



MC2 DAVID GIORDA/U.S. NAVY

# The American Tribute Tour

Bikes honoring veterans to roll across the nation on three-year trip

**W**hen six specially designed motorcycles make their appearance at the Rolling Thunder Memorial Day Rally in Washington they will be starting a three-year journey expected to cover 21 states in 2014, according to plans at press time. Along the way, the bikes will be honoring the service of veterans from all wars and raising money for programs that help veterans set up their own businesses.

The bikes on The American Tribute Tour include one representing each branch of the service. The sixth Rolling Thunder bike represents all branches and will be raffled off.

Some of the touring bikes are being made by professional bike builders who are donating their services. Others are being lent to the tour. After the tour, the bikes will be returned to their owners or displayed in museums.

The American Tribute Company,

a nonprofit organization created last year, is putting together the tour under the leadership of New Orleans attorney William "Bill" Ryan.

Ryan, general counsel for Ebbert & Associates, a consulting and planning firm that works on emergency preparedness matters, came up with the bike tribute idea and explored the possibilities in a meeting at G. Smith Motorsports LLC, a motorcycle sales, repair and customization company.

Joining Ryan at the meeting was friend B.J. Perrett, executive director of the Mandeville, La.-based Blackhawk Flight Foundation, which provides scholarships and other educational opportunities in aviation and aeronautical sciences for the children of military or law enforcement personnel killed or disabled. Ryan served as Marine Corps first lieutenant in Vietnam and was awarded a Silver Star. Perrett, a retired Air Force

major, was a pilot in Vietnam.

They talked with Harold Marchand, a representative of The Magnolia Companies of Louisiana LLC, based in St. Rose, La., which owns Smith Motorsports. One of Marchand's sons is in the Army and served in Iraq. When Ryan looked at the motorbike collection in the Smith family museum, he saw an opportunity to combine motorcycle displays with his interest in helping veterans tell their stories, find satisfying jobs and get good health care.

In the months following that initial meeting at Smith Motorsports, the three men recruited others to their cause, including William M. "Bill" Detweiler, consultant for military and veterans affairs at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans; Malcolm P. Ehrhardt, a Vietnam infantryman who was awarded a Bronze Star and now is president of The Ehrhardt Group Inc.,



JENNIFER E. BERRY

a New Orleans public relations agency; and Walt Sides, a retired first sergeant in the Marines and one of the “founding fathers” of Rolling Thunder.

“Bill [Ryan] approached me because he knows that I have been working on the POW/MIA issue for over 30 years and would jump on any opportunity to work with him on a project that supports our troops,” Sides said. “That—and he still outranks me and reminds me all the time!”

Another partner in the project is retired Air Force Master Sgt. Rob Wilkins, who is on the board of directors of Rolling Thunder Washington, D.C. Inc.

Ryan also pulled in a college fraternity brother, retired Marine Colonel Ed Sandrick, head of veterans affairs with Humana Strategic Alliances’ veteran sales business. Humana Inc., a health insurance company based in Lexington, Ky., is one

of the sponsors of the bike tour. Some Humana health plans are designed specifically for service members and veterans.

Veterans at the tour stops will receive information on a new suite of health plans and financial protection services available to them.

Marchand, who has been involved in emergency response projects related to disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the 2010 BP oil spill, said the bike tribute tour “is the biggest logistical project I have ever worked on in my life.”

Money raised through sponsorships and the raffle will go to the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities Foundation and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, for programs that provide employment assistance to veterans and their families.

The winner of the raffle—and the sixth bike—will be announced on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2014.

But Sides hopes the real winners will be the veterans.

“I know what it’s like to come back from war and have no support and not be appreciated,” he said. “If I can save an Iraq or Afghanistan vet from that experience, it not only helps them—it helps me too.”

## Rolling Tribute

Each stop on the American Tribute Tour will include the bikes, riders, veterans and representatives of the sponsors. The events will be promoted through print, radio, TV and social media featuring local and national celebrities. Below are the stops in 2014.\*

Washington	May 25
New York	June 7
Laconia, N.H.	June 14-22
Louisville, Ky.	July 4
Sturgis, S.D.	Aug. 4-10
Atlanta	Aug. 17
Nashville	Sept. 5
Pigeon Ford, Tn.	Sept. 5-6; 12-14
Biloxi, Miss.	Oct. 5-12
Houston, Texas	Nov. 1
Galveston, Texas	Nov. 6-9
New Orleans	Nov. 11

\* Schedule is tentative.



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## Bucket Lists

# Former POW Ready to Ride

Every Rolling Thunder rider has a story and a reason for being on a motorcycle in the nation’s capital Memorial Day weekend, but perhaps few have a story and reason like that of retired Army Staff Sgt. Nat Henry.

After a battle on July 12, 1967, Henry, the only survivor in his platoon, was captured in Cambodia and spent six years as a prisoner of war. His time as a POW, chronicled in the book *To Hell and Beyond*, included years in a bamboo cage with only snakes, spiders and biting ants for cellmates. He arrived at his torture chamber after days of being dragged, still bleeding from his wounds, on a one-pole stretcher pulled by women armed with AK-47s.

When Henry, who was released March 5, 1973, finally made it home, he was one of the few Vietnam veterans to receive a hero’s welcome. His awards include the Silver Star. In 2012 a bridge in Macon County, N.C., was named after him.

Now in his golden years, Henry has a bucket list of things he told Becky, his wife of 38 years, that he still wants to do. The list includes:

- Shoot a gator in the bayou.
- Land a seaplane in Alaska.
- Attend a snake church service.
- Ride in Rolling Thunder and lay a wreath at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall.

He is about to cross that last item off the list. Former POW Henry will participate in the 27th Rolling Thunder Demonstration Run, an event formed to bring attention to the POW/MIA issue.