



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS CENTER

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READY ...OR NOT?

In a hurry to nowhere: profile of an Army motorcycle fatality

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Editor's note: The following is a composite profile based on past private motor vehicle fatalities in the Army's accident database. Victims' names are fictional, and any similarities to individuals living or deceased are purely coincidental.

This particular Friday afternoon was set to be special for Staff Sgt. Kenneth Robbins. His brand new Harley-Davidson 1200 Custom was primed and ready. All he needed was to pick up the keys from the dealer.

This would be the combat veteran's first motorcycle ride following his deployment to Afghanistan almost a year ago. Not wanting to waste daylight, he hurriedly left the motor pool, sped home and changed clothes.

Though this was only his second week back home, the 28-year-old spared little time greeting his wife and raced out the door. He was a man on a mission and, of course, his young bride of six years understood. She was just glad he was home safe and after what he had been through, he deserved a little break.

At the dealership, Robbins halfheartedly listened to the salesman explain the motorcycle's new features. It was nothing new, the NCO said. After all, this was not his first bike and he did survive three combat tours.

Anxious to ride, Robbins literally snatched the keys from the salesman, straddled the bike, secured his helmet, revved the engine and sped off the parking lot onto the open road. By now, it was 7 p.m. and beginning to get dark. Still unsure about driving his new bike at night, he decided it would be a short, quick ride.

There was nothing like the sheer thrill of hitting the open road on two wheels, Robbins always said. The motor rumbling, the wind hitting his face, 10 minutes into the ride and all his stress seemed to disappear. Riding a bike was his "therapy" and a refreshing reconnect with the environment.

Once on the road, however, Robbins lost all track of time and though he struggled a little with the lights, he grew more and more at one with the feel of the rumbling motor. Not a big deal, or so he often said, this was heaven.

In an instant, something from the corner of his eye caught his attention, perhaps a deer grazing near the tree line, a dog rummaging along the brush or an empty grocery bag blowing across the road. It

was enough, however, to cause him to swerve, lose control and run down an embankment. The motorcycle hit a tree and Robbins was thrown into the bushes. The impact broke his back.

Despite his wife's frantic calls to the sheriff's office that night, they did not initiate an active search for the downed rider. It was not until the following morning when a commuter on his way to work reported seeing a motorcycle lying in a ravine alongside the highway that sheriff's deputies were dispatched. After a brief search of the area, they found Robbins' still, lifeless body some 100 feet from where the motorcycle hit the tree.

According to Steve Kurtiak, motorcycle safety specialist, Driving Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center, this scenario is all too consistent with the Army's profile on motorcycle injuries and fatalities.

"He's a mid-level NCO who falls within the 28-32 age range," he said. "It seems Soldiers believe they don't have to readjust or re-familiarize themselves with motorcycles after long periods of not riding them. They're too anxious to go back to the way things were before they left."

Kurtiak explained that Soldiers, especially those who have recently returned from combat, need time to readjust. They often fail to realize that during deployment, their motorcycle skills become rusty and it takes time to get used to riding a motorcycle again. Diminished skills coupled with the unfamiliarity of a new bike make it all the more dangerous.

"Soldiers must realize readjustment does take time," he said. "You can't be too anxious to get on a motorcycle and just hit the road."

Kurtiak emphasized the importance of motorcycle training for new and experienced riders.

Army Regulation 385-10, The Army Safety Program, mandates that Soldiers operating motorcycles on or off the installation, regardless of whether the bike is registered on post, must successfully complete all prescribed motorcycle safety training.

These requirements include the Motorcycle Safety Foundation Basic RiderCourse prior to operating any motorcycle; Experienced Rider Course or MSF BRC 2 upon completion of MSF BRC; Military Sportbike RiderCourse or MSF Advanced RiderCourse within 12 months of completing the BRC; Motorcycle Sustainment Training every five years following completion of MSF BRC and BRC 2; and Motorcycle Refresher Training following deployments of 180 days or more.

"Army leaders are charged to enforce these requirements," Kurtiak said. "And Soldiers should make use of all these resources and training to ensure their safety. It's all about safety."

For more information on motorcycle safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil/>.