

# ARMY SPACE ANGELS

## Practice Safe Riding Skills



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SMDC/ARSTRAT Angels with their bikes (left to right): Jeffrey Major, civilian guest rider; SGT Brandon LaForce, HHC, SMDC/ARSTRAT; SS Kristina Levy, HHC, 1st Space Brigade; 1SG Benjamin Hartwig, HHC, 1st Space Battalion; SFC Jamey Peterson, 4th Space Company, 1st Space Battalion; 1SG Anthony Manalo, HHC, 1st Space Brigade; and CSM William Baker, 1st Space Battalion.

“Get your motor runnin’,  
Head out on the highway,  
Lookin’ for adventure,  
And whatever comes our way...”

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. – These are the lyrics to classic rock song “Born to Be Wild” performed by “Steppenwolf” back in 1968. They come to mind when one envisions themselves on the back of a motorcycle cruising down the open highway in one of those ‘biker’ movies be it Marlon Brando in “The Wild One” from 1953, Dennis Hopper’s 1969 classic “Easy Rider,” or Tim Allen and John Travolta in the 2007 “Wild Hogs.”

The same can be said for U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Soldiers, however this sense of freedom in the wind can come with a heavy price.

According to 1SG Benjamin J. Hartwig, first sergeant, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Space Battalion, “The number of Soldiers riding motorcycles began to rise drastically in 2004 when they began to return from 12 and 15 month deployments.”

“There were 22 motorcycle related fatalities that year and continued to rise until fiscal year 2008 when we had 51 fatalities. Last year in fiscal year 2009 there were 31 motorcycles related fatalities.”



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CSM Cody Baker,  
1st Space Battalion

Owner of both a 2007 Yamaha Road Star cruiser and a 2002 Yamaha R1 sport bike, Hartwig emphasized, “We have been fortunate to only have had minor accidents involving Army Space Soldiers in the Colorado Springs area. I don’t want it to be just dumb luck that is keeping us alive and in the fight. Motorcycling is a dangerous, but extremely fun lifestyle and should receive specific attention in order to ensure the safety of our Soldiers.”

To this end the SMDC Colorado Springs Motorcycle Mentorship Program was created. As part of the program, which includes monthly meetings and training sessions, several ‘rides’ are slated during the year to let Army Space Soldiers watch, learn, and gain experience.

The most recent even took place back on September 25 when a few Army Space Soldiers and a civilian guest took a bike ride entitled appropriately ‘In The Wind.’

The journey was suppose to take a route from Peterson Air Force Base to Sedalia, Colo., with a lunch stop in Castle Rock, Colo., and then return back to base. Unfortunately weather conditions were chancy and the route was switched to Limon, Colo., a shorter journey.

Prior to the sojourn participants viewed a motorcycle safety video, had their respective cycles inspected, and were paired up with appropriate mentors before taking to the highway.

This was the third in a series for the year. Two previous rides took place all on Fridays – the first was back on May 8 which journeyed to Canon City, Colo., and returned to Peterson, the second took place on June 12 via Cripple Creek and ending at Turkey Creek Ranch just outside of Fort Carson, Colo., for the annual USASMDC/ARSTRAT Operations organizational picnic.

“I started this program this year when I identified how many riders we had in SMDC and no program was present,” said CSM William C. Baker, 1st Space Battalion, and owner of two Bigdog choppers.

Baker, who has over 35 years of riding experience, began the program at the battalion level, but recognized the need to move it to the brigade.

“Normally we have approximately 65 participants show up. It all depends on mission requirements. We have also worked with the Fort Carson Motorcycle Mentorship program and feed off each other for support – two separate programs, but we help each other. The brigade motorcycle mentorship program allows the command to place focus on motorcycle safety.”

But the program is not just about getting together and jumping on a bike heading for the open spaces. There is a lot more to it with leaders in the battalion and the brigade taking responsibility.

“At the company level leaders keep track of who the motorcycle riders are,” says 1SG Anthony H. Manalo, first sergeant, HHC, 1st Space Brigade.

“Leaders also conduct safety inspections of the motorcycles at each safety event and verify endorsements required by law. These include the policies and regulations govern by the Army. In addition, they emphasize and strictly enforce the use of proper protective equipment/clothing and Department of Transportation approved equipment. All motorcycle riders are required to attend a Motorcycle Safety Course whether it is the basic or the experienced rider skills training course.”

Manalo, who rides a Harley Heritage Softail Classic, states, “We conduct group rides to give young and new riders the



Peterson, left, and Levy, center, pull out on their sport bikes while Hartwig brings up the rear with something more classic



Manalo, the brigade's HHC 'Top', assumes the position as he races in the wind

opportunity to learn from one another. New riders are encouraged to learn from riders with more experience and vice versa. Every motorcycle rider learns from each other regardless the level of experience.

“We discuss hand and arm signals provided by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, basic motorcycle etiquette, and then launch a group motorcycle ride to a designated location.”

Once they arrive at their destination Manalo says the group conducts after action reviews, discuss observations from the ride, re-emphasize motorcycle etiquette and finishes with a safe ride back to the unit.

A native of the Philippines, Manalo has been riding since he was 14 and currently has 23 years under his belt.

As for one of the Army Space Soldiers who has joined the program SGT Brandon K. LaForce, says, “I think these last few rides have been great.”

“I feel that it helps build camaraderie in the unit and it helps new riders to feel more comfortable with their limited experience.”

“Sometimes as a veteran rider I think you tend to get complacent with your surroundings, and the safety classes that we conduct before these rides are a reminder for you to continue to ride defensively.”

A current owner of a Yamaha YZF600 sport bike, LaForce has been riding for about eight years.

“In my opinion, you learn something new every time you ride. Until this program started I hadn't done much riding in large groups and I think that I have learned to do it safely.”

... I like smoke and lightning  
 Heavy metal thunder  
 Racin' with the wind  
 ... Born to be wild

Words and music by Mars Bonfire