

## Rocky Mount man's custom bike to be revealed on the History Channel

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### The motorcycle is a memorial to soldiers lost on the USS Belknap



Courtesy Photo: A Rocky Mount man commissioned Danny "The Count" Koker in Las Vegas to build a custom motorcycle to honor those lost on the USS Belknap in 1975. The bike will be revealed on "Counting Cars" Tuesday, July 15 at 9:30 p.m. on the History Channel. Koker was presented with a plaque from the Belknap Association. Above, from left, are Shannon Aikau (bike builder), Dick Tremain (USS Belknap Association), Mark Angle, Judy Angle, Koker, Kevin Mack (Count's general manager) and Ryan Evans (paint artist).

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By MORRIS STEPHENSON - Special to the News-Post

A Rocky Mount man who commissioned Danny "The Count" Koker in Las Vegas to build a custom motorcycle will appear on "Counting Cars" on Tuesday, July 15 at 9:30 p.m. on the History Channel.

Mark Angle, who served in the U.S. Navy in the 1970s, asked Koker to build a bike to memorialize his shipmates on the USS Belknap, who perished when the cruiser was struck by an aircraft carrier on Nov. 22, 1975.

Angle served on the Belknap in 1972 and 1973. The fatal incident occurred in 1975 when the USS John F. Kennedy collided with the smaller Belknap just south of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea.

"The flight deck overhang cut the top of the Belknap off from the top of the bridge up," Angle said. "Ruptured fuel lines on the Kennedy dumped about 2,000 gallons of jet fuel on the Belknap."

"In the resulting fires, seven men on the Belknap and one on the Kennedy died," he added. "I knew six of the Belknap men."

Koker owns Count's Kustoms in Las Vegas, which specializes in custom-built cars and motorcycles. Koker was first on the History Channel show "Pawn Stars" as a car expert. Eventually, he was given his own program, "Counting Cars," which is starting its third season on Tuesday.

Koker's father was a Green Beret and Koker is a big supporter of the military, Angle said.

"I have been a fan of the show since it came on and had been to his shop on a visit to Las Vegas last August," Angle said. "I contacted them last August about building a memorial bike to honor the Belknap shipmates lost in the fires."

"It's a drawn out process to get a project approved to be built and aired, so it took a lot of time," he added. "We flew out to Las Vegas in March and filmed the commissioning of the bike. This is when you are filmed telling them what you want built and general ideas."

During the building process and when the motorcycle is complete, photographs cannot be released until the reveal on the show.

"They normally do the reveal at the shop in Las Vegas," Angle said. "This is when they film you getting to see the bike for the first time. Because of the nature of this bike, we had to fly to Southern California to film. They wouldn't tell us anything."

"The day of filming, we were to be standing on a street at 1:30 p.m.," he added. "Danny (Koker) and Kevin, his partner, picked us up and took us to the reveal. It was a big surprise, but we are not allowed to say until the show airs. Let's just say, they made it special."

On Tuesday's show, the USS Belknap DLG/CG-26 Memorial Motorcycle will be revealed for the first time.

"Danny and the staff of Count's Kustoms did a wonderful job, and they were super to work with through the whole project," Angle said. "Leftfield Pictures in New York is the production company, and they were

also the best. Without both of these great companies, we would not be able to honor these men."

Angle is a 1970 graduate of Franklin County High School. He served in the Navy from 1971 to 1973. He is married to Judy McBride Angle, who taught math at Franklin County High School for 31 years.