

Patton's Mobile Headquarters Shop Van-A Recreation

*By Ken Rose, #31293
and Denny Hair, #9986*

Denny Hair is no stranger to restoring military vehicles, having brought back to life a WC15 Dodge half-ton command car, had a part in restoring both a Dodge VC1 command car, and a 1943 Ford GPW jeep over the past 20 years. But his latest effort to fulfill a dream may be the most ambitious to date.





The GMC CCKW shop van was completely sandblasted and primed at a local shop in Waller, Texas.



The van's interior color was matched to Patton's original van at Fort Knox.

Denny has portrayed Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. hundreds of times since 1984 and his impression has won him the accolades of no less an audience than the 90th Infantry Division and the general's granddaughter, Helen Patton-Plusczyk. He is now determined to recreate, with as much authenticity as possible, the Patton Headquarters Field Command 6x6 van; establish a website dedicated to the men and women who served in the European Theater's 3rd Army during WWII; and create a group of like-minded individuals who will support other groups and museums in their efforts to keep alive the memory and sacrifice of that generation which defeated totalitarianism on all fronts across the world. He has named this group Patton's Lucky 3rd Army and it is rolling forward to meet his goals.

Denny's group is establishing a traveling museum and Patton Show to give the audience an authentic scenario of command activity during battle.

While most reenactments concentrate on the battlefield, the decision-making and field command process is often overlooked. They will address that gap by showing the leadership in moments of battle planning, crisis and response.

As for the new website, <www.pattonthirdarmy.com> Denny has this to say, "We have said we wanted to educate the public... now we are going to do it. We are non-political, so we will link it to all the clubs who wish a link and help them as well. We



Arrival at Bryan, Texas, Veterans Day Parade November 8, 2008.

will eventually have our impression on YouTube, MySpace and anything else it takes to tell the story. Needless to say, this will also get us publicity, events and places to come play. I want to promote our group and also our equipment for movies.”

Central to this program is the 6x6 van which, helped by many friends, is emerging as an exact replica of the general's; even the can of talcum powder is correct based on photos from the front. Denny had mulled his idea for a long time and a conversation with Carlos Manning (MVPA #10401) earlier this year set the wheels in motion. Carlos is a long time reenactor and facilitator in the hobby. After seeing what Denny had in mind, he became a strong supporter and helped Denny find the right truck for the project. The photographs show the amount of progress that has been made in the last few months.

The search began when he heard of Art Pope's efforts to reproduce a copy of the original HQ shop van. Denny contacted Art through the MVPA who assisted him in many aspects of the restoration. The hardest part was to locate a shop van. They were once easy to find but not now. Art had a lead on one, as did Brent Mullins of Texas and through them Denny finally located a 1942 CCKW GMC ST5 shop van in Pennsylvania. The truck was purchased and prepared for its long journey from Pennsylvania to Hockley, Texas, in March of 2008. Art supplied Denny with his restoration plans and the restoration and recreation of history began in earnest.

The truck had sat for some time so the gas tank was cleaned and coated. Remarkably, the engine and running components were in good shape. A local church youth group took on the van as a youth project and cleaned and masked the truck off in preparation for sandblasting. Some twelve young people spent a whole day on top, underneath and in every nook and cranny taping it off. The vehicle was sandblasted and primed. Denny was very fortunate when a group of military enthusiasts came to help and lend their talents to what would become a large group effort. Bill Warren, a superb and experienced military vehicle restorer contributed his time to paint the truck.



Based on exhaustive research in over seventy books these items are what George S. Patton would have had on his desk.

Carlos Manning, Homor Thomas, Will Bickers, Ken Spencer, Mario Vaca, Ken Rose, George Lindsey, Bill McKown, and Cris Storms spent countless hours working on the van. Master antique furniture expert and military vehicle owner Mike Sabota and his son Andrew made the furniture for the van to exact specifications furnished by Art Pope and the staff of the Patton Museum at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The museum staff also sent high-resolution photographs of the inside of the original van.



Patton always had a library with him; he, and later his son, read The Collective Verse by Rudyard Kipling. This is the exact dated 1940 copyright edition that Patton carried with him. He always had his beloved cigars with him as well.



The inside of Patton's van was carefully duplicated. The top photograph is the inside of the original van and the bottom photograph is the inside of ours. Even the Molly toothpaste and tooth powder was duplicated.



What had started out, as an idea now became a determination to duplicate a piece of history and use it to educate the public. Brent Mullins was able to help and gave a rare part that made the project much easier to complete. Many CCKW owners and members of <www.cckw.org> lent advice and help online in locating manuals, specifications and sharing their expertise. Robin Silva is preparing the web site describing Patton's charge across Europe to help keep this part of American history alive for present

and future generations. Americans from all parts of the country helped to defeat Hitler's forces. Now many Americans have donated their time, efforts and resources to make this project a success.

A LITTLE HISTORY OF PATTON'S 3RD ARMY MOBILE HEADQUARTERS IN EUROPE

Letter June 10th 1944.

In a letter to his wife Beatrice while still stationed in England, he wrote, "I have a truck to sleep in. It is quite swell-like the cabin in a cruiser only you can stand up. There is a bed with an air mattress, a wash stand, clothes closet, desk map board, heater and a 110 electric circuit with a built-in radio; also a sort of canvas porch effect The horrors of war are fast departing and the far off booby traps are gone. It can also black out and has a huge map board so one can work at night. It is made out of an obsolete truck body and runs well or at least well enough."

This is the first mention of a unique traveling headquarters assigned exclusively to Patton. The US Army had technical designations for their vehicles so, officially, he was assigned a 1942 CCKW GMC ST 5 Shop Van, truck ordnance, maintenance, 2_ ton truck, powered by a GMC 270 cu. In., 6-cylinder, gas engine. Fully loaded at 13,265 pounds it could go about 240 miles on a 40 gallon gas tank at an average of 6 miles a gallon with a maximum allowable speed of 45 mph. The electrical system was powered by 6-volts. It was modified on the inside rear portion of the van to suit Patton's needs.

The original van is on display in the Patton Museum at Fort Knox Kentucky. There are few WWII pictures of the van's interior and none have been found showing an inside view during the war. The display at Fort Knox is not complete, as it does not have all that it would have contained during the war. Most of the general's personal belongings are either on display

elsewhere or gone. The radio set-up above his desk remains a mystery that we are still trying to solve.

There is evidence that at least two more shop vans were assigned to Third Army HQ. One was assigned to Patton's Chief of Staff General Hobart Gay. The other was most probably assigned to Major General Hugh Gaffney who also served as his chief of staff. Patton did take a photograph of three shop vans assigned to his command while they were still in England waiting to become operational.

Patton's 3rd US Army was and had always been designated as the army to take the war to the Germans after D-Day under a plan called Operation Cobra. On the morning of July 6th, 1944 Patton's C-47 landed on an airstrip near Omaha Beach in France and Patton was now back in the war to command his army.

As Patton was waiting for 3rd Army to become operational his field headquarters was organized. His mobile office and quarters had a large camouflage net over it. Under the net were his jeep, 3/4-ton Dodge command car and his mobile HQ truck. In the rear of the truck was a canvas canopy just under the camouflage netting. Just out from there was plywood, laid on the ground to walk on, a field desk and several director style chairs. The ladder leading up to the rear entrance had been modified with wood slats over the stairs so Willie (Patton's dog) would not catch his toenails on the wire mesh covering



Denny Hair, impersonating Patton, is looking at a photograph of the general in Life magazine, as Patton would have done when he received his copy.



Mike Sabota, who built all the furniture, points to one of our prize possessions. We have an original dated command staff map from 3rd US Army. It was bought at a bargain price for \$40 on eBay and is possibly worth thousands. It has Patton's Third Army HQ mark on it in the original marker.



Col. Carlos Manning, (left) our Chief of Staff. He plays the part of Col. Oscar Kotch, Chief of Intelligence for Patton. It was his loving hand that made this all possible. He was the glue for all of us to get involved, kept the group together, and is like a 'father figure' that we all love and admire. Carlos spent more time on the van than anyone but me.



I colorized the only photograph of General Patton exiting from his HQ van in August of 1944.

the stairs. Patton often moved a small map board to the table and discussed pending operations with his staff outside the van.

The first mention of its use in combat during WWII was in his diary.

Diary entry July 8th 1944.

Patton liked the truck and it was comfortable enough for him to write home and say... *“The sleeping truck is really too comfortable. I fear I will get soft.”*



A recreation of Patton exiting the HQ van in August of 1944 to meet with his staff.



Left, Mike Sabota, as an MP, Denny Hair as General Patton and George Lindsey as an MP. Mike and George helped restore the Patton van.

The exterior of the 1942 GMC CCKW Shop Van shown with Brig. Gen. Hap Gay (played by Bill Mckown) at the Bryan, Texas, Veterans Day Parade.

Patton had dropped a map board on his toe in England and it had become infected. He wrote home and mentioned the truck after he was in France and waiting for 3rd Army to become operational.

Diary entry July 11th.

"Stayed in the truck all day resting my toe..."

Letter to Beatrice July 12th 1944.

"My toe is much better and I can wear my shoe. As there is nothing I can talk about I drew you ...the plans of the truck. It is quite roomy and has lots of storage space."

Patton kept his dog Willie (William the Conqueror) with him in camp and the dog traveled and slept with him in his truck.

Diary entry July 15th 1944.

"Willie is crazy about me and almost has a fit when I come back to camp. He snores too and is company at night."

Patton also had guards (sentinels) posted near his truck. He wrote on August 9th when interrogating a captured German general that... *"I had two sentinels with fixed bayonets at my truck-usually I have more. I had one table and one chair and he had to stand."*

One Happy Bunch of folks. Kneeling, Will Bickers, standing left to right George Lindsey, Ken Spencer, Mike Sabota, Mario Vaca, Denny Hair, Homer Thomas, and Joe Nobles.



Denny and his group of like-minded reenactors are not letting the grass grow under their feet as the *Lucky 3rd Army* has already participated in the 90th Anniversary of the 90th Infantry Division, supported Brent Mullins Museum of the American GI and rode in Bryan, Texas veterans parade. The year 2009 promises to bring many more opportunities to present history and educate people of all ages on our past.

