

There is an almost universal recognition that the “birth of the American biker” occurred during the infamous Gypsy Tour event at Hollister, California, over the Fourth of July holiday weekend in 1947. Hollister '47 affected not only the motorcycle culture but the entire of American society as well. It still does.

From that point on vicarious living, fear, envy, and a myriad of other emotions and reactions set the biker culture far apart from the mainstream. At the epicenter of the Hollister event were several motorcycle clubs, primarily comprised of World War II veterans; young men who had just returned home from the chaos and horror of war. They were trying to assimilate back into the calm-living staid society that was emerging as the routine of industrial/prosperous America in the post-war years. But a staid society wasn't what these men craved; or needed.

Not after years spent with guns in their hands, crawling in muddy and bloody trenches, diving to the depths of the sea in submarines, spinning and shooting in the ball turrets of B-25 bombers, and everything else that they had to do to survive and to preserve freedom for the rest of the citizenry.

These men found their version of a “staid society” in the form of big fast motorcycles, stiff drinks, and the occasional “disagreement” in notorious bars such as Shanghai Red in San Pedro, The All American in Los Angeles, and Johnny's in Hollister.

One of the most visible clubs at Hollister in 1947 was the Boozefighters, a group led by the charismatic “Wino Willie” Forkner. At the time, the Boozefighters consisted of chapters in three cities: Los Angeles, San Pedro, and San Francisco.

The Boozefighters Motorcycle Club-almost exclusively made up of WWII vets-was formed in 1946 at the All American Bar in Los Angeles (near what is now the town of South Gate). When Wino Willie was kicked out of the 13 Rebels Motorcycle Club because of his excessive drinking habits, he decided to start his own club with the likes of men like Vern Autrey, Jack Lilly, Jim Cameron, J.D. Cameron, George Manker, Bobby Kelton, “Red Dog” Dahlgren, “Dink” Burns, Gil Armas, Johnny Roccio, Johnny Davis, “Fat Boy” Nelson, Lance Tidwell, and C.B. Clausen.

The club got its name from a suggestion by a man who ironically never became a member; Walt Porter. Porter was a regular at the All American. When he heard Willie and the other guys discussing their ideas for a new club and the possibilities of a name, he suggested “The Boozefighters,” drunkenly offering that “you might as well name it that because all you ever do is to come in here and fight that booze anyway!”

The Boozefighters and the town of Hollister were elevated to society-altering legends by a series of occurrences that epitomized the “never-a-dull-moment” essence of the biker lifestyle.

To begin with, there was indeed a lot of drinking and wild riding that went on in central Hollister while the races associated with the Gypsy Tour were being run at the Bolado Racetrack, just outside of town. Along San Benito Street, the main drag in Hollister, two Boozefighters in particular-Gil Armas and Jim Cameron-gained quick notoriety for riding their bikes into local bars; notably Johnny's, still a landmark in Hollister.

Barney Peterson, an opportunistic photographer from The San Francisco Chronicle, saw the potential for some vicarious titillation as the bikers enjoyed themselves. He staged an ominous photograph with an unknown drunk (*not* a club member) on a motorcycle surrounded by broken beer bottles. That exact photo never ran in the Chronicle (although a variation of it did) but Peterson managed to get it onto page 31 of the July 21, 1947 edition of the popular Life magazine. When that issue hit the stands the nation was greeted by a disturbing full page photo along with some uncomfortable screaming text. Mainstream America had just met a new beast. The caption in Life read: "Cyclist's Holiday: He and his friends terrorize a town."

The concept of bikers "taking over a town" was born; a concept that would become a looming fear and thrill-for both those on the "inside" and the "outside" of the lifestyle-forever. Media sensationalism translated the riding and drinking that went on in Hollister into a frightening show of brute force and power-something that is always attributed to bikers-running roughshod over the innocent. The runaway train was gathering speed. In 1951, Harper's magazine published a story called "Cyclist's Raid" by a writer named Frank Rooney. Rooney was inspired by the Hollister incident and the Life magazine spread. And, yes, in his story a motorcycle "gang" takes over a town.

The real serious stuff hit the fan shortly thereafter when Stanley Kramer-then a young, ambitious film producer/director-also felt the inspiration of Hollister; and Rooney's short story. His classic motion picture, "The Wild One" debuted in New York on the last day of 1953. The roles of "Johnny" and "Chino"-played by Marlon Brando and Lee Marvin respectively-helped to launch the careers of both of these cinematic giants but more important, was the social impact of the film.

The leather, the attitudes, the motorcycles; and the ever-present strength, power, and volatility of the bikers became a paradoxical fear/envy attraction for nearly everyone. Not everyone could become a "wild one"; but it seemed that deep down everyone wanted to be one.

Marvin's character of Chino was loosely based on Wino Willie but Willie detached himself from the production (even though he was asked by the filmmakers for input), displeased with the negative media twists on what really occurred at Hollister '47.

As the media continued to exploit the fear/envy element of the biker world throughout the '50s and '60s in the form of bent movies like "The Born Losers", "The Savage Seven", and "She Devils on Wheels", bikers continued to enjoy the true camaraderie-driven lifestyle that had emerged in the post-war years.

The main focus that holds any motorcycle club together is the concept of "love and respect." This concept comes right from the trenches of war when "love and respect" for those fighting beside you means survival-on physical *and* mental levels. It also means a true brotherhood; when common feelings and emotions become something so much more than just socializing-they become a shared way of life.

Wino Willie Forkner knew this in the core of his soul. That's why the club he founded has lasted for over six decades. The Boozefighters Motorcycle Club is truly one of the elite organizations in the motorcycle community; with proven longevity and a serious passion for this way of life.

The famous Boozefighters green and white patch-the bottle with three stars-is a legend in itself. There has been a great deal of speculation as to the origin but shortly before her death, Wino's widow, Teri explained that the design was based on the vintage Hennessy's cognac bottle label: "Willie liked the looks of those three stars so much that he put them across the barrel of the bottle."

The use of the bottle in the patch speaks for itself; he wasn't called Wino for nothing!

Today the Boozefighters Motorcycle Club has members worldwide. There is a great reverence for history that permeates the club, not just the specific history of the organization but a respect for the history of the entire lifestyle; a respect that has made this club one of the most unique and most honored in the entire biker community.

More from Wikipedia ...

The **Boozefighters** are one of the first American working-class [motorcycle clubs](#) formed in California just after the [Second World War](#).

The Boozefighter Motorcycle Club (BFMC) was formed in 1946 by veterans fresh out of World World II. "Wino" Willie Forkner (deceased 1997) is recognized to be the founder. The BFMC were at the mythical [Hollister incident](#) of July 4, 1947 which was immortalized by the movie [The Wild One](#), starring Marlon Brando. Lee Marvin played the part of "Chino." It is this history that is being preserved in the spirit of fellowship and good fun.

The BFMC is one of the oldest, active motorcycle clubs in existence. The Boozefighters have never been "[one percenters](#)" or an [outlaw biker club](#). Their mottos are, "The Original Wild Ones" and "A drinking club with a motorcycle problem."

Today, the BFMC has chapters across America with its national headquarters located in [Ft. Worth, Texas](#).

Author Bill Hayes has written a book about the club entitled, *The Original Wild Ones: Tales of the Boozefighters Motorcycle Club*.