

The G.I. CYCLISTS Who BEAT GEORGIA'S 'ANGEL BASTARDS'

They soldiered hard and rode hard, but to do both they had to stay alive—and that meant beating the renegade bikers ...

By STEVE ERICSON
as told to
ANTHONY HODGES



THE bikers and their
messes roared into the
sleepy little town,
straight down Main
Street, to make sure that
as many citizens as pos-
sible knew they arrived

TRUE



12 FIRST COMPLETE ACCOUNT ANYWHERE

THE RUMBLE THAT RIPPED THE SOUTH

NOT even the U.S. Army can keep a cyclist away from his cycle. That's the way it was with me and my cycling buddies, anyway. And not even the U.S. Army can keep any man away from women, and the mixture of cycles and women is what got us into trouble.

I was stationed in an Army camp in Georgia after finishing my tour of duty in Vietnam. I had only a few months of service left and things were going fine. I had light duty in a detachment of men who were either waiting for their discharges or for reassignment. I was helping the supply sergeant, supposedly, but actually I was running the supply room while the supply sergeant was doing more pleasant things that I won't go into. It was a good deal; I did the job and "covered" for him and he tipped off his buddy, the first sergeant, to let me come and go as I pleased. The supply sergeant would stop by a couple of times a week to sign forms



CYCLE duty in Vietnam (as above) was good training for the G.I.'s battles with the outlaw bikers ...

ANGEL BASTARDS

and straighten out any problems that came up. The rest of the week I put in a few hours of work a day and got into town two or three times a week and every weekend to ride my cycle.

There were four other cyclists in the detachment. All of us had been in Vietnam doing recon and patrol duty on cycles. We had a club going, sort of. And we were quite a collection of "GI Outlaws":

Rocker Reilly, who was a rock 'n' roll freak and always had a portable radio stuck in his pocket and an earphone plugged into his ear, except when he was in the shower or asleep. And he had his cycle helmet fitted out with a specially designed transistor radio so he could listen while he rode. He looked like a Martian, with a two-foot-long aerial sticking out of his helmet.

KP; real name, Henry Mitchell. He once did a week of voluntary KP so the first sergeant would give him extra time off to ride his cycle.

Sarge, whose name was Michael Sergeant; he was a corporal so, Corporal Sergeant. Confusing.

Binge Harkins who, his buddies said, was drunk the whole time he was in Vietnam, even when he was decorated with the Silver Star. "Only way I could get through the ----- war," he said.

Before Vietnam, we had all been with what you might call outlaw clubs, so we knew our way around.

There was this small town about two miles from camp that was so dead that none of the other GIs ever went there; the MPs would ride down the main street on Saturday night at midnight, just in case, and that was it as far as checking for GIs. We'd gotten friendly with an old-time cyclist named Doc Hadley, who ran a service station. He let us keep our cycles there rather than on post, so we could keep them tuned up and not be hassled by the Army. All of us had got friends to ride our cycles to Doc's from home, since we all lived within a hundred miles or so of the base. My kid brother rode mine down from Charleston, West Virginia, my hometown. And having my big chopper—a Honda 750, a four-cylinder "super bike" that can come right



THE GIs weren't cowed by the cyclists and fought back—hard. Cyclists knew that they had a tough fight on their hands...

from the crate and cut down any cycle going—was almost as good as having a shack-up in town.

So whenever we could, the "GI Outlaws" slipped into town to go riding. Those of us who didn't have passes just sneaked out through a wooded area that led from the post to the road to town. The guards never bothered to patrol that area because who'd want to go to that town anyway?

We'd walk straight to Doc's garage. He called us "crazy cycle freaks" and was always telling us that when he was a boy, cyclists were really cyclists, and didn't have "all kinds of fancy doodads like helmets, safety tires, padded seats and roll bars." We'd hoot at him and say that cycles in his day were "sissy bikes" that couldn't go over 75 mph and that cyclists then were little old ladies who rode their bikes to church on Sundays, and faggots who only rode cycles to get thrills

riding over bumps. It was all in fun; everyone liked Doc, enough to say that any time he wanted to take out one of our choppers, to go right ahead. He'd snort and then swear he'd never get on "one of them chrome-plated Christmas trees." But we knew he went riding now and then because we'd come in and find one of the bike's engines warm.

The people in town had resented us at first, and the three local cops hassled us a couple of times. But we made damned sure that we obeyed the traffic laws, kept out of trouble, shaved, got haircuts and dressed neatly—no denim jackets, leather pants or freaky decorations on the bikes, just GI pants and boots and sweat shirts. The freakiest we got was to wear our GI helmets in-



CYCLIST-GI tension (such as above) reached the near-boiling point in the area. Outlaw bikers, Rebel Rats, felt that their hold on mamas (below) was threatened



stead of cycle helmets, except Rocker, who wouldn't give up his radio-equipped cycle helmet.

So after awhile the "townies" accepted us or, anyway, ignored us. We made our hangout one of the three bars in town, and made sure that every Saturday night we bought a round of drinks for the house and left a good tip for the bartender. We made out now and then with townie girls, but kept it quiet so the townie guys wouldn't get sore at us.

We had no real trouble until one Saturday night when we went out to the cycle drag races. Outside of town there was a section of road that wasn't used very much and the guys from 50 or so miles around blocked it off every weekend and raced their hot rods and choppers there. The local cops and the state troopers "looked the other way," figuring it kept the cyclists and hot rodders off the highway where they might kill someone, and also gave them something to do on weekends besides drinking and brawling in town.

When we quietly rode out to the "outlaw track," as they're called, no one took any notice of us. The track was a standard quarter-mile, with a half-dozen portable floodlights set up, and it looked as good and as safe as any outlaw track I'd seen.

There were maybe 200 people there, all young guys and girls—lots of girls, and they were a better reason for going to the races than the races themselves.

We stacked our cycles and went to have a look at some of the far-out choppers—and had our first meeting with the Rebel Rats, the local outlaw bikers. We were admiring an especially wild-looking chopper that was entered in one of the races. There was so much modified on the cycle that I wasn't sure what it had been originally, a Harley, Indian, Triumph or what. It was dripping with chrome and junk, which made me think it was "all show, no go."

As we were looking, a voice behind us said, "Like the cycle, do you?"

The voice was edged with hostility and I knew what I'd see when I turned around. Sure enough, a big outlaw biker with seven outlaws stood there. The Rebel Rats. A few of their mamas were with them and I especially noticed a big blonde standing just behind the leader, obviously his old lady.

"Yeah," I said, "bike's just fine." I smiled enough to look friendly but not scared. I knew I had nothing much to be scared of with four tough-heads like the GI Outlaws there with me, even though we were outnumbered.

"What kinda bike you got?" asked the chief. He was big, husky, sort of square-built, except for the beginning of a beer belly pushing out his greasy leather shirt. He was standard outlaw in his clothes and long hair, (Continued on page 75)