

# AN ARMY OF ONE

by Stephen Long, photos by Mark Velazquez

**A build commemorates all veterans**

## To understand the

significance of this build, one must first understand the origins of its builder. Doug "Triple D" Meeker served for 10 years in the Army as an infantryman. He's the guy you send in to handle the seriously messy stuff, muck it up with the enemy and bear the brunt of the fight. The infantry more often than not suffers the most casualties. And if that wasn't enough of a sacrifice in itself, he earned a Purple Heart. "I got hit in Ramadi, Iraq. I was on a rooftop and got hit with a mortar round," he tells us. A freakin' mortar round. "Builds character, needless to say," he wryly remarks.





After he medically retired from the Army, Doug needed to concentrate his energy elsewhere. During his youth, he spent a lot of time riding motocross and BMX, and his parents owned a company that fabricated and installed iron rail fences. He learned to weld from his father and continued to practice on friends' BMX bikes.

"After I medically retired from the military, I kind of didn't know what to do with myself. I just knew that I could return to riding motocross, and I was doing BMX stuff with a team that I was a part of, the Buckeye BMX Freestyle Team. And then I came down to Daytona Beach, attended Wyotech, and then thought, 'okay – what am I going to do from here?'" Doug says. Well, from there, he decided to give motorcycle technician school a shot and then planned to return to Colorado Springs where he was stationed while in the military and still remained in touch with a lot of his friends. But we all know how plans change.

Doug started doing some work on the side for his friends, and more and more people continued to approach him for work they were interested in having done on their bikes. Suddenly, those frigid Colorado winters seemed as distant in his agenda as Daytona is from Ramadi. Six months later, Doug opened his first store front.

"It was about 3,000 sq-ft, and I had one lift and a toolbox," Doug recalls now with light laughter. "A few months went by and I knew I couldn't afford the space plus my house on such a small operation. So I up and bought another lift, primarily to sleep on." His fortitude revealing itself yet?

It's important to understand why Triple D Motorcycles' continued existence is integral to the military-style build laid out in front of you. The shop survives on the goodwill of others, mainly those with a background in the military. Doug's story is a familiar one among veterans, people who want to ply their trade in a civilian setting, using the specific skills

and lessons learned while serving in hostile territory. Other vets attend Wyotech, too, with the purpose of digging their hands back into motors and bringing to life the machines of their choosing. Those soldiers-turned-students at Wyotech are looking for somewhere to test themselves when class ends, and Doug's shop is always open, especially for a vet in need. And it goes both ways, as a majority of the work Triple D Motorcycles does is tended to by people on what Doug calls "contributed time." They're happy to be there, they're happy to be working on bikes, and they're happy to focus their energies on positive enhancement. This 1998 Softail is just one of the recipients of such labors of love.

The build was commissioned by the AMVETS association, to be raffled when completed to raise money for its foundation. But Doug and his band of merry volunteers weren't approached first. Rather, they saved the day. "The build was brought to us by the AMVETS association. They asked if we'd be interested in finishing a project that was started with another group, with which they wouldn't be able to follow through. They said, 'We have all these parts laid out, and we want to see if you guys could do something with it,'" Doug says. He accepted the job, as working for his brothers and sisters who served is paramount in his mission as a builder, rider, and veteran ("Anything to do with vets is a big deal"). But, as with most custom builds, not everything went smoothly.

The bike arrived in the bed of a pickup truck, completely stripped down. And those parts that were laid out and ready to go? Yeah—half of those parts weren't correct. And figuring out where to go from there felt like, as Doug puts it, "reinventing the wheel." But he and his mostly volunteer staff put their heads together and gathered the concepts they envisioned for the bike, opting for a "World War II look with a modern, new-age feel."

The front end was first to be redesigned, as it was completely



missing from the frame to begin with. Triple D researched and eventually settled on Paughco's springer front end kit, a nod to the ubiquitous 1942 WLA, the everlasting symbol of Harley's efforts and presence in the war. Paughco actually donated all the parts it provided, including the springer, fenders, a set of wheels, and the handlebar. Builds such as this really stir up the emotions!

Those are actual ammo cans, donated by a vet, the taillights are a set of Humvee taillights that actually saw action and were rewired for a 12-volt system, also donated by a vet, and that slight pouch on the right-side ammo can is an actual e-tool kit that holds a shovel (and it saw action in Vietnam), which you shouldn't be surprised to learn was also donated by a vet. Higg's Auto Paint in Holly Hill, Florida, laid down the deep olive green scheme, recalling once more the military vehicles of the '40s and '50s. And Triple D's in-house painter detailed that white Army star perfectly.

GI Jeff's, another local shop in Daytona, donated the 20mm antiaircraft rounds that operate as the foot controls on both sides, which Triple D drilled and bored out. These might be the baddest pieces on this bike. Although that handbuilt dash, complete with three switches meant to evoke a bomber's control panel and a compass (a slight joke about the GPS navigation of old), gives the 20mms a compelling opponent. Even the right-side horn is a callback to the post-war designs.

The motor was cleaned up, the heads were brought down, and those pipes were throwaways that fit what Doug wanted to do with the bike, which was to give it girth and presence. "I didn't want this to be some stock military build, but I also didn't want it to be some flashy build. I wanted this to be a bike you could fire up, and it wouldn't sound like a Vespa whispering in your ear. You fire that thing up, and it will



deafen just about anything around us. This bike would kick ISIS right in the face."

Tying the build together are actual coins from the AMVETS association that were slammed into the primary case, one for AMVETS and one for the Army. The bike was recently raffled off to its new owner in Alaska, who plans to have even more work done on it and then donate it to another veteran's charity. That calls to mind Doug's mentioning of just how small the world is, as he spoke about his youth and other builders from his home state of Ohio. Often times, other vets are just about the only people veterans can fall back on, and in learning about Triple D Motorcycles and all the work Doug and his crew do for other vets, it sheds light on their vast but tightly knit community. "The PTSD stress, the things that these guys go through and what I know I go through, it's a lot. And maybe we don't want to go talk to someone, maybe we don't want to go to a meeting. Maybe we want to get on our motorcycles and just let the motions flow. Maybe we want to get together with our vet buddies and hit the back roads, getting rid of the stress of the last month." This build is by veterans, for veterans, and it signifies way more than most of us will ever know. ★

## TECH SHEET

<b>Builder</b>	Triple D Motorcycles
<b>Year/model</b>	1998 Harley-Davidson Softail
<b>Time to build</b>	Nine months
<b>Powdercoater</b>	Moto Stop, Daytona Beach, FL
<b>Painter</b>	Triple D Motorcycles
<b>Color</b>	Olive green

<b>Air cleaner</b>	K&N
<b>Exhaust</b>	Homemade
<b>Ignition</b>	Thunder Heart
<b>Charging system</b>	Cycle Electric
<b>Primary cover</b>	Modified Harley-Davidson

## ACCESSORIES

<b>Taillight</b>	US Army Humvee
<b>Fuel tank</b>	Paughco
<b>Handlebars</b>	Paughco
<b>Risers</b>	Paughco
<b>Seat</b>	Leathermen
<b>Dash</b>	Handbuilt with Panhead dash inlay with aircraft switches
<b>License bracket</b>	Zip-ties
<b>Foot controls</b>	Custom-made 20mm antiaircraft rounds

## POWERPLANT

<b>Engine</b>	Evo 1340
<b>Pistons</b>	Weisco
<b>Cams</b>	Andrews EV46
<b>Valves</b>	Kibblewhite
<b>Lifters</b>	S&S
<b>Pushrods</b>	S&S

## CHASSIS

<b>Front forks</b>	Paughco springer
<b>Front wheel</b>	Paughco
<b>Rear wheel</b>	Paughco
<b>Front tire</b>	Shinko
<b>Rear tire</b>	Shinko
<b>Front fender</b>	Paughco
<b>Rear fender</b>	Harley-Davidson Shovelhead