

# Crash Victim Thankful for PPE

I flew about 15 feet in the air and landed “like a rag doll.”

By Lt. Scott Gardner

**W**ith dinner and a movie behind us, my wife and I had started home on our motorcycles. We both were in the right-hand lane of an access road to an interstate, riding in a stagger formation. I was in the right-hand part of the lane, and my wife was about a car-length behind, in the left half of the lane.

As we approached the interstate, the access road curved to the left, followed by a short, straight stretch and then an even sharper curve to the left. I realized I was running wide when we entered the sharpest part of the curve and instinctively applied the brakes to slow down. This action caused the bike to upright itself and straighten out, which, in turn, caused me to run even wider toward the outside of the lane. I leaned the bike back over to try and recover the turn, but I was in roadside gravel and debris by this time. I ended up sliding into the adjacent guardrail.

This guardrail was about two feet high, with two continuous beams of metal fastened to uprights every few feet. I almost was parallel to the guardrail when I hit it, so my right leg was

crushed between the rail and my bike. I flipped over the rail into a grassy lot, and my bike bounced back into traffic. According to my wife, who had a perfect view of the whole incident, I flew about 15 feet in the air and landed “like a rag doll.”

My wife called an ambulance to take me to the hospital and kept me from moving around and making my injuries worse. She had a good idea of my injuries as soon as she saw me, but I didn’t find out until later. I had dislocated three bones in my right hand, torn the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in my right knee, sheared off the end of my right thighbone where it joined my knee, and sustained a dozen or so fractures between my right ankle and knee.

Several of the leg fractures were compound breaks that had penetrated my skin and my jeans. I underwent about eight hours of surgery after admission to the hospital and remained there for the next 10 days.

My days after returning home were filled with painkillers, doctors’ appointments, and physical therapy. I spent the first month in a wheelchair, then progressed to a walker—one

just like my grandmother used. After four months, I was able to walk with the help of a cane. A month later, in January 2004, I was able to return to work and perform limited duties. I could teach students and grade simulator events, but it was July 2004 before a flight surgeon cleared me to resume flying duties. My command was very supportive throughout my rehabilitation, and their first priority always has been my recovery.

The good news is that I haven't required any more surgeries, and I should recover 95 percent use of my leg. As serious as my injuries were, I realize they could have been much worse. I believe that wearing the proper PPE saved my life—at least, it saved me from more serious injuries. I was wearing a full-face helmet, heavy motorcycle jacket, riding gloves, boots, and denim jeans. I especially was thankful for my helmet. It was damaged significantly on the top, sides and chin bar, and the face shield actually was torn off during the crash. Amazingly, after doing my "Flying Wallenda" impersonation over

the guardrail, I didn't even have a headache.

Were I not wearing gloves, my dislocated bones easily could have penetrated my skin. I believe my boots helped prevent any ankle injuries. Being covered head to toe prevented me from getting any abrasions or road rash. Although denim jeans aren't really adequate protective gear, they were better than nothing. Had I slid along the road, instead of being thrown over the guardrail, my jeans undoubtedly would have shredded in the first 10 feet.

What would I have done differently to prevent this accident? I would have maintained awareness of my position within the lane. Because I was riding in the right half of the lane, I already had given up a large portion of maneuvering room. Also, I failed to recognize the decreasing radius in the left turn until I was running wide to the outside of the lane. The road where I had my accident also was poorly lit, which should have been a warning for me to be extra cautious. 

Lt. Gardner flies with VAW-120

# Mishap-Free Milestones

VAW-117	27 years	57,100 hours
VP-30	40 years	400,000 hours
VP-16	39 years	257,000 hours
VAQ-130	23 years	39,045 hours
VR-57	25.5 years	130,075 hours
VFA-136	11 years	47,151 hours
VFA-146	19 years	79,000 hours

VR-58	26 years	128,000 hours
VAQ-132	34 years	55,800 hours
VPU-2	22 years	56,391 hours
VQ-2	17 years	106,200 hours
VF-103	1 year	2,900 hours
VFA-131	17 years	70,000 hours
HS-10	11 years	58,000 hours
VP-45	35 years	222,000 hours
VP-26	42 years	301,000 hours
VAW-115	19 years	40,009 hours
HC-3	30 years	170,000 hours in the H-46 and 20,000 hours in the MH-60S