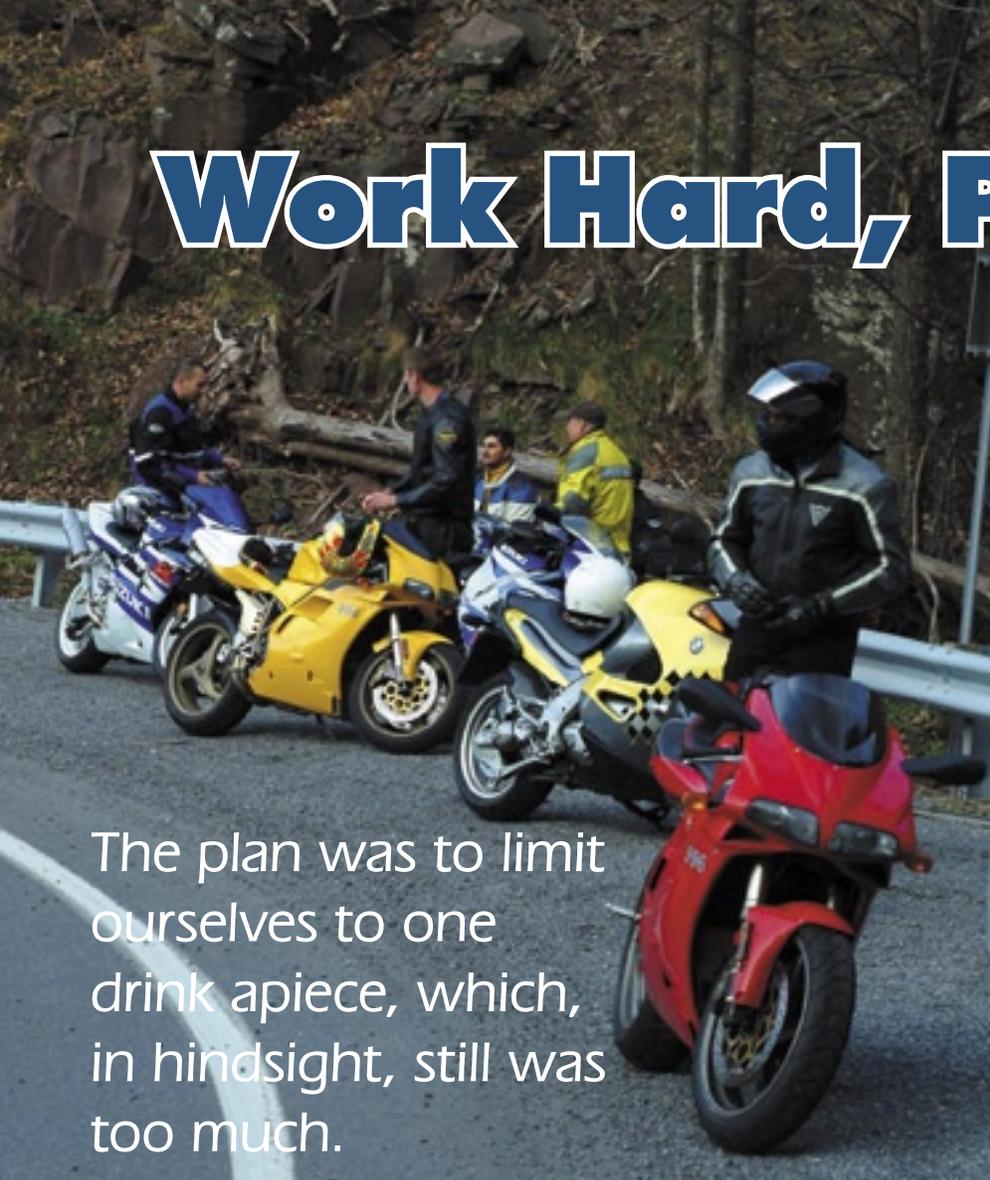


Work Hard, Play Hard.



The plan was to limit ourselves to one drink apiece, which, in hindsight, still was too much.

It was like any other Friday for Marines, who work hard and play hard. After working 10 hours, John (my roommate) and I went home and made some calls to see what the plan was for later on that evening. The two of us ate dinner and washed it down with a single beer.

Our friend, Mike, showed up at our house about 7 p.m., and the three of us decided to ride our bikes to a popular dance club about 50 miles away. We called Bob, another rider, and asked him to join us. Because Mike didn't have his bike with him, he left before the rest of us to go get it, with plans to meet us at a designated gas station.

Once dressed for the cool night air, we mounted up and headed for the gas station, where we met Mike, topped off our sport bikes, and set out on the highway we would follow for most of the trip. Bob and I were riding new 1000cc bikes. Mike had a lighter bike that was a couple years old, and John was on a

600cc bike that was a few years older than that. What we didn't know was that this night would prove to be both unforgettable and regrettable.

All four of us had done our share of wheelies and stunts, but they weren't part of our mission this particular night. Our speed, however, was slightly above the limit, which would figure in the laundry list of questionable variables. On a positive note, the four of us all had at least two years of riding experience.

We arrived at the club without incident about 10 p.m. and headed for the bar. The plan was to limit ourselves to one drink apiece, which, in hindsight, still was too much. Although our BAC remained under the legal limit, it was enough to slow our reaction time and to sway our balance and judgment. We danced for a few hours—until the lights came on, and people started leaving—then headed for the door ourselves.

Once again we stopped at a gas station, this time for non-alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. While there, we met two girls who wanted to hang out with us; they decided to follow us to Denny's. They only finished their water, though, before leaving, so the four of us set out for the trip home.

Bob and I ended up about five minutes in front of John and Mike because of a red light. We stayed in the far left lane most of the time, unless we were passing someone, and we kept our speed at 80 to 90 mph. Our riding pattern was staggered or beside each other, but we switched back and forth.

Eventually, I realized Bob no longer was with me. I looked back and to the sides, to no avail, and mistakenly assumed he just had slowed down for the others. I maintained my speed for another exit or two, then got off for gas when my fuel-low light illuminated. I was filling up when my cellphone rang. It was John, asking if Bob was with me. John said he and Mike had seen a bike like Bob's wrecked alongside the highway.

..Die Young

My heart skipped a beat, and I swallowed hard, as I asked where they had seen the bike. I backtracked down the highway until I saw blue lights on the opposite side, got off at the next exit, and then took the onramp to get back on the highway. My stomach was playing tricks with me when I merged into traffic just long enough to get around the bright display of blue and red lights.

I quickly slowed, eased onto the right shoulder, and was dismounting my bike when I saw Mike leaning against a concrete barrier—the one that, as I soon would learn, had claimed the life of my friend. In front of Mike was a tarp spread out, obviously covering Bob's lifeless body. Not wanting to accept the tragedy of the moment, I walked toward Mike and the tarp. Mike looked up at me and, with tears running down his cheeks, said, "He's dead, man." My eyes instantly filled with tears, too.

A police officer pulled me to the side to question me about the events leading to Bob's fatal crash. Mike already had sent John home, so he wouldn't have to see the scene. Once the cops had gotten all the info they needed, they sent us on our way. Mike and I stayed within the speed limit the rest of the way home. The next morning, we went to our unit and had to explain what had happened.

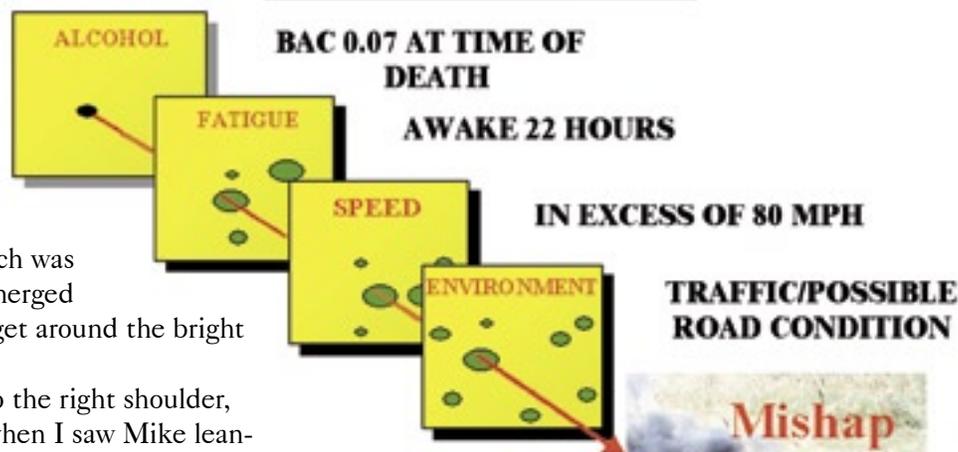
An analysis

These experienced Marines had taken similar trips in the past without incident. They were not operating outside their limits in any one area, so why the tragic outcome?

- **Alcohol:** The plan was for one drink apiece at the bar, but the victim consumed more than just one. Was he legally drunk? No, but his balance and reaction time definitely were impaired.

- **Fatigue:** The victim had been awake 22 hours, with 10 hours spent at work. Studies show that, after being awake 24 hours, your impairment is similar to 0.10 BAC. The victim's fatigue level was approximately equivalent to 0.08 BAC.

Reason's Swiss Cheese Model



- **Speed:** Is 80 or 90 mph too fast for a "crotch rocket"? Probably not, but does that speed leave you enough time to react to traffic or other unknown factors? Definitely not!

- **Traffic/Road Conditions:** This variable is one you cannot control. You only can leave yourself enough time and space to make the necessary adjustments.

Too many risk factors lined up this tragic evening [see accompanying graphic]. When you combine the alcohol and fatigue factors, the victim's ability to operate a motorcycle was way over the limit. His speed gave him less time to react to traffic and road conditions.

Marines take risks every day, so we become accustomed to them—to the point we sometimes take excess risk without knowing it. If you're older and reading this story, you're probably saying to yourself, "This accident was one waiting to happen." A younger person, on the other hand, probably would say it's just a case of "bad luck." But, it wasn't luck that killed this Marine. He simply placed himself in a situation where several seemingly minor risk factors added up to disaster. ■

Author's name withheld by request.

The Naval Safety Center did not do the analysis you read here, nor do we endorse all the findings contained herein. — Ed.

For more info, go to: <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/articles/motorvehicle/decisiontoride.htm> or www.motorcyclecruiser.com/streetsurvival/impaired_rider/.