

# Sailors Die in Desert

By Ken Testorff,  
Naval Safety Center

If you plan to ride your dirt bike in the desert, where the ambient temperature exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit, you'd better dress properly and drink plenty of water. That's good advice, but it comes too late for a couple of fleet Sailors.

Local hikers found the body of a 22-year-old PO3 and reported it to authorities, who then discovered the body of a 29-year-old PO1 a few hours later. The two were about a half-mile apart, dead apparently from heat exposure. The PO3 was found without a shirt or water. Meanwhile, the PO1 was wearing a bandana, protective clothing, and a hydration backpack with water. The autopsy and investigation reports eventually would indicate both victims had been riding when one of the motorcycles became disabled. The victims then walked until both collapsed and died. Toxicology reports were negative for alcohol and drugs.

No records exist showing that either rider had attended a motorcycle-riders safety course.

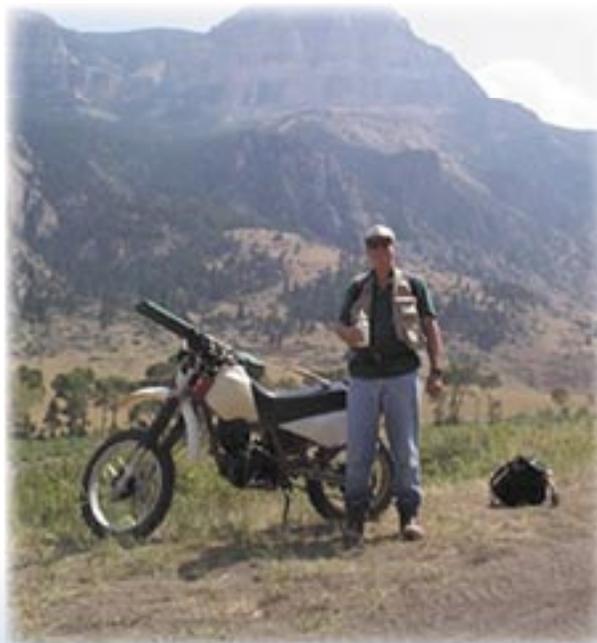
The one thing the duo did right was to notify friends of their intentions to ride dirt bikes in the desert, but the operational risk management ended there. If they had followed all the ORM principles, both probably would be alive today.

The desert can be a wonderful place to ride, but it also can be dangerous if you're not prepared. Every year, people get in trouble, and, as we learned here, some even die in the unforgiving desert environment.

Keep these simple guidelines in mind anytime you decide to go riding in the desert:

- Always carry plenty of water. One gallon per person, per day, should be a minimum, and don't forget to drink it. The water does you no good in your water bottles.

- Know your limitations in the heat and rugged desert terrain, where temperatures can reach 125 degrees Fahrenheit.



When you're riding in the desert, carry plenty of water and don't forget to drink it. The water does you no good in your water bottles.

- Protect yourself from the sun; use a hat and sunscreen.

- Use maps. Detailed topographic maps of an entire park usually are available from visitor centers and local businesses.

- Make sure your bike is well-maintained and dependable. Bring along tools and adequate spares.

- Because of the many thorny plants in the desert, consider using a tire sealant in your inner tubes.

- Don't ride alone; use the buddy system.

- Tell someone else about your trip plans.

- If you find yourself in trouble, don't panic; help soon will be on the way. ■