military Sportbike Riders Course and the Motorcycle Mentorship Program all present important information meant to prepare riders of all experience levels to meet the challenges of sitting in the saddle of a potentially deadly machine.

"These programs bring riders together to learn and have some great, high-energy fun," said Eyer. "These shared experiences help every biker learn from their peers what and what not to do to stay safe out on the roads."

Today, more than a year after the accident, Daniels is back on his bike and once again teaching motorcycle safety courses to riders, emphasizing the importance of practicing emergency techniques as often as possible. Before every ride, he dons his complete set of PPE including a full-face helmet and, as often as he can, practices the emergency swerve that very likely saved his life.

"It never crossed my mind to stop riding after the accident," Daniels said. "Everything out there is dangerous and safety is just about understanding that fact and being ready for the risk."

For information about motorcycle safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil/povmotorcyclesafety>. To register for a motorcycle safety course at your installation, visit the Army Installation management Command Registration System (AIRS) Web site at <https://airs.lmi.org/>.

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## **SIDEBAR**

### **Motorcycle Safety Tips**

- Get trained and licensed
- Wear "all the gear, all the time" including a helmet
- Ride unimpaired by alcohol or other drugs
- Ride within your skill limits
- Be a lifelong learner by taking refresher rider courses

*Source: Motorcycle Safety Foundation*

