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"BREAKING IN" THE FIFTH ARMY'S TAXI COMPANY

By Technical Sergeant Robert Geake

WITH U.S. FIFTH ARMY, ITALY--With an outstanding two and a half year service record behind them, including front line action in two major campaigns, members of the headquarters car company of the U.S. Fifth Army in Italy feel they and their vehicles are "just getting broken in!"

Not to be confused with the standard truck company, the car company operates only jeeps, reconnaissance cars and staff sedans. This crack outfit was one of four special units organized for the first time in June, 1941.

Since that time, each of its charter members has driven a distance equal to over four trips around the globe at the equator. For two action packed years they chauffeured army officers all over the southeastern quarter of the United States, through Ireland, and England, and over North Africa from Casablanca to Tripoli. Now the four platoons of experts drive Fifth Army headquarters officers day and night to all points in the Italian theater, from the beaches to the front lines.

Most selective service men in our armed forces would feel like recruits talking with this gang. These men were experienced when they drove in the Louisiana maneuvers in '41 and "old timers" for the fall maneuvers in the Carolinas that year.

As for the great figures of this war--this bunch really "knew them when". If Private First Class Michael Acciaio, of Rochester, New York, tries hard enough he can recall driving for a "swell guy" in the Louisiana maneuvers--a Lieutenant Colonel. Name was Eisenhower. Everybody liked him and called him "Ike". "He's done right well since I last talked with him", observes Private Acciaio.



They did just that. After surviving bombing and strafing at sea, the company landed and set up its first motor pool 650 yards behind our lines, ready to defend, if necessary, any headquarters in the area. From that day on these drivers have worked under fire like infantrymen.

Private First Class Ned. J. Chiarello, of Brooklyn, New York, had to play hide and seek with a Nazi machine gunner one trip but he got his staff officer to the front on schedule. "We had to hide around a curve approaching a long bridge covered by a Jerry," says Ned. "One at a time a vehicle would make a run for it and we'd hear the enemy gun sputter and just sweat. Finally my turn came! I held my breath and bounced my Jeep around that corner like a scared rabbit. Sure enough he opened up on us but his timing was off and we made it across by a hair".

Lucky too was Private First Class William Paul Naylor, of Winston Salem, North Carolina. Naylor was driving a colonel along the front through German artillery fire. It finally got so hot that they had to hit the ditch. As they lay under a dirt bank an 88 gunner began pouring shells at their vehicle, but every shell exploded in a big tree not fifteen feet away. "I thought every one was in my lap," says Paul, "and for an 88 that's close enough".

The dispatcher of the "battle taxis" is a little man with a big bark-- Corporal Louis J. Mascitelli. Louis answers over a hundred phone calls a day as he distributes his hundred odd vehicles all over the Fifth Army. Working with heavy traffic makes Louis feel at home. He lives in the Bronx, New York City. "I come from a long line of traffic," he explains.

When incoming planes want to be met at a nearby airport, they zoom low over the corporal's dispatch station and cut their motors. Louis says it's just as good as a phone call, but not as polite as the Commanding General's method. When General Clark returns to the airport unexpectedly in his small plane, he cordially calls down to Louis through the loud speaker built in the ship. Louis waves a white handkerchief back and sure enough when the General comes in there is a car by his landing strip.



Rolling back the years, Michael remembers driving another "regular guy" that fall. Name was Mark W. Clark--a major, now Lieutenant General Clark, commanding the Fifth Army in Italy. "Dont visit with him as much as I used to," reports Michael. "New job keeps him tied down, I guess."

Private Anthony Shertza, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, is a member of the first platoon to come overseas, 22 months ago. "When we first hit Ireland the people were afraid of us for a few minutes," says Anthony. "They had never seen our new hood-model helmets and thought we were Germans."

Immediately after they landed in Africa last winter, the headquarters chaffeururs were asked to show what they were made of. Their demonstration lasted for two weeks and at the end of it the army in North Africa knew its car company was as tough and rugged as they come.

It was during the critical days at Kasserine Pass that the car men climbed into two and a half ton trucks and for fourteen consecutive days and blacked out nights convoyed soldiers and vital supplies through winter weather over hazardous mountain roads up to the front lines in Tunisia. Through it all they ate and slept in their truck cabs, driving in shifts so that their vehicles never stopped.

First Sergeant Michael Harbacevich of East 70th Street, New York City, reports that in the two week grind the drivers rolled up over a quarter of a million truck-miles without an accident! After that the company took a vacation; for six months the men did nothing but drive day and night throughout North Africa for Fifth Army headquarters, averaging 7,000 miles per day.

Last August the drivers were given infantry training for four weeks, including courses in map reading and camouflage, and long days on the firing range. The men who are supposed to drive all day polished off with fourteen mile hikes the last week! In September they learned why! they were to invade Italy with fighting troops prepared to drive twenty-four hours a day and fight and pull guard in their spare time.



Says Cpl. Joe Noble of 114th St., Richmond Hill, N.Y., "Being the Company clerk cramps my style for adventure."

Lucky was Anthony F. Boccio of Brooklyn, N.Y., who, while driving somewhere in Italy came upon his aunts and uncles. An Italian festival was the order of the day for Tony that day.

Johnny Doughboy Found A Rose In Ireland can be claimed the theme song of this company as Pfc. Walter P. Eiser of 70th St., New York City met and wed his Irish rose named Agnes. And so it was for Pvt. Paul T. Wilkinson of Glencoe Ohio, and "Nan", and Pvt. Hiram T. Bean of Exeter, N.H. and "Edith".

Morale-builder, happy-go-lucky Cpl. Louis J. Bagiano of Detroit, Michigan the Company's mail clerk, has himself a long day's work each day. Besides handling the mail, Lou distributes P.X. rations and a must at night is when Lou gets his accordian out and plays for his fellow soldiers.

Getting the men properly clothed and equipped falls in the hands of our oldest member, S/Sgt. Walter A. Willis of New York City, who has already passed his 23rd year in the Army. His able assistants Pfc. William E. Crego of Syracuse, New York called "Statement of Charges Crego" and Pfc. Glenn Calane of Orrville, Ohio, our dairyman, spent many a sleepless night in order to equip the boys so that they may look their best.

Lucky was Dewey Addington of Tullahoma, Tenn., when while driving to the front lines one day had but moments to get out of his peep and hit the ditch as a plane started to strafe the area. Says Dewey, "He sure wasn't an American."

Says Pfc. Walter H. Kleemann of Madison, Wisconsin, one of the first to come overseas, "Its been tough at times, but no matter how tough and dangerous a mission may be, it always can be worse."

Pvt. Lyman Blagman fo New York City, the company's bid for pugilistic fame says, "If only my two managers, Pvt. Russell Oppenheim of New York City and Pvt. Joseph P. Pinto of Washington, D.C., knew how to manage a boxer, I'd have won them all."

"Most credit belongs to our platoon sergeants", so say the boys, speaking of S/Sgt. Michael Donnelly of New York City, S/Sgt. Jeremiah C. Schaeffer of New Ringgold, Penna. ~~and~~ S/Sgt. Harvey W. Finn of Skaneateles, New York, and S/Sgt. Dominick DeFazio of Niagara Falls, New York.

"After driving all these years, my steady milk route will be kind of dull, " says Cpl. Richard C. Smith of Hudson, Wisconsin.

"I'll be able to tell them plenty back home," says Al Ciccone of Cleveland, Ohio after coming back from one of his numerous trips to the front lines. Al is one of the members that has been overseas the longest.

"B-2's", says Dominick Vevone of Auburn, New York, as a drone of planes roar overhead. What Dominick means about B-2's is: "Be too bad if they are not our planes."



Ten men keep the car company's vehicle running like Swiss watches. The motor officer is Lieutenant Leo A. Nesius, of Remington, Indiana. His assistant is Staff Sergeant Glen L. Wilson, of Logan, Ohio. Wilson attended the Army Motor School at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina.

Glenn manages a crew of eight skilled mechanics responsible for repair and maintenance. Their hours are very definite. "We knock off when every car is rolling", explains Glenn. Recently in Italy quitting time happened to be at five o'clock in the morning.

Part of the crew's job is to service civilian cars the Fifth Army purchases in different countries. By now the mechanics say they can repair in four languages - English, French, Arabic, and Italian. Their latest triumph was building an army jeep motor into a French sedan which already had as English rear axle.

Commander of the car company is Captain John Paul Painter, a former lawyer from Longview, Texas. Captain Painter is "the best doggoned officer in Fifth Army". That's the opinion of the men under him and perhaps no higher authority is necessary.

The men like three things in particular about "the old man" (Painter is twenty-eight). First, he came up the hard way. They remember him when he was a platoon leader who would work side by side with them day and night. Second, he came up fast and soldiers think that usually speaks for itself. Eighteen months ago the Captain was a buck sergeant. Third, he possesses those two essentials of superior leadership which so rarely go hand in hand: he enforces strict discipline while remaining democratic and cordial.

Asked to explain the method and theory behind the obvious success of his car company, Captain Painter has a ready answer which he believes is the only one: "Any outfit with good men is a good outfit".

It might be supposed that driving for an Army headquarters would be a routine job, but the men who do it report plenty of variety. Regularly they drive generals and dignitaries whose every move is front page news.



Private First Class Johnny Magnus, of Neffs, Ohio, specializes in heads of government, having chauffeured the King of England, the Sultan of Spanish Morocco, and the Pasha of French Morocco.

Private First Class Miles Kendziorski, of Alpena, Michigan has forgotten all the movie stars who have ridden with him, but remembers Kay Francis, Merle Oberon, Carol Landis, Mitzi Green, and Martha Raye.

Platoon leader, Staff Sergeant Dominic DeFazio, of Niagara Falls, New York, drove Al Jolson in England. Later, when Al was entertaining some soldiers in North Africa he spotted Dominic in the audience and greeted him from the stage.

Sometimes the drivers live up their assignments on their own initiative. Sergeant Herman C. Muehleisen, of Elmire, New York, and Corporal Maurice S. Sigler, of Hagerstown, Maryland checked in with the dispatcher recently with some unusual passengers - two German prisoners they had rounded up and captured themselves at the front.

On the basis of their past record, you can make only one prediction about the Fifth Army's headquarters drivers for the duration and six months: they'll be on the job--but good. What or where the job will be is less certain when you're speaking of this versatile outfit. After working their way four times around the world, they're "just getting broken in!"

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## FIFTH ARMY'S SHORT ORDER RESTAURANT

WITH U. S. FIFTH ARMY, ITALY--The hardest working crew of cooks in the U.S. Fifth Army not only prepare -- "the best mess in the army" -- they serve it ten hours a day.

These tireless chefs work in the kitchen of the special car company of Fifth Army headquarters. From Camp Blanding, Florida to Ireland, to England, to Africa, to Italy, they have cooked and served on a "round the clock" schedule.

Right now their loyal customers chauffeurs headquarters officers all over the theatre of operations day and night. That means the drivers are continually "dropping in for a bite" -- the system that eventually drives most cooks mad.

"It's a short order restaurant, not an army kitchen," explains Mess Sergeant Neal Holdren, of Buffalo, New York. "When a guy gets in at midnight after driving all day at the front lines on C rations he's entitled to something more than a menu of the next morning's breakfast!" What he gets is one of Sergeant Holdren's "midnight specials" -- big, hot and no complaints.

Sergeant Holdren has posted a meal schedule, more in compliance with army mess regulations than to suggest that there might be a time when his "restaurant" is closed. Officially, then, breakfast is from 6:30 to 9:00 A.M.; dinner from 11:00 to 1:30 P.M.; and supper from 4:00 to 9:00 P.M.; -- five hours! Between these periods it's business as usual.

A specialty at the car company kitchen is the new dish that turns up regularly. First Cook, Sergeant Paul E. Lohri, of Fly, Ohio, for example, can't or won't follow directions. Give him spam and it will come out a delicious spread for bread -- once, that is; the next time it will turn up as spiced stuffing for chicken. To the despair of his customers and fellow-cooks, Paul never records recipes. "I'm afraid I'll get in a rut," he explains.

A number of Fifth Army kitchens claim to have the best pie-baker in the army. This one is no exception. The car company's candidate for this honor is Corporal Harold D. Brenneman, of Warsaw, Ohio.



Put him in the same room with some filling and flour and seasoning and that night hungry headquarters drivers will find themselves drooling over one of Harold's specialities: chocolate, apple, cherry, pineapple, raisin, custard, prune or peach. The last is the corporal's favorite. About all of them the drivers have an old saying, "They're the kind of pies mother would make -- if she knew how."

Three other culinary artists complete the crack kitchen staff of the Fifth Army: First Cook, Sergeant James N. Chrysler, of Detroit, Michigan, and two cooks helpers, Private First Class Robert R. Watkins, of Wellesboro, Pennsylvania, and Private Hugh D. Lockwood, of Cuba, New York.

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