

Soldiers cruise even though rally cancelled

WILSON A. RIVERA

Monitor Staff

Despite the early morning rain showers that ignited the official cancellation of the Fort Bliss motorcycle rally Friday, more than 100 Soldiers, veterans and civilian riders still went on a short bike run.

Riders slowly rolled into the museum parking lot to find other individuals, like themselves, who didn't let the rain stop them from riding in the installation's first bike rally.

"It's raining, and we had this type of a turn out ... If the sun was out, it would have been great," said Maj. Gen. Robert P. Lennox, post commanding general.

According to Lennox, due to rising gas prices, Soldiers are returning from overseas deployments and purchasing motorcycles.

Motorcyclists on sport bikes and cruisers arrived to participate in the bike rally; however, it was canceled because of wet road conditions.

"What better training can it be than riding in the rain," said Ret. Chief Warrant Officer Ed "Lil Bag" Veroneau, a member of the Rising Eagle Motorsport Association. "Any chance I get, I'm riding."

Even though the official motorcycle rally bike run was canceled, it didn't stop many of the experienced riders from spreading the word about going ahead with a short cruise of the Sun City.

After the sun appeared from behind the clouds, the roads dried up. An alternate route was checked for dangerous areas, and word spread that a bike run would still happen under the supervision of experienced riders within the motorcycle mentorship program.

"I just came back from Iraq, and it's the first time I've seen something like this," said Spc. Humberto Suarez, 3rd Battalion, 6th Air Defense Artillery. "I thought it was going to be more like a riding course and didn't expect for it to be a full-out ride."

Riders gathered around to hear Lennox's thoughts about the turnout and appreciation toward the safety office's efforts in the planning of the event. Lt. Col David R. Grussing, 387th CONUS Replacement Center commander, also appointed leader of the event, prepared those who still wanted to go on the short ride.

Out through the Marshall Gate and down Railroad Drive to Loop 375, riders flowed down the road in a staggered formation to a gas station in far east El Paso. After a quick break, the group of about 100 riders cruised south on Loop 375 and ventured onto the Border Highway enroute back to Fort Bliss.

The leading cause of death and serious injuries to military personnel continues to be privately owned vehicle crashes, to include motorcycles. Fort Bliss's commanding general looked to promoting awareness and improving knowledge and riding skills of Fort Bliss' motorcycle riding community, which consist of more than 1,000 riders.

"I came to ride. If you have a bike, then they want you to get out and ride," said Spc. Dalton E. Nielson, 1st Bn., 1st ADA.

All the event riders learned more about El Paso area motorcycle clubs and associations. The Coalition of Clubs sponsors meetings for motorcycle riders to stay informed about community events. Meetings are held every first Wednesday of the month at Mulligans Bar and Grill off of U.S. Highway 54 and Kenworthy.



PHOTOS BY WILSON A. RIVERA

Bikes lined up outside the Fort Bliss ADA Museum as the skies cleared and the rain receded off the roads.



Ret. Chief Warrant Officer Ed "Lil Bag" Veroneau registers with the post safety office for prize giveaways.

(Left) Shirts are handled out to participants of the event who remained after the cancellation of the rally.



Maj. Gen. Robert P. Lennox spoke and greeted riders who showed up for the event.