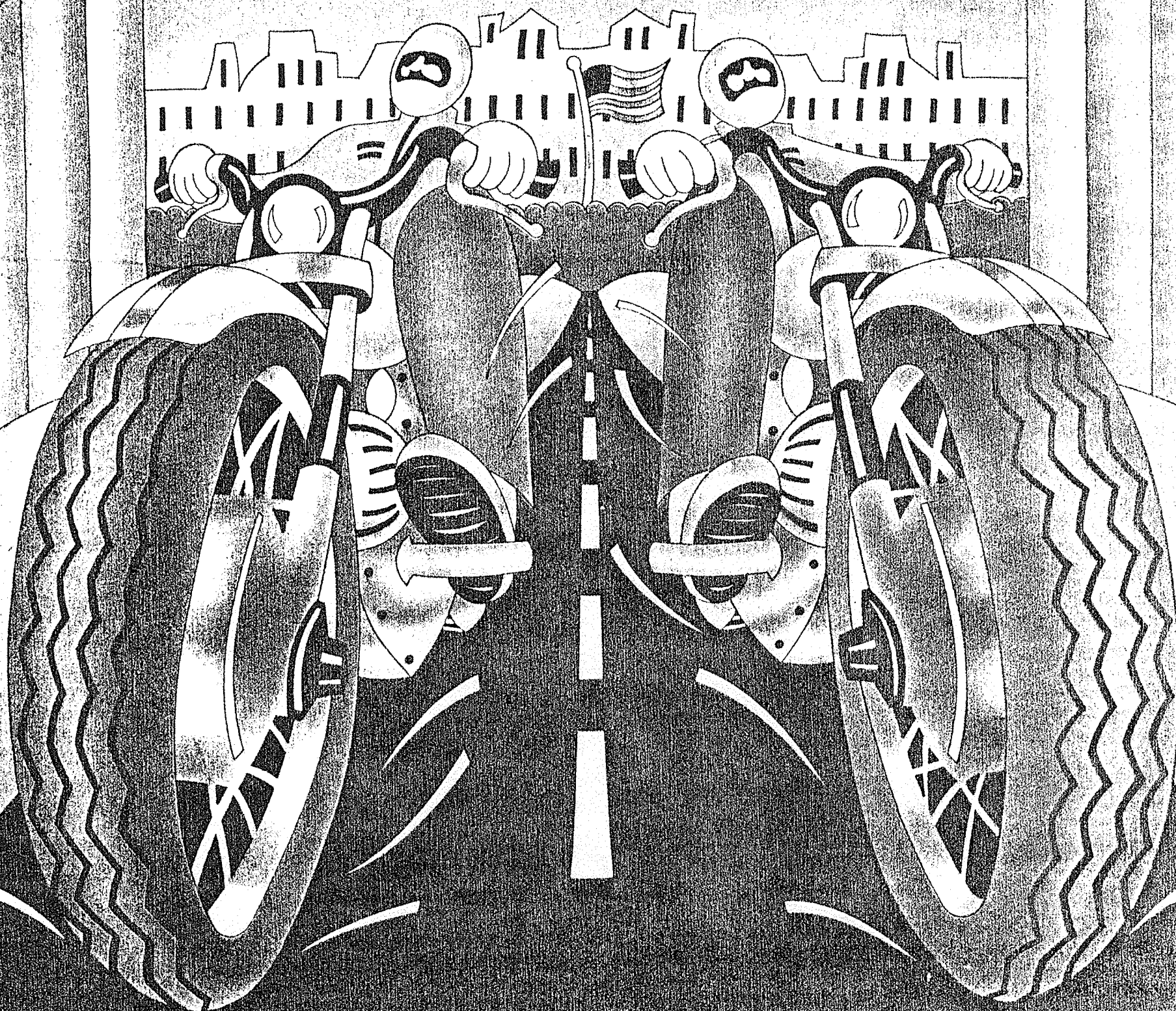


# Family

The Modern Volunteer Army presents

## UNCLE SAM'S EASY RIDERS



HENDERSON



# Two GIs bike across America, to reveal the love, truth and — beauty — which lurks in the inner recesses of (gasp!) The U.S. Army!

By Barry Fishler

Photos by Andrew Schneider

It was the sheer *nerve* of it all that was so unsettling. When the early word came out of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command late last September, career soldiers sputtered into their coffee cups with the most pronounced mutterings since *Catch-22* unleashed Ex-PFC Wintergreen on an unsuspecting world. Here were these Sp4s named Reitmeyer and Speegle, with riding leathers thrown over their nice new greens, revving up these two growling Harleys with Modern Volunteer Army stickers on the sides while all these generals and colonels, from USAREC to the Pentagon, signed the paperwork, swallowed deeply and sat back in silent contemplation. Whither thou goest — the NCOs might have thought — Army I knew and loved?

Whither indeed. The very idea would have been unheard of — *unthought of* — in those not too distant pre-MVA days. Give two young enlisted men three months to travel around America on motorcycles? As spokesmen for the Army? With — and this is for real — no restrictions about whom to talk to or what to say? Why it would have been nonsensical, non-military, non-Army, for crying out loud. And while we're on the subject, who *are* those guys, anyway?

An excellent question. And while there still may be some who are not with it, sequestered so many rings inward on the Arlington shoreline that they have yet to find out, it's a pretty good bet that they are very few in number. By the time the whole saga is writ, blending elements of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Phil Silvers Show* and *M\*A\*S\*H*, the whole country may be hip to what's going on. After all, how many Sp4s do you know that get mail addressed to

Doug Reitmeyer

U.S. Army

Washington, D.C.

and have it delivered? With generals writing the answers because the Sp4 in question is still laying patches somewhere between Reno and the Bonneville Salt Flats? Only in America.

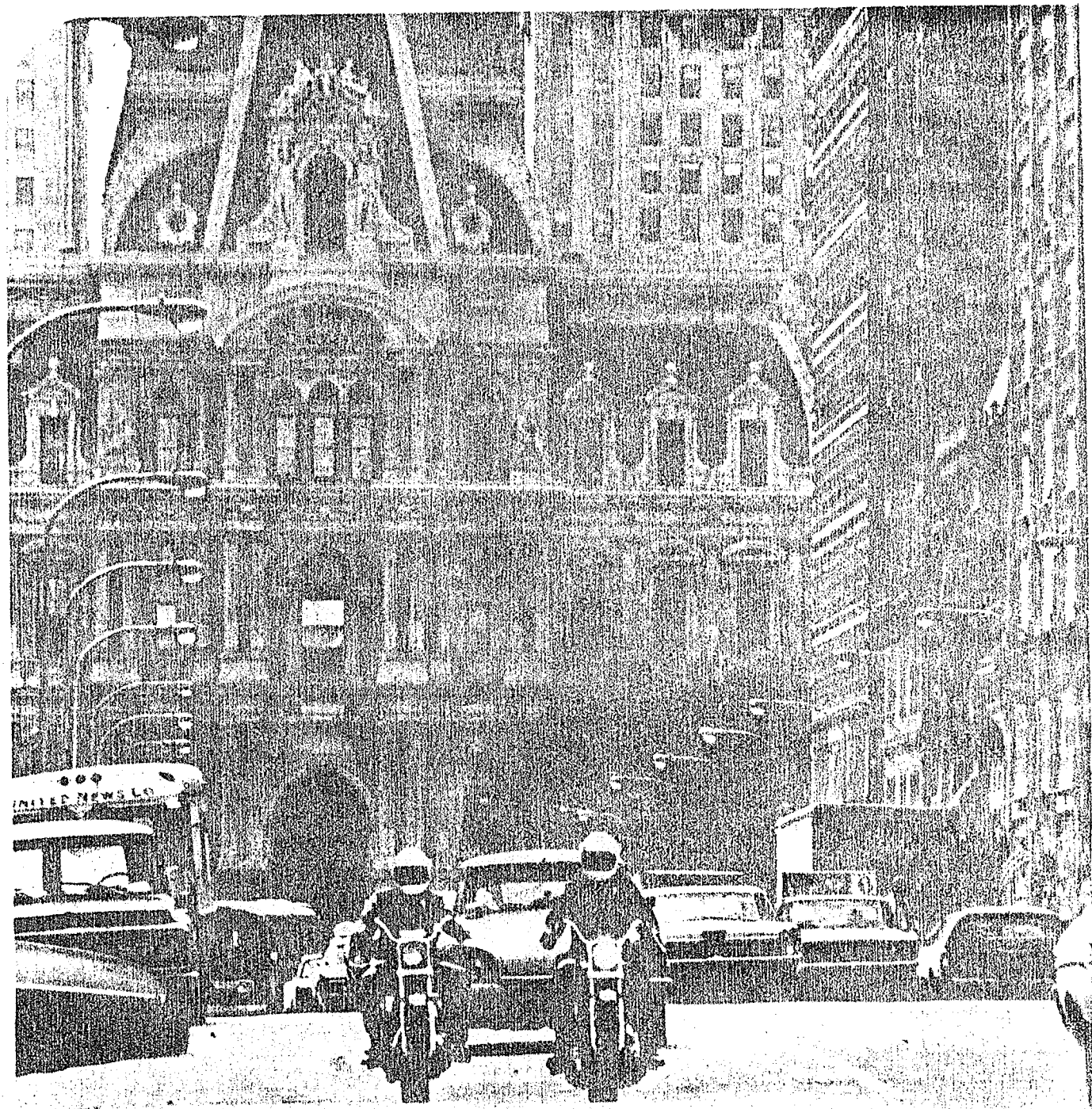
Our story begins in the fall of 1970, with Doug Reitmeyer, civilian, sadly contemplating his impending draft call. The reason he finds himself in this state is because he has chosen to drop out of San Jose State — where, characteristically, he leaves a 3.5 average in physics — in order to help a friend sail a 29-foot sloop to Hawaii.

Not too long before, Reitmeyer, who thinks big, his 5'6" stature notwithstanding, had joined the same friend on a 3 a.m. climb to the top of the Golden Gate Bridge. There the pair remained for seven hours, doing whatever it is that people do at the top of bridges all night.

(It isn't quite clear, yet, as to *why* he does things. He just, well, . . . *does* things. In his time — which spans all of 22 springtimes — he has functioned on and off as a carpenter, electrician, mailman, painter, computer circuit card designer, locksmith, welder and several other things for which job descriptions have not yet been written. He has also raced motorcycles on the European continent, including the Grand Prix circuit at Spa, Belgium).

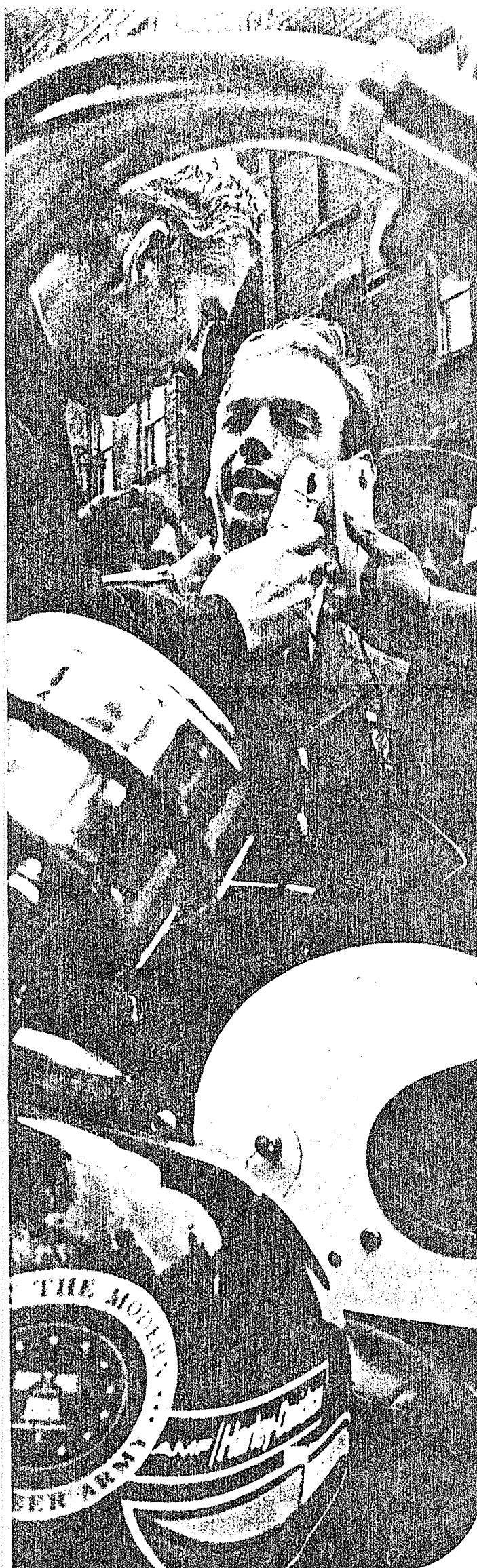
In repose — which is rare — he resembles more than anything else a flashcube getting ready to fire. *Blip. Blip. Blip. Blip.* Hurry up and change it. He may take

Barry Fishler and Andrew Schneider are free-lancers who have reported on the Marines' NCO pilots and the Army's "Superdogs" in recent issues. They trailed the "Easy Riders" night and day for weeks throughout the Southeast and on to New York for this article. They swear the pace almost killed them.



## UNCLE SAM'S EASY RIDERS





off again. His eyes dart back and forth in a continuous pattern of fact gathering. Question. Evaluate. Conclude. Input. At some time in the future, a week, a month, a year, something will trigger his circuits and a dissertation will burst forth.

Witness a drizzly night in Orlando, Fla., waiting for a 6 a.m. breakfast date with 83 brand new recruits. Reitmeyer chances to find a motel room key dancing in his fingers.

"Hey! These locks have seven tumblers. *Sevqn*. You know, man, that's really unusual. Most motel locks don't have seven. That's because. . ." And he is off on a 10-minute evaluation of the motel security situation of America. Renaissance Man, 1971. Ten minutes later he will take the lead in the removal of certain sutures from the posterior of his sidekick, Mike Speegle, who sustained injuries when a Riviera skidded through an icy Atlanta intersection, almost ending the tour for Speegle right then and there.

Ali. Mike Speegle. The other half of the most dynamic duo to wear Army green since Glenn Davis and "Doc" Blanchard, of West Point football fame. He looks like an Everyjock — 6'4", 240 pounds of blond-haired Coloradan. But the ski country visage is a belying one. Behind the easygoing approach ticks a brain with big plans for a post-service life.

He'll return to college to finish up his bachelor's in math. Then he'll add one in electrical engineering. Then one in physics. And a master's in the first one so as to, in his words, "build a big foot" when the time comes to knock on a few corporate doors. (Oh, yes. When he and Reitmeyer found themselves together in the Army's toughest academic haul, nuclear weapons electronics, they wasted little time in putting first things first. It was Speegle tops and Reitmeyer second.)

But we're ahead of ourselves. Reitmeyer is about to be drafted, Speegle likewise. Speegle is in that fix because a calendar miscalculation gummed up his timetable for appeals as a conscientious objector. With a lottery number of 40 it was the only mistake he got.

Reitmeyer, meanwhile, is thinking about packing his bags. Nice place, Canada. They've even got motorcycles up there. Enter his father, a self-made man now moving in the upper echelons of IBM, Inc., and possessed of a very realistic view of the way things are with respect to youth, the times and the draft.

"He told me it didn't make any sense to go to Canada right off. He had been in the Army and I'd heard from him and my friends some really bad things. But he said I ought to see what was up first. Enlist, see what they had. If I didn't like it, Canada would still be there. I couldn't see as how it'd make any difference, so in I went."

The initial welcome at Fort Lewis, Wash. raised some second thoughts. They took his hair. His identity. His patience.

"I got my head shaved, the food was lousy, we were having five formations a day. Man, it was terrible." If ever a private was ready for a Modern Volunteer Army, and improvements thereto, it was Reitmeyer.

Cue MVA and roll tape. Suddenly he was at Fort Ord, Calif. and things began to happen in Reitmeyer's outer world. Not surprisingly, they triggered things in his inner world, an unplumbed depth.

Things began to move. Rapidly enough to startle even him, which is fast. Formations dropped to just two a day. Soldiers were walking around with hair on their heads. With his Fort Lewis cranial spitshine he felt like "some sort of weirdo." When a civilian in the mess hall asked him how he'd like his eggs — and complied with his somewhat sarcastic retort for a cheese omelet — the little tumblers began to click inside his by now spinning head.

By the time he and Speegle had intersected at Redstone Arsenal for their advanced individual training in nuclear weapons, both were ready to admit that the Army was not exactly what they had expected.

**Top, far left:** With Philadelphia, Pa.'s city hall behind them, "Easy Riders" Sp4s Doug Reitmeyer and Mike Speegle head for a rap session at a local high school **Bottom, far left:** Students at Southern High School, Baltimore, Md., asked for and got more than 500 Army recruiting posters like the one Doug is holding. **Left:** The final stop on the tour was a repeat visit to East Harlem. Doug again meets the press and local citizens on 112th St., while Mike is elsewhere, rapping with some youths.

"I was in a two-man room," recalls Speegle, "with black light posters, peace signs and a styrofoam beer cooler. Every morning we'd wake up and Doug couldn't tell me we were in the Army. I'd tell him it *couldn't* be the Army."

(Young soldiers who get beyond basic training today are going to have as hard a time believing it as did Speegle then. Soon after he and Reitmeyer returned from their three-month tour — leaving behind them hundreds of conversations with young Americans, during which they painted a rosy picture of life at an MVA installation, recruits included, the Army pulled part of their compliments right out from under them. The noble experiment with beer in the barracks and plush accommodations of cubicle life for recruits at Fort Ord was a thing of the past. On January 19, the Army announced that the elimination of reveille and non-essential formations for recruits and other soldiers was permanent, but that squad bays and hard physical training were back for recruits.)

(Do Reitmeyer and Speegle feel embittered by this change, since it came so close on the heels of their own face-to-face promises to the contrary? Do their faces feel eggy, at least where future recruit life is concerned? "Hell, no!" says Reitmeyer. "If they tried something and it didn't work and they decided to go back to something that's better, then that's fine. Just because they've changed two months of the Army doesn't mean they've changed the Army. If a recruit is going to learn more and be put into better physical condition, then he's the one who should appreciate the Army for trying to do it for him.")

But for Reitmeyer and Speegle at Redstone Arsenal, it was the Army, circa 1971. Ever interested to see how far things would go, Reitmeyer began to snoop around a little. His wanderings brought him to the local MVA coordinator, and after some nice talk about how great things were, he decided to broach a little plan that had been fermenting within his head, back there amongst the tumblers and Hawaii and the Golden Gate. "Hey, Army, why not put a couple of us on cycles and send us around America to rap with people — let 'em know what's going on," thought Reitmeyer.

The next thing young PFC Reitmeyer knew was that he was on the shores of the Potomac, spilling out the scheme nobody was supposed to pay any attention to. Lt. Gen. George Forsythe, top man in the Modern Volunteer Army project, heard him out.

To Reitmeyer's amazement, Forsythe went for the idea. And while an examination of the top echelon memos which were traveling back and forth at the time reveals more than a smattering of paranoia (one general officer concerned with such things suggested going easy on publicity, because there was always the chance that Reitmeyer "might be beaten up at some school"), Forsythe seemed troubled by no such nightmares.

"Well, there are always some risks involved when you don't know a man very well, but the Army is changing for the better. We're trusting our people more, and I was willing to put my professional neck on the block, based on my judgment of Reitmeyer."

"There wasn't a self-centered thing about what he wanted to do. He came in — which is so typical of young guys today; they're very, very frank — and he said he'd been wrong. He was going to go to Canada but that now things were different. People just didn't understand and he'd like to go and tell them about it. And he wanted to go on a motorcycle."

"Well, the immediate thought is 'why a motorcycle?' The answer is that first of all, he *likes* motorcycles. And secondly, young people like them. And that made sense to me — the guy just made sense."

"One of the profound things that's happening to the Army — and something that just isn't really understood at all — is the attitude and environment now that General Westmoreland is building the trust and confidence in our people. There are so many policies that we've come out with that relate to that: the sign-in, sign-out for a trained soldier; not having to hold reveille every morning just to count noses; the beer in the barracks — all of those things. They say that 'You're a man and we trust you. You know what the standards are.' It was all just in line with something I believe in and I felt I could trust Reitmeyer."

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From preceding page

So the caravan was to form at USAREC headquarters at Fort Monroe, Va. as soon as Reitmeyer and Speegle finished their Army schooling. During the next 17 weeks Reitmeyer put his agile head to work juggling times and dates and necessities. The last was easy enough. Perhaps remembering his lessons in weapons of opportunity he cast anxious eyes toward the biggest opportunity of all: American business.

"I didn't think the Army should have to pay for advertising. With all of these new programs it practically sells itself. All you have to do is get the word to the people," said Reitmeyer.

Which is what he began to do. By the time he was finished he had convinced Harley-Davidson to furnish the bikes, a 1000-cc Sportster for himself and a more stable 1200-cc Superglide for Speegle, who had ridden before, but was now about to get the quickie intensified course in big bike survival. In like manner, Texaco came through with \$500 worth of free gas and oil credit, Coleman with enough camping gear to sustain an expedition to any point short of the Himalayas and Kampgrounds of America with a VIP card.

To complete the armament, Reitmeyer bought an extra long van, stocked it with his brand new wife of three months, 18-year-old Debbie Reitmeyer; extra uniforms; mountings for the bikes; and certain other necessities.

"Hey, man, find the earphones. You've got to dig this," he told a visitor to the van, somewhere between Gainesville, Ga. and Atlanta. After a hurried search through a growing pile of laundry, tools, MVA posters and road maps, the earphones were produced. Reitmeyer slapped the cartridges into the player. Cartridges? Of course. One for each ear. (What's the matter, you never heard The Rolling Beatles?)

But Uncle Sam's Easy Riders need their diversions, for the schedule is hellacious. When the trip is over the trio will have done 12,000 miles in 86 days, hitting about 90 cities in a frenetic dash across the gut of America — Virginia to California — and back across the South. A bike breaks down and the trio is late in Pittsburgh.

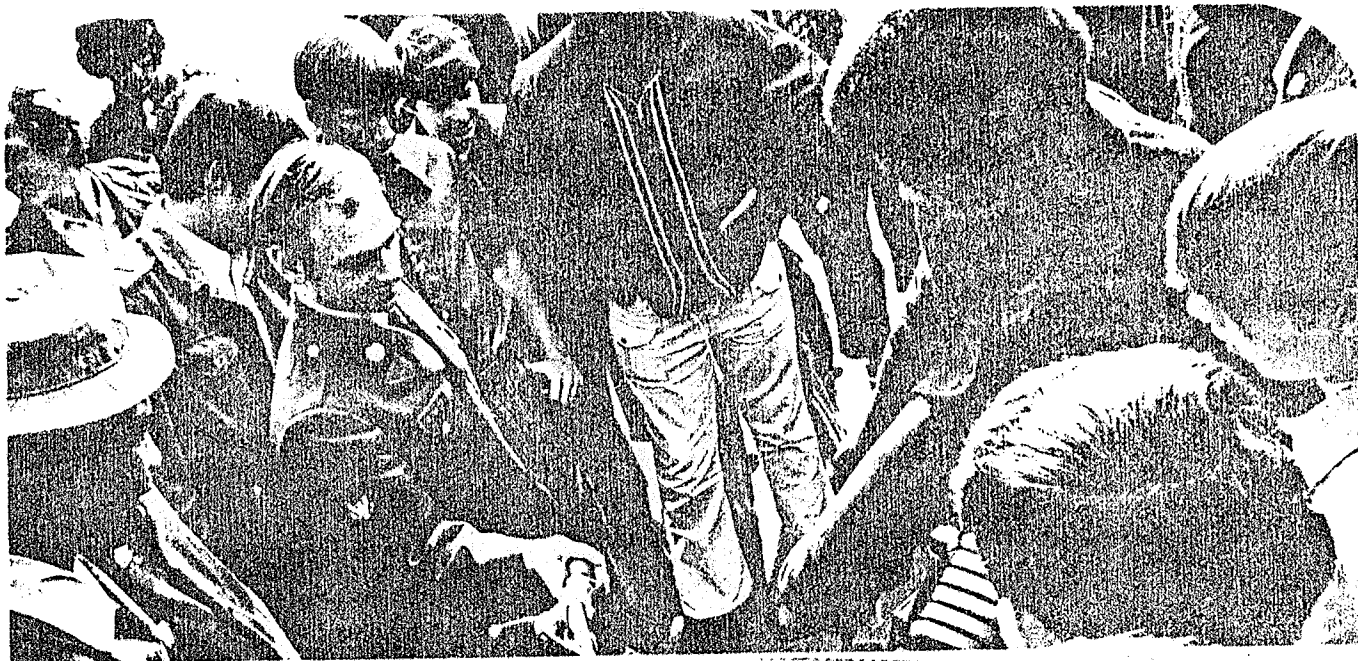
"Never again, man," Reitmeyer recalled later. "We were late that one time and the papers printed that it was still the same old Army. Hurry up and wait. Practically all of the media had split by the time we got there. We swore it was the last time we'd be late anywhere." It was. From that point on the caravan traveled at night, getting to each stop before daybreak, grabbing what little sleep they could before confronting America the next day. Sometimes this involved strange logistics, with the caravan traveling in pieces, with Debbie driving the van either ahead or behind, trying to coordinate appearances, repairs and laundry with the bikers' schedule.

The appearances were unusual. It was a rare occasion — no matter what region they were in — when Vietnam was thrown at them for openers. The young people in America didn't seem to be as worried about being swept up in a war they care little for as much as they worried about being swept up — period. So their questions were about job training and social life and working conditions.

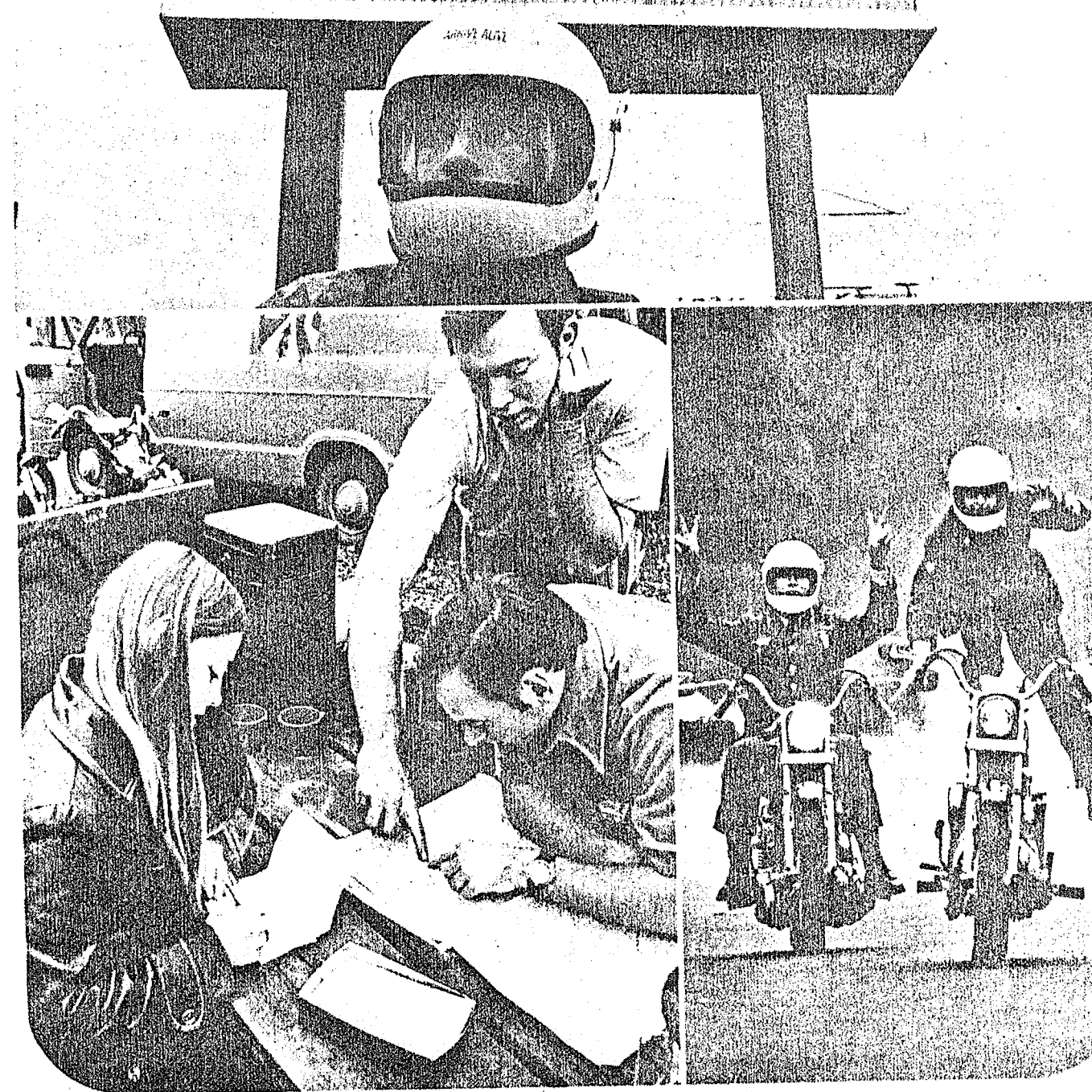
A closely cropped cadet at Riverside Military Academy in Georgia — where Reitmeyer spent his senior year running the late night ice cream smuggling ring as a profitable sideline — throws out a question

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**Top:** Every time the "Easy Riders" stopped at a high school, students wanted to get on the cycles. Here, Doug lets a student at Clark Central High School, Athens, Ga. try on his bike for size. **Center:** Although the "Easy Riders" normally shunned motels, advance men from the Army's ad agency helped provide appropriate greetings when they did stay in one, as happened here at the Heart O' Jacksonville (Fla.) Motel. **Bottom, left:** Doug, his wife, Debbie, and Mike (top) often camped out on the road. Here they plan the next day's trip at their campsite on the Potomac River in Virginia. When necessary, they could put the bikes in the van, but often Debbie followed along or went ahead in the van Doug bought for the trip. **Bottom, right:** Whenever they pulled up to a crowd outside a high school, Mike and Doug stunted. Mike normally did safer tricks, such as his hands-off "V" signs here in Savannah, Ga., while Doug stood on the seat or did wheelies.



WELCOME US ARMY EASY RIDERS  
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From page 8

"Is everything as cool as you say it is? I mean, do they still have those old redneck sergeants and all that?"

"Sure, they've still got a few guys like that — but they're really trying to change. They're trying to get rid of the guys that won't pull their own weight. Like, you can go to one company with a commander who's really a great guy and you can really dig the Army. But by the same token, you can get another one and not like it at all." At an Orlando, Fla. recruiting station Reitmeyer will be more blunt. He will tell a reporter from the local daily that the officer corps suffers because "some of them are meatheads." He will say this surrounded by one lieutenant colonel and a roomful of senior sergeants. The colonel almost chokes on his cigar.

"I told them we wouldn't make the trip unless we could say exactly what we wanted," Reitmeyer emphasizes. And he always does. A recruiter asks him to record a pitch.

"No. I'm not a recruiter." When he finally does get to the tape recorder he tells listeners that "he doesn't feel you should have to go." It's aired that way.

"I just want people to know what's going on. I've got buddies who are still going to Canada because they don't know what the Army is like. The word has got to get out. I think we ought to go out and talk for peace! What better qualified guys are there than the Army? You think we want to go over there and dodge bullets?"

The point eventually comes up at high schools across the country. What about 'Nam?

"What about it? The Army doesn't send people to 'Nam. Civilians do that. They'll draft guys that you just wouldn't believe and give 'em to the Army. We don't want this."

On the road, though, there were some things they did want.

The trio leaned toward campgrounds whenever possible. "Motels?" queried Reitmeyer, "What are they? People lock themselves in and come back to the world

for meals. We wanted to get out to where we could see the people. It was the whole point of the trip."

"All we'd have to do," said Speegle, "would be to pull in on those bikes, set up shop and we'd have people coming over before we knew what was happening. We'd just start a rap."

If ever a crowd lacked for a rap, Reitmeyer possessed the sure cure, especially at high schools. There are few things a cyclist likes more than a big bike and open space. Throw in an audience and you're in business.

With his European bike racing experience coming to the fore, Reitmeyer would blast up to a school, turn a wheelie or two, perhaps stand up on the seat. Then he and Speegle would look for an open door, which is when the fun usually started.

Few things are guaranteed to upset a high school principal more than a couple of guys in black leather riding Harleys up the front steps. Sometimes this calls for drastic action. At one school in Georgia a school official planted himself in the doorway like the Colossus of Rhodes: "You're going to bring that thing in here? Not in my school, you don't!" It was a small setback in the great scheme of things, and Reitmeyer was forced to set up shop in the breezeway. Speegle was one stop behind, getting repairs to bike and body following the incident in Atlanta.

That accident was one of only several near-misses that came close to fulfilling some of the more dire prophecies that had echoed down Pentagon hallways when the idea for the trip was first put forth. In California, Reitmeyer was rear-ended by a Cadillac as he was making a right.

He came out of it with some bad bruises and ammunition for the cycle safety lecture he made a point of delivering at each school. "If you've got a 10-dollar head, wear a 10-dollar helmet," was his favorite line, followed by an admonition to buy the very best helmet you can afford. Then he'd point to his 60-dollar Harley-Davidson helmet. "I think my head's worth more than 10 bills."

(He is so right, and the totals keep clicking onward and upward. There aren't any final figures yet on how much newspaper, magazine, radio and television space and time the tour got, but it's a safe bet to assume that the Army just doesn't have the wherewithal to buy it. You don't purchase ads like the coverage they got on the front page of virtually every newspaper they encountered on the trip. Neither do you get network correspondents to read your plugs for you. It's easily the best thing to happen to the Army's image since quarterback Roger Stauback graduated from Annapolis.)

Other disasters threatened to overcome them at various points along the way. Once, while hauling the bikes in the van across the Bonneville Salt Flats, bound for a Harley shop and routine servicing, the right rear tire just went. Disintegrated. At high speed the van began to fishtail back and forth across the road. Behind the wheel, Reitmeyer was busily accepting this latest gift from the gods, perhaps wondering what tomorrow might bring. "There aren't any problems, man. I've never had a problem. There are only situations. This particular situation that was not a problem ended a mile-and-a-half down the road, upright, with nobody having then — or now, for that matter — the slightest idea about what happened to that right rear tire or why the pieces can't be found."

By the time the tour ended where it began (New York City's Harlem), to the same sort of tumultuous greeting they got the first time around, they couldn't count the tour as anything but a rousing success. "All we wanted was to get to the people and let them know exactly what to expect if they *did* join the Army," said Reitmeyer. "We weren't out to recruit anybody — just to give them the kind of straight talk they haven't been able to get up until now. And for us — well — we got an education you couldn't have paid for at any price."

So did the police along the way. They learned that the best laid plans of ticket-writing often go astray.

Reitmeyer and Speegle got replacement bikes at several stops instead of hanging around waiting for a tuneup and were often several stops ahead of their

registration. Police reaction was as might be expected: Here are these two guys sort of in uniform, with motorcycle boots, leathers and some story about being on official business. Oh, yeah? Gimme my pad.

Which is where it usually ended. Policemen who ride motorcycles often were left at the side of the road, scratching their heads: "Hmmm. . . I could've sworn I was gonna give that guy a ticket. But then he started layin' this rap to me about bikes. . . By the time I was ready to write they were gone. Maybe things'll go better tonight."

Reactions throughout the country, for the most part, couldn't have pleased the Army more. The only incidents that even started out as adverse were in Royal Oak, Mich. — a suburb of Detroit — and San Rafael, Calif. In Michigan the pair found themselves being picketed by a delegation from Vietnam Veterans Against the War, who had rented a shiny black hearse for \$12 an hour to show, as they put it, a vehicle an enlistee is liable to encounter long before he runs into any cycles.

"Yeah," says Reitmeyer, "but they had the wrong idea about us. They thought we were trying to recruit guys, telling them that if they joined up they'd get a motorcycle. That's completely off base from what we were trying to do. I went over and spoke to these guys for 15 minutes. By the time we were finished we had one of their guys going around with us for the next two days, telling everybody that we were giving it to them straight."

The greatest advocate of Reitmeyer's ability to completely turn around situations like that is his wife.

"I think being able to talk to people like this gives them a chance to see the other side. Doug really believes in this — he really does. Sometimes we find people that are really narrow about the military, but Doug can break through. It's great to see the way they can come to an understanding," said Debbie.

Sometimes the breaking through must be executed with a firmer touch — at San Rafael, things could have been a lot stickier. A lack of understanding on the part of local recruiters had loaded a high school with a bevy of dress-blued representatives — definitely not the sort of impression Reitmeyer and Speegle were trying to create.

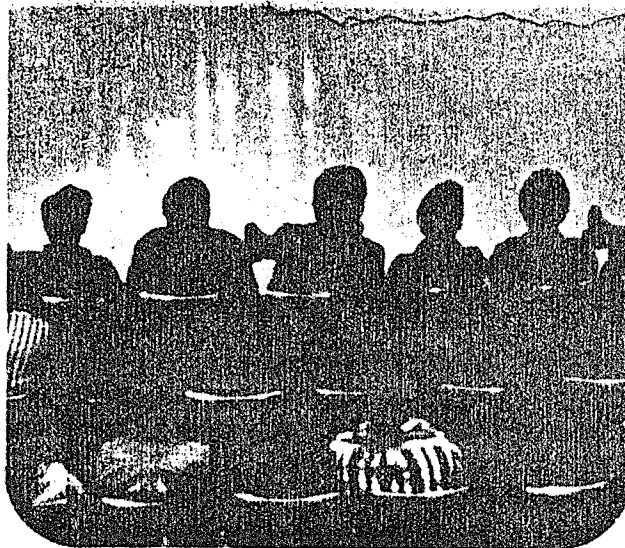
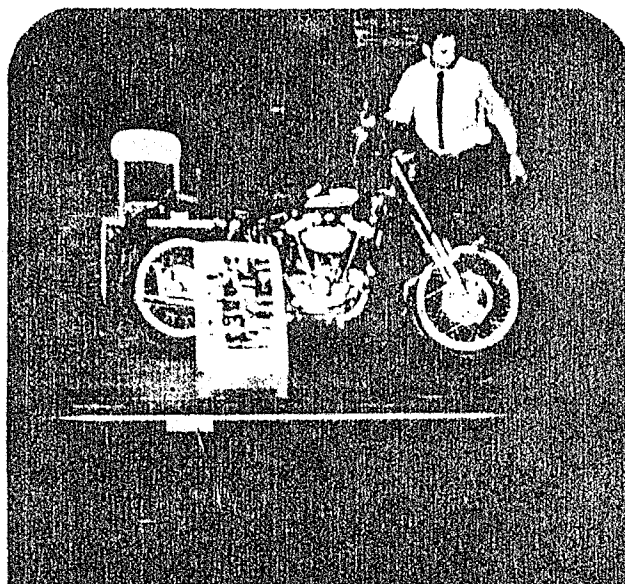
"Those poor kids must have thought they were being invaded," recalls Reitmeyer. One youth on a cycle took advantage of the situation, he says, to tool around the area screaming for the students to kick the Army out. "It took five minutes just to calm him down, but it worked out pretty well. A crowd had gathered around us and I told the guy, 'Look — if you can't help these kids any other way than by getting them thrown into jail then they don't want you around.' When the kids heard this it was a big help because it got a rapport going."

This success notwithstanding, the Army made sure that its advertising agency, N.W. Ayer & Son of Philadelphia, had advance men working the remainder of the trip to prevent such future misunderstandings. Up until that point it was sort of catch-as-catch-can, with recruiters as often as not really not understanding the purpose of the trip and really not taking advantage of the access to youth offered by Reitmeyer and Speegle. Frequently the two had to arrange their TV, radio and newspaper coverage in a hurry after finding out that it had not been set up in advance.

No such problems arose upon their return to Washington in December. *Everyone* was initially pleased, from the generals at the Pentagon who had, in the words of Secretary of the Army Robert Froehke, "lain their heads on the chopping block" for the trip, to the people at Harley-Davidson, who had deliberately remained in the background for the entire tour but had still come away with more free advertising — on a face-to-face basis — than any budget could possibly have paid for. Their expenses ran to four bikes, about \$10,000 worth, the last two of which Reitmeyer and Speegle were permitted to keep.

"I don't think there's any way of measuring the reaction," said Forsythe, "but everything we've had — from the recruiting command, letters from high schools, comments of fathers and mothers — give no criticism at all. And we've had a lot of people saying, 'Hey — maybe that Army does make sense, if it'll let an articulate guy like this fellow get to the top with

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Doug Reitmeyer launches into his cycle safety lecture portion of the "Easy Riders" program at Lansdown High School, Baltimore.



# UNCLE SAM'S EASY RIDERS

From page 10

an idea and then offer the willingness to support it.

"Reitmeyer ends up kind of being the guy that's gonna help us configure the Army of tomorrow in many respects."

Recruiters in the field, admittedly a bit confused at first, gradually came to admit that Reitmeyer and Speegle were their greatest aids since VRBs. Everybody was just primed to purr as soon as the

pair began to tickle their ears.

"How much," asked Chief of Staff Gen. William C. Westmoreland, "can you tell me in 10 minutes?"

"I told him I had several more ideas," said Reitmeyer, "and he said that he was sure Secretary Froehke's office would listen to them."

"We gave him a rundown on how much anti-military feeling there was in California and that we ought to go in there and change it. I think the Army has a habit of staying away from areas where they're liable not to be welcome and that's one of the reasons I wanted to go to Berkeley and Harlem. We never got to Berkeley but we did get to Harlem twice, and it was incredible. They said it was the best reception any white guys have had in years. It was the second day of the trip — when we went the first time — and it just turned out terrifically well. It kept us going."

"He didn't say much, but when we thanked him for letting us make the trip he sort of smiled and indicated to us



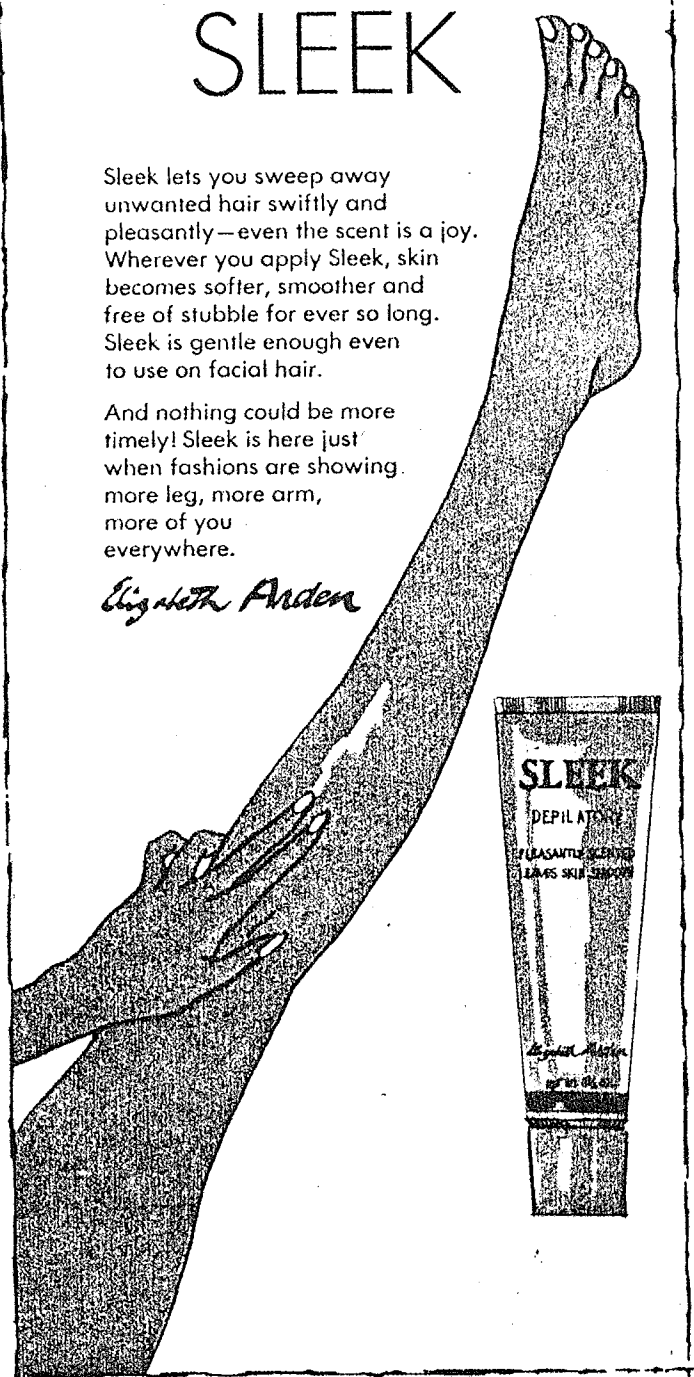
"Easy Rider" Doug Reitmeyer (right) raps with some high school students in Orlando, Fla. It's almost midnight, and he's still selling the Army at a McDonald's restaurant.

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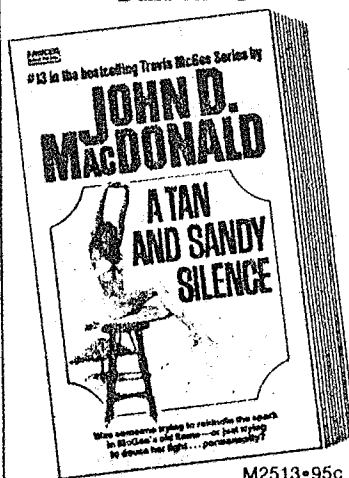
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that the Army wasn't as closed to ideas as everyone thinks it is."

After the interview with Westmoreland, the Reitmeyers and Speegle paid a call on Froehke, who wanted to know what could be done to better relate to young people across the country.

"Well, you want me to lay it on the line, man?" said Reitmeyer, which is the way he tends to operate. Froehke smiled and nodded, and the same points that Reitmeyer and Speegle had emphasized in conversation for the past three months came out again:

- Forget this advertising bit. What the Army needs is more face-to-face relationships. Why not send a helicopter team, for instance, barnstorming throughout America on the same premise as did Reitmeyer and Speegle?

- Use some of the talent now being wasted. "The Army's got guys that are so talented you wouldn't believe it. How about some of these rock stars that get drafted?" asked Reitmeyer. "You could station them all in the same place and turn out some hits. Use these people! I knew a guy in basic with a master's in geophysics. So he goes to 'Nam with a rifle. That's gotta be crazy!"

- Set some records. "Listen — I know that me and this other guy who's already in the Army could build a really righteous funny car (a drag racer that only looks like a regular sedan, somewhat) that could be a world-beater. And get American business to furnish the parts," said Reitmeyer.

This last already seems to be a reality. Reitmeyer is now at

Fort Hod, Tex. bring the car — which he wants to call "Hell on Wheels," (which just happens to be the motto of Hood's 2d Armored Div.) — to fruition. A multitude of new schemes continue to swirl in his head. They include sending him around the world in 80 days — on a motorcycle — with American businesses chipping in so much apiece per mile, for charity. He wants to make a movie about the Army to take with him on his next trip — one that'll tell it straight. While Speegle is already sure of his course — he's back in electronics at an Army base in New York building some practical experience toward the growth of that big corporate foot, and will return to college as soon as his hitch is up — Reitmeyer is still trying to juggle alternatives.

Brad Jacobs, speaking for Ayer's, feels the trip — experimental to begin with — was successful enough so that a "couple of other things are coming down the pipe." It seems they've already come.

Reitmeyer had intended to return to Army electronics when the trip was over but now feels he can do more good by riding his current hot streak.

"Sure they spent a lot of money to train me, but from the way the publicity's been going I think I save the Army several million — and that's a lot more than I was trained with."

Over a hurried hamburger in Athens, Ga. he confessed that he "sort of played it by ear."

"It's what I'm best at," he explained. Just keep on thinking, Doug — that's what the Army pays you to do. □

# RIDING WITH THEM AIN'T EASY

*The headline above brought a big smile and not a few chuckles from photographer Andrew Schneider, who wrote the following letter to FAMILY editor John Greenwald describing what it's like to spend a 22-hour day with the Modern Volunteer Army's "Easy Riders."*

Dear John:

We're in Orlando, Fla. in a room on the tenth floor of a new hotel which we're told almost overlooks Disney World. It's 3 a.m. and it's raining like hell, as it has been most of the day, but it hasn't slowed up our "Easy Riders" one bit. We left Reitmeyer and Speegle at their motel about 15 minutes ago. They said that they were going to call it a day and hit the sack, but with Reitmeyer you can never tell. We've been with these guys for more than a week and the one conclusion I've come to is that if George Wallace had Reitmeyer as his advance man in Harlem, he would have the Black vote in the bag. He's that good.

Our day began about 22 hours ago. Barry Fishler, Tom Johnston (from the N.W. Ayers ad agency) and I were sitting in the coffee shop of the motel listening to a waitress explain why it was against union rules to make coffee before 5 a.m. At that moment Reitmeyer rushed in, ripped-off a donut and announced, "We're late, let's go!" By the time we got to the parking lot, Doug had started his cycle and was heading up the dark and empty main street.

All we knew about our destination was that it was a rock radio station 10 miles out of town on a "dirt road with three tall TV towers."

After Reitmeyer had stopped and gotten directions from a cop coming off duty, a drunk on a street corner and a girl at a bus stop, we finally arrived at the station. The sun was just coming up and we still had five minutes to kill before the interview.

The station manager was shaking his head as he came out to meet us. Spotting Doug, he said, "You sure are a gung-ho dude. I've never had anyone nuts enough to come out here at six in the morning, just to be interviewed. I'm glad you're here." Doug told the guy, "I'd walk out here at midnight to get my story on the air." You know, John, I think he meant it.

In 20 minutes the interview was over. The guy had asked the same questions all the other reporters had asked and Doug had given the same answers. The thing that continues to amaze me is that no matter how many times a day he repeats his lines, he still sounds like he believes it.

We returned to the motel about 7 a.m. and were greeted by the sight of Speegle gently lowering his tall frame on a new "super-sport" bike. It had been a little less than a week since an accident in Atlanta had put a cast on his leg and many stitches in his backside. Meanwhile, the "Easy Riders" had been invited to ride in Orlando's biggest parade, and Mike was determined to make it.

At 7:45 a.m. we were due at the Army recruiting station. We were

there on time but the Army wasn't, and this didn't make Reitmeyer very happy. He jumped on his cycle and headed out to a nearby shopping center. His parting comment was, "When the Army gets here, tell them I'm up the road talking to people." And off he went.

When we finally caught up with Doug about an hour later, he was surrounded by a tight group of about 25 adults and teenagers. Again, the same questions and the same answers: "The Army is a great life for some people, for others it's like jail." "No, miss, the NCOs can't lay a finger on your boy. If they do, just scream for the IG." "Sure, we've got beer in the barracks, but most of the guys don't like to drink it there." The same questions, the same answers. Some of the people believed him and some didn't.

There was just enough time to return to the recruiting station for a quick TV interview and press conference. The small office was crowded — there were six newsmen, four recruiters, Reitmeyer and a colonel who happened to be working in the area on a recruiting project. Doug was in the middle of the reporters doing his usual stand-up routine. Over in the corner, the colonel, chewing on the stub of a cigar, was hanging on every word. Then Doug got to the part of his talk where he says that "a guy should try the Army first, and if he doesn't like it, then go to Canada." The colonel turned red and bit through his cigar.

It was now almost 11 a.m. The rain had turned to a soft drizzle and the parade was forming.

At last, the parade was moving past the thousands who lined the streets. Doug controlled himself as long as he could, but after about 10 blocks he had taken as much as he could of driving at a snail's pace behind a convertible sporting one each, Wac, Wave and WAF. Leaving Mike to trail the car, Doug broke away. He wanted to meet the crowd and after a couple of minutes of stunting, the crowd wanted to meet him. He was doing handstands, one-wheelers, riding backward, and cutting in and out of the line of floats and bands. The crowd loved it. Unfortunately, the Orlando police didn't. About a block before he got to the TV cameras a motorcycle cop stopped him and told him, "Kid, one more wheelie and you're out of the parade." A block later, the Mayor of Orlando gave him the keys to the city.

The parade was over a little after one. Mike had made it through without a mishap, but now he said that his stitches screamed to be soothed with a warm bath and cool beer. Off to the motel for him and off to another shopping center for us.

At this stop, Doug was greeted by a group of high school newspaper editors and, let me tell you, most of their questions were a lot more penetrating than those being asked by some of the professional newsmen. It was the only time during the trip anyone asked Doug, "Are you telling us the truth or is this what the Army wants us to hear?" Doug answered, "I am not a recruiter, and no

one told me what to say." He added, "I guess that everyone in the Pentagon thought that someone else would tell me, but in the end no one did."

Doug announced to the world that it was now four o'clock in the afternoon and he wanted breakfast, so we headed back to the motel.

We had almost gotten to the motel when another daily occurrence happened. Doug was being stopped by a cop. It really must be hard for a red-blooded conscientious policeman to let a guy dressed in black leather riding gear, full head helmet, on a new "super-sport" with out-of-state "TEMP" tags, drive through his town unchallenged. He was stopped in almost every major town along the way. But, as usual, within five minutes Doug talked his way out of the ticket and stood there rapping with the cop about cycles and the Army.

The prettiest and most patient member of the "Easy Rider" trio was impatiently waiting for us. Debbie and Doug had been married just three months before he started working on this 12,000-mile honeymoon. She would make a great wife for a politician. At the age of 18 she has mastered the skill of being able to look happy when she's unhappy, remain cool when she's angry and put up with the endless line of stupid questions that reporters ask her. But today she was unhappy and she let Doug know it as only a wife can: "You didn't get any sleep last night. I bet you've been wearing that wet uniform all day. You haven't eaten yet, have you?" She wasn't nagging him. She was just concerned. All it took was a hug and a couple of words from Doug and she cooled down.

Watching Doug and Debbie heading off toward their room, Fishler and I thought it would be a safe bet to grab a bite to eat. As usual, we were wrong. No sooner had the waitress brought the menu than we spotted Doug outside, kicking over the cycle. "The shop closes at six, I've just got 10 minutes to make it." We could barely hear what Doug was saying because by this time he was almost out of the parking lot. Have you ever tried catching a motorcycle in heavy rush-hour traffic, when it has a three-block head start? I'm getting good at it.

At two minutes to six, we pulled up in front of a Harley-Davidson cycle shop. Doug was already inside talking to the manager and I had a feeling that this shop would not be closing at six tonight nor would Barry and I get back to our hamburgers. Mike and Doug pull their own maintenance and do minor repairs on the bikes, but anytime the schedule allowed it, they stopped at the local Harley dealer. As Doug explained it, "These guys live cycles day and night. If they can spot some trouble before it happens, it might help me keep on schedule." We walked out of the Harley shop about 7 p.m. The manager had given Doug a clean bill of health on the cycle and a new foul-weather suit to replace one he had worn out.

We had just 30 minutes to get across town for another interview, this time a taping for a TV talk

show. The moderator had a carefully chosen list of questions which I'm sure he thought would make Doug and the Army look foolish. It didn't work that way. Several times it appeared that he had Doug backed into a corner, but each time Doug gave a good, reasonable, and well thought out answer to his question. In the end, the Army won and the moderator looked foolish.

It was now 9:30 and we found ourselves parked in front of a McDonald's. Doug had run in to get some food for Mike and Debbie. The day had to be over. What else could happen? Fishler, Tom Johnston and I were planning our assault on a nearby steak house. All we had to do now was get Doug back to the motel. It didn't work that way. Doug came running out of the McDonald's saying that he was going to drop off the food, change out of his uniform, and then come back here. The place was packed with high school kids and Doug said that they wanted to rap.

Instead of steaks, we ate hamburgers. The three of us took over a corner table and waited for Doug's return. It didn't take long for him to exchange his wrinkled khaki uniform for his black leather riding gear and he was now showing the assemblage what his "super-sport" could do in a small parking lot. As usual, the crowd loved it, but the McDonald's rent-a-cop didn't look too happy.

Now that Doug had the attention of the crowd, he moved the group inside. Setting up court at a table across from ours, Doug started fielding questions.

It was almost 1 a.m. when we finally followed Doug back to his motel. Debbie was asleep, so we took over Mike's room. For the next hour we discussed the plans for tomorrow. We would leave at 7 a.m., Debbie would drive the van, Mike would play navigator, Doug would lead, etc., etc. Fishler and I kept looking toward the door. We had had enough of it, having heard the same conversations before. We made a break for it — "Goodnight Doug, Goodnight Mike," "No, I couldn't take one more drink," "No, we really don't want to sleep in the extra beds. We have this beautiful motel room going to waste." "No Thank you!" "Yes, we'll meet you at 7 a.m. Goodnight."

We made it to the car. Tom Johnston, who had done a good job for Ayers that day, rapidly moved out to his room. Fishler and I drove out of the parking lot without looking back. If Doug was going out again, we didn't want to know about it.

Driving back to the motel, we agreed with the statement made by most of the other newsmen that Reitmeyer was indeed a con man. The point we couldn't agree on was, who was he conning? It wasn't the Army — he was telling their story in a manner that a recruiter could never match. It wasn't Harley-Davidson — they were getting coverage that they couldn't buy for any amount of money. Maybe, just maybe, Doug was conning himself. Who ever heard of a con man working 22 hours a day for E-4 pay?

Andy □