



MOTOR POOL MESSENGER

the official monthly newsletter of the **MILITARY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION**
visit us online at www.MTAofNJ.org

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Editor: David Steinert



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ON THE COVER...



A pair of American M109 self-propelled 155mm howitzers crossing a flooded creek, as they return to Nui Dat after completing an operation supporting Australian troops at Bin Ba village. The M109 series was developed in the 1950s and the first production vehicles were completed in 1962. They were used extensively during the Vietnam War.

The U.S. Army M109 is a 155 mm turreted self-propelled howitzer, that was conceived by the Ground Systems Division of United Defense (now part of BAE Systems) in the early 1960s to replace the M44 self-propelled howitzer using a chassis and other components common to other U.S. armored vehicles.

It has been upgraded a number of times, most recently to the M109A7. The M109 family is the most common Western indirect-fire support weapon of maneuver brigades of armored and mechanized infantry divisions.



M109A1 in Vietnam

Around 200 vehicles were deployed to Vietnam in 1966, but the entire fleet suffered a mechanical malfunction within a year of operation. The U.S. dispatched engineers and mechanics to Vietnam, but all M109s were recalled back to the U.S.

in 1967 after failing to be successfully repaired in the field. The howitzer underwent upgrades afterward, which resulted in the M109A1 variant that went into production in 1970. This variant implemented the replacement of the M126 Cannon with a 39 caliber M185 Cannon, featuring a longer barrel while increasing maximum range to 18,100 meters.

The M109A2 variant incorporated 27 Reliability, Availability, and Maintainability (RAM) mid-life improvements. Most notably, the long barreled 155 mm M185 Cannon in the new M178 gun mount, ballistic protection for the panoramic telescope, counterbalanced travel lock, and the ability to mount the M140 bore sight alignment device. Stowage of 155mm rounds increased from 28 to 36 rounds; .50cal ammunition remained at 500 rounds. Crew capacity was increased to six. During M109A2 production, a slightly simplified version was also produced for export. This had minor internal changes and deleted the hull flotation feature. These were designated M109A1B.

Over the years different variations of the M109 would be introduced such as the M109A2s and M109A3 would be improved with Nuclear, Biological,



Accepted in November 1962 and entering service in Vietnam, where its 360-degree traverse made it a welcome asset at firebases. The air-transportable M109 mounted an M126 23-caliber 155 mm howitzer within an armored turret, as well as a flexible .50-caliber M2HB machine gun.

The original M109 had a crew of four: the section chief/commander, the driver, the gunner, and the ammunition handler/loader. The chief or gunner aims the cannon left or right (deflection) and up and down (quadrant).

and Chemical / Reliability, Availability, and Maintainability (NBC/RAM) improvements, including air purifiers, heaters, and Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) (protective) gear and designated M109A4s.

In 2009 Upgrades to the M109 were introduced by the U.S. and by Switzerland (KAWEST). This Swiss introduced an improved version designed by RUAG incorporates a new Swiss-designed L47 155 mm gun with an increased firing range of up to 36 km. It also features an inertial navigation system coupled with a new gun-laying system, along with an ammunition storage increase of 40 rounds and 64 charges. It is able to fire three-round bursts within 15 seconds, or maintain a constant firing rate of over one round per minute.

With the canceling in 2002 of the U.S. Crusader and Non-Line-of-Sight Cannon, the M109A6 ("Paladin") will likely remain the principal self-propelled howitzer for the U.S. until the new M1299 enters service.



A prototype M109A7

The M1299 is a prototype self-propelled howitzer developed by BAE Systems in 2019 under the Extended Range Cannon Artillery (ERCA) program. It is based on the M109A7, and was primarily designed for the purpose of improving the M109A7's effective range. One battalion of vehicles is planned to begin a year-long operational assessment in 2023. It is expected to be fitted with an autoloader in 2025, which could increase its rate of fire from 3 to 10 rounds per minute.



ATTENTION MEMBERS!

THE NEXT MTA MEETING WILL BE HELD ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2nd 2023... MEETING WILL BE HELD AT THE WHIPPANY AMERICAN LEGION IN THE MEETING ROOM IN THE BASEMENT

Food at 6:00PM...Meeting starts at 7:00PM

MTA Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 5, 2023 at the American Legion Hall in Whippany, NJ

Submitted by Jean Swanick

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 pm with a *Pledge of Allegiance* followed by a moment of silence.

A motion was made to accept the September meeting minutes by **Jim Mescher** and seconded by **Andy Salzano**. *Motion accepted!*

Treasurer's Report: as submitted by **Al Mellini** for the month ending September 30, 2023 is as follows:

Beginning Balance	\$ 47,486.65
Income	572.00
Expenditures	- 1,515.80
Closing balance	\$ 46,542.85

A motion was made by **Andrea Antonelli** and seconded by **Michele Heusel** to accept the Treasurer's Report. *Motion accepted!*

Membership: Nothing new to report this evening.

Newsletter: **John Sobotka** thanked **Dave Steinert** for his continued efforts with the publication.

Quartermaster: Inventory shows there are some large- size green and tan t-shirts left in stock along with a few anniversary shirts. In the womens' style, only 1 small and 1 large are left

A show of hands resulted in a large interest in sweatshirts in either pullover or zip style for the colder weather. It has been quite a while since the club ordered such. **Jim Mesher** and **Gary Schultz** will research pricing for these.

Parades: **Andrea Antonelli** updated the group that the start time for the East Hanover parade on October 8th has changed to a 1 pm lineup with a 2 pm start.

THE CLIFTON PARADE IS ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5th. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND, PLEASE CONTACT ANDREA ANTONELLI @ 973-214-1383.

Swap Meet: The Sea Cadets have reached out to John to let him know they plan to help again in April. **Pat Dolan** informed the group that he spoke with several reenactors in Hazelton last week. The feedback seemed positive that some would try to make our show.

Website: All members seem to be receiving notifications at this time! *HURRAH!*

Toys for Tots (T4T) Update: **Angie Farrell** reported that times are being finalized for the upcoming train runs and she will provide more information next month.

The final total raised from the *Toys for Tots* kick-off at Lead East was \$2,380. Thanks again to those who helped.

New Business: The executive board announced the appointing of **Al Burghart** as the club's newest *Life Member* for all his participation over the years-**Congratulations All!**

A donation request was made by **Andy Salzano** for a \$200 donation to the *Wyckoff YMCA* towards their Veteran's Day luncheon on 11/6. A motion to approve was made by **Andrea Antonelli** and seconded by **Jim Mescher**. This long-standing, well-established event draws a large veteran turnout. *The vote to approve was unanimous!*

Member **Gary Schultz** requested a donation be made to *Honor Flight Connecticut* for \$500. This organization provides free flights and event costs for veterans plus a guest, or a chaperone if required, to attend the *Salute to Veterans* events in Washington DC. A motion to approve was made by **Jim Mescher**, who was able to provide more insight to the group and seconded by **Ken Gardner**. *Approval was unanimous!*

Ken Gardner updated the group on the election for the executive board positions. Currently running are **Gary Schultz** for President, **Ken Gardner** for Vice President, **Al Mellini** for Treasurer and we need nominations for Secretary by the November meeting.

Old Business: The Lackawanna Cut-Off Society has postponed their open house until June 2024. Rescheduling was due to timing issues. The group is hoping to restore the last remaining station on the line. The line was developed in 1910 in order to transport coal to Pennsylvania on no more than a 3-degree slope.

Good of the Club: **John Sobotka** announced that the Sea Cadets are having a drill on Saturday, October 14th at Picatinny Arsenal and are interested in having our club vehicles in attendance. Please let John know if you can attend.

Michele Heusel mentioned that her dad will be doing a WWII speaking event at the Livingston Community Center on October 23rd at 7:30 pm if anyone would like to attend.

A thank you letter was received from the *Military Technology Museum of NJ* for our support of their operations.

A huge THANK YOU to **Jack Shuart**, who donated a 48-star American flag from his mother's estate to the club to be used for events.

Bill and **Lisa Schaum** did research for the cost to club members to attend a future Yankees game on a Military Appreciation night. The cost would be approximately \$160 per person and would include transportation.

A motion to adjourn at 8:10pm was made by **Tim Swanick** and seconded by **Panos Diamando**.

Next meeting is Thursday, November 2nd!

Respectfully submitted,
Jean Swanick
Secretary

MTA 2023 Officers and Key Committee Heads	
President- John Sobotka	
Tel: 862-266-6284	email: jsobotka@hotmail.com
Vice President- Gary Schultz	
Tel: 973-207-8955	email: garyrschultz@gmail.com
Secretary- Jean Swanick	
Tel: 973-647-0148	email: jswanick170@msn.com
Treasurer - Al Mellini	
Tel: 973-723-2166	email: albert.mellini@gmail.com
Sergeant at Arms-Andrew Salzano	
Tel: 973-831-0920	
Membership Chairman- Dave Steinert	
Tel: 201-407-4035	email: dsteinert@mtaofnj.org
Newsletter Editor- Dave Steinert	
Tel: 201-407-4035	email: dsteinert@mtaofnj.org
Parade Coordinator- Andrea Antonelli	
Tel: 973-214-1383	email: andreaantonelli@aol.com
Swap Meet Co-Chairman- Jim Mescher	
Tel: 201-245-7521	
Swap Meet Co-Chairman- Gary Schultz	
Tel: 973-207-8955	email: garyrschultz@gmail.com
Webmaster- Rudy Garbely	
Tel: 973-800-9251	email: rgarbely@gmail.com
Quartermaster and MTA Archives Custodian	
Gary Schultz	
Tel: 973-207-8955	email: garyrschultz@gmail.com

THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE SERIES PART IV

**To Hold at the Shoulders: SHAEF Shuffles the Deck
Jim Swanick**

By 19 December 1944, the German offensive was in full swing. In its opening drive *Army Group B* had hurtled nearly twenty divisions against V and VIII Corps, bursting through the lines of the 106th and 28th Infantry Divisions. German forces had reached the major road centers of St. Vith and Bastogne, and between the two towns a massive chasm yawned, within which the armor of the 116th *Panzer Division* was racing to the west. In the north *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, with most of the 1st SS *Panzer Division's* armor, was stampeding toward the Meuse, while in the south the 2^d *Panzer Division* was making good time as well. Viewed through a certain lens, it would appear that

there was much to be pleased with, if one were a German general officer.



THEN PHOTOGRAPH: M4 Sherman equipped with a dozer blade in Rue de la Gare, Malmédy in December, 1944.

The men in position to know better did know better, however. In the north the main thrust of the drive, (Waffen-SS) Gen. Sepp Dietrich's *Sixth Panzer Army*, had run into a brick wall. Even by 19 December the assault was in shambles, the *12th SS Panzer Division* having broken its back against the *2d* and *99th Infantry Divisions* in front of the *Elsenborn Ridge*. The *1st SS Panzer Division* had gotten through, but now its main effort, *KG Peiper*, was nearly out of gas. In the south a stubborn defensive action by parts of the *9th Armored* and *4th Infantry Divisions* had kept all but one division of Lt. Gen. Erich Brandenberger's *Seventh Army* from getting much further than the western banks of the Our and Sauer rivers; thus, no blocking line against interference from Lt. Gen. George Patton's Third Army would be forthcoming. The lion's share of the operation's success to this point could be found in the center, where Lt. Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel's *Fifth Panzer Army* had punched through the VIII Corps line and was rampaging through its rear, but even here there were problems in the form of stiffening resistance at both St. Vith and

Bastogne. Across the front rearguard actions by various units, particularly determined resistance by engineer formations at river crossings and pickup teams at road junctions, slowed the advance overall.

Throughout the first few days of the offensive the fog of battle had limited the larger Allied response to attacking with airpower where the weather allowed and funneling whatever reinforcements could be found into the battle area. The first to go had been the *7th* and *10th Armored Divisions*, ordered forward during the first night of the battle; behind them came a steady stream of additional units. From Lt. Gen. William



THEN PHOTOGRAPH: Three U.S. soldiers standing in front of Hotel des Ardennes behind a KO'd Panther in Ligneuville, December, 1944.

Simpson's Ninth Army, north of the battle area, came the *1st*, *9th*, and *30th Infantry Divisions*, as well as the *3d Armored Division*; from SHAEF strategic reserve came the *82d* and *101st Airborne Divisions*. The *1st* and *9th Divisions*, along with *CCA/3d Armored* had gone to Maj. Gen. Leonard Gerow's V Corps, while Maj. Gen. Matthew Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps came in on Gerow's right, taking over the remainder of the *3d Armored*, the *30th Division* which had come down to contain the advance of *KG Peiper*, and the *82d Airborne* which had gone into position along the Salm and Amblève rivers. The *101st*, of course, had gone to Bastogne.

On 17 December Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander cancelled all upcoming American offensive

actions. Having recognized that the enemy had launched a major offensive, he sketched out the rough framework of how to defeat it, which he presented on 19 December at an emergency meeting in Verdun. With forced optimism but genuine belief in his words "Ike" instructed his subordinates that they should look on this turn of events as an opportunity, as the reserves of the enemy had been brought into the open where they could be destroyed. Having identified that the enemy's goal was to drive a wedge between Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group and British Field Marshal straightforward: hold the shoulders and contain the drive east of the Meuse River as Third Army counterattacked against the salient using six divisions. When asked how quickly he could strike

control over the battle that he had seized on the first day, while the latter put on full display the maturation that he had undergone as an army commander. That Patton was able to conduct himself with such grandeur was a testament to the preparation that he and his Third Army staff had conducted in the hours, days, and weeks prior to the meeting. As early as late November his G-2, Col. Oscar Koch, had detected a buildup of German forces east of the Ardennes, and while neither he nor Patton forecasted the offensive, both took it seriously, the latter instructing his staff to do the necessary work to ensure that should something occur Third Army would not be caught flatfooted. When the offensive did begin Patton began beating the bush for information, obtaining enough to appreciate its scale by 17 December and alert XX Corps to the possibility that it may be used to intervene. On 18 December he received a briefing from Bradley on the particulars of the offensive and began formulating the plan that he would present the following



THEN PHOTOGRAPH: Troops of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division pass through the village of Bihain.



In the photograph you can see members of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment on the Bastogne-Houffalize road on December 19, 1944. It was the Division's first day of combat during the Battle of the Bulge. Photographer: Wesley B. Carolan (NARA)

the southern flank of the penetration, Patton replied with characteristic bombast: in 48 hours, with three divisions. Ike counseled the army commander's enthusiasm and ordered that it come off on 22 December to ensure all three divisions were ready to go. Having seized the attention of the room Patton took the floor and within an hour the specifics of the attack- the avenue of advance, the formations to be used, and the shifting of unit boundaries and areas of responsibilities- had been worked out.

The Verdun meeting was a shining moment for both Eisenhower and Patton. The former continued to exercise the

day, ordering the 4th Armored and 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions to prepare to move north, and on the morning of 19 December worked with his staff to outline three avenues of advance against the southern flank of the penetration. It was due to this diligence, and the work of his staff to further develop the plan while he was in Verdun, that at the close of the meeting Patton was able to get the ball rolling by issuing a terse order over the phone.

As Eisenhower and Patton enjoyed the spotlight Bradley was fumbling the ball. From the beginning Bradley had failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation. He had waffled when Ike directed that the 10th Armored Division be moved north, complaining that Patton would be upset, and spent the night of 16-17 December at SHAEF rather than returning immediately to the front. For 36 hours he clung to the theory that the offensive was a spoiling attack against Patton's drive into the Saar, and even after coming to terms with the reality of the situation he failed to exert

control over the battle. Bradley did not and never attempted to visit First Army HQ to gauge its atmosphere and engage in direct discussions with Hodges and his hard-pressed staff, and though he remained in contact with First Army by telephone it apparently accomplished little, for when Montgomery visited First Army on 20 December they reported that Bradley had handed down no directives for them to follow. It is no surprise, then, that at the Verdun conference Bradley did little more than be present, considering his apparent lack of action over the prior three days.

Bradley's lack of effectiveness could not have occurred at a worse time. The First Army commander, Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges, had pushed himself exceptionally hard during the First Army drive to reach the Roer River in the weeks leading up to the German offensive. By 16 December he was exhausted and falling ill with a cold that later turned into viral pneumonia. His main contribution on that day was to insist that V Corps continue attacking to gain the Roer River dams; thankfully Gerow and his deputy all but ignored the order, stopping the attack in time for the 2^d Division to fall back on the Twin Villages and prevent the corps from being enveloped. Due to his illness, the shock of the German attack, or both, Hodges became incapacitated the following morning, and for the next several days he alternated between his bed and his desk, where an aide at one point found him semiconscious with his head in his hands. There was also an intelligence problem: First Army had never developed a strong network of liaison officers to ensure that information flowed into the headquarters as effectively as it flowed out, and so even though Hodges' Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. William Kean, more or less took over the operation of First Army in his stead, visitors to First Army HQ as well as subordinate commanders reported that the command seemed to be totally in the dark as to what was occurring and who was where. On the evening of 19 December Brig. Gen. Thomas Betts, deputy G-2 at SHAEF, returned from checking in on the headquarters and recommended to Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, that Hodges be relieved. This sentiment was initially echoed by Montgomery when 21 Army Group took over First Army the following day.

Eisenhower's decision to place First and Ninth Armies under the control of Montgomery's 21 Army Group was one of his most crucial of the battle. Bradley's HQ, in Luxembourg City, was now right behind the front line along the southern shoulder of the Bulge. First Army HQ, which had been evacuated to Chaudfontaine from Spa when *KG Peiper* brushed by just to south of that town, was located 100 miles away behind the northern shoulder of the Bulge. Between the two was the entirety of the offensive, with its spearheads racing ever westward. Though the lines of communication had not yet been totally cut, there was no way for the two to meet face-to-face, which would have improved their ability to collaborate and respond to the attack while giving Bradley an opportunity to assess the atmosphere at First Army HQ and Hodges' fitness for duty. On 17 December Ike had suggested to Bradley that he pull his HQ back to Verdun to improve his ability to run the fight, but Bradley had demurred, stating that it would send a bad message to friend and foe alike and that he would "never move backwards with a headquarters" for matters of prestige. Moreover, he rejected any notion of compromise; he refused to move his HQ out of Luxembourg City. Without the ability to communicate securely and reliably and meet in person for operational planning, Bradley could not effectively manage the battle.

The first to realize that a command change had to occur was, unsurprisingly, Montgomery himself. On 19 December the field marshal dispatched a liaison officer to First Army HQ, who arrived at Spa to find that its evacuation to Chaudfontaine had been so sudden that situation maps were still on the walls and

subordinate units had not been informed of the move. Montgomery relayed this information, his doubt that Bradley could effectively control the battle, and a recommendation that he be given control of First Army to Maj. Gen. "Jock" Whiteley, the SHAEF deputy G-3, who discussed the proposal with Ike's G-2, Maj. Gen. Ken Strong, on the evening of 19 December. Although neither Strong nor Whiteley were big "Monty" fans and it was certainly true that Montgomery had an angle- he had been clamoring for control of First Army for months, and after seeing Whiteley off immediately wired Gen. Sir Alan Brooke, the British equivalent to Gen. George Marshall and like Marshall, a member of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, to inform him that he had recommended he take over the American field army- in this case he was correct. Strong and Whiteley, themselves concerned that Bradley was not grasping the seriousness of the situation, took the case to Smith, who initially exploded in anger and fired both but soon came to his senses. If, as the two generals claimed, Bradley and Hodges had been out of touch for two days, then there was no way that Bradley could retain command. When Bradley confirmed this to Smith over the phone, the latter knew he had to make the recommendation to Ike.

Eisenhower was made aware of the machinations of his staff on the morning of 20 December and immediately approved the recommendation to give the First and Ninth Armies to Montgomery. He called Bradley and asked him where he intended to stop the Germans; Bradley didn't have an answer, failing the test. And with that, control over the armies north of the Bulge passed to Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery and his 21 Army Group.



To add or remove listings from the Classifieds, please email Dave Steinert at dsteinert@mtaofnj.org or call 201-407-4035.

For Sale: Own the world's best tailgating/cooking trailer. MKT 95 in operational condition. Includes 2 M-59 Ranges and 4 MBU V3 burners, griddle, and V3 Power Converter with correct MBU Branch cabling. Asking \$5000. Call John at (973)600-9486.

For Sale: 1963 Dodge M43 B1 w/o winch in very good condition. Comes with a large amount of spare parts and accessories. If there is an interest, contact Michael Maglio at 973-697 9419.

For Sale- Military 500 Gallon Water Buffalo for sale; \$300 or BO. Call John Sobotka at (862)-266-6284.

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

WANTED: Hello MTA Members, I am in search of a 1953 Dodge Power Giant D300 early two-whole Hydrovac brake unit. This unit can be found on many similar sized vehicles. Please contact me for any information / leads @ Bob Leach (mobile) 201-663-1093 or Email : robertleach59@aol.com.

Military Transport Association

P.O. Box 391
Budd Lake, NJ 07828

**THE NEXT MTA MEETING WILL
BE HELD ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2nd
AT THE WHIPPANY AMERICAN
LEGION POST AT 7PM**



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.

for more information, visit our website at www.MTAofNJ.org

Name: _____

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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:

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Budd Lake, NJ 07828

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