



# MOTOR POOL MESSENGER

the official monthly newsletter of the  
**MILITARY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION**

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Issue: DECEMBER 2019

Editor: Dave Steinert



the German Half Track

The WWII U.S. Half Track vs



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# 2019 CHRISTMAS ISSUE



## MERRY CHRISTMAS

If these guys can get along, you can make it through dinner with your relatives

### WWII Half-Tracks: American vs. German

During WWII, both the United States and Germany used half-track vehicles as personnel carriers to get infantry troops quickly to the frontlines with minimal damage. These vehicles were heavily armored to protect their personnel from enemy rifle shots and light machine gun fire.

A casual glance at the two opposing half-tracks, one can see a few obvious differences between the American and German versions. In the pictures on the cover, you can see that the German tracked portion is much more dynamic than the American version. The Russian half-track has a lot more interwoven road wheels that distribute the weight over a much larger area. The German version was much more maneuverable over soft ground than the American half-track.

Also, a noteworthy difference is that the American half-track had a rubber roller on the front end. The roller was designed to lift or raise the half-track over low obstacles or increase the height of obstacles so that a half-track could traverse over it. This gave the American half-track an advantage maneuvering over high obstacles.

The American half-track also had louvered ventilation (metal panels that could be opened and closed) on the front to cool the radiator for the engine. The louvers would be closed in a shooting situation.

The American half-track provided anti-aircraft defense with a heavy .50 caliber machine gun. With the ability to rotate the MG around a ring mount it served defensively at ground level also. The American half-track basically had flat walls and a single wide door on the back, with seating for ten soldiers, a driver, and a machine gun operator. (12 people). The German version also carried about twelve people but there were other significant differences. The walls on the German vehicle were sloping so that the opening at the top was considerably smaller, so if you've got an

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enemy who's throwing hand grenades, it's a smaller opening to hit, and if you miss by even a small amount, the slanted wall will tend to bounce the grenade off. Whereas the American half-track presents a much larger target. If you're dealing with an enemy on a hill, a sniper up in a tree, or soldiers in town up in a second story, the target is much bigger on the American half-track than on the German version. And in terms of delivering troops, the German half-track had a double door at the rear that would allow the soldiers to exit much more rapidly than with the single door of the American half-track. And in terms of delivering troops, the German half-track had a double door at the rear that would allow the soldiers to exit much more rapidly than with the single door of the American half-track.

The German half-track has been criticized as being underpowered with only a 100 horsepower engine compared to the 147 horsepower engine in the American half-track, resulting in a top speed of only 33 miles per hour in the German vehicle compared to 45 miles per hour for the American half-track. It is a valid criticism, but might have been dismissed by German Army planners by pointing out that a 33 mile per hour vehicle is still adequate to keep pace with German panzers which had a top speed of 25 miles per hour.

Both of these half-tracks did the job that was required of them in WWII. They did get troops much more rapidly deployed. Probably the strongest point of the American half-track was the production numbers. There were about 31,000 M-3 half-tracks and variants produced by the United States as opposed to 16,000 SKdfz. 251 half-tracks produced by Germany.

**THE NEXT MTA MEETING WILL BE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5TH 2019 AT THE WHIPPANY AMERICAN LEGION, LEGION PLACE, WHIPPANY, NJ. MEETING BEGINS PROMPTLY AT 7:00PM. GET THERE EARLY FOR PIZZA AND OTHER ITALIAN DELICACIES!**



## **Military Transport Association**

### **The MTA November 18<sup>th</sup> 2019 Monthly Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was called to order at about 7:00PM by MTA President **Al Mellini** followed by The Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence led by Sgt. Of Arms **Andy Salzano**.

**Approval of Minutes for October** – Approval of the minutes made by some unidentified embedded MTA members. *Passes unanimously anyway.*

**Treasurer's Report:** As reported by Al:

<b>Military Transport Association, Inc.</b>	
<b>Summary of Funds Activity</b>	
<b>For the Month Ending October 31, 2019</b>	
	<b>All Funds</b>
<b>Beginning balance from last month</b>	<b>\$ 58,012.66</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>994.04</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>(1,614.66)</b>
<b>Closing balance</b>	<b>\$ 57,392.04</b>

**The MTA Fall Trail Ride:** A good time was had by all; kudos to **Gary Schultz** and **Chris Van Orden** for organizing the ride and to **Pat Tipton** for letting the club off-road on his property. Spring trail ride was discussed for May or June of 2020.

**Toys 4 Tots:** **Tim Farrell** discussed the new locations of train stops that were added this year. **Carolyn Hoffman** has indicated no additional volunteers are needed at this time.

**2019 Election Results:** Gary Schultz reports that 40 ballots were received by mail from MTA members, the results of the voting were; **Al Mellini** remains as MTA President, **John Sobotka** remains as Vice President and **Anita Roberts** was elected as Recording Secretary and **Ginnie McDevitt** remains Treasurer.

**Note:** Frank Shane's War Dogs presentation was pushed back to the December meeting. Rumor has it that Frank was bitten

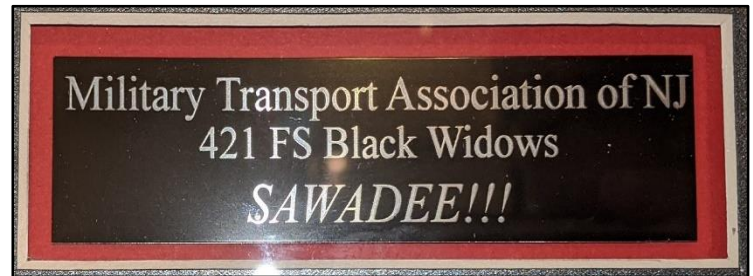
by one of the War Dogs. After biting Frank, the dog started foaming from the mouth and the dog was given a rabies shot. The latest update is that the dog is doing well but Frank is now on a steady diet of Alpo.

**Gary Schultz** presented the MTA with a framed plaque, signed by the F-35 Squadron in appreciation of our donation of a Keg-a-rator. Gary read the following letter from his nephew, Colonel Jonathan Hassell (call sign Rev) sent to him to describe the plaque and the word Swadee that's prominent to the award:

"The whole Squadron has been very impressed with the MTA's Keg-a-rator donation. Our previous Keg-a-rator was home-made from the outer shell of a 5000 lb. penetrator bomb. It broke and we could no longer find the parts to fix it. The generous MTA donation helps a lot with morale and is extremely appreciated.

Our Squadron is the envy of the base, even the Australian and the USMC F-35 pilots who came through for training were impressed by our new Keg-a-rator.

The meaning of salutations *Sawadee* on the award plaque goes back to when the 421st was flying Wild Weasel missions out of Thailand during the Vietnam war".



"*Sawadee* is Thai for greetings or welcome home. The 421st pilots knew that they were safe over friendly territory once they heard the flight controllers saying *Sawadee*, *Sawadee!!* The term went on to represent a successful mission and rally cry for the Squadron".



**New Members:** Tom Weber. *The MTA welcomes Tom to the organization!*

**Food Trucks for the Swap Meet:** Al reported that he had attended Lead East and the Sussex County Fair to scope out food trucks for our event. He took pictures of potential vendors and had reached out to Pam Geiger, Concessions Manager at the FG, for contact information on food trucks. **Jack McDevitt** provided contact information for several food trucks, as did **Tim Swanick**. **Andy Sternick** attended a food truck festival at the FG to secure food truck information. All information was passed along to **Anita Roberts**, who reported that she had reached out to 64 food trucks, 25 expressed an interest and received our information packet, only 2 committed and paid the \$100 registration fee; a shaved Ice truck and a gourmet hot dog cart; 7 requested we reach out to them in January.

Al also mentioned that he had reached out to the Newton Rotary as recommended by Pam at the FG. They have their own kitchen on the FG site and could run the entire food program and then **Al "Cookie" Mellini** could drive around the Swap Meet and bother everyone! Al has a meeting on Nov. 26 with the Rotary to discuss our requirements. If food trucks or the Rotary do not work out by Jan 2020, we book the Ag kitchen. Discussion ensued.

**Fair Ground Vet Parade Update:** Sussex Co. has a parade every year, this year the MTA had 5 vehicles for the parade.

**Clifton Parade Update:** MTA had 13 vehicles participating. With Clifton paying \$500, the parade season official ended with \$6550 in parade revenue.

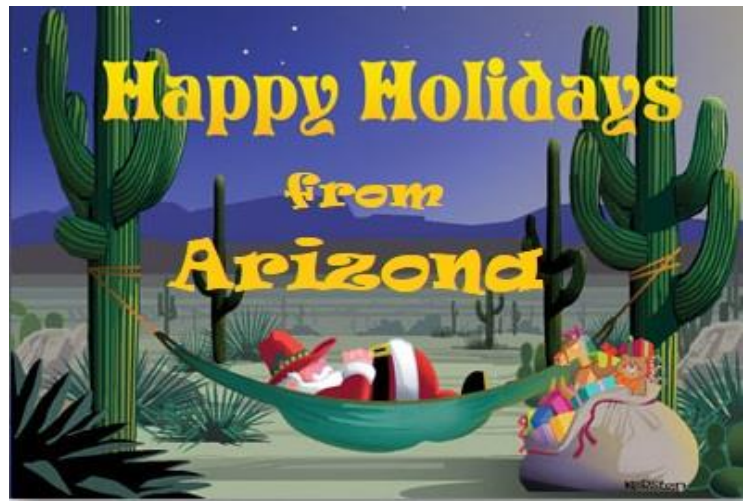
**Donations: Wreaths Across America:** **Andy Salzano** suggested we make a donation of \$1500 for 100 wreaths. Andy made the motion to discuss the donation, **Frank Shane** seconded the motion; must go into the newsletter for membership approval at December meeting.

Al suggested we donate \$500 for food for Operation Toy Train. Motion was made by **Ben Cave** to approve; **Kevin Smith** seconded; motion was approved by the membership.

*Newly re-elected Vice President **John Sobotka** tried to sneak into the meeting at 8:15 pm, claiming he locked himself by mistake in the men's room stall, but he was caught!*

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by **Dennis Dutcher**, seconded by **Pat Dolan**. *Motion carried!*

*Respectfully submitted by  
Anita Roberts*



Our embedded Correspondent and MTA Member in Arizona, Phil Francis submitted the following pictures from the recent Good Guys Custom Car Show in Scottsdale, Arizona.



**MVPA Mega Membership Drive**

**The Goal is to Double the Membership in 2019!**

To accomplish this goal we need every member to recruit a new member, or to give a gift membership to a friend or relative.

To make membership more attractive, the Board decided that from now through 1 January 2019 the dues for new or returning members will be reduced by \$5.00!

Active members renewing on or before their due date already receive a \$5.00 discount, and until 1/1/2019 EVERYONE does!

This offer is only valid on Regular U.S., Canadian and Overseas memberships. Electronic memberships are excluded.

A personalized gift card will be included with all gift memberships.

Recruiting and gift giving members receive \$5.00 in MVPA bucks for each new member, so it's a win-win situation!

ALSO in 2019 all active MVPA members are welcome to attend the York, PA convention with no registration fee charged! Proof of membership will be required.

REGULAR MEMBERSHIPS - All included in the above offer:		OUTREACH MEMBERSHIP:
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Second Class Postage - \$40.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Overseas Air Mail - \$70.00	<input type="checkbox"/> To Organization
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. First Class Postage - \$28.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Canada Air Mail - \$68.00	<input type="checkbox"/> or School - \$68.00
	\$70      \$45      \$55      \$45	
<b>\$5.00 discount not valid after 1 Jan 2019</b>		
Gift from or Recruited by: _____ MVPA Number: _____		
Name of recipient: _____		
Address: _____		
City: _____ State/Prov: _____		Zip: _____
Telephone: _____		E-mail Address: _____
16 Digit Credit Card #: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____		
Exp. date: ____ / ____ / ____		Signature: _____

Mail application with a check or money order in U.S. funds to: MVPA, PO Box 520378, Independence, MO 64052  
 Call HQ to use a Visa, MasterCard or Discover at (816) 833-MVPA (6872) or (800) 365-5798  
 Gift memberships are not available online, please, contact MVPA-HQ

division was ashore on Guadalcanal the beachhead was moved to Lunga Point, and the amtracs put in more work here moving supply dumps from the assault beaches to within the new perimeter.



**LVTs head towards Guadalcanal**

Six months of hard fighting followed, with the situation in doubt for much of that time. By late September most of the LVT's that had come ashore with the Marines were out of action due to wear and tear from substantial use, including employment as pontoon bridges, and those that remained were used sparingly to make supply runs to forward elements in the jungle. In mid-December the division handed over responsibility for the island to the Army's XIV Corps, and all amtracs that had survived the fighting to this point were left behind for the 2d Marine Division to use in the last two months of the battle. In his after action report for the campaign, Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift noted that "while equipment employed in the landing proved generally satisfactory, the amphibian tractor demonstrated a usefulness exceeding all expectations... [and] made a vital contribution to the operation by its performance of diverse missions beyond the capacity of conventional vehicles." In short, the amtrac had made its mark. In the summer of 1943 this positive impression was reinforced, as a small number of Marine LVT's provided exemplary service in support of XIV Corps' offensive into the Central Solomons.

With their reputations as can-do cargo haulers established the amtracs padded their resume with further accolades. On November 1<sup>st</sup> the 3d Marine Division, reinforced, conducted an assault landing at Empress Augusta Bay on the island of Bougainville, in an effort to squeeze the Japanese out of the Solomons. As the area that the division was operating in was heavily jungled with extensive swamps the amtracs were kept busy for the duration of the operation, which lasted into January of 1944. Here the LVT's did it all. They broke trails through the jungle in order to improve forward movement, lay communication wire, and establish supply routes and access to aid stations; operated as part of reconnaissance patrols; and evacuated wounded Marines from the front lines. In the first weeks of the operation as the Marines slugged through extensive swampland the amtracs were the

On a sad note...Right before this newsletter went to print, it was announced that Sven Johnson had passed away. Sven was a member of the MTA and Red Ball organizations. We will dedicate the January issue of the newsletter to Sven. Our condolences to the Johnson Family!

## Can-do Cargo Haulers: Amtracs in the Logistical Role, 1942-1943, Part II

Written by Jim Swanick

The baptism of fire for the LVT's took place in the Solomon Islands. In August of 1942 the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and several attachments landed on the islands of Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Gavutu-Tanamabogo in the southeastern Solomon's as part of Operation WATCHTOWER. During the landing the amtracs were split between the infantry regiments, following the assault waves with supplies and heavy equipment. At Guadalcanal and Tulagi they went to work ferrying supplies and acting as prime movers for artillery pieces, but at Gavutu they sallied into battle out of necessity, carrying supplies and personnel into the beachhead and evacuating wounded on the way back. At one point one of these vehicles drove inland to rescue a group of infantrymen, taking out a Japanese machine-gun nest and evacuating seven wounded men. Once the

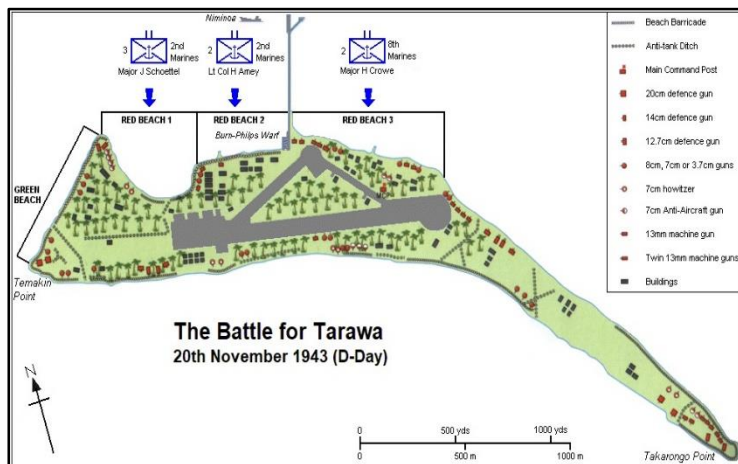
only vehicles capable of bringing supplies and heavy weapons forward, and as in the Guadalcanal operation attrition hit the machines hard despite constant maintenance work. Requests for more tractors were an oft-repeated plea in the division after-action report, which lauded the amphibians as a "vital necessity." Some officers even went so far as to state that had it not been for the LVT's certain maneuvers could not have been executed successfully.



Three weeks after the 3d Marine Division made landfall on Bougainville, an amphibious corps supported by eleven carriers swept into the Central Pacific. Their objective was Tarawa, a coral atoll in the Gilbert Islands. The 2d Marine Division had decided in August that the first three waves should come ashore in amtracs in order to surmount the shallow reef that rings Tarawa; the rest of the assault elements would have to come ashore in Higgins boats, because there were not enough tractors to carry them. These landing craft would have to unload their troops onto the reef. Most of the amphibians to be used in the assault were refurbished LVT(1)'s, with newer LVT(2)'s making up the balance. In anticipation of meeting heavy resistance the amtracs were fitted with machine guns and makeshift armor, and the LVT(1)'s were modified with grapnels to destroy wire entanglements as they passed them. Eighty-seven amtracs would carry ashore the 2d Marine Regiment, 2d Battalion/ 8th Marine Regiment attached, with the first wave consisting of 42 LVT(1)'s carrying 18 men each. The second and third waves followed 300 and 600 yards behind the first wave, and were made up of 24 and 21 LVT(2)'s respectively. All of these amtracs carried twenty men each. Nearly 30 additional amtracs would follow the assault waves tasked with bringing preloaded supplies ashore and aiding any LVT's that experienced mechanical problems.

The battle opened on the morning of 20 November. At 0824 the first wave crossed the line of departure and soon after began taking artillery fire in the form of airbursts 3,000 yards from shore. As the assault waves closed on the beach this fire was augmented by that of automatic weapons, anti-boat guns, and small arms, the effectiveness of which varied due to the amtracs' makeshift armor. The LVT's scaled the reef easily and proceeded to the beaches with machine guns blazing, and despite the heavy fire casualties were extraordinarily light thanks to the mobility and durability of the LVT's. Only eight

amtracs were knocked out on the way in and in exchange the LVT's placed about 1,500 Marines onto the beach in fifteen minutes.



The battle quickly devolved into chaos. The amtracs had launched with orders to proceed inland prior to disembarking their troops, but only a few were able to do so thanks to the presence of a tall seawall along the shoreline. As a result casualties among the initial waves quickly mounted, with many Marines being killed or incapacitated as they leapt over the sides of the LVT's. Many more were hit as they attempted to carve out a foothold across the three beaches. The amtracs that had spearheaded the assault backed off the beach, looking to return to the reef where additional combat elements and supplies were coming in via Higgins boats. As the LVT's repeatedly traversed the fire-swept surf in an effort to carry wounded men out and fresh men in they began taking casualties, and the number of operable machines began to dwindle. Because of these losses and the small number of LVT's involved in the operation to begin with, the majority of the following waves were forced to wade the 500 yards between the reef and shoreline. Casualties among these troops skyrocketed.



Once the initial assault elements were ashore the amtracs largely reverted to performing logistical tasks. LVT losses continued to mount and by the end of the battle, which

lasted 76 hours, only 35 of the original 125 tractors were operational. All but eight of those lost were combat losses. Casualties among the crews were especially high; somewhere between 40% and 65% of the 500 men in the 2d Amtrac Battalion were killed, wounded, or missing at the end of the battle, including the battalion commander Major Henry Drewes.

The exemplary performance of the LVT's did not go unnoticed. In his report the commander of V Amphibious Corps, Major General Holland M. Smith, emphasized that without the LVT's "it is believed that the landing... would have failed," while Colonel "Red Mike" Edson, the 2d Marine Division's chief of staff, opined that "without LVT's I doubt if we would have even reached the beach." Similar testimony could be found all throughout the ranks of the 2d Marine Division as well as the upper echelons of Marine Corps and Navy brass. Numbers backed up the first-hand accounts of those who attested to the value of the amtrac in a combat role, as it was shown that the Marines who had come ashore from the Higgins boats had suffered grievously in the water. The 3d Battalion/8<sup>th</sup> Marines, part of the division reserve, had been committed to Red Beach 3 only a few hours after the 2d Battalion/8<sup>th</sup> Marines had landed there in the initial assault. The latter had suffered only 25 casualties coming ashore in LVT's; in contrast, when the former came in via Higgins boats and waded in from the reef, the two leading companies alone suffered over 200 casualties, approximately 70% of their strength. To avoid such grievous losses in the future it was recommended that 300 LVT's be assigned to each division making an assault landing, and that these be accompanied by 75 LVT(A)1's in order to give the assault waves organic direct fire support. Changes to the LVT design were also recommended, including the addition of a rear ramp, which resulted in the rapid development of the LVT(4).



With beach secured US Marines make their way ashore on Tarawa

The battle for Tarawa marked a watershed moment in the evolution of Marine amphibious doctrine. It cost the 2d Marine Division 1,027 men killed, 2,292 men wounded, and 88 men missing and presumed dead, numbers which translate to approximately 30% casualties among division elements that participated in the fighting. Due to the performance of the amtracs it was immediately decided that the LVT should be

used as an assault craft for all amphibious operations going forward, wherever applicable. Though the tractors would continue their able logistical work with the same fervor for the rest of the war, from now on they would also lead the charge into the breach as amphibian assault craft.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**To add or remove listings from the Classifieds, please email Dave Steinert at [dsteinert@mtaofnj.org](mailto:dsteinert@mtaofnj.org), or call 973-347-9091.**

**Parts For Sale-** 230 CI M725 motor, ran when pulled, burns oil \$200, M725 litter racks-best offer, M725 Rear doors, some dents, no rust \$200 for the pair, M715 windshield frame, minor surface rust \$150, NOS in packing Southwind heater for M725 possible M-43 best offer, M37 windshield frame outer only \$75, M725-M715 rims with lock rings -make offer. Many more items available, too many to list. Call for more information. Call Matt Ziegler, cell 973-445-3890, email : [Matrziegler@gmail.com](mailto:Matrziegler@gmail.com)

**For Sale:** 1964 Ford M151, current Odometer: 34252. Currently registered and inspected in New York State. Comes with Army radio, mounted machine gun (disabled firearm) w/ mount and cartridges, trailer, plastics to go over vehicle (no photo included, but available at request) as well as two large boxes of extra parts. Vehicle has always been garage kept. Buyer is responsible for pick-up or to arrange for shipment for out of town sales. This vehicle has not been cut. Asking \$18,000. Located in Pine Island NY. Please contact Lodzia - 845-258-4493 or Vince - 845-728-9191.

**For Sale:** Replica 81mm mortar. M1 tube and bi-pod. M4 sight. Has incorrect M23A1 two piece base (Nam era?). The tube is original with 1 pin cross welded and a dummy cup welded on. Comes with one practice round (inert) in a newer tared tube. And a wooden ammo crate. Asking \$3000.00 . Will take a M35a2 ring mount in trade. Kirk Stinson 862-209-0933

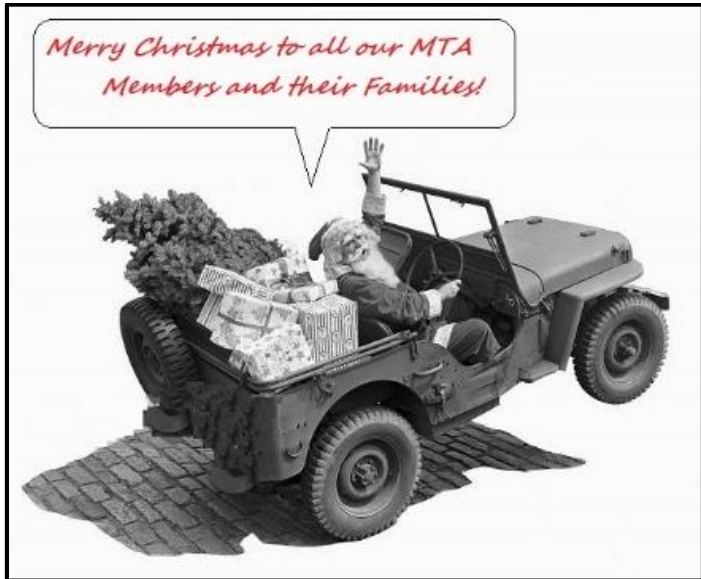
**For Sale:** I have many Jeep and M37 parts for sale, call Tom Weaver @ 973-627-9448.



# Military Transport Association

P.O. Box 391  
Budd Lake, NJ 07828

The next MTA monthly meeting  
will be held on **Thursday, December 5th**  
**7:00PM** at the Whippany American  
Legion Hall, Legion Place, Whippany, NJ



a chapter of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association

The Military Transport Association is dedicated to the education and preservation of historic to present military vehicles. Members enjoy restoring, displaying, and operating military vehicles of all types, from bicycles to tanks.

But trucks and Jeeps aren't all we do! Join today and participate with us at our annual Toys for Tots train ride and toy drive, help at our annual Swap Meet at the Sussex County Fairgrounds, or attend our special events for veterans. Our lively, informative monthly meetings are held in Whippany, NJ.

You do not have to own a military vehicle to be part of this exciting and active hobby - you just need a desire to do your part in keeping our military history alive. All you need to join the MTA is to fill out the the form below, include your dues payment, and mail it to the address below. Alternately, you can give your form and dues to any MTA member you meet at any of our events.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ (cell preferred)

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

MTA Membership Level:  Single (\$30)  Family (\$35)

Are you a member of MVPA?  Yes  No

Military vehicles owned: \_\_\_\_\_

Return form with \$ \_\_\_\_\_ annual dues and \$ \_\_\_\_\_ donation to:

Military Transport Association, Inc.  
P.O. Box 391  
Budd Lake, NJ 07828

Contributions, gifts, or membership dues made or paid to the Military Transport Association, a 501(c)(4) organization, are non-refundable or transferable, and are NOT deductible as charitable contributions for federal tax purposes.

for more information, visit our website at [www.MTAofNJ.org](http://www.MTAofNJ.org)