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Tanks for the memories: Retired, restored military vehicles on cool display in Huntsville (photos)

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(<http://connect.al.com/user/kkesner/index.html>) By Kenneth Kesner, The Huntsville Times
(<http://connect.al.com/user/kkesner/posts.html>)
on June 29, 2012 at 3:00 PM, updated June 29, 2012 at 3:20 PM

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Living Historian Denny Hair as Gen. George Patton talks about a restored WC-57 Command Car set up like the one Gen. Patton rode in during World War II at the Patton Third Army Living Historians booth at the 37th annual Military Vehicle Preservation Association Convention at the Von Braun Center South Hall Friday, June 29, 2012. The event is open to the public Saturday with 140 vehicles registered on display. Admission is \$9 for ages 12 and up and free for ages 12 and under. (The Huntsville Times/Robin Conn.)

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HUNTSVILLE, Alabama (<http://www.al.com/huntsville/>)-- What moves a man to buy a World War II-era Army "deuce-and-a-half" - a two-and-a-half-ton truck - restore it to nearly-new and then drive it all the way across the country at about 45 mph, no air conditioning, in a convoy with other old military vehicles?

"We call it the 'green iron addiction,'" said Richard Evans, of Sandrock.

"It's worse than any kind of dope you can get into," said 73-year-old Lamar Rowland, of Sampson.

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They are both members of the **Dixie Division Military Vehicles Club** (<http://www.ddmvp.org/>), which this week is hosting the 37th annual **Military Vehicle Preservation Association** (<http://www.mvpa.org/>) convention at the Von Braun Center South Hall. On Saturday, the general public is invited to come in from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to see the 140 trucks, jeeps, armored personnel carriers, Humvees, Soviet T-34 tank from 1943 and other "steel soldiers" registered for the convention. There is even a Soviet Scud B missile launcher, brought in from a display on Redstone Arsenal.

Admission is \$8 for age 13 and older; younger is free. It will be cool inside the hall and a great family outing on a very hot day, said Evans, who serves as convention spokesman.

The event offers a lot in addition to the vehicles. Table after table is topped with vintage and replica parts, tires, uniforms, helmets, placards, pins, books, manuals, models, tools, holsters, fake machine guns and other weapons, and much, much more. Some have been set up by vendors; some by individuals.

"Where else are you going to find an armor-plated Humvee door," Evans said, walking along a row. "We have people who collect a little bit of just about everything."

A number of club members are re-enactors and are in period uniforms. You might even meet Gen. George S. Patton and some of his Third Army soldiers, such as Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Hobart Gay - portrayed, respectively, by Denny Hair of Hockley, Texas, and Mike Maloney, of Austin, Texas.

For years, they've been part of a living history group that has traveled internationally, recreating one of Patton's wartime field headquarters. In Huntsville, they have a replica of his customized command car and a number of authentic Patton artifacts.

Rowland, a retired plumbing salesman, said his "addiction" began 12 years ago when he fixed up an old Willy's jeep. Two years later he had a dozen vehicles.

He and his wife, Jewell, also got married 12 years ago - "We're newlyweds," she said, making a set of dog tags in the booth they're running at the convention.

Restoring the old military vehicles has been a great pastime for them to share, Jewell said. She went along in the "deuce" a couple of years ago when they joined 32 other vehicles in a 28-day convoy from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco, Calif. They took the same route along the old "Lincoln Highway" that a Defense Department convoy took in 1919.

Along the way, Lamar said, they were often escorted by police and other officials, and drove past flag-waving crowds lining the roads.

"It was marvelous," Jewell said. "You meet wonderful people. You realize the freedom, the spirit of America, it's still alive and well."

In late July, they'll be part of a group traveling from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, into Alaska and back, retracing the route taken by a military convoy building the Alaska-Canadian highway during WWII.

For the Rowlands, Evans and others in the club preserving these trucks and vehicles is also another way of honoring soldiers' service; of keeping alive the memories of what they experienced in the defense of the country.

A phrase painted on a WWII helmet carefully positioned atop the hood of one of the jeeps on display puts it best: The World Can't Forget What A Few Remember.

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