



Bike Ride Grounds Pilot

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After spending a full day working around the house, I wasn't looking for an adventurous mountain-bike ride. My wife and I just wanted a chance to get out for a little exercise.

We were tired, so we decided on a simple route we had used before. Part of it was on-road, and the rest was on an easy dirt trail. I had been using clipless pedals for about three weeks and felt comfortable getting in and out of them. I had fallen several times while getting used to the pedals, but the spills were becoming infrequent, and I had learned how to deal with them. I just took the impact on my side, unclipped my shoes, and climbed back on the bike.

We had been riding about 20 minutes when we reached a short, downhill portion of the trail that included a fairly sharp turn. I had slowed down for the turn and was stopping to look behind me to see how far back my wife was. Unfortunately, I forgot to unhook my shoes and put out a foot to brace the bike. "No big deal," I thought. "I'll just fall on my side and hop back up."

Things didn't happen that way, though. As I was falling, I put out my arm, with the elbow locked. I heard a small pop at my elbow and felt some mild pain but didn't think it was a serious injury. I assumed my arm was jammed, and I could shake it out. In a few minutes,

I recovered, and we continued an otherwise uneventful ride home.

The next day, my arm was a little swollen, but I wasn't worried because I had full motion and could support weight on it. Pain, however, continued into Monday, so I went to a doctor, and he told me I had sprained my arm. Two days later, I went back for a follow-up, expecting to be declared medically qualified to fly again. An X-ray, however, revealed my arm was broken, and I had surgery the next day. The doctor put a screw in my arm and sent me home to heal.

The problem was that my healing coincided with two weeks of field carrier landing practice and three weeks at sea for an exercise. The squadron got by with one less junior pilot for both.

Once I healed, I arranged a deployment that caught me up to my peers in our quest for qualification as carrier aircraft plane commander. This story is proof that every activity, no matter how familiar, requires constant vigilance. Don't forget to apply the risk-management process beforehand, too, which, in this case, would include wearing a protective helmet. Otherwise, your chosen activity can turn into a very long and painful lesson. All those extra watch duties aboard ship are no fun, either. ■