

METAL ART



A NATURAL PROGRESSION FOR GULF WAR VET

Story and Photos by
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"I'm very fortunate; I have a job that I love and a hobby that I love," Bill Smith of Somerset said. Employed by Wheeler Brothers, Bill ran the government sales department and recently moved to the postal research side of the business. His hobby is metalworking.

The U.S. Army veteran finds metalworking to be relaxing and it serves as a creative outlet. "I also like getting my hands dirty. It started in 2008 when I wanted to restore a 1966 Toyota Land Cruiser. I found that after-market parts just weren't available, so I started fabricating my own."

Bill finished the restoration of his Land Cruiser in 2012, and during the process acquired a number of tools, including a plasma cutter, a very fast and precise tool for cutting metal. "I had all these tools and still wanted to make things, so I got into metalwork." He is self-taught, learning by reading on the Internet and through people he has met who have shared tips.

"I picked up welding as an Army mechanic. I initially went in as a fuel handler. My dad was in the natural gas industry; he maintained gas wells in the area. He also ran the Gulf gas station that used to be where Turkey Hill is now. So since I'd been around that, it didn't seem like much of a leap for me to get in the petroleum field."

"I entered the military after graduating from Somerset High School, and volunteered to go to Korea for my first duty station. I'd always liked the TV show 'MASH.' The things you come up with when you're 18!"

Bill served in the First Gulf War. After his first four years of duty, he re-enlisted for an additional six. "When I re-enlisted, I went to mechanic school for track vehicles. I spent time in Germany, and Central and South America. I did get to do a lot of traveling that I would not have had the



Bill Smith with metal art.



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Bill Smith in his metal workshop.

opportunity to do otherwise. Central America was my favorite area, but I enjoyed Germany and Korea too."

His skills as a mechanic have trans-

lated well into his metalworking, and the art developed as a natural succession. "It basically began because of boredom. I had tools and nothing to work on. I had

been making parts for other people here and there. Trying to keep busy, I got involved in a few forums online."

On the forums, he started seeing what other people were doing with their plasma cutters and began looking at patterns. "I've always been pretty good with computers and drawing out items. So I started coming up with ideas and designs, drawing and then cutting them."

Bill works primarily with steel, and recently started using aluminum and copper. "I use a variety of finishes to make my work different, to stand out. So much of what you see is flat and either black or just painted. I got into patinas to provide different looks and to change things up a little. I mix my own chemicals for the patinas, and I also taught myself to air brush."

He is doing more three-dimensional items and getting more into layers in his art, including some LED backlit pieces. He can create an image to cut based on a photograph. "I always need to get more involved in the thought process, always a progression. I enjoy learning and doing more."

Bill's art work is impressive, as is his generosity. He does not charge for his work in drawing and developing the design for a client, and his pricing on the actual piece is quite reasonable. He also donates his work to nonprofits such as school functions, Ducks Unlimited and other sporting groups.

Bill's other interests include ham radio and "off-roading." "We do what we call rock crawling, driving over really rough terrain." He enjoys going to Rausch Creek, a 3,000-acre, off-road park in central Pennsylvania. "It's a great place for off-road clubs to go for a legal place to run."

The artist is adept in networking with others, and appreciates the value of community. "What's neat is meeting others and sharing resources." For example, he does not do woodworking, so instead he has someone local provide whatever he needs in the way of wood for his projects. He also likes purchasing materials locally.

Word-of-mouth referrals have been great for Bill. "It's amazing. I've probably had as many sales in Virginia as I've had here." For more examples of Bill's art, check out Smith Metal Workz on Facebook, and watch for him at local craft shows.

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