

SA Saves My “A”

By AT1(AW/SW) Dewitt Townsend,
VFA-15

I've ridden a motorcycle for six years and am dedicated to being aware of my surroundings [*known as SA, or situational awareness*] when I'm out riding. That dedication definitely paid off during a recent ride when a motorist put my life at risk.

As a shop supervisor in a Navy FA-18C squadron, I lead a busy life. When an opportunity came along to kick back one Friday during a command-sponsored beach picnic, I was all too happy to trade my coveralls for a pair of flip-flops and watch the khakis grill lunch. It was a hot day, and some of my squadronmates were enjoying their day off with a couple of frosty adult beverages. Knowing that I later planned to go for a ride on my motorcycle, I opted to stay hydrated with water.

That ride started out like any other. Because the day had been so hot, I didn't start until almost 2130, when much of the heat had dissipated. A light rain just had fallen, and I knew that riding a motorcycle at night obviously carried additional risks. Using ORM analysis, I concluded that those risks were mitigated somewhat by the bike's excellent lighting, my reflective jacket, and the potential for lighter traffic due to the hour.

I donned my usual complement of personal protective equipment (gloves, denim jeans, reflective riding jacket, and helmet) and set out. The night was comfortable, though still a little humid. The cooling effect

of the open air was just what I had been looking for after a hot day at the beach. It's easy to get distracted and complacent when riding in such enjoyable conditions, but I remained alert because we had addressed this topic during the monthly meeting of our squadron's motorcycle-rider club.

Our club maintains training jackets for every rider, with full documentation of all training and group-ride participation. Numerous guest speakers have attended our meetings, including motor-vehicle experts from the Naval Safety Center, as well as local law-enforcement personnel. I feel it's because of this training that I'm still here today to write this account.

No more than six minutes from my front door, I was stopped behind several other cars at a traffic light. The road had two lanes of traffic traveling in each direction, as well as a right turn lane. While standing over my bike in the right-most lane for through traffic, I heard a car approaching from behind. This sound initially only alerted me to the fact a car was pulling up



The car's bumper hit the bike between the tire and frame.

Double “S”



The bike's back-tire swing arm was hyperextended from the impact, and the pipe and mount were torn from the engine and frame.

confronted by the headlights of a car, with the brakes locked up, struggling to maintain control. In a split second, I decided riding the bike clear was out of the question. Instead, I dove

behind me. The sound of skidding tires that quickly followed, though, grabbed my attention.

Everything seemingly was in slow motion as I turned my head, looked over my shoulder, and was

off to the right to avoid being run over. The car hit the rear wheel of the bike just as my left foot cleared the seat. I could feel the air rushing past my leg as I struggled to expedite my dismount. I ran through the right-turn lane and onto the shoulder before turning around to see my bike lying on its side in front of the offending car.

The damage to my bike was close to \$5,000, but the real story for me wasn't the material loss. It's knowing I could have been killed if I hadn't been aware of my surroundings. The lessons I've learned as a graduate of the base motorcycle-safety course and as a member of the command motorcycle club truly made the difference in this life-or-death situation. **S**



bent rim

The bike's back rim was crushed by the car's bumper.

Resources:

- What Should I Know About City Riding? Knowledge and Skills Are Power, http://www.epinions.com/content_4807958660
- Sierra Alpha Is Life, <http://sierraalpha.net/>
- Rider's Workshop Riding Skills, <http://www.ridersworkshop.com/skills.html>