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Progress on the restoration of the 1924 Cadillac stage is slow but steady. The running board structure is complete and the exhaust system has been finished.

The Transcontinental Convoy of 1919

By John W. Thomas

In 1919 an assemblage of motor vehicles gathered at Washington D.C. for the largest motor convoy ever seen. The convoy was sponsored by the U. S. Army and was to follow the course of the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental road, at that time more a dream than a reality. It took 62 days to traverse 3251 miles from Washington D.C. to San Francisco, in the process setting a world record for the greatest continuous distance ever traveled by a motor convoy.

The Plan

Harry Osterman, the vice-president of the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA) that was promoting a coast-to-coast highway project, instigated the plan. He had been working for the LHA since 1913 and had crossed the continent by automobile an astounding 19 times. The planning was begun in February 1919 by Capt. Bernard Mc Mahon of the army's Motor Transport Corps. The convoy was to be made up of two companies of the 433rd Motor Supply Train, a company of the 5th Engineers and Service Park Unit 595 (a truck maintenance unit). There was a medical detachment, a field artillery detachment



The convoy in east Wyoming led by a Mack AC
(Photo courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library & Museum)

and a motion picture crew provided by the Signal Corps. Capt McMahon was to be the Expedition Commander. The Convoy was to be an extensive field test of the motor vehicles with military service objectives in mind. The guide for the convoy would be (who else?) Harry C. Osterman, ranging one or two days ahead of the convoy in his white Packard twin six, schmoozing with town dignitaries and making sure that all citizens were well aware of the approach of the convoy and its importance.

The convoy had five objectives.

- (1) To determine through experimentation the difficulties associated with sending the Army to the Pacific coast in the event of war,
- (2) To road test U. S. Army vehicles,
- (3) To demonstrate U. S. Department of War participation in the Good Roads Program,
- (4) To recruit students to enroll in motor transport schools, and
- (5) To demonstrate to the general public the importance of motor vehicles in winning WWI.

To add a touch of realism the convoy was to operate under simulated wartime conditions as a motor march through enemy territory, and thus had to be self-contained and self sustaining. This illusion was hard to maintain considering the wild enthusiasm with which the convoy was greeted at every town and village along its route.

The Need for Military Motor Transport

At the outset of World War I in 1914 the principal means of transport of men and material in wartime was, as it had been for centuries, horses and mules. The potential for motorized vehicles to take over these duties had not gone unnoticed, but the lack of money and the bureaucratic inertia of peacetime army life had precluded any concerted development or testing of trucks as army transport. Thus when the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the army had only 3039 trucks of all types, all of them designed and built for the commercial market with factory or field modifications to adapt them for military use. By the end of the war 19 months later it had over 85,000 trucks made by 294 manufacturers, the largest fleet of trucks in the world. The wartime experience convinced even the most conservative that the truck would soon replace the horse and mule as the prime mover in military transport.

The Convoy

The convoy was comprised of 24 officers, and 258 enlisted men and 81 army vehicles of which 46 were trucks. In addition there were 17 War Department observers, and the Goodyear Tire Company's 15-member band joined the convoy at Chicago. The trucks were built by companies such as Packard, Mack, Garford, Four-Wheel-Drive, Riker, Dodge, and White and ranged from ¾ ton to five ton behemoths. Three of them were 4-wheel drive vehicles. Some were fitted with pneumatic tires and the rest with the solid rubber tires which were the standard of the day for trucks. One truck was fitted as a blacksmith

shop, two as machine shops, two as fuel tankers and one as a water tanker. A Cadillac chassis was fitted with a three million candlepower searchlight. There was also one Maxwell crawler tractor transported on a trailer towed by a Mack truck. One piece of equipment that would prove indispensable to the success of the operation was the Militor, a powerful four-wheel-drive artillery tractor developed by the Ordnance Department during World War I. It had a 165 horsepower four-cylinder Wisconsin engine and had a three-ton capacity. It had a winch and a sprag that could be buried in the ground to give it purchase when using the winch to haul another vehicle out of the mire. It was in the charge of Sgt First Class Theodore Wood, who not only drove it but also attended to its maintenance. This team of man and truck would do heroic duty keeping the convoy moving.

There were eleven passenger cars for the officers and nine motorcycles for the scouts. There were five General Motors ambulances, two ambulance trailers and four kitchen trailers. There were also many non-military vehicles including Harry Osterman's white Packard Twin Six to lead the way.

One of the observers was Lt/Col Dwight D. Eisenhower, from the Tank Corps who became the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in World War II and, in 1953 the 34th President of the United States. A 1915 graduate of the U. S. Military Academy, he had risen quickly through the ranks of the wartime army, but had not been sent to combat in France as had most of his contemporaries. An army officer who had missed his war, he was expecting to be returned to his permanent rank of captain and was considering leaving the service for civilian life. He was glad for the opportunity to trade the boredom of garrison duty for the adventure of the convoy.

The Lincoln Highway

In 1912 the prime means of long distance transportation of people and goods were the railroads. Roads were primarily local. With over 2,000,000 miles of rural roads in use only 190,000 miles (less than 9%) had "improved" surfaces (gravel, stone, sand-clay, brick, shells, oiled earth, bituminous), the rest were dirt. Senator Charles E. Townsend of Michigan had proposed the Townsend Bill that called for a national system of highways and a federal highway commission to run it. This bill was the rallying point for all those who wanted federal money for improvement of roads that had, to this point, been the responsibility of state and local taxpayers.

On September 10, 1912 industrialist and retired racecar driver Carl G. Fisher hosted a dinner meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana for a group of his fellow industrialists from the automobile, truck and tire industries. "The automobile won't get anywhere," he proclaimed, "until it has good roads to run on." He proposed to build a coast-to-coast paved highway to be financed by private capital, to cost \$10 million and to be completed by May 1, 1915 in time for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Needless to say both the cost and the schedule were wildly optimistic.

Fisher's original name for the new road, "Coast-to-Coast-Rock Highway" lacked panache and was replaced by "The Lincoln Memorial Highway" as a tribute to Abraham Lincoln, fallen President of the United States and one of Carl Fisher's

heroes. On July 1, 1913 the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA) was established "...to procure the establishment of a continuous improved highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, open to lawful traffic of all description without toll charges." The highway was to run from Times Square in New York City to Lincoln Park in San Francisco.

The eastern part of the route, from New York to Indiana was pretty well established, the roads had been built as settlements had pushed westward, but the section west of the Mississippi, a good two-thirds of the route, was undefined. Thus a path-finding expedition set off from Indianapolis on July 1, 1913 to chart the best route for the proposed highway. The "Trail Blazer" expedition of 17 cars and two trucks was led by Carl Fisher and took thirty-four days to reach San Francisco enduring mud, sand, flooded and washed-out roads, breakdowns and overheated engines along the way. They were greeted enthusiastically in every town they entered, the community fathers envisioning the boost to commerce to be experienced by having the transcontinental highway go through their town. After a triumphant parade down San Francisco's Market Street, the expedition returned to Indianapolis by train.

The LHA appointed unpaid "consuls" in each state that the highway transited whom, in turn, sought local consuls in the communities along the proposed route. These were local movers and shakers such as mayors, merchants, attorneys and hotel owners who were tasked with keeping the Lincoln Highway on the tongues of their legislators and fellow townsmen. There were about 300 consuls along the route. The LHA also promoted paving of the Lincoln Highway. The Lehigh Portland Cement Co. believed that the industry would donate 1,500,000 barrels of cement and various community organizations built "seedling miles," one-mile stretches of concrete pavement usually in rural locations, to demonstrate the advantages of hard-surfaced roads. The first was built in DeKalb County IL in October of 1914.

Change of Command

Three days before the start of the Convoy, Capt McMahan was replaced as commander by Lt. Col Charles McClure. Although no record of the reason for the replacement has been found, there is one possibility (aside from perceived incompetence on Capt. McMahan's part) for this abrupt last minute change.

Although the names and ranks of the 15 War Department observers have not been listed, at least one of them was a Lt/Col, two grades above Capt. McMahan. It would be difficult for a captain to deal with a person of higher rank second-guessing his every decision on a daily basis even when such a person was outside the chain of command. In the Army rank often outweighs operational continuity. Lt/Col McClure was a seasoned Infantry officer recently returned from a WWI combat assignment in France. Capt. McMahan was assigned as Train Commander under Lt/Col McClure.

Milestone Zero

On Monday, July 7th the convoy left Camp Meigs at 8:30 am for the two-mile drive to the Ellipse near the south lawn of the White House. President Wilson was traveling and could not attend the zero milestone ceremonies but Secretary of War Newton Baker, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Payton C. March, chief of the Motor Transport Corps Brigadier General Charles B. Drake and a bevy of Washington politicians were in attendance. After Secretary Baker extolled the virtues of the trucks that played so great a role in the winning of WW I and hailed the start of the new era of motor transportation, he was presented with the Zero Milestone. It still stands there today, the point from which all highway distances in the United States from the nation's capital are measured. The dedication of the milestone finished in a flurry of encouraging words, the convoy cranked its engines and, at 11:15 am, departed on the first leg of its historic journey, Henry Osterman leading the way in his Packard twin six.

Washington to Pittsburgh

The first overnight stop for the Convoy was Frederick, MD a forty -six-mile journey. The first elements of the convoy arrived at 6:30 pm. Along the way, certain deficiencies of the train became apparent. Rather than the "flower of the Motor Transport Corps" as claimed by the train's ebullient public relations officer, Lieutenant William Doron, most of the enlisted men were raw recruits, who were more comfortable behind a team of mules than behind the steering wheel of a truck. The haste with which the convoy had been thrown together left no time for military training and road discipline became a problem. With no time to stop, the proper training would have to be conducted as the convoy went along.

On the second day, heading north on what would later become U. S. Route 15, a problem was encountered that would recur with tiresome regularity throughout the journey. The convoy encountered a covered bridge whose roof was too low for the tallest trucks to pass and whose floor was too weak to support the heaviest trucks. The larger trucks forded the stream while one of the men cut boards from the roof until the tall trucks could pass.

On the second day the convoy joined the route of the Lincoln Highway at Gettysburg PA. After a short lunch stop they proceeded on to their planned overnight stop at Chambersburg. The route through Pennsylvania followed what would become U.S. Route 30 and, with its good bituminous macadam surface, was as fine a road as could be found in any state in America. The weather was fair and warm and the people of Chambersburg made the troops welcome with a band concert at their camp while the searchlight illuminated the surrounding countryside.

The good weather held throughout the next day as the convoy headed for Bedford, their next overnight camp. The whole town of two thousand turned out to greet them and General Drake came up from Washington to see how his troops were doing. Also in attendance was Dr. S. M. Johnson, representative of the National Highways Association and the convoy's official spokesman. There were speeches and a dance and the searchlight again swept over the countryside.

After some experimentation, the convoy established a routine for its daily travel. Reveille was at 4:50 am and the trucks were on the road by 6:30. Two motorcycles scouted ahead of the main body setting out markers to define the best route and reporting back with road conditions. The mess crew, after cleaning up after breakfast, made lunch, usually sandwiches, and then pushed out past the expedition and set up for lunch at the designated stopping point. After lunch the mess crew once again pushed ahead to the overnight stop (usually a county fairgrounds or, rarely, a nearby army fort) to attend to dinner. The main convoy pressed forward all day and, depending on driving conditions, arrived at the overnight point, from about 4 pm to midnight or later. McClure's philosophy was to keep the convoy moving, If a truck broke down or got stuck, the rest of the train bypassed it and left it for the mechanics to repair or for the Militor to tow into camp, Thus, the truck train often straggled into camp in small groups long after McClure and the advance party had arrived. This may be a suitable policy for a march through friendly territory but a disastrous one for a march through enemy territory as the convoy had been originally conceived.

The convoy was well received at all of the lunch and overnight stops on its journey. The public relations officer, Lieutenant Doron, and the Lincoln Highway Association representatives made sure its progress was well publicized and each town it went through welcomed it with great fanfare. There were dinners for the officers at the country club, dances for the enlisted men to the music of the Goodyear band or local bands employed for the occasion. There were speeches by the town dignitaries and sometimes Col. McClure. Dr. Johnson, formerly a Presbyterian minister, never let an opportunity to say a few words, especially in support of the Townsend Bill, pass unexploited. After the speeches were over the truck-mounted searchlight played across the night sky.

The going got tough on the fourth day. Although the road was improved from Bedford to Greensburg, much of it paved in brick, it wound through some of the steepest switchbacks in Pennsylvania. The weather also deteriorated with light rain falling in the morning and a thunderstorm in the afternoon. A Garford burned out a crankshaft bearing; a Dodge careened into one of the ambulance trailers. One of the GM cargo trucks slid off the road coming down from 2864 ft. Laurel Hill Summit in a thunderstorm and tumbled down the hillside. All of the seven men in the truck jumped clear but the truck had to be abandoned to wait for a recovery team from Washington. The convoy dragged into Greensburg at 11 pm. The Militor, towing the Garford, the GM supply truck and the ambulance trailer did not arrive until the next morning, just after the rest of the convoy had left for Pittsburgh.

The objective for Friday, July 11th was to travel from Greensburg through Pittsburgh to camp overnight at East Liverpool at the Ohio border. Lt/Col McClure changed the route to jog north and enter Ohio at East Palestine, 45

miles northwest of Pittsburgh, claiming, in his telegram to Washington, that the rain had made the road to East Liverpool impassable.

The convoy was escorted into Pittsburgh by police on motorbikes, and the city, having declared "Transport Day" in honor of the convoy, turned out to welcome the army. The convoy paraded through downtown Pittsburgh then passed in review before Colonel McClure, Mayor Babcock and the chamber of commerce. The festivities, however took up so much time that the convoy failed to make its objective for the day and had to overnight in Sewickley, a high class Pittsburgh suburb thirty miles short of East Palestine.

Touring the Industrial Midwest

Another reason that might have influenced McClure's jog to the north may have been the fact that Harvey Firestone, president of the Firestone Tire Company, had invited the entire convoy to lunch. But first they must get to East Palestine. They broke camp at 6:30 am Saturday and rolled into town seven and one half hours later. It turned out that the road from Sewickley was not significantly better than the one they had deemed "impassible." They were met by a cacophony of factory whistles, church bells and cheers from the crowd that lined their route through town to the fairgrounds where they set up camp for two nights. Sunday was a day of rest and renewal of their equipment, and, of course, Mr. Firestone's picnic.

East Palestine, home of the McGraw Tire Company, pulled out all the stops for the convoy. The officers and journalists were invited to dinner at the Country Club, the enlisted men were invited to play pool and billiards at the clubhouse and on Sunday morning the Red Cross opened a canteen at the fairgrounds. On Sunday afternoon the entire convoy plus a bevy of northeastern Ohio industrialists sat down to a chicken dinner at Firestone's estate, Harbel Manor. The 500 guests dined in a large tent on fine crockery off tables covered with tablecloths and flowers. The next morning the convoy was on the road again at 6:30 am.

The convoy rejoined the Lincoln Highway that follows the course of today's U. S. route 30 at Canton, Ohio, a town famous for brick making. Much of the highway in Ohio was paved with bricks, about 500,000 to the mile. The town's main industry the Metropolitan Brick Company made paving bricks for projects from New York's Holland Tunnel to Carl Fisher's Indianapolis Motor Speedway (giving the latter the appellation "the Brickyard"). After lunch and a parade in Canton the convoy pressed on over good brick roads to Wooster.

So it went through the industrial heartland of America, up early each morning, battling dust, mud, heat and rain until after sundown, greeted warmly at each town they visited and entertained by the townsfolk at each overnight camp while the big truck-mounted searchlight played over the night sky. The only one who didn't get his share of the festivities was the long-suffering Sgt. Wood. He and the Militor were tasked with towing any and all broken down trucks into camp and that task was often not completed until long after everyone else had gone to bed.

After an overnight stops at Wooster and Bucyrus, the convoy took a shortcut due west to its next overnight stop at Delphos,

shortening the route by eleven miles. It also passed five miles north of Lima that had been on the original map of the Lincoln Highway. The Lima town fathers were outraged and planned to send a delegation to Detroit to confront the directors of the Lincoln Highway Association. They were informed that the directors were out of town, that there wasn't another board meeting until August and that the efficiency of the new route made it essential. Everyone wanted the highway to go through their town and was ready to protest most strongly if they felt that promises had been broken.

The next morning the convoy headed northwest through Van Wert and across the Indiana border to its next overnight stop at Ft. Wayne. The Lincoln Highway in Indiana had only five miles unimproved, the rest being paved with either brick or concrete or graded and graveled. After the usual festivities and a good night's sleep, the convoy arose early on the twelfth day of the march and struck northwest again to South Bend, the home of Studebaker. The Studebaker brothers had opened their business in 1852 and grew to be the largest producer of horse drawn vehicles in the world. Their first automobiles were an electric built in 1902, and a gasoline automobile built in 1904. By the time the convoy passed through South Bend, Studebaker had become one of the largest automobile companies and enjoyed a reputation for high quality, reasonably priced autos

Studebaker invited the officers to dinner and had booked rooms for 20 officers at the Oliver Hotel for the night. The enlisted men dined and danced at Springbrook Park, their overnight camp. The mess trailers had arrived early and prepared dinner and a local band had showed up to provide music. Another band arrived later, a 15-piece group sent from Akron OH by Frank Seiberling, president of Goodyear Tire Company. This band would accompany the convoy all the way to San Francisco.

After thirteen days on the road the soldiers had become an efficient and disciplined unit that could handle both routine and emergency situations with aplomb. They took only half an hour the next morning to get the convoy out of the park and on the road for their next encampment at Chicago Heights, Illinois. This rail center twenty-seven miles south of Chicago became a highway crossroads with the Lincoln Highway intersecting the Dixie Highway that ran from Chicago to Florida. It was Saturday and, besides the townspeople, many industrialists, newspapermen and curiosity seekers had come down from Chicago to see the convoy. This was the heartland of the auto industry and all were intent on giving a boost to good roads for their products to run on.

The next day, Sunday, was the convoy's day of rest, broken trucks were fixed, laundry was done and the men fed and entertained by the townsfolk. On a more ominous note, Harry Osterman took his Packard twin six up to Chicago for a thorough overhaul. The easy part was over. They had been sixteen days on the road and had covered

less than one third of the route, and the hard part was still ahead.

The last overnight in Illinois was spent in De Kalb. The next day the convoy passed through Malta, about 5 miles west of De Kalb and the site of the first “seedling mile” sponsored by the Lincoln Highway Association. The mile had been paved in 1914 and was apparently the only good thing about this last leg of the journey before crossing the Mississippi River. In his daily telegram to Washington McClure described the ninety miles between De Kalb and the Mississippi River as little more than a dirt track and its condition as “deplorable”.

The convoy crossed the Mississippi on the Fulton High Bridge in the late afternoon for their overnight camp in Clinton, Iowa. Their journey thus far had totaled 906 miles in 14 travel days for an average of 65 miles per day on some of the best cross country roads in the nation. Only Henry Osterman knew what awaited them across the mighty Mississippi and even he didn't know how the convoy would fare in this great unknown.

The Dust in Iowa

The Fulton Bridge had been built for wagon traffic in 1891 and its planking had deteriorated under the press of motor vehicles. All the vehicles made it across safely and were met by a crowd estimated at between fifteen and twenty thousand. Clinton was a lumber town fallen on hard times as the industry moved farther west. It saw the Lincoln Highway as its salvation. The dancing and revelry went on until after midnight, the next day, Wednesday would be another long day.

Iowa was prosperous with the income from the farm products demanded by World War I and one in seven Iowans had a car, the highest per capita ownership of any state in the nation. But the roads were deplorable. There was hardly a paved rural road in the entire state and the roads were deep in dust in good weather and a muddy bog when it rained. Lt Col McClure had dry weather throughout the six-day transit of Iowa, the best luck one could hope for. The dust was a nuisance whereas the mud would have made the roads impassable.

At their first overnight, Cedar Rapids, the townsfolk put on a feast for the whole convoy and, as they departed the next morning, raised the speed limit outside the business district from 15 to 25 miles per hour. Next was Marshalltown and then Jefferson. The weather held, hot and dry. The dust billowed from beneath the tires clogging carburetors and nostrils, hanging over the convoy like a brown fog. It was everywhere, in the food, mixed with the grease in the steering linkages, in the engine compartments, clogging air passages in the radiators. If there was any memory that each trooper carried away from the six days spent in the transit of Iowa it was of the dust.

The officers of the convoy had developed a habit of telling the citizens of whichever state they were in that the roads were better than the state they had just left. Not much of a compliment but not something the questioner could become defensive about. The Iowans were not, however, immune to the obvious. The sight of the great rolling five-mile-long cloud of dust from the convoy, the foot deep ruts sunk into the soft spots in the road, the dust covered faces of the drivers could not be ignored. The Good Roads Movement got a big boost from the convoy and, even as the convoy crossed the border into Nebraska the citizens of Iowa

voted the money for paved roads. By the mid 1920s the Lincoln Highway would be paved from one end of Iowa to the other.

The next day, Saturday, the convoy arrived in Denison, IA and laid over for Sunday, their day of rest and maintenance. The town was packed with onlookers for the party and dance on Saturday night. On Sunday one of the soldiers got married to a girl he had met in Cedar Rapids, the second marriage of a convoy soldier during the trip. The local baseball team took on a pick-up team from the convoy but the game was called in the sixth inning because of heat and lack of interest with the town team leading 19 to 1. Each truck got an oil change.

Council Bluffs was the convoy's last overnight stop in Iowa. The next day the convoy drove the three miles to Omaha, Nebraska crossing the Missouri River on the Douglas Street bridge and drove another four miles north to Ft. Omaha, an army facility that had a branch of the Motor Transport Corps. The convoy spent the day giving the vehicles a much-needed overhaul and the men enjoyed showers and real mess hall food. When offered bunks in the barracks for the night, they declined because of the heat and slept outside on the ground as they had for the previous three weeks.

Mud in Nebraska

In 1919 the Lincoln Highway in Nebraska paralleled the Union Pacific Railroad and was all dirt except for some city streets and three “seedling miles.” It departs the low fertile farmland of Iowa and starts its relentless climb to the 5000 ft. parched sagebrush lands of the Great Plains. Whereas Iowa was sufficiently populated to raise local money for road improvements, Nebraska and especially the states west of it was too large and sparsely populated to undertake road improvement without help from Washington. Thus Dr. Johnson's daily address switched from a plea for local support to a plea for his listeners to write their congressmen to support the Townsend Bill.

The next day, July 30th the convoy left early for Columbus, Nebraska. The weather was still sunny and hot but rain was in the forecast, the road was sand and gumbo and would have been impassable if it had rained. The people of Columbus gave the convoy a rousing welcome prompting McClure to comment, “The further west we go the better treatment we get.” But it had taken 10 hours to go the 83 miles and shortly after midnight it started to rain.

The next day on the way to Grand Island, the effect of the rain became apparent. It kept the dust down but, because of soft spots in the road, it took 10 hours to go 64 miles. The convoy approached Grand Island on its “seedling mile” but the rest of the Lincoln Highway east of town was impassable because of the mud. The rain did not dampen the townspeople's enthusiasm, plus it was payday for the soldiers and the Grand Island National Bank distributed the \$13,000 payroll in cash.

Cooler weather and showers made the transit of the rest of Nebraska slower. They made their next scheduled

overnight at Lexington on schedule but the next day had to stop at Gothenburg, thirty miles short of the planned North Platte. The following day was Sunday; their day of rest, but McClure chose to use it to try to get back on schedule. They did make it to North Platte that day but the trucks were so broken down and the men so exhausted that he had to declare Monday the day of rest and maintenance.

Unfortunately, Tuesday continued the pattern. By 11pm they had made it to Oglala, fifty-three miles from North Platte and still 21 miles from Big Springs, their planned overnight. It took seven hours to traverse a 200-yard stretch of bog. Each truck had to be assisted by the ever-valuable Militor and crawler tractor. They camped there and completed the trek to Big Springs the next day. The following day was easier. They made the 86 miles to Kimball, the last overnight stop in Nebraska in 11 hours with few of the troubles of the previous day.

They had traversed the 480-mile breadth of Nebraska going from the lush lowlands of Iowa to the 5000 ft. dry, sage brush-covered plains of Wyoming in ten days. Wyoming is a high plateau broken by mountain ranges up to 13,000 ft altitude. The topography is more rugged than Nebraska but does not have the high passes of the more direct route through Denver, Colorado.

Cold in Wyoming

The first overnight was at Cheyenne, the capital. It was cold and rainy when the convoy arrived but the clouds broke and the sun came out producing a double rainbow. After a rousing welcome and a rodeo in their honor the truck train bedded down for the night at Ft. Russell three miles northwest of the city.

Early the next morning the truck train set off for Laramie fifty-seven miles west. It took twelve hours, battling a cold forty-mile an hour wind and they arrived about seven pm. The 9000 inhabitants made them welcome, they camped at the fairgrounds and had a dance. The next day, Sunday, cold windy with occasional showers, was spent in inspections and repairs of the vehicles and escorting curious visitors around the encampment.

The next overnight was Medicine Bow and then Fort Steele, where there were more people in the convoy than in the town. The next stop, Tipton Station, wasn't even a town, only a place for the railroad crew to sleep. The high desert was cold at night and plagued with dust storms. Green River was the next camping spot and then Ft. Bridger. The weather had moderated somewhat, but steep grades and the need to stop and reinforce bridges slowed them down. They arrived at Evanston, their last overnight stop in Wyoming on Saturday afternoon looking forward to their traditional Sunday day of rest and repair. Unfortunately circumstances dictated otherwise.

Controversy and Hardship in Utah

The stretch from Evanston to the next stop, Ogden, Utah was eighty miles over steep grades and McClure decided to make it a two-day trip. Thus the convoy pulled out of Evanston at noon Sunday and camped that night at Echo, Utah, a mining camp. The weather had turned cloudy with drizzle and the road was a steep and treacherous downgrade through Echo Canyon. Sgt. Wood and the Militor performed heroically, towing a broken down machine shop truck and pulling another truck from a broken culvert. They were finally overtaken by darkness and

spent the night camped out on the road, arriving at Echo at nine the next morning, long after the rest of the truck train had departed.

The route of the Lincoln highway turned southwest from Echo and climbed over the Wasatch Mountains to Salt Lake City. McClure chose to take the longer and less mountainous route northwest through Ogden before turning south. Besides sparing the soldiers the climb up the mountains it may have seemed expedient to present the truck train to the merchants of Ogden rather than to the sparsely populated Summit County. The county commissioners didn't see it that way. Their protest reverberated all the way to Washington but the convoy went through Ogden anyway.

The next day they turned south to Salt Lake City and another welcoming celebration. Although urged by Utah's governor to extend the truck train's stay in the city, McClure declined. He was behind schedule and a very difficult passage lay ahead. The convoy left early the next day for Nevada.

The route chosen for the Lincoln Highway drove southwest from Salt Lake City skirting the Great Salt Lake to the south. It cut through the north-south mountains at Johnson's Pass, a 5600 ft.-high trail. The pass had been enhanced with \$25,000 of money contributed by Carl Fisher but was still a challenging prospect. It was followed by 17 miles of the salt flat desert where the Goodyear Company had spent \$100,000 upgrading the road.

The convoy left Salt Lake City early on Wednesday August 20 and made good progress over good roads through Johnson pass and into Skull Valley. There the trail was deep in dust and fine sand leaving the vehicles high centered with wheels spinning ineffectively on either side. Each had to be jacked up and dug out by hand. They finally made Orr's Ranch, their first overnight at 10:30 at night. To add to their woes, the Militor had broken down east of Johnson pass.

The Militor, which had towed every truck in the convoy out of trouble at least once, was finally wearing out. The first breakdown was a slipping fan belt, an item that had been on backorder for weeks. After jury-rigging a replacement Sgt. Wood was on the road again when a fitting stripped its threads allowing a brace rod to puncture the radiator. After fixing this the Militor was plagued by carburetor and governor problems until finally a main bearing in the engine worked loose requiring backtracking to Toole, UT to a garage where repairs could be made. While there Lt. Col. McClure came by and declared that the Militor was too badly damaged to continue and ordered it shipped to Salt Lake City for overhaul. It would then be sent to Eureka, NV by train to rejoin the convoy. McClure was the only one who felt that the Militor couldn't be repaired and rejoin the convoy for the trek across the salt flats, but his was the only opinion that counted.

The convoy left Orr's Ranch early on Thursday bound for their next scheduled overnight at Ibapah on the Nevada

border. It turned out to be an impossible task. The Lincoln Highway at this point, while challenging for passenger cars was impossible for the heavy trucks of the convoy. The trucks routinely broke through the roadway to the sticky silt below. Even the tractor was of no use, its treads unable to get any traction in the muck. Each truck had to be pulled across the flats by 50 or 100 soldiers on the end of a rope. The Militor would probably have been of no use here, having to be pulled by hand just like the other trucks. This exercise in frustration soon became an exercise in survival as they ran low on gas and then water. The water truck was put under guard and water rationing imposed.

Some officers who had made it by car to Black Point, a construction camp at the west edge of the flats, established an emergency control point. By midnight none of the trucks had made it that far. The trucks straggled in between 3 am and noon the next day, the crews having spent the night bivouacked on the desert. The water problem was solved by a road construction crew that brought two tanks of water pulled by horse from Gold Hill 12 miles west of Black Point. McClure gave his troops a full day to rest and repair their vehicles before pushing on to Nevada.

The highway across the salt flats was trashed by the passing of the convoy. The \$100,000 of improvements had been ground into the dirt by the heavy trucks. The road was described as looking like a ploughed field and at least 25 separate tourist parties had to spend the night in the desert, stranded on the truck-churned road.

More Mountains in Nevada

The trip through Nevada was not much better. More mountain passes and roads that ranged from bad to nonexistent challenged the best of them. Now five days behind schedule, McClure kept them moving even through Sunday, their traditional day of rest. The made it to Ely NV that night where the town provided showers and a place to repair and replenish the trucks. The next day they negotiated three summits, one over seven thousand feet and camped at Pinto House, an abandoned mining camp seven miles short of Eureka, their objective, when overtaken by darkness. On reaching Eureka they found that the Militor hadn't left Salt Lake City as planned and now proposed to rejoin the convoy at Carson City.

Two more mountain passes the next day and they were in Austin for the night and two more the following day brought them to Eastgate. The next day they crossed the Fallon Sink, salt flats much like the ones west of Johnson Pass, but somewhat better improved through local efforts and thus the transit was much easier. After a night's rest at Fallon the convoy tackled another stretch of desert, this time made more challenging by seepage from a giant irrigation reservoir. With trucks chained together they pushed through sand dunes, quicksand, and grades up to 25 percent as they struggled on toward Carson City. This was the most difficult transit since the Utah salt flats.

The citizens of Carson City expected the truck train to begin arriving by noon. When none had arrived by late afternoon they went ahead and prepared the chicken dinner that they had planned for the troops. Nightfall and a few cars had arrived but still no trucks. Finally at 11pm the trucks started to trickle in and

the festivities began, dinner for the hungry troops, the band played and soldiers danced and finally rolled out their bedrolls on the capitol lawn for a well-deserved nights sleep. The next day was Sunday and a day of rest, enjoyed to its fullest by both the troops and their hosts in Carson City.

The next day was the ascent of the east slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, with a climb to 7600 ft on grades up to 14 percent. McClure held an officers' meeting the day before and each of the trucks was given a thorough inspection especially in regards to its brakes. The Militor was still in Salt Lake City being held up by a railroad strike so McClure sent the tractor half way up the grade to be ready to help any truck that had trouble making the ascent. After one more thorough inspection the trucks started up, heavy trucks first, spaced at 100 yards apart and moving so slowly that a man could walk alongside carrying extra chocks in case of trouble. They reached Glenbrook, on the shores of Lake Tahoe at 2 pm, and then pressed on to Meyer's Ranch for the night. Another of the kitchen trailers had been wrecked and a Mack had broken down but the troubles were insignificant in light of the accomplishments.

California and the end is in Sight

More mountain passes and a 5800 ft. descent down the American River valley the next day brought them to Placerville, the heart of California's Gold Country and the beginning of California's excellent road system. Whereas many states such as Iowa lacked the will to build roads and others such as Utah lacked the population to fund roads, California had an abundance of both. By the time of the convoy's appearance California had issued \$73 million worth of highway bonds and the result was good paved roads the length and breadth of the state. The convoy headed for the 65th annual California State Fair at Sacramento and the only thing slowing them down was the speed limit imposed by Lt./Col McClure. After the obligatory parade through cheering crowds they headed to the fairgrounds to camp for the night. The Willys-Overland Company treated them to a dinner at the local branch office and, back at camp, they had a dance. Already six days behind schedule, McClure declined Sacramento's invitation to stay another day, so the truck train decamped next day for Stockton and the following day, September fifth, for Oakland. The road was the best section of the Lincoln Highway that they had driven on.

Oakland had been regularly updated on the convoy's progress and was ready for a party when it arrived. They had already hosted the Pacific fleet on September first and gave the convoy, dubbed the "land fleet," a rousing welcome. The weather was clear and beautiful, the troops were resplendent in new uniforms sent from the Presidio in San Francisco, the road was lined with automobiles all blowing their horns and 200 girls sang the City's welcome. After dinner at the Hotel Oakland ballroom McClure and Dr. Johnson addressed the troops as usual but the most

popular speaker was Capt. McMahon. It was his plan, his troops, and his willingness to put aside personal ambition and work for the success of the mission when leadership was transferred to someone else, that made the convoy a success and the troops gave him an ovation that shook the rafters.

McClure, recognizing that celebration fatigue had replaced travel fatigue allowed the troops to sleep in for an extra hour the next morning before the grand entrance into San Francisco. Two ferries with an escort of two navy destroyers took the convoy from Oakland harbor to the Embarcadero in downtown San Francisco. All along the eight-mile line of march to Lincoln Park the citizens of San Francisco lined the way cheering the troops. At the park McClure presented laurel wreaths he had brought from Washington to Governor Stephens. The Lincoln Highway Association had struck special medals for the convoy and every man was presented with one. The indefatigable Dr. Johnson presented one more speech in favor of the Townsend Act and, after lunch was served by the Red Cross the convoy disbanded.

Sgt. Wood and his crew arrived in San Francisco five days later, the railroad having taken two weeks to ship the Militor from Salt Lake City. This sort of unresponsiveness would drive the railroads into bankruptcy two generations hence, opening the door for over-the-road trucking to take their business. There is no record as to whether Sgt. Wood and his crew got their LHA medals, one can only hope that the crew of the most important vehicle in the truck train received some recognition for their selfless efforts to keep the convoy moving.

Lessons Learned

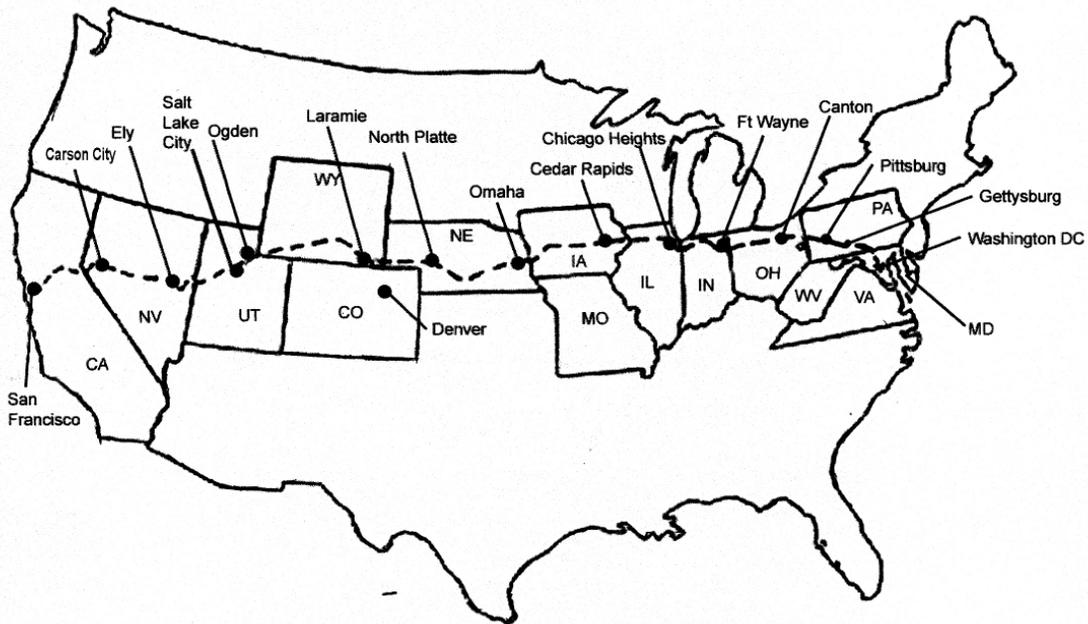
Although there had been 230 accidents no one had been killed or seriously injured, Of the 46 trucks that set out from Washington only three didn't make it to California under their own power. Of the five original objectives of the truck train four

were admirably fulfilled. The convoy experiment certainly showed the difficulties of transporting the Army across the country and road-tested the army vehicles. Thanks to Dr. Johnson's nightly speeches, approximately 3 million people in 150 towns in 11 states were made aware of the Good Roads Program and the importance of the Townsend Bill and were continually reminded of the capabilities and importance of motor trucks. The fact that the convoy averaged only 6 miles per hour brought home the deplorable condition of the nation's roads. The convey fell short of recruiting students for the motor transport schools, the trials and travails of the troops in the harsher parts of the trip may have discouraged more potential recruits than it encouraged.

Eisenhower's report makes special mention of the sturdiness and reliability of the Packard, White and GMC trucks. He is not as kind to the Garfords. He recommended that light (two tons and less) and heavy trucks not be used together in a convoy, the differences in best operating speeds making it difficult to keep the convoy intact. He gave good grades to pneumatic tires especially in traversing sandy terrain.

The effects of the convoy would be felt for years after its final ceremony in San Francisco. Although the public support generated was not enough to pass the Townsend Bill, the Federal Highway Act of 1921 accomplished most of its objectives. The convoy brought home to the citizens of the nation, especially Lt/Col Dwight Eisenhower, who as President in 1956 would authorize the greatest road improvement in the nation's history, the necessity for good public roads.

(Much of the foregoing chronology of the convoy was adapted from "The American Road" by Pete Davis)



Route of the 1919 truck convoy from Washington DC to San Francisco

New Members

Terry Kelnski of Fontana, CA and **John Thomas** of Bonita, CA have upgraded their general membership to Life membership since publication of the last newsletter. Thanks to these two members for their continued support.

MTM Elections

Elections for president and members of the board of Directors for 2009 will be held this spring. MTM members will find a mail-in ballot enclosed in this newsletter. Voting instructions are printed on the ballot.

Dues Reminder

It is time again to pay your annual MTM dues. To find out whether you are paid up look in the top right hand corner of the mailing label that came with this newsletter.

Attention All Members

You can donate money towards MTM's cause without spending a dime by simply receiving these quarterly issues of the Motor Transport Museum News by e-mail. This way MTM can save mailing costs and use the savings towards operating expenses. Not only will you get instantaneous delivery of your copy, you will get the photographs in glorious living color, a feat that we have not yet accomplished with the printed copy. Please e-mail us at motortransport@att.net and subscribe.

Also – MTM needs people like you to greet and educate our visitors. Being a Docent is fun and rewarding.

Anyone interested in helping on any of the Saturdays during 2008 please call John Thomas at (619) 479-4318 or MTM at (619) 478-2492 to volunteer.

Recent Donations

The following items were donated to the Museum in the last three months:

- A 1952 Ford F-2 pickup by Bill Gardner of Oceanside, CA.
- A 1960 Kenworth tanker donated by Jimmy Singer of San Diego (see photo).



1960 Kenworth tanker donated by Jimmy Singer. This was used by Sim Harris Company and later, Hanson Materials

MTM thanks these donors for their generosity in helping the Museum attain its goals.

For Sale

The MTM has numerous items for sale at its main facility at the Mill in Campo, CA. To view the items that MTM is currently selling, visit our web site at www.motortransportmuseum.org.

Upcoming events

The **Antique Gas Engine and Tractor Museum** of Vista, CA will be hosting its spring show on the weekends of June 21-22 and June 27-28. Visit www.agsem.com for further details.

The **American Historical Society** Southern California Chapter will hold its **24th Annual Antique Truck Show & Swap Meet** at the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris, CA on May 2nd & 3rd. For more information and driving directions visit www.oerm.org

The **American Historical Society** will hold its **National Convention and Antique Truck Show** at Huntsville AL on May 28-30. For more information visit www.aths.org

The **MTM Board of Directors'** meetings for the spring quarter of 2009 will be held at the Horseless Carriage Foundation library at 8186 Center St. La Mesa, CA at 6:30 PM on the following Thursdays: **April 16, May 21, and June 18** All members are invited to attend.

Mystery Photo

Below is a photo of one of the Julian stages in 1925 in Santa Ysabel, CA in a snowstorm. This one, though the body looks much like the 1924 Cadillac under restoration at the MTM, appears to be a larger chassis, perhaps a Lincoln with a stretched frame. If anyone has any information on the vehicle shown, please contact Carl Calvert at (858) 756-1543.



Hours of Operation

The Museum facility at 31949 Highway 94 in Campo, CA is open to the public every Saturday from 10 AM to 5 PM. Admission is free, donations are accepted.

MTM Officers and Directors

The officers and directors of the Motor Transport Museum are as follows:

Officers: Greg Long, President

John W. Thomas, Secretary

Carl E. Calvert, Chief Financial Officer

Directors: Reid Carroll, Roger Challberg, Jim Jensen

Steve Sackett, Bill Jellyman

MOTOR TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Open House
For members, family and friends

Saturday April 25th, 2009

10 AM to 5 PM

Lunch served for \$1.00
Donations accepted

We plan to run various equipment and show off the new library. Come and see the 1924 Cadillac Julian stage, pictures of the MTM activities throughout the year, the Campo school bus and other recent donations. **Many donated items excess to our collection including tools, trucks, cars, & parts will be for sale at the Museum**

Come out to the museum at
31949 Highway 94
Campo, California
(619) 478-2492

Bring your old car, truck, collectables or parts for sale!

For more information see our website motortransportmuseum.org or call (619) 478-2492.

Directions: Campo is approximately 50 miles East of San Diego on State Highway 94 From San Diego, **go east** on Interstate 8 to Buckman Springs Road. Go south on Buckman Springs Road about 10 miles to the junction with Highway 94. Turn left at the "T" intersection (Highway 94 and Buckman Springs Rd). Go 1 mile East on Highway 94. The Motor Transport Museum is the nine-story mill building on the right just before crossing the railroad tracks.

While in Campo you may also stop by the Stone Store museum and see exhibits from former Camp Lockett of WW II fame and the San Diego Railroad Museum. Trains will be running to the back country on this day.



Motor Transport Museum

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

New Renewal

Name _____ Spouse _____
Street Address _____ City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ E-Mail _____

General Membership	1Yr \$20 _____	2Yr \$40 _____	3Yr \$60 _____
General - International Membership (Non USA Mailing Address)			1Yr \$25 _____
Corporate Membership			1Yr \$75 _____
Life Membership			\$250 _____
Endowing Life Membership			\$1000 _____
Associate Membership - Non Profit organization			1Yr \$35 _____
Jounior Membership - Children under 18 (non-voting)			1Yr \$1 _____
Student Membership - Full time students, 18 - 25			1Yr \$6 _____

I agree to comply strictly with the By Laws of the Motor Transport Museum; to conduct myself at all times in a manner which will support and promote the best interest of the Motor Transport Museum

Signature of Applicant _____ Date _____

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

MOTOR TRANSPORT MUSEUM
31949 HIGHWAY 94
CAMPO, CA 91906